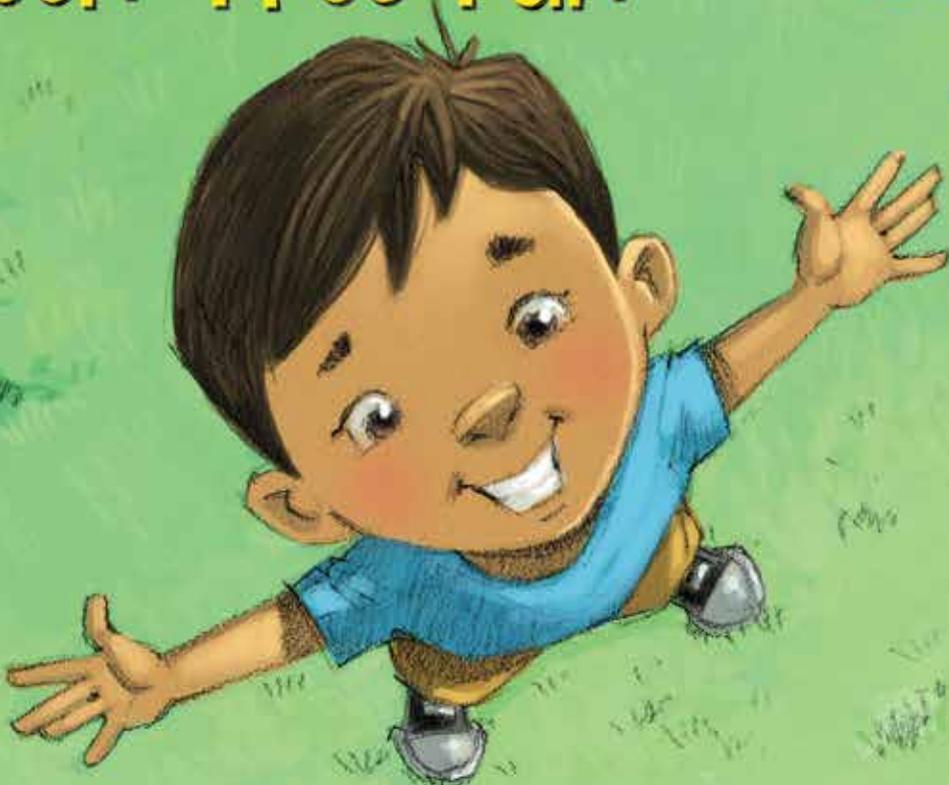


# Ollie Outside

Screen-Free Fun



# Ollie Outsideside

Screen-Free Fun

Michael Oberschneider, Psy.D.  
Illustrated by Guy Wolek

free spirit  
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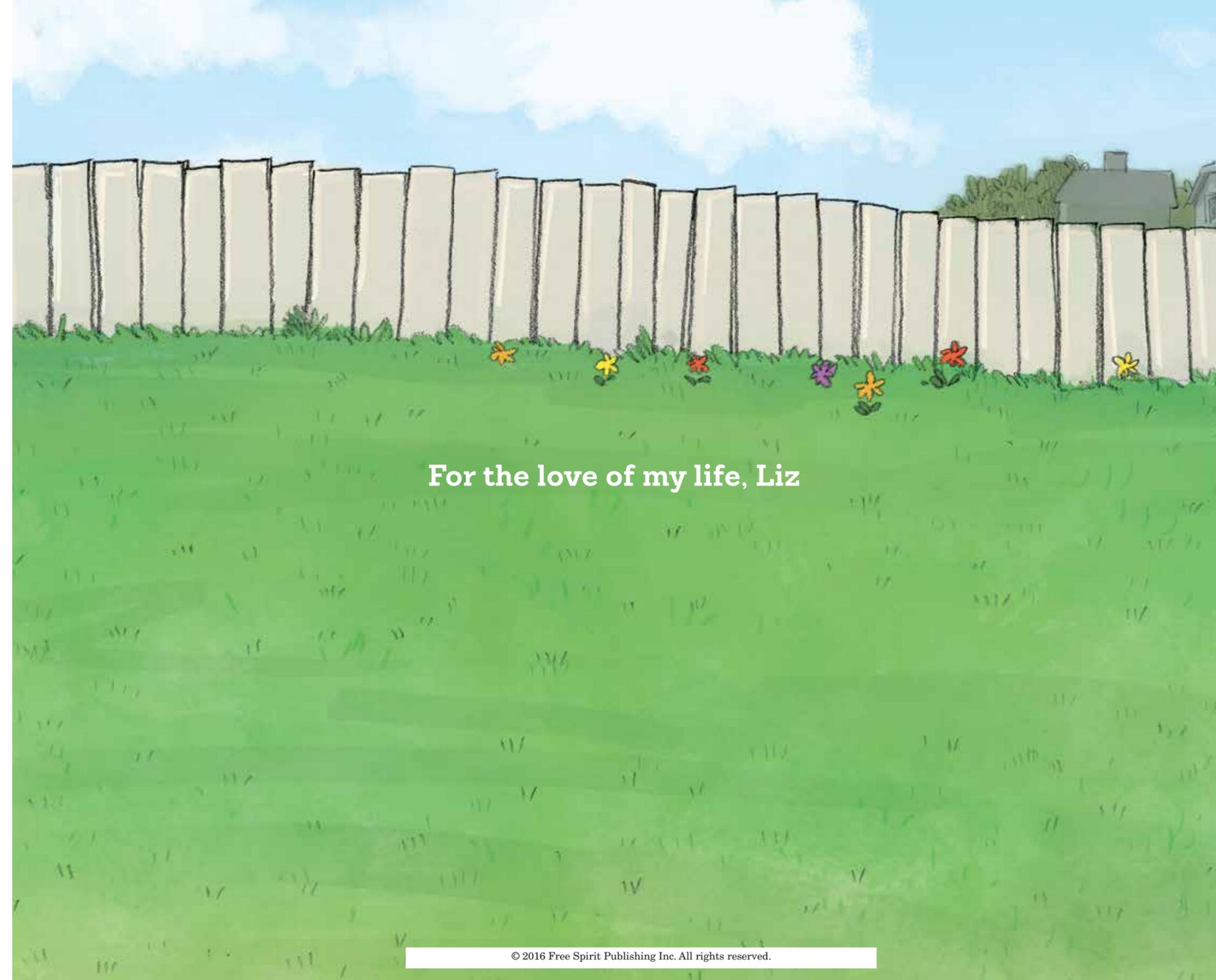
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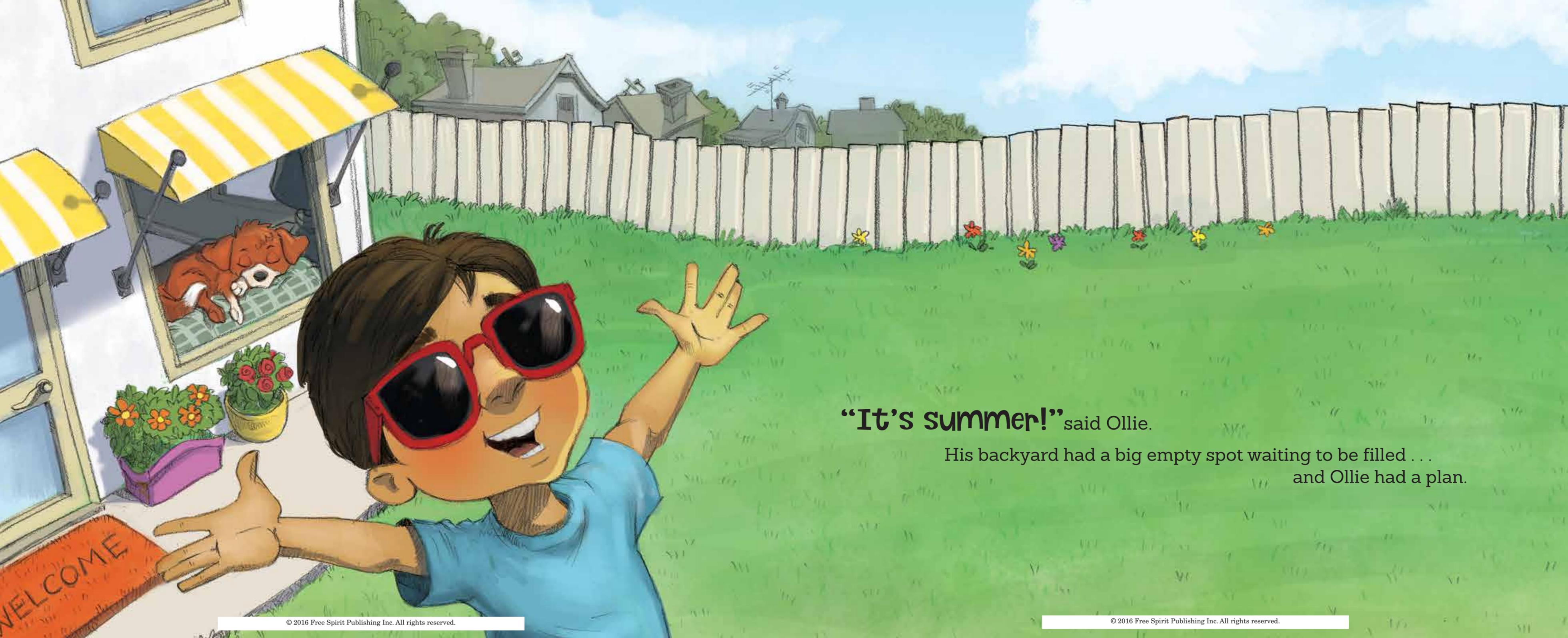
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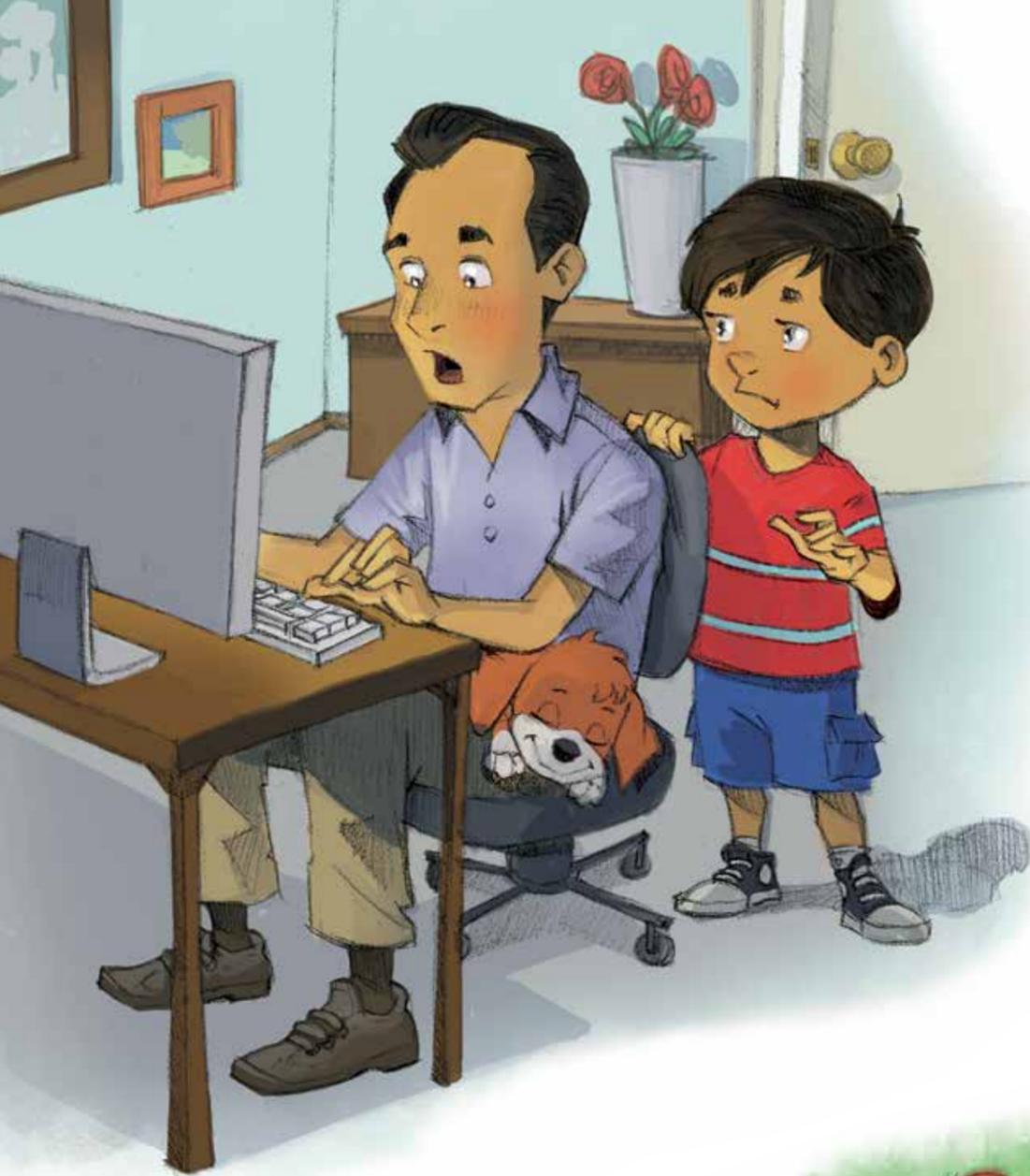


For the love of my life, Liz



**“It’s summer!”** said Ollie.

His backyard had a big empty spot waiting to be filled . . .  
and Ollie had a plan.

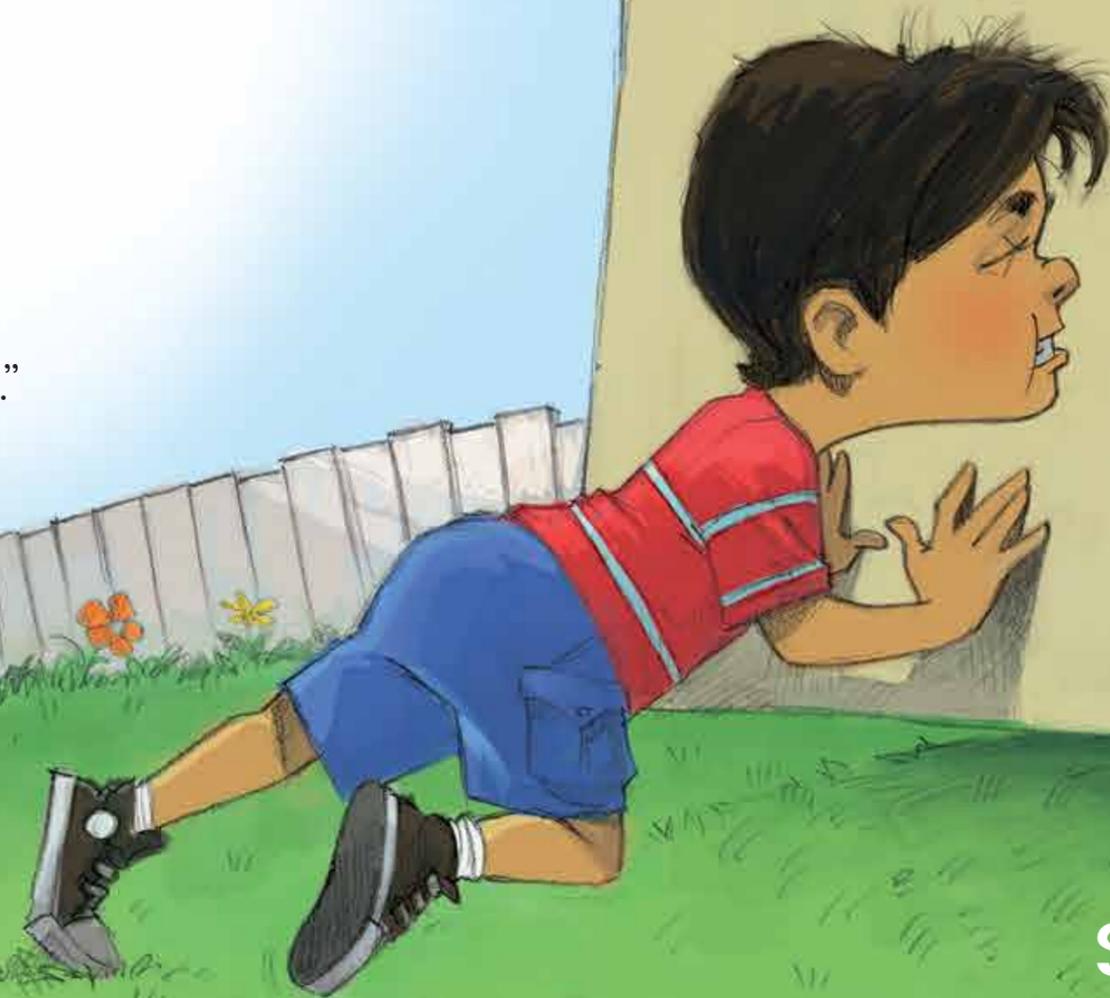


**On Monday** Ollie said,  
“Dad, will you build a  
fort with me?”

“I’d like to, but I have  
emails to send.”

“Please?” asked Ollie.

“There’s a big box in  
the garage. You can  
use it to make your fort.”



Ollie moved the box outside.  
He borrowed a welcome mat.  
He made a flag.

Something was missing ...



# Tips for Parents and Caregivers

We live in a technology-focused world, so our children are growing up with all kinds of electronics and media: TV and movies, smartphones, tablets, computers, video games, and apps (the list goes on and on). As parents and caregivers, we play an important role in modeling a healthy use of screens. Children learn from watching us, and then they practice what they see. Becoming your child's "screen-time guide" is a matter of knowing how to make the most of technology—and how much is too much.

**Make face-to-face time the priority.** Children thrive on interaction. They watch your facial expressions, listen to your words, ask you questions, and look to you for answers. A screen simply can't interact in the same way. This is why experts recommend limiting the amount of time spent in front of electronic devices.

**Look for ways to stay interactive.** Children can learn from educational technology, and there's plenty of it to choose from. But passive watching doesn't promote learning. If you're using screens, read and play along with your child, emphasizing interaction and focusing on the storyline. (*What happened there? Why do you think it happened? What might come next?*) Point to areas of interest, imitate the motions on the screen, pause to ask or answer questions, encourage lots of movement, and get up to take regular breaks together.

**Supervise screen time.** Experts agree that technology shouldn't serve as a babysitter or pacifier. Although it may seem convenient to set your child in front of the TV so you can get work done, children are better off playing with toys or "helping" you in some way (imitating your work or pitching in at whatever level they are capable of). Busy parents often find themselves handing over a smartphone or tablet to keep

their children quiet or entertained in public places, but it's best to avoid doing this. Soon, a child may come to expect technology in the car or in the store. Remember, children learn about the world by accompanying you and watching what you do. Even "boring" errands are learning experiences!

**Set up "screen-free zones" at home.** For example, make it a rule that there's no screen use during snacktime or meals. Keep bedrooms screen free, too. Children who have free access to screens in their rooms tend to use technology more frequently. Studies have shown a link between screens in bedrooms and weight gain. And avoid the use of electronic devices before bedtime—not only for children but also for adults. Using screens in the evening and late at night makes it harder to settle down and fall asleep.

**Focus on educational material.** Children ages 5 and up have a wider variety of entertainment technology to choose from, and stronger opinions about what they like or don't like. But as the parent or caregiver, you still have the final say. Keep looking for high-quality material with a learning component. Remember that fast-paced content may have the effect of riling up your child. If you see this happening, step in.

**Question the "norm."** Today, more and more preschoolers have tablets and smartphones of their own. This suggests that electronic devices are becoming a regular part of the childhood experience. And yet, at what cost? Preschoolers and early elementary-school students are naturally curious about gadgets and media, but as a parent you ultimately get to decide what's right for your child. Children who sit in front of screens for long periods of time from a young age aren't getting fresh air, physical activity, and social interaction—all of which help them learn and grow. So be sure to make unplugged play the priority!

**Schedule screen time so the limits are clear.** The recommended daily guideline is no more than 1 to 2 hours total of screen time per day for children ages 2 and up. So, you might limit use of the TV to certain times of day or allow it only on weekends. Consider making the use of electronics conditional: "You can play the computer game for 20 minutes after you've finished homework and chores." Consistency is the key. Grandparents, sitters, and older siblings all need to know your screen-time expectations. Post the rules and set a timer to help everyone remember. Also, make sure the 1 to 2 hours of screen time reflect *all* electronic usage in a day. So, if you go see a movie together, try to turn off the screens and devices for the rest of the day.

**Keep tabs on what's on.** Place the TV or computer in a public area of your home so you can stay aware of what your child is watching and doing. Use passwords and parental-control features on electronics to block access to inappropriate material.

**Limit your own use.** Most of us could benefit from going on a "media diet" and becoming more aware of how much time we *really* spend in front of a screen. You may find it helpful to keep a written record of how much time you're on your phone, computer, or tablet and how often you watch television and movies. Your children are learning from your example. Make an effort to "turn it off": Avoid leaving the TV on in the background or channel-surfing while the kids play. Be sure to stay off the phone while driving. For conversations, shut down your device and talk to family members face-to-face. This isn't always easy, but it's important for your child's health and development.

## Screen-Free Guidelines

- ☀ The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says children under the age of 2 should avoid screen time. Studies show that the brain of a child age 2 or younger isn't developmentally able to process information from screens; young children may quickly become confused or overstimulated.
- ☀ Children over age 2 should be limited to 1 to 2 hours of screen time each day, with a focus on high-quality educational material. (Avoid media that's aggressive or overstimulating.)
- ☀ Always avoid violent content. Select age-appropriate material.
- ☀ Don't let your child use more than one electronic device at a time. This kind of multitasking isn't good for brain development.

