

# Exploring Emotions

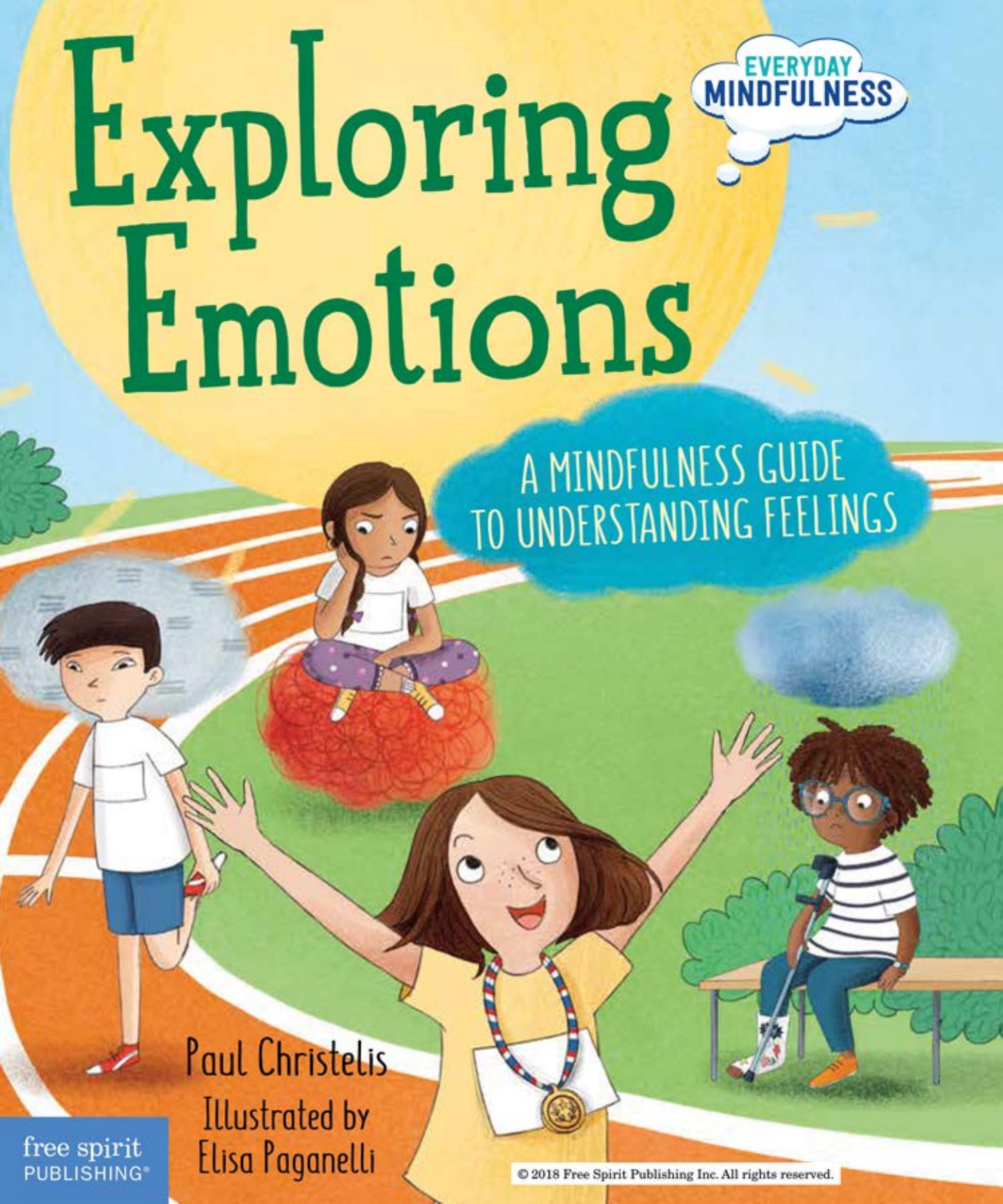
EVERYDAY  
MINDFULNESS

A MINDFULNESS GUIDE  
TO UNDERSTANDING FEELINGS

Paul Christelis  
Illustrated by  
Elisa Paganelli

free spirit  
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## A MINDFULNESS GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING FEELINGS

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# WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to our present-moment experience with an attitude of kindness and curiosity. Most of the time, our attention is distracted—often by thoughts about the past or future—and this can make us feel jumpy, worried, self-critical, and confused.

By gently moving our focus from our busy minds and into the present moment (for example, by noticing sensations and emotions in our bodies, without judging them or wishing they were different), we begin to let go of distraction and learn to tap into an ever-present supply of well-being and ease that resides in each moment. Mindfulness can also help us improve concentration, calm unpleasant emotions, and even boost our immune systems.

In this book, children are gently guided into mindfulness exercises that encourage an exploration of emotions. By being curious about their “inner weather” and accepting their current emotional experience rather than judging it, they begin to cultivate a healthy relationship with emotions. Instead of identifying themselves with the emotion they are feeling (“I am angry!”), children begin to see that emotions are natural experiences that come and go (“Right now, I am feeling anger in my belly”). The benefits of making this shift are explored in the story.

The book can be read interactively, allowing readers to pause at various points and turn their attention to how they are feeling or what they are noticing. Watch for the  PAUSE BUTTON in the text. It suggests opportunities to encourage readers to be curious about what’s going on for them—in their minds, their bodies, and their breathing. Each time this  is used, mindfulness is deepened.

Try not to rush this pause. Really allow enough time for children to tune into their experience. It doesn’t matter if what they notice feels pleasant or unpleasant. What’s important is to pay attention to it with a friendly attitude. This will introduce them to a way of being in the world that promotes health and happiness.

Everyone notices the **weather** outside, don't they?

Have a look now: Is it sunny or cloudy?  
Rainy or dry? Windy or calm? Or something else?

But did you realize that weather also happens inside you?  
In fact, if you take a look, you'll feel it right now.  
We call this inner weather **emotions**. And just like  
the weather outside, emotions are completely natural.



Today is Track and Field Day at school. The weather outside is warm and sunny, but for many children it feels very different. Here's Mateo. He's not feeling warm and sunny at all!

Inside, Mateo is experiencing a different kind of weather. For him, running in a race makes him feel nervous. It's like watching a storm approaching: It can be **Scary**.



# NOTES FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Here are a few mindfulness exercises and suggestions to add to children's Mindfulness Toolkits. These are simple, effective, and fun to do!

## Weekly Weather Patterns

Find a place to display a Weekly Weather Chart. This might be on a wall or bulletin board or in children's notebooks or folders. Include days of the week and times of the day. Each morning, ask children to check their inner weather, and then place a colored sticker corresponding to that emotion on the chart. (For example, blue = sad; yellow = happy; red = angry.) Do the same at other times of day. At the end of the week, look at the weather patterns. It's likely that there will be a variety of colors, suggesting changing emotions. If there is a lot of one color, you can talk about this too: Was it a particularly anxious week, or a sad one? Looking at their internal weather this way helps children notice that emotions constantly come and go. This makes difficult emotions easier to acknowledge and accept.

## Take Action

Acknowledging difficult emotions can help ease their intensity, but it is also helpful to look at what is needed in that moment to ensure that a child feels safe and resourceful. A cuddle or a hug, perhaps? A few moments alone in a quiet space? Or maybe calling to mind a fond memory or visualizing a special place? The intention of such action is not to avoid the child's feelings. Rather, the action comes from a place of fully accepting the child's experience and compassionately responding to it. This teaches children to self soothe when the going feels rough. Essentially, you are saying, "You feel really sad right now, and that's okay. But you also know that you are safe and loved no matter what you feel."

## Magic Minute

Scientific research shows that if we are able to observe the physical sensations of difficult emotions without getting caught up in our thoughts about them, then the chemical component of that emotion flushes itself out of our system, returning us to a state of relative ease. All it takes is a minute or two.

So when a child is in the grip of a strong emotion, suggest taking a Magic Minute to notice it: Where in the body is the angry feeling? What happens when the child pays attention to this feeling? Does it get stronger or softer? Does it move? Are other parts of the body affected? After timing a minute, if the emotion is still intense, take another 30 seconds. The intensity is likely to have waned. A minute often can make all the difference! (It is also possible to take a minute to notice pleasant feelings.)

## Invisible Raincoat

Sometimes we can really feel pummeled by stormy emotions. When this happens, it's time to put on your Invisible Raincoat to protect you! If a child needs extra support, invite him or her to imagine a special personal raincoat. What color is it? Does it have an interesting pattern or design? What is it made of? When children are feeling blown away by a rainstorm of emotions, encourage them to slip into their raincoats. This won't stop the storm, but it *can* protect them from getting soaked. Ask them to imagine the raindrops bouncing off the protective layer and to wait patiently for the storm to pass.

## Share the Weather

Encourage children to notice and understand that everyone—including parents, other family members, teachers, friends, and pets—experiences changing emotions. We are all in the same boat! Sometimes a parent might be feeling sadness or irritation and may need some space and time to move through it. You can help young people pay attention to this by openly acknowledging and sharing how you are feeling. The intention in sharing feelings is to create an inclusive space where it is possible to bring empathy and compassion to our relationships, without judging one another for feeling the way we do.