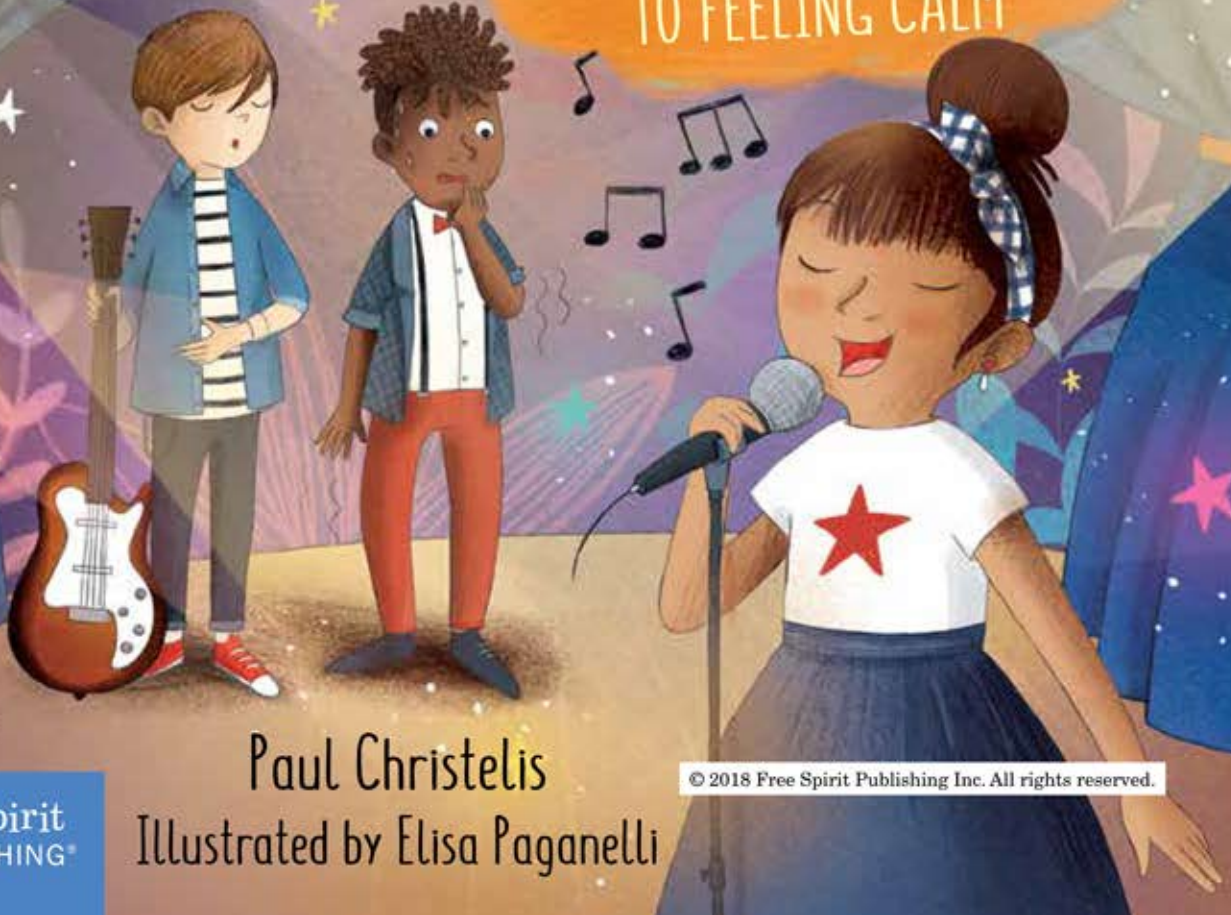


EVERYDAY  
MINDFULNESS

# Breath by Breath

A MINDFULNESS GUIDE  
TO FEELING CALM



Paul Christelis

Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli

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# Breath by Breath

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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, we begin to let go of distraction and learn to tap into an ever-present supply of well-being and ease that resides in the here and now. Mindfulness can also help us improve concentration, calm unpleasant emotions, and even boost our immune systems.

In this book, children are encouraged to develop mindfulness by using their breathing as an “object” to pay attention to. Breathing happens naturally, in the present moment, and simply noticing the sensations of the breath can bring a sense of peace and calm.

Readers are also invited to gratefully acknowledge the gift of life bestowed by each breath. Cultivating this attitude of gratitude helps us experience life as wondrous and special, even in times of difficulty.

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 they observe, such as the texture or temperature of their breath. Each time this  is used, mindfulness is deepened.

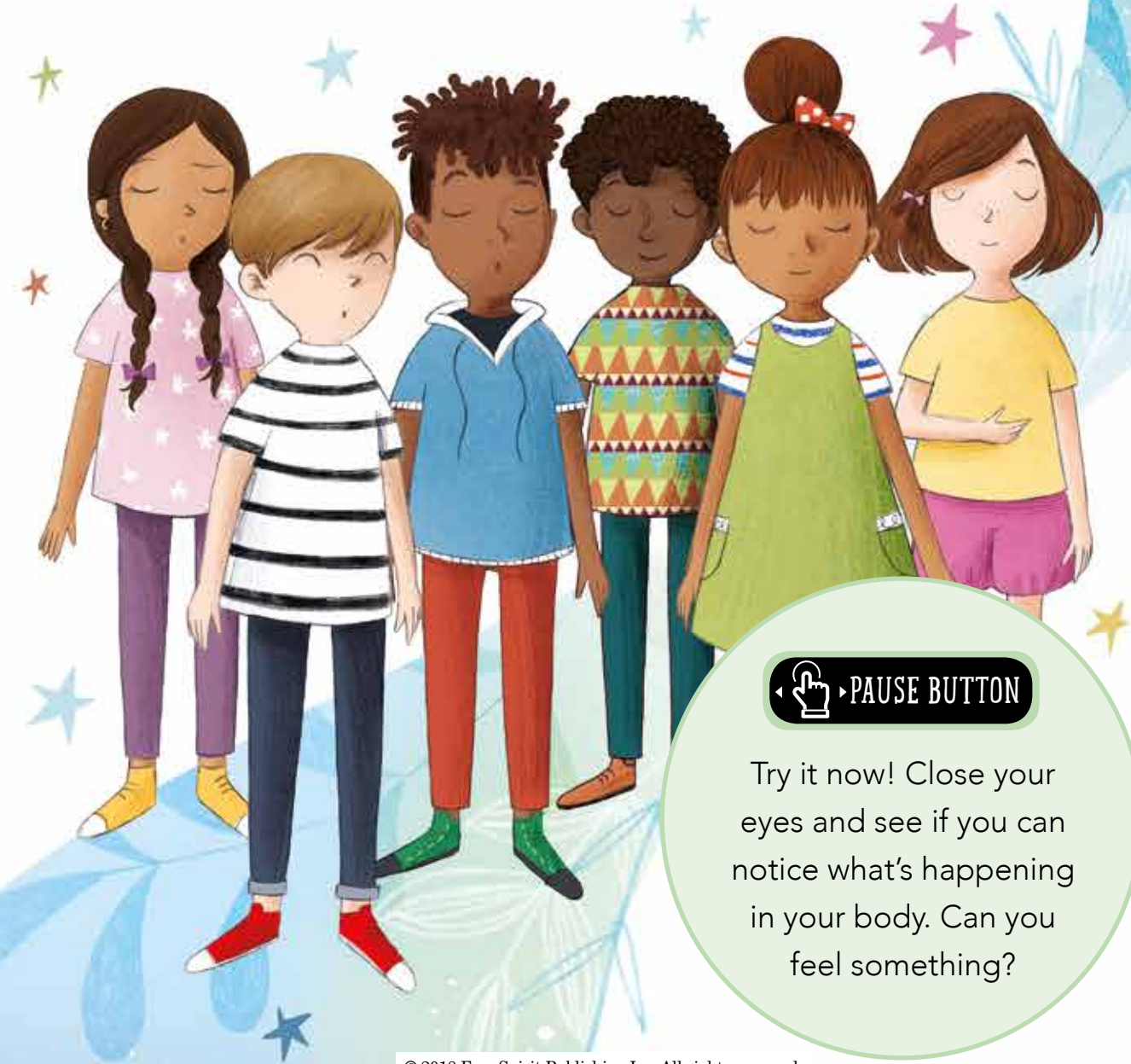
Try not to rush this pause. Really allow enough time for children to stay with their experience. It doesn't matter if what they feel or notice is pleasant or unpleasant. What's important is to pay attention to it with a friendly attitude. This will introduce them to a way of being in the world that promotes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



This is the story of three different children who have one very important thing in common. In fact, they also have something in common with **you!** Yes, the **YOU** who is reading this book right now.



Do you have any idea what Sam, Lenny, Rosa, and you all share? Here's a clue: It can't be seen and, unless you are exercising, it probably can't be heard. But if you are very still, close your eyes, and concentrate on what's happening in your body, you will **feel** it.

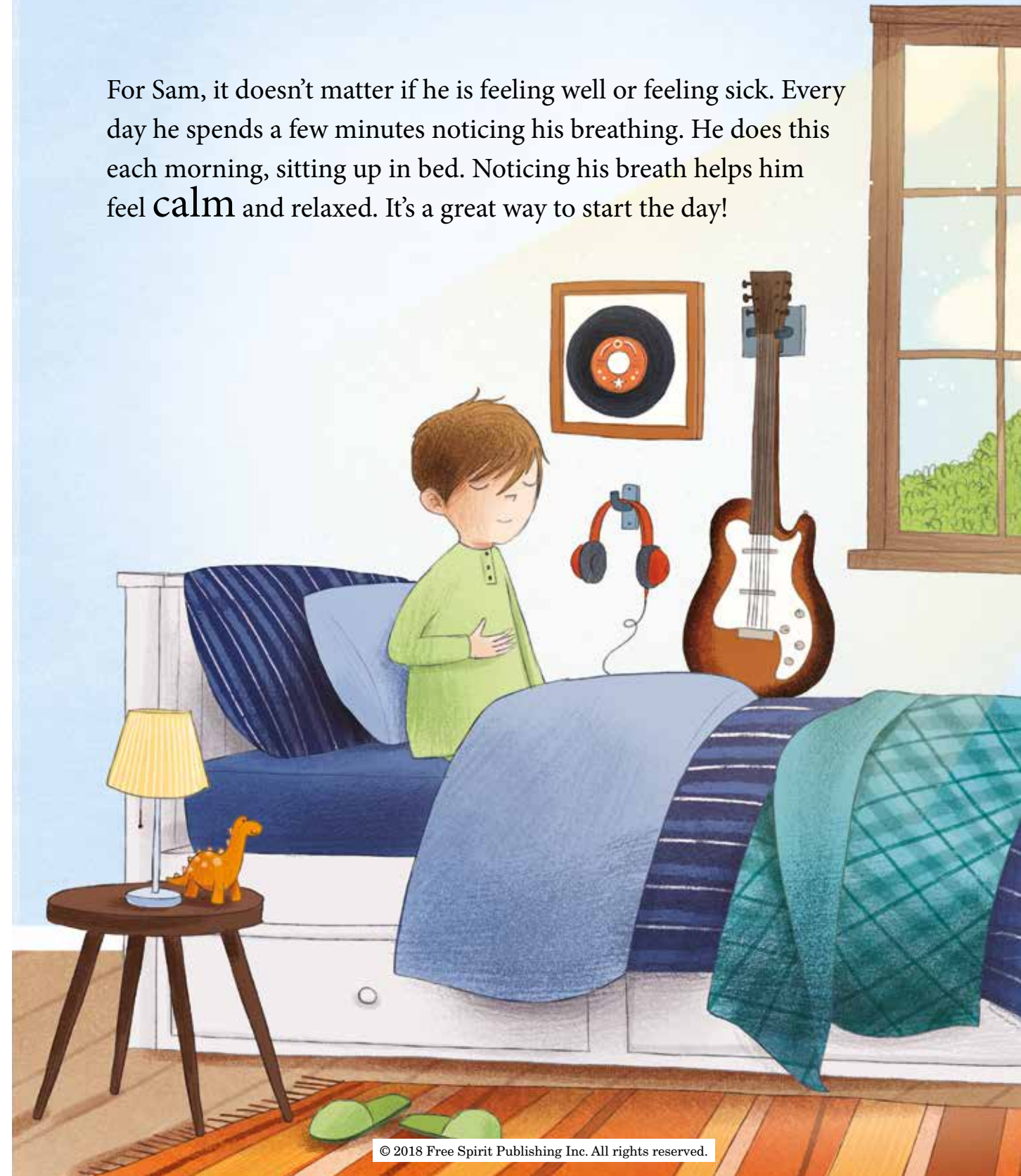




Aha! What we all share is **breath!** Without it, we wouldn't be alive, so it's very important indeed. But we hardly notice that we are breathing unless we are out of breath or feeling sick.



For Sam, it doesn't matter if he is feeling well or feeling sick. Every day he spends a few minutes noticing his breathing. He does this each morning, sitting up in bed. Noticing his breath helps him feel **calm** and relaxed. It's a great way to start the day!





# NOTES FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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

## Balloon in the Belly

Breathing deeply into the belly (diaphragmatic breathing) supports a calm and relaxed body and mind. This practice helps children shift their breathing from the chest into the belly. (It's equally beneficial for adults!)

To really feel the effects of this type of breathing, lie down on a bed or the floor, close your eyes, and begin to notice your breathing. After a few breaths, place one hand on your chest and feel how far your hand moves as you breathe. Then, place your hand on your belly, and notice the amount of movement there. If there is more movement in the chest than in the belly, it tells you that you're not breathing deeply enough with the diaphragm.

You can encourage children to breathe more deeply by inviting them to imagine that there is a balloon in their belly that inflates when they breathe in and deflates when they breathe out. Ask children to choose a color for their balloon. Then invite them to close their eyes and imagine the balloon filling with the breath, then emptying. Children can keep their hands on the belly as they do this. If they become distracted by sounds or thoughts, they can simply notice the distraction and then choose to return their attention to the balloon.

A variation on this practice is to place a toy on the belly. Children can try to breathe smoothly and evenly so that the toy doesn't fall off.

## 7-11 Breathing

This practice is particularly helpful if children are feeling overwhelmed or anxious, or simply want to relax.

To use this technique, breathe in through the nose to the count of seven, pause, and then breathe out through the nose to the count of eleven. This ensures that the out-breath is longer than the in-breath, which enables the body's parasympathetic nervous system (PSN) to kick in. The PSN is responsible for calming the stress response in the body. Activating it when we feel stressed is an effective way to regulate physiological and emotional arousal.

You can also experiment with using shorter countdowns, such as breathing in to the count of five and out to the count of nine. Be careful not to rush the counting, though. Allow each breath enough space and time to reach its full length.

## Breathe in the Good

In this exercise, children are encouraged to focus their attention on nourishing and affirming aspects of their lives.

First, ask them to call to mind something that makes them feel good, happy, or safe. Examples might be: a relationship with a close friend, family member, or pet; a place where they feel content and safe, such as in a bedroom, near a special tree, or at the beach; or something they feel grateful for—like the kindness of a grandparent, meals cooked by a parent, or the opportunity to learn how to play a musical instrument. Then, as they inhale, they imagine breathing in all the good feelings associated with this particular person (or animal), place, or object. Exhaling, they imagine breathing out these feelings and sharing them with the world so that everyone might benefit from this nourishing, positive energy.

Repeat this sequence a few times. Then invite children to notice how it feels to take in and give out such happy vibes!