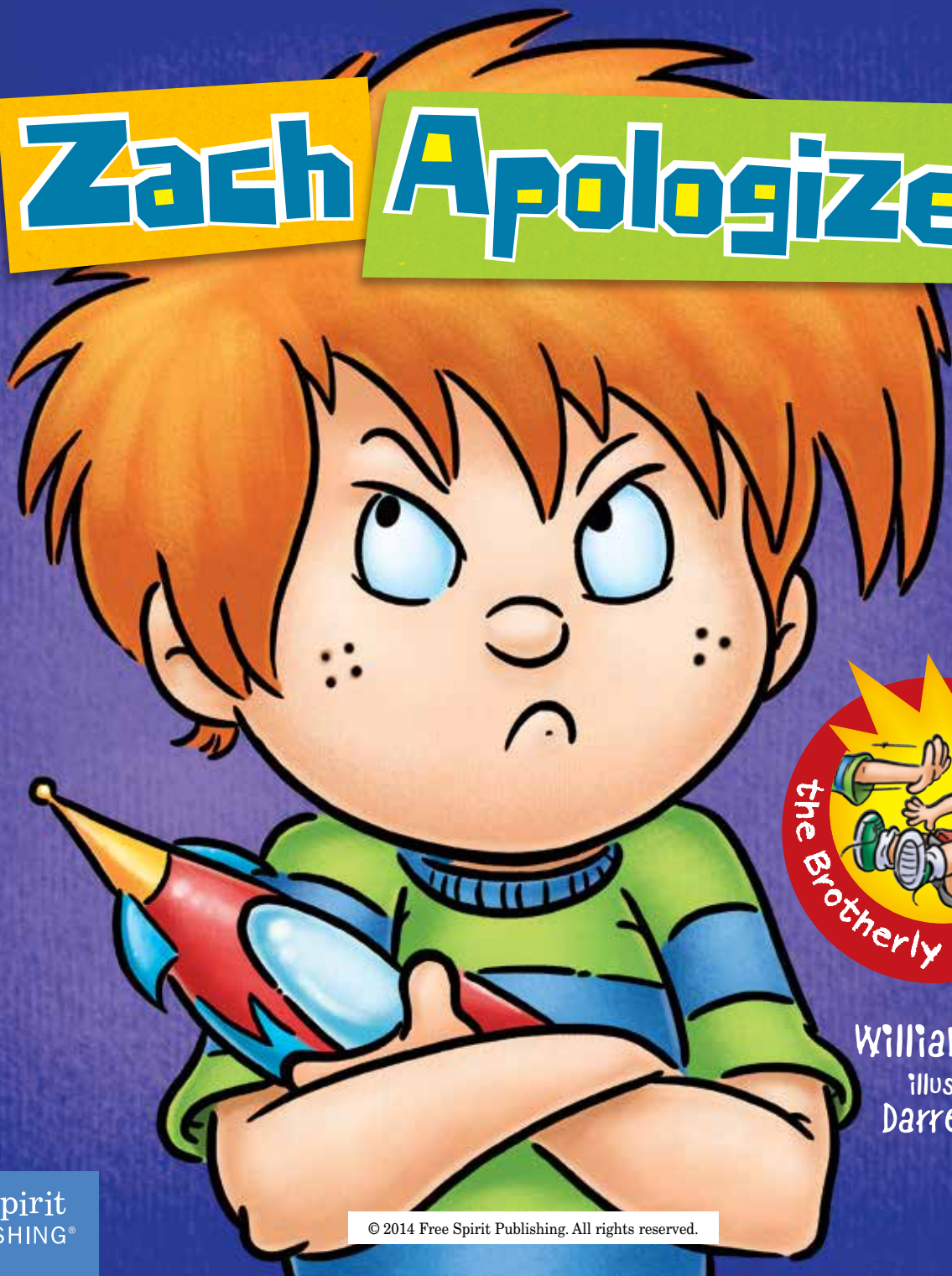


Zach Apologizes



William Mulcahy
illustrated by
Darren McKee

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

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Dedication

To Jane for always believing

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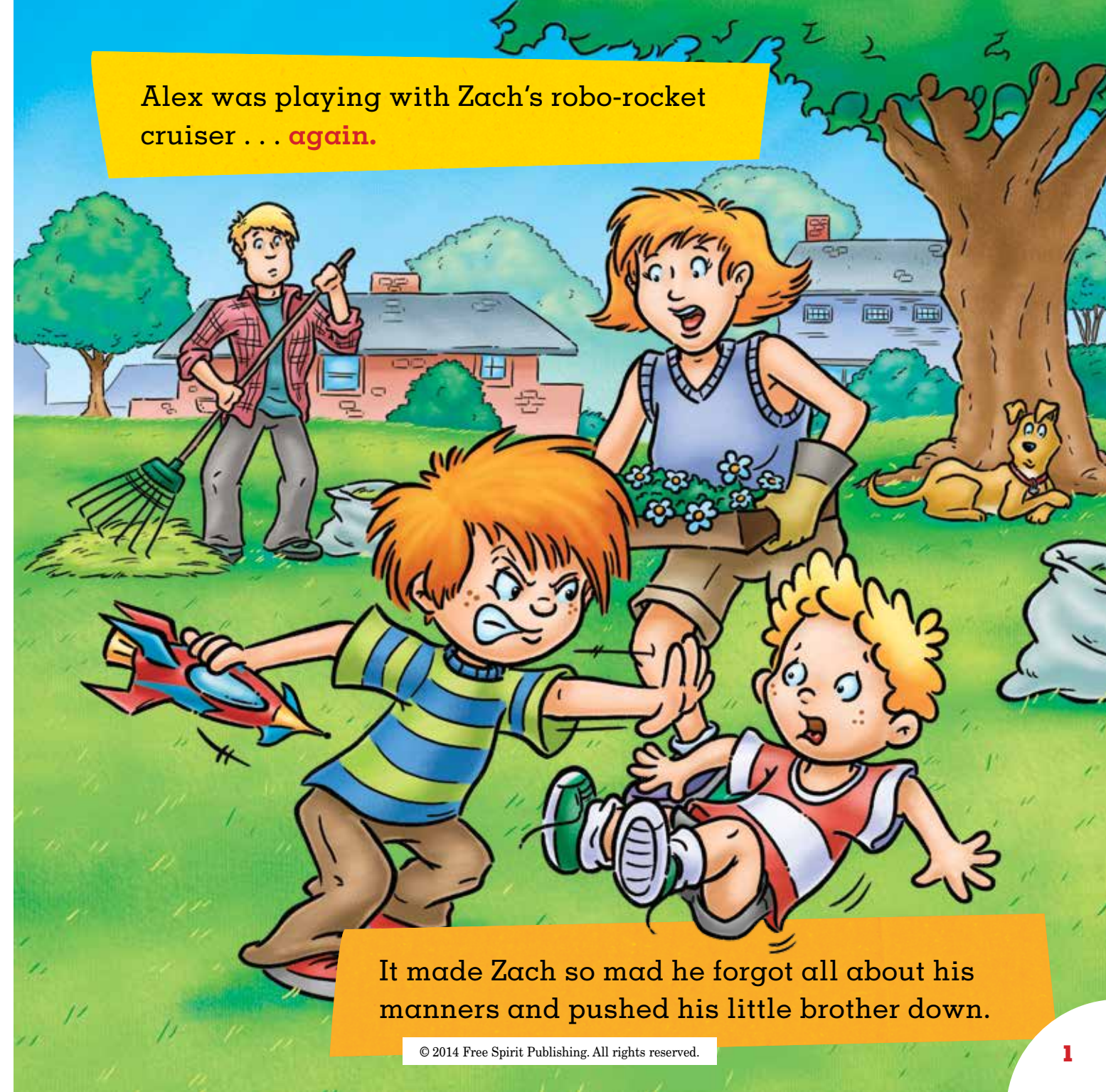
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Alex was playing with Zach's robo-rocket cruiser . . . **again.**



It made Zach so mad he forgot all about his manners and pushed his little brother down.



"It's mine!" Zach yelled.

"You pushed me!"

"Well **you** started it!"



That's when Mom interrupted.
"Enough!" she said.

"Zach, give me
the spaceship and
go cool down."

Helping Children Apologize

Apologizing can be hard to do, especially for young children. It means admitting they have done something wrong and asking for forgiveness. Children often feel an avalanche of thoughts and feelings when they have hurt someone, and apologizing can feel shameful if not taught in a positive way. This is especially true when adults force children to say they're sorry. A forced apology is often meaningless and even traumatic. It can compromise relationships and an individual's well-being.

But apologizing can and should be a positive, healthy act for both the giver and receiver. A sincere apology keeps everyone's dignity intact and repairs the wrong that has been done. Such an apology has the power to

- end conflict without fighting
- encourage further communication
- restore self-respect
- improve empathy for both the giver and receiver
- repair damaged relationships
- heal negative feelings such as guilt, shame, and anger

The four-square apology presented in this book has four key parts. To make it positive and effective, you will want to partner with children in the apology process. Here are the four parts along with some tips to help you guide your child:

1. What I did to hurt somebody. Perhaps the hardest part of apologizing is admitting that, yes, I have done something wrong. I hurt someone—perhaps physically, perhaps emotionally. Allow children sufficient time to calm down and acknowledge what they've done. Know your child. Some children need ten minutes to settle themselves, while some need an hour. However, don't let too much time pass, or the apology will lose some of its meaning. When children are ready to talk about it, remind them that *everyone* makes mistakes, and everyone does something to hurt others sometimes. That does not mean the child is a bad person, just that he or she did a bad thing.

2. How the person felt. This step helps the apologizing child understand the impact of what he or she did. Empathy—to be aware of and understand the thoughts and feelings of others—is a critical social-emotional skill. It is key to developing a secure sense of self and healthy relationships. If children have difficulty with this step, ask them to picture themselves as the victim—to put themselves in the other person's shoes. How would *they* feel? Or has anyone ever hurt them in a similar way? How did that feel?

3. What I can do next time. This step helps children think about and plan for their future behavior, including promising to try not to be hurtful again. How will I handle similar situations? What are my options? What will I choose to do? Spend time helping your children discover the many choices they have in a given situation; choose an option based on what they value, not on a knee-jerk reaction. This will make it easier for them to keep their promises.

4. How I'll make it up to the person. This is often the crucial feature of an apology. When we hurt other people, we take away something from them. Only by giving something back can we truly repair this hurt. Suggest to children that the way they make it up to the other person might have something to do with the hurt they caused. In Zach's story, he pushed his brother over a toy. To make it up, he offers the toy and more. Children don't need to go overboard with what they offer. Their offer needs to be sincere and, of course, reasonably possible.

After children have answered all four parts of the four-square apology, they include the answers from *all four parts* when they deliver the apology. These answers are not only important for the apologizing child to think about, they also need to be heard by the person being apologized to. Kids don't have to recite their answers from the sheet word for word, but they can use them as a guide.

A few other tips:

- Perhaps the most important thing adults can do is model genuine apologies themselves. This gives children a strong message that apologizing is important. They see adults taking responsibility for their actions, and this helps reinforce that apologizing is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength. It shows that the adult is honest, generous, and committed to improving relationships.