



# Caregiver Guide

**Preschool, 3-5 years old**



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## The Healthy Minds, Thriving Kids Pre-K Project makes important mental health skills available to every preschool child in the State of Ohio.

The project seeks to

- Give preschool children basic age-appropriate mental health skills
- Provide adults with ways to emotionally support kids as they grow

This video series, based on mental health research, includes five videos and this Caregiver Guide. The videos cover five important areas:



### Understanding Feelings

Learn to name and accept all feelings while finding healthy ways to deal with them.



### Being Brave

Learn to face situations that make you feel nervous or scared.



### Using Your Words

Learn to use words to say what you need, solve problems, and connect with people.



### Being a Good Friend

Learn skills to be a better friend.



### Having Big Feelings

Notice when big feelings happen and learn how to deal with them, improving self-awareness and decision-making.



# Understanding Feelings

**Kids have all of the same tricky, wonderful, confusing, and big emotions that adults do. It's important for them to know that it's okay to feel all of their emotions — and that means good feelings but also uncomfortable ones.**

As your child learned from our hedgehog friends, emotions are important because they tell us a lot about ourselves and the world around us. They also help us connect with one another. Learning how to notice, label, and express their feelings helps children feel more in control. “Feelings happen every day. Feelings happen, they’re okay!”

## Important skills from the video

- Everyone has lots of different feelings, and all of them are okay.
- Name feelings when they happen. Naming feelings helps you notice that they are happening — and lets you know that you can feel more than one emotion at a time.
- Notice how feelings in your body are connected to different emotions. Our bodies give us clues about what we are feeling.

## PRACTICE SKILLS

- Check in with your child every day and ask what they are feeling. Showing them pictures or giving them different words to use can help them get better at talking about their feelings — do this before jumping to problem-solving or fixing what is wrong! You might say:



“I see that you’re feeling sad, and that’s okay.”

“I hear you feel angry and sad at the same time. That happens.”

“It makes sense to feel excited and nervous!”

- Praise them every time they name their feelings or notice someone else’s feelings. And be specific about what they did well. You might say:



“Great job knowing that you feel scared. Thank you for letting me know.”

“Good job noticing that you are feeling mad. I will take deep breaths with you to calm down our bodies.”

- Use picture books and stories. Ask kids how a character may be feeling based on the story or their expression in the picture. You can also use books and stories to help your child understand their own feelings, and where in their body different feelings happen.

For example:

“How do you think Jaila is feeling in this picture?” “What is Jaila doing that makes you think she is feeling mad?” “Where do you feel mad in your body?”

- Share how you are feeling and how you feel it in your body. This is a great way to teach kids that uncomfortable feelings are normal.

### START WITH THIS →

- When kids talk about their feelings, caregivers should make sure they feel heard. Let kids know that it's normal to have all kinds of feelings. Talking it through helps kids understand their feelings better and better as they grow.
- Talk about your own emotions and what they look and feel like. When kids do the same, give them praise to remind them that this is an important skill.





# Using Your Words

**The preschool years can be hard for kids. Having the ability to use words to say what they think, say what they feel, and ask for what they need, can make things a little easier for them.** A major skill children need to learn is how to use language to express themselves and get their needs met. Kids at this age act out when they want to communicate. But with practice, they can move away from this behavior and learn to use their words instead.

Our hedgehog friend Nina was able to use her words to tell her friend Sam why she was upset. And then they were able to work together.

## Important skills from the video

- All feelings are okay to feel — it's what we do with them that matters.
- It's normal for preschool kids to have strong reactions sometimes. When kids act out, adults can use the situation to teach them about using words instead.
- When kids face problems or have big feelings, they need a little help finding their words.

## PRACTICE SKILLS

- Preschool kids learn from watching adults. Show them how you use words to talk about how you feel and ask for what you need. You can also use words to describe what you see your child may be feeling or needing.
- Angry, sad, happy, or excited. Whatever feeling you are feeling, talk about it in a calm voice. You might say:



“I am feeling angry, but I’m going to talk to my friend about ways that we can solve this problem.”

“I’m feeling a bit sad. I think talking to a friend will make me feel better.”

- Show kids how to use words to say what you like. You might say:



“I really liked how you helped me clean your toys.”

“I like books that describe fun places to visit.”

- When your child is calm, practice words and phrases that they can use when they are upset. This can help kids feel ready to use words when they have a problem. When they are able to use their words in hard situations, give praise right away and every time you see them do it. This is the best way to encourage helpful behavior. You might say:

“I’m proud of you for calmly using your words to tell me you’re not ready to leave the playground.”

“I love how you’re using your words to ask for a turn with that toy.”

“Thank you for telling me that you loved that show. Me too!”

- Use books, movies, or real-life situations to show how people clearly use their words to say how they feel or ask for things they need.

### START WITH THIS →

- Watching what adults do and say is an important way preschool kids learn. Model how you use your words. This means letting them see you talk about your feelings, say what you like, and ask for what you need.
- Be a narrator. This means using words to say what you may think your child is feeling and wanting. Being a narrator helps kids connect words to how they are feeling and what they are wanting.
- When your child is calm, practice words they can use when they are upset or have a problem. Praise them every time they use their words to say how they feel and what they want.



# Having Big Feelings

**For preschoolers, having big feelings can happen a lot. Learning how to manage them is an important skill that will help them as they continue to grow and develop.**

Kids at this age are starting to know that any emotion can feel big. But they're also learning that they can use skills or go to trusted grown-ups to help the big feeling pass.

When Rocco the hedgehog was having big feelings of sadness and anger, he started to cry. He learned that there are many different things he could do to help with big feelings, like taking some deep breaths, counting to three, using words to name his feelings, or getting a hug from someone safe. These actions can help a big feeling pass. They also help us see that we can get through even the biggest of feelings and give us a little space to figure out what to do next.

## Important skills from the video

- Everyone has big feelings sometimes, and that's okay.
- Big feelings can make us want to act before we stop and think.
- But there are a lot of things we can do — like taking deep breaths or hugging a safe person — that can help us calm down so we can decide what to do next.

## PRACTICE SKILLS

- Tell your child that it's okay to feel what they are feeling. This helps them feel heard and understood, and teaches them that they can handle big feelings.

“ I hear how upset that made you feel, and I can understand why.”

- Model healthy ways to deal with big feelings. This means showing and telling them about the things you do when you feel a strong emotion.

“ I'm feeling a big feeling, so I'm going to take some deep breaths to help me calm down.”

“ I feel frustrated right now. I'm going to take a break and then come back to this when I feel a less frustrated.”

- When your child is calm, discuss things they can do when they are feeling big emotions. Be specific about what they can try in different situations.



- When your child does one of those things to ride out a big feeling, give them praise in the moment. It's important to do this every time. These reminders help make using these skills a habit. You might say:



“I see you were feeling overwhelmed, and I love how you're hugging your stuffy to calm down.”

“I like how you're taking a break to help with big feelings.”

“Thank you for counting to three with me and taking big breaths.”

### **START WITH THIS →**

- Start by letting your child know that feeling big feelings is normal, and that sharing them with you is a great first step to handle them.
- When your child is in a calm place, make a plan for big feelings before they happen. Ask your child if there are things or activities that would help them deal with a big feeling — like hugging a favorite stuffed animal or taking a few deep breaths. Knowing a safe thing to reach for when you need to calm down makes you more likely to do it.

# Being Brave

**Kids in preschool will face situations that might make them feel nervous or scared.** Common ones include going to school for the first time, being away from a parent, sleeping on their own, making new friends, and going to the doctor.

As you and your child will learn from our hedgehog friends, it's helpful to know that these feelings are normal, and that being brave when they happen helps to build confidence. Being brave — when you're in a safe place with grown-ups around — means pushing yourself to do something that may feel scary at first. But with practice, it will feel less and less scary.

## Important skills from the video

- It's normal to feel scared and nervous when you try new things.
- Feeling scared in your body is normal, even if your stomach hurts, your heart is beating too fast, or you start to cry.
- Practicing taking brave steps in a safe place with a grown-up helps to make a scary situation feel less and less scary over time.

## PRACTICE SKILLS

- When your child is going into a new situation, let them know what to expect, so they will feel more confident. Some kids may ask a lot of questions — and that's okay. They may also like hearing the same details a few times.

“You are going to dance class for the first time, where you'll meet your teacher and get to know your classmates! I'll be in the waiting room the whole time and will get to watch you do your class.”

- It helps kids to know what a new situation will look like. How big is the classroom? How far away is the waiting room? Try to describe what a new situation will look like or show them a new space before they have to face it on their own.
- But let them know that it's still normal to feel scared or nervous.

“When we start something new, we can feel a little scared or nervous and that's okay. Everyone feels scared sometimes.”

- Help kids understand that feelings in their body and their emotions are connected.
  - “When you feel scared, where do you feel it in your body? Does your tummy feel funny or hurt? Does your heart feel like it’s beating fast? Do your hands feel shaky? All those body feelings can happen when you feel scared or nervous and that’s okay.”
- Show them skills they can use when they feel scared by doing them yourself. Take a deep breath or say out loud, “I can do this,” when you feel nervous or try something new.
- Be understanding of how they feel but also encourage them to take brave steps.
  - “I hear that you feel scared AND I know you can take this brave step.”
- When your child does take a brave step, celebrate it. And remind them that practice will make being brave easier.
  - “You did a wonderful job going into class all by yourself! The more you do it, the easier it will be!”

#### START WITH THIS →

- Name uncomfortable feelings — like being nervous or scared — and let kids know they’re normal. Show kids ways to feel calm by doing them yourself.
- Talk about taking brave steps as a way of practicing feeling less scared. When a kid takes a brave step, celebrate it and cheer them on to keep going.



# Being a Good Friend

**Sharing, waiting, taking turns, and noticing and doing something to help when a friend is upset — these are the skills of being a good friend.** Kids begin to learn them in preschool. As they get older, they will build on them to be a good team member and a good community member, too.

In the friendship dance, Ralph the hedgehog learns one way to be a good friend to Mandy. Because being a good friend means practicing helpful friendship skills.

## Important skills from the video

- Getting along with others helps you to be a good friend and a good family and community member.
- Other good friendship skills include helping, listening, sharing, taking turns, being flexible, and finding a middle ground when you don't agree.

## PRACTICE SKILLS

- Model helpful friendship skills. This means talking about and showing how you use helpful friendship skills. You might say:



“It really felt good to share my favorite book with my friend, Sarah.”

“Our neighbor Nancy isn't feeling good. I thought we could bake her some cookies, so she knows we are thinking of her.”

- Find ways for your child to practice friendship skills at playdates, in groups, or even at home.
- When they use these skills, tell them that they did a good job and name the helpful friendship behavior you saw. It's important to give praise in the moment and to do it often. You might say:



“You're doing great sharing and taking turns with your brother.”

“I love how you're using your words to ask for a turn with that toy.”

“That was really nice of you to ask how your friend was doing when they were upset.”

“Thank you for being patient and waiting your turn to talk.”

“Great job being flexible and letting your friend choose what to play.”

**START WITH THIS →**

- Talk with your child about why it is important to be a good friend. Use examples from their life at school and at home to help them learn that people use good friendship skills every day.
- When you see your child using helpful friendship skills, give them praise. Make sure to name the helpful friendship behavior when it happens and as often as it happens.

# Activity Sheets

On the following pages you'll find activity sheets that you can do with your child or post at home to reinforce these five skills.

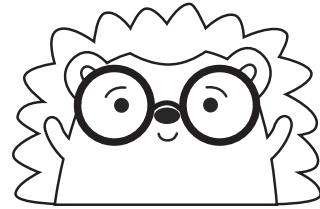


# Understanding Feelings

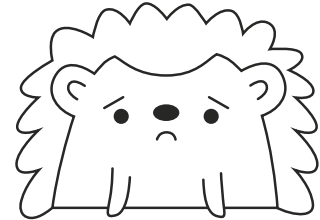
🎵 Feelings happen every day. Feelings happen, they're okay. 🎵

Below are our hedgehog friends with different feelings faces.  
Match the feeling word to the hedgehog face.

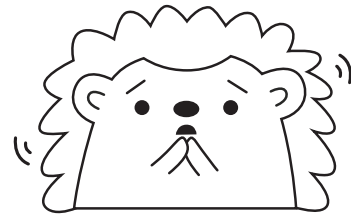
Sad



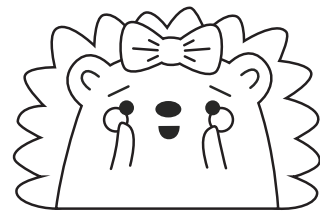
Mad



Happy



Scared



Surprised



# Understanding Feelings



♪ Feelings happen every day. Feelings happen, they're okay. ♪



Happy

Mad

Scared

Sad

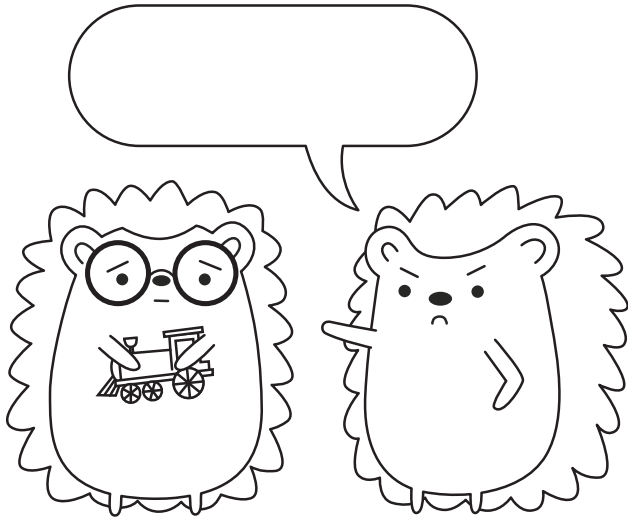
Surprised



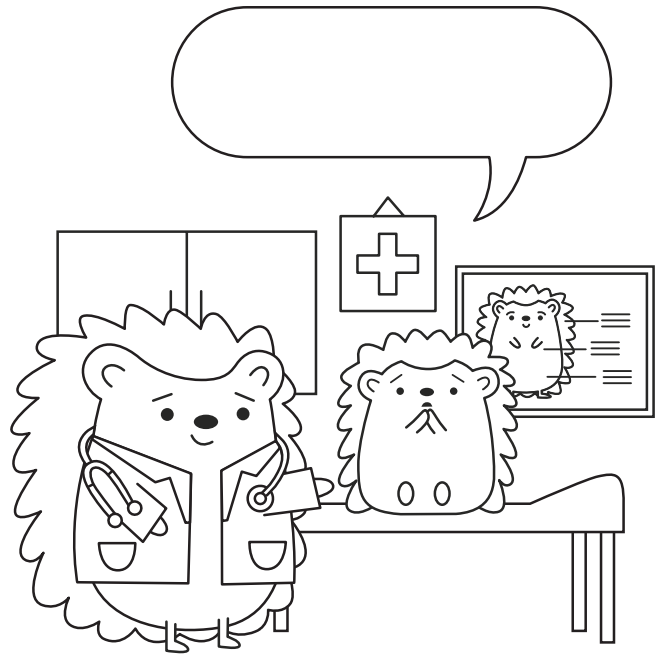
# Using Your Words

♪ You can use your words! ♪

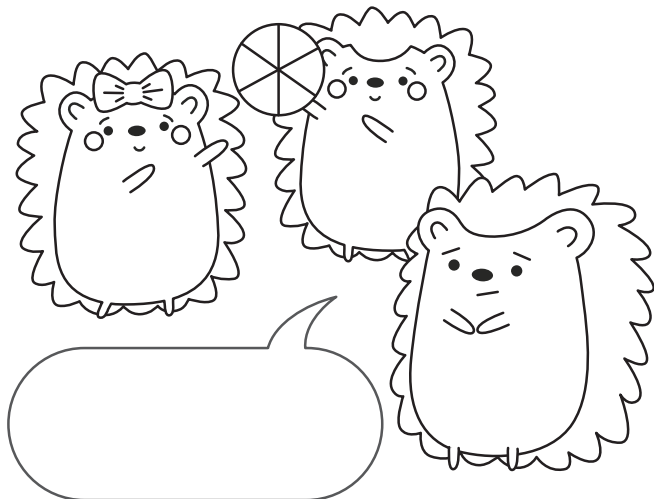
Take a look at the hedgehogs in different situations below.  
Think about what words the hedgehog can use in that situation.



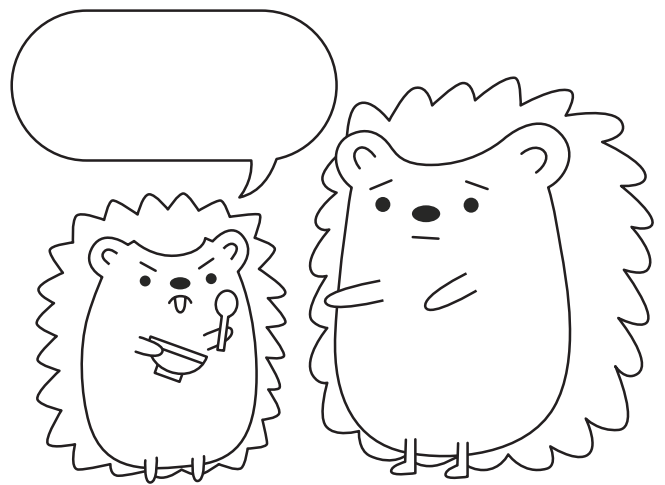
The hedgehog is mad at the other hedgehog for taking their toy.



The hedgehog is nervous at the doctor's office.



The hedgehog is nervous to join the other hedgehogs playing.

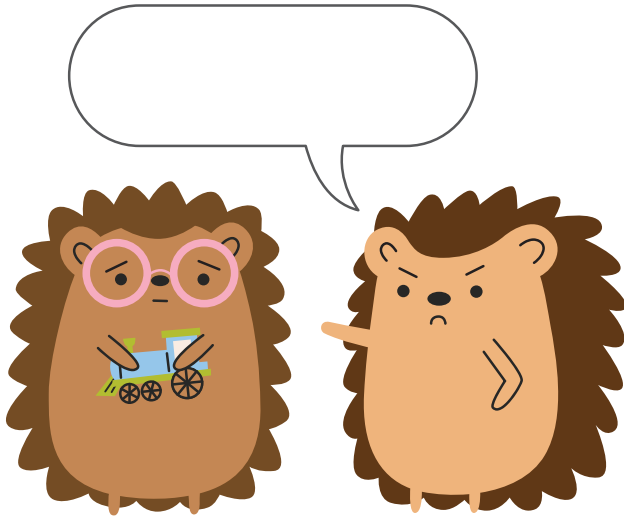


The hedgehog does not like the meal.

# Using Your Words

♪ You can use your words! ♪

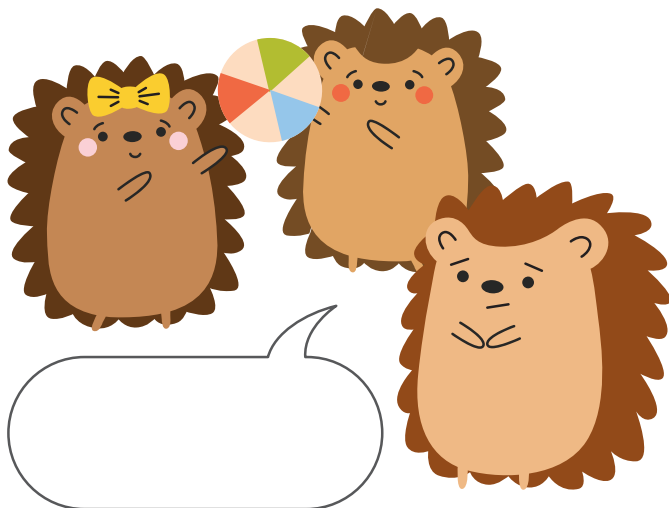
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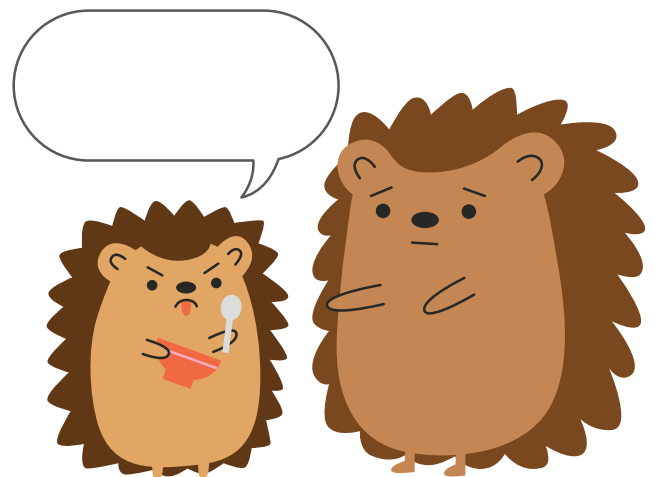
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# Having Big Feelings

🎵 *Big feelings, they come and they go.* 🎵

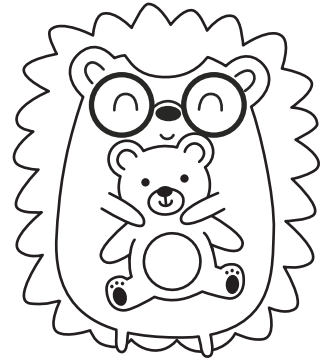
Below are a variety of skills YOU can use to help with having big feelings.  
Think about a time when you could use each of the skills below.



Count to three



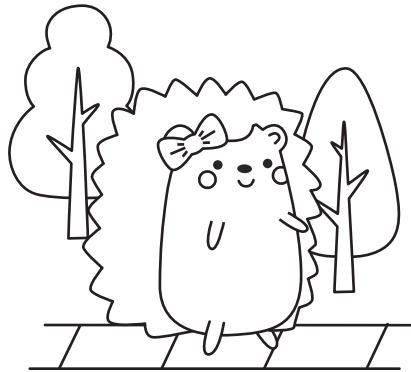
Take a deep breath



Hug a stuffed animal



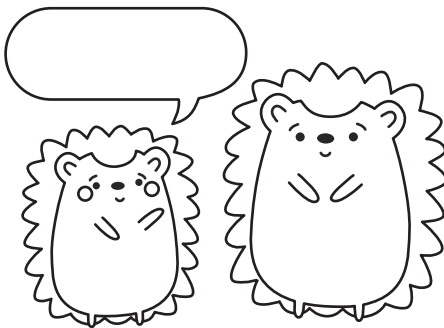
Draw or color a picture



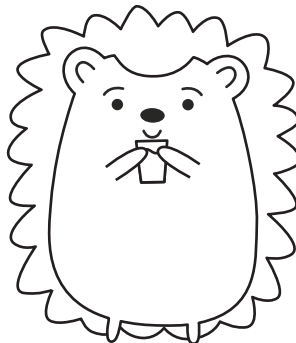
Take a break or walk



Listen, dance, or sing to music



Talk to a trusted grown-up



Get a drink of water

What do you like to do when you have big feelings?

# Having Big Feelings

🎵 *Big feelings, they come and they go.* 🎵

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Think about a time when you could use each of the skills below.



Count to three



Take a deep breath



Hug a stuffed animal



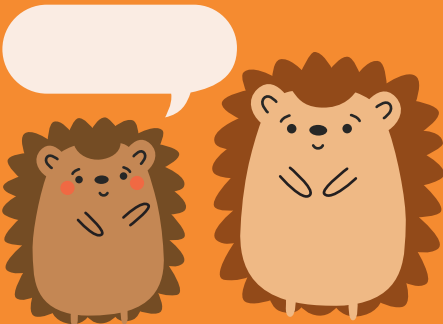
Draw or color a picture



Take a break or walk



Listen, dance, or sing to music



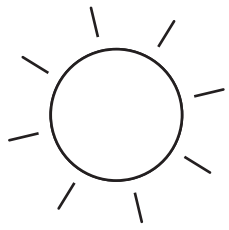
Talk to a trusted grown-up



Get a drink of water

What do you like to do when you have big feelings?



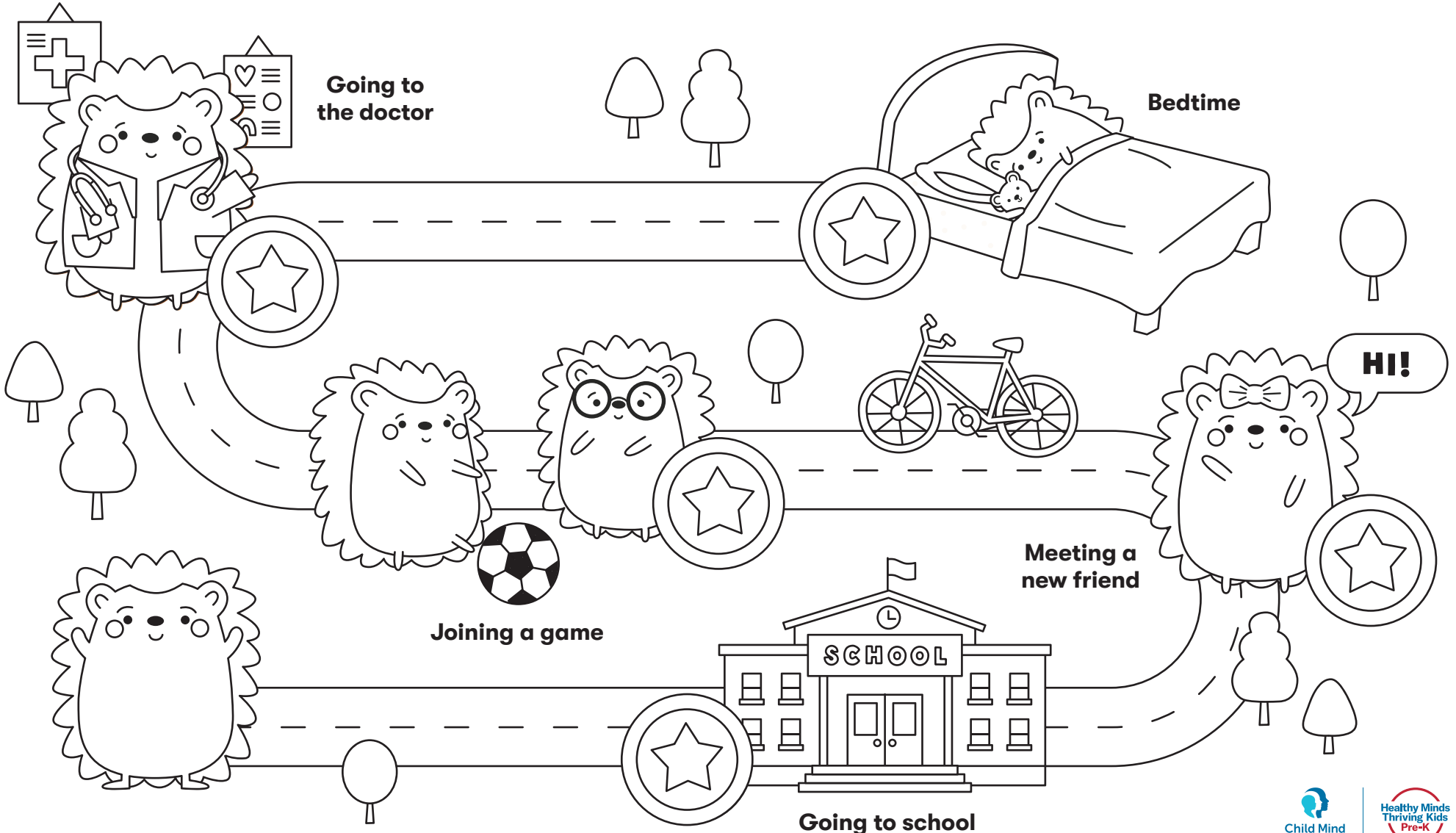


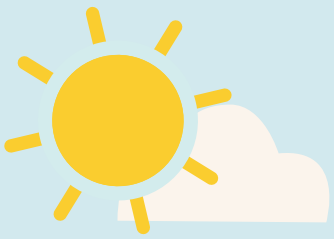
# Being Brave

♪ A little bravery every day makes the scared go away. ♪



Trace the hedgehog's steps through Hedgehog Land to collect bravery coins by doing things that may make them feel scared. Color in the bravery coins as you go!





# Being Brave



♪ A little bravery every day makes the scared go away. ♪

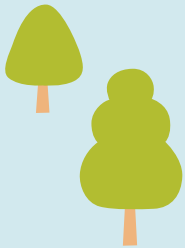
Trace the hedgehog's steps through Hedgehog Land to collect bravery coins by doing things that may make them feel scared. Color in the bravery coins as you go!



Going to the doctor



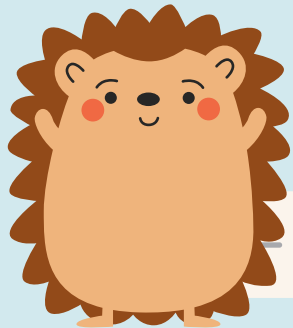
Bedtime



Joining a game



Meeting a new friend



Going to school



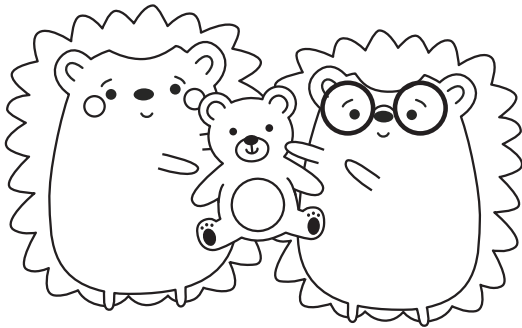
# Being a Good Friend



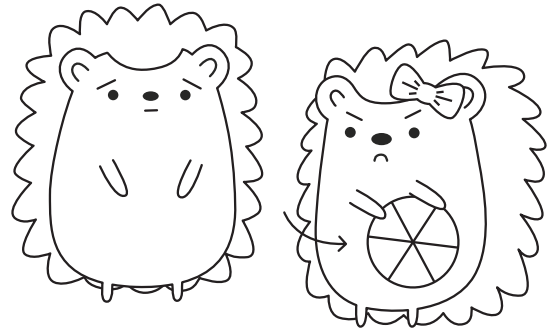
*It's always good to be a good friend  
because being a good friend is great!*



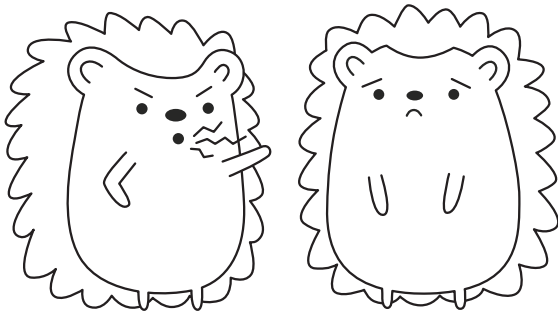
Below is a picture of different situations with our hedgehog friends interacting with each other using helpful or unhelpful friendship behaviors. Color the helpful friendship behaviors.



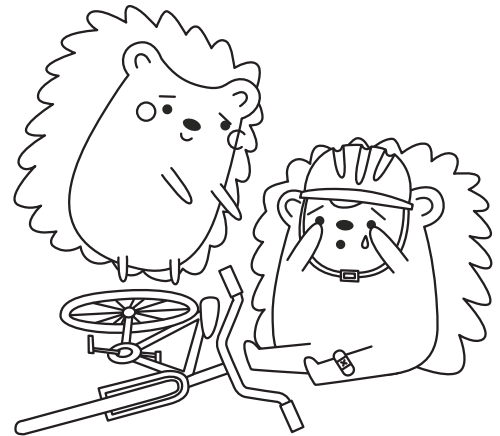
Sharing toys



Taking a toy

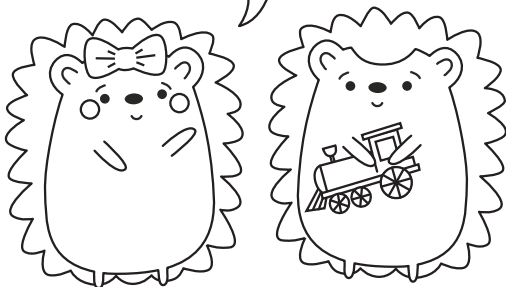


Yelling at a friend

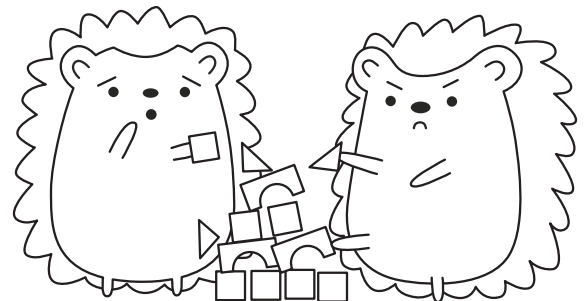


Helping someone

**CAN I HAVE A TURN?**



Using your words

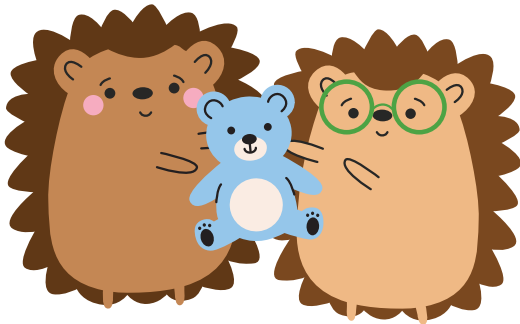


Knocking something over on purpose

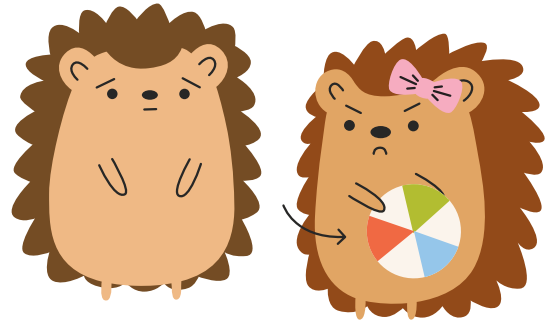
# Being a Good Friend

♪ It's always good to be a good friend ♪  
because being a good friend is great!

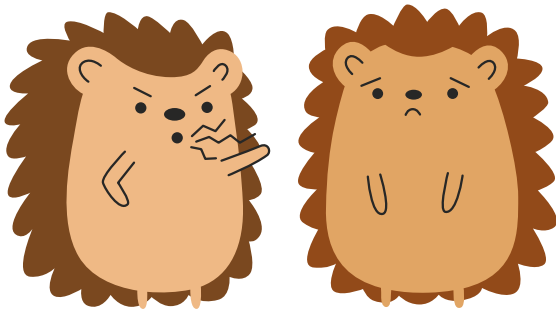
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Sharing toys



Taking a toy

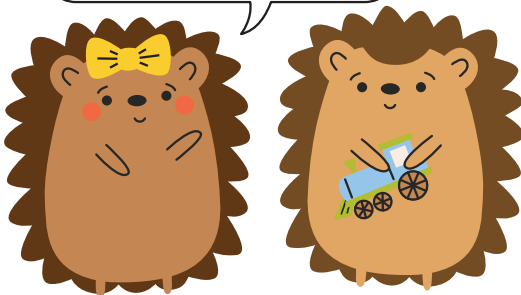


Yelling at a friend

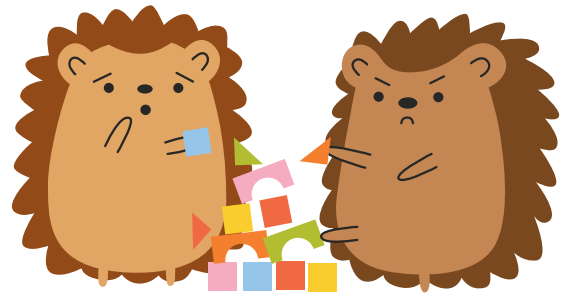


Helping someone

CAN I HAVE A TURN?



Using your words



Knocking something over on purpose