

EVERYDAY
MINDFULNESS

Get Outdoors

A MINDFULNESS GUIDE
TO NOTICING NATURE



Paul Christelis

Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

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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 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 cultivate mindfulness by becoming curious about the natural world around them. By placing attention on their environment, they can quiet their distracted, worried, or self-critical minds.



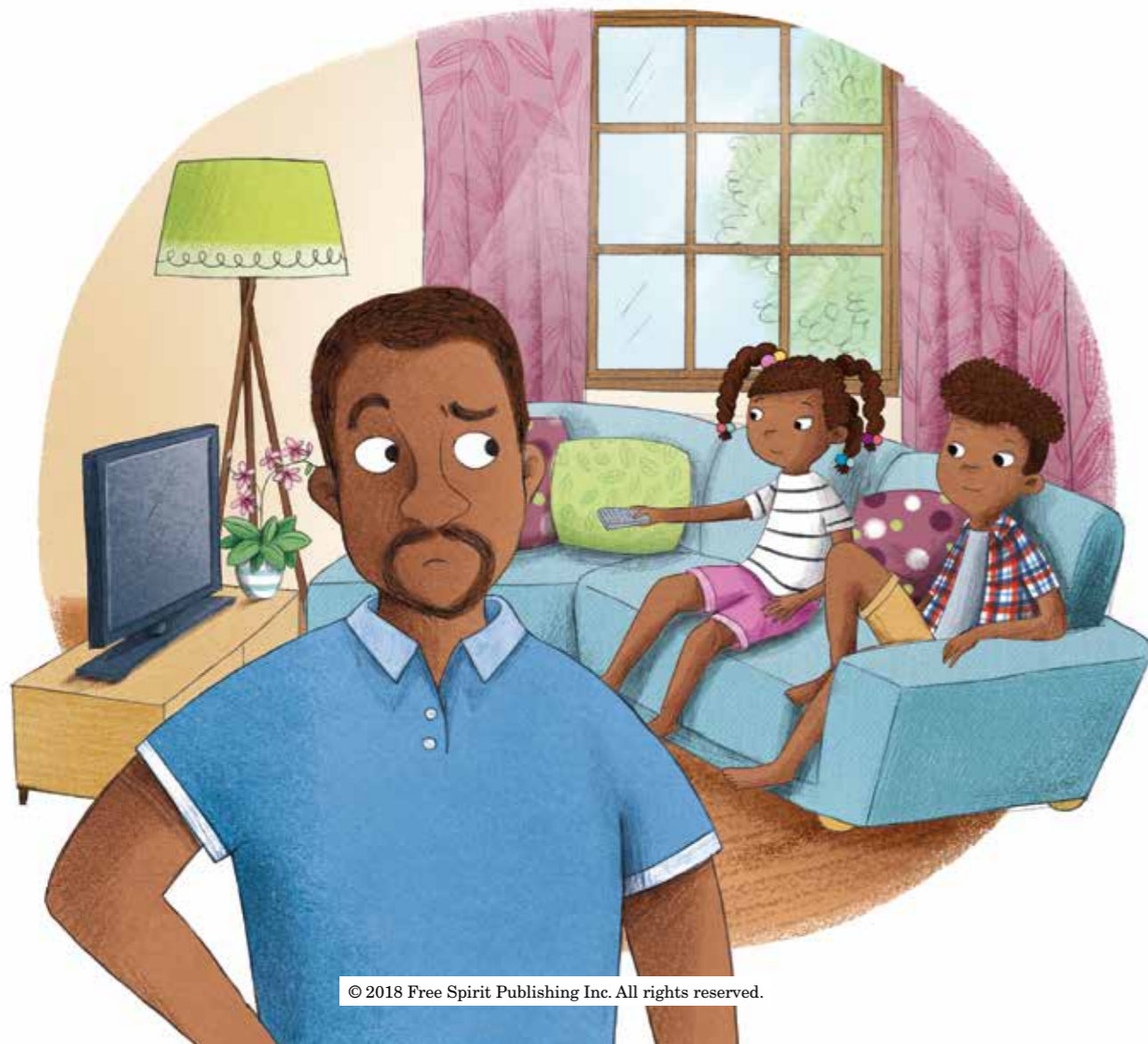
Focusing on nature also reminds us that we are each connected to the wider world, which can help us feel more secure. This can also instill empathy for all living creatures and a sense of responsibility for the impact we make on the environment.

The book can be read interactively, allowing readers to pause at various points to turn their attention to 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, whether this is outdoors, indoors, or an internal response to what they see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. 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 health and happiness.

It's Saturday morning and Jada and her brother Michael are watching TV.

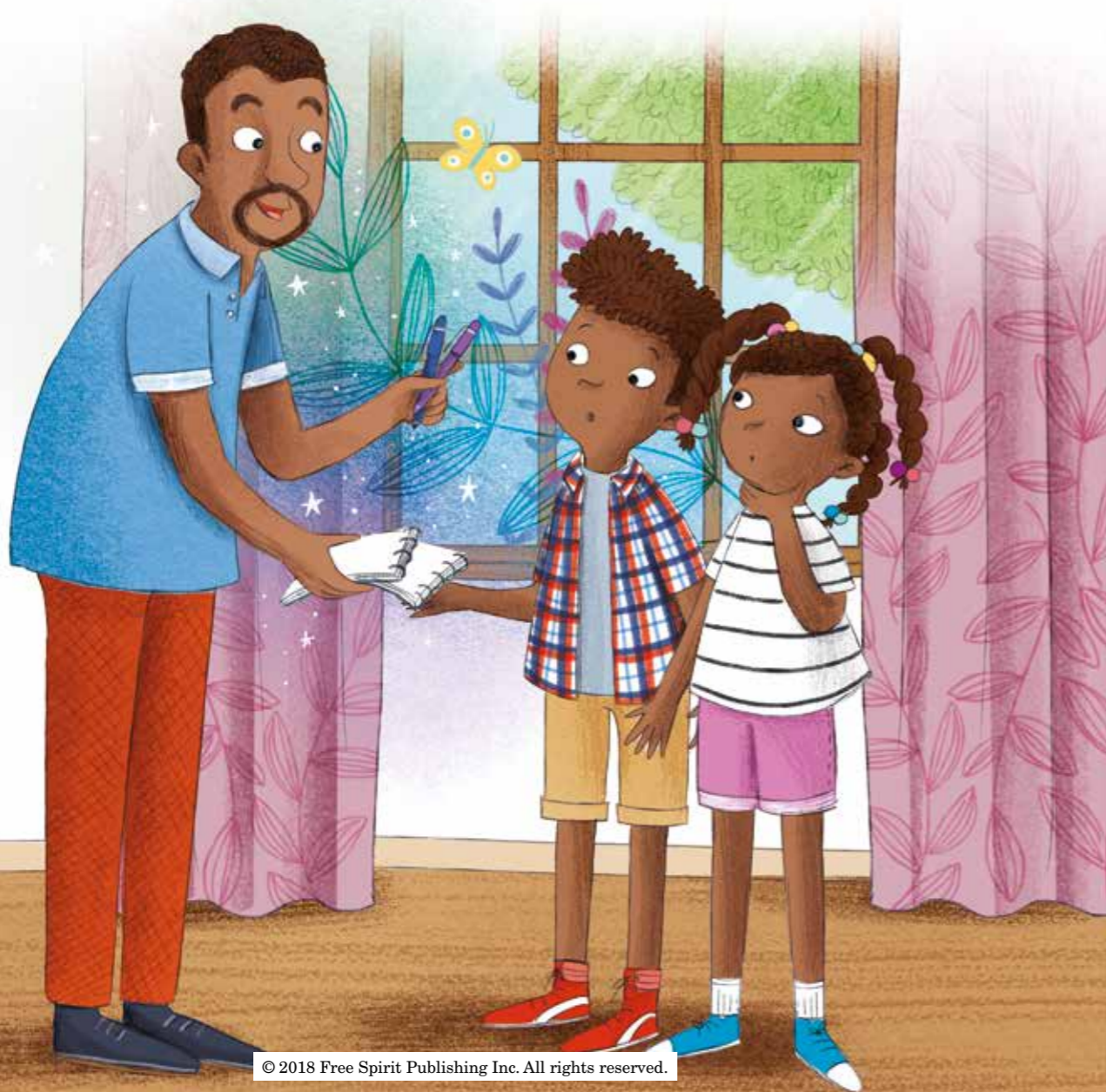
“That’s all they ever seem to do!” sighs their dad. “It’s a **beautiful** day and we are lucky enough to have a yard, but they won’t budge from that couch!”



Suddenly, Dad has an idea. “Kids, who wants to win a **prize?**” This gets their attention. “Me! Me!” they both shout. “Then switch off the TV and listen up!” says Dad.



“You’re going to play the Get Outdoors Game. The winner is the person who can notice the most **interesting** things outside. Each of you take a notebook and a pen to write down everything you see. And remember, sometimes the smallest things are the most interesting. So observe carefully!”



“What’s the prize?” asks Michael, who is very competitive.
“It’s a **surprise**,” says Dad.
“Now off you go. You have until lunchtime.”



⏸ PAUSE BUTTON

Do you have a yard or a park near your home? Take a moment to be curious about how much time you spend indoors and how much you spend outdoors.

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!

Senses in a Box

You can play this game with as many players as you'd like. Write down each of the four senses other than taste on four pieces of paper, fold them, and put them in a small box. When it's your turn, choose a piece of paper from the box. Read out the sense that's written on that paper. If, for example, you have picked *smell*, then set a timer for three minutes. During this time, all players should use their sense of smell to pay attention to what's around them. Write down all of your observations, just as Jada and Michael did in the story. At the end of the three minutes, spend some time sharing what you noticed. What was the most common smell? The most pleasant? Unpleasant? Unusual? Then choose a different player to pick a new sense from the box.

If you really want to sharpen your attention during this game, try playing it in silence. Talking can dilute our attention and distract us from noticing things.

This game is best played outdoors to take advantage of the endless wonders of nature around us. However, if it's not possible to be outside, exploring indoors can work well too. What's important is to remain curious and open to our environment, wherever we may be.

Be a Tree

This practice is a meditation that encourages children to embrace stillness and be receptive to what's around them.

Choose a spot outside, preferably where trees are present. Encourage children to stand or sit up straight and to be still and relaxed, just like a tree. They can

imagine that they have roots growing from under their feet into the earth. They can spread their fingers and notice the feel of the breeze or wind moving past their hands, just like wind passing through tree branches. This is especially effective with closed eyes, allowing children to deeply experience the feeling of being still and quiet in the open, and allowing them to hear the sounds around them.

Super Sense Spot

A variation of the tree meditation is to sit down on the ground and to claim that spot as your Super Sense Spot. Notice how it feels to make contact with the earth. Then look around you and take in as many sights, smells, and sounds as you can. Remember to look above at the sky and notice shapes and textures of clouds, the shade of blue or gray, birds passing overhead, and so on.

Notice that if you sit for long enough you observe different things. In fact, it is important to really give yourself enough time for this exercise, because initially the first few minutes can seem unremarkable. It's only when we slow down our attention that we start to pay attention to all the little sensations that are going on in and around us.

What's great about these mindfulness practices is that there is no such thing as a right or wrong "answer." Simply allow children to have their own responses to stimuli. Help them be curious about how they experience the world by entering into the experience with them through prompts like: "Tell me more about that." "How does that sunset make you feel inside?" "What's it like to be as still as a tree?" Share your own responses too. This helps children accept and validate others' experiences, even if they differ from theirs.