



MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES
DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS

NOAH'S GROWING UP DIARY

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL



Illustrated by Nelson Lip



NOAH'S GROWING UP DIARY

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL



"I don't want to leave you both! School is scary!" cried Noah. It was the first day of a new school year and Noah, a six-year-old boy, was starting primary school.

"Primary school is just the same as the kindergarten you went to last year. You're going to make new friends and have fun," Mum said affectionately. "Don't worry and just enjoy the school life! Dad and I will come to pick you up this afternoon."



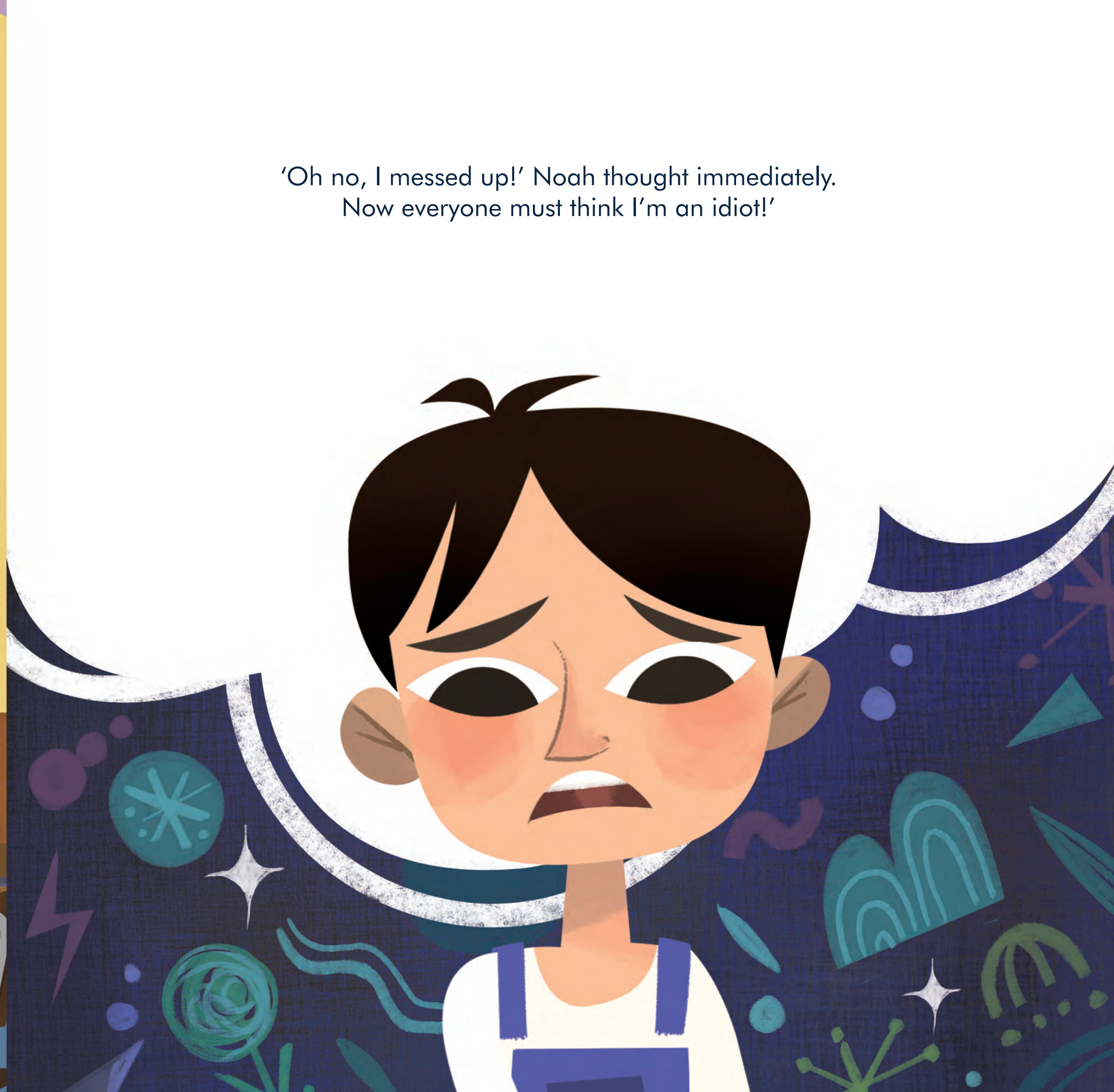
With that encouragement, Noah finally plucked up the courage to enter the school.




In the first lesson, the teacher asked all the students in the class to introduce themselves. When it was Noah's turn, he blushed.

"Good... good morning. My... my name is... is... No... Noah."

'Oh no, I messed up!' Noah thought immediately. Now everyone must think I'm an idiot!





During the break, Noah saw a group of classmates who were playing football together. Noah wanted to join them, but didn't have the courage to speak to them. All he did was peep at the group from the classroom window with a sense of loneliness.

Noah started to miss his parents and Ball, an orange Superball who came from the Universe and who was now his best friend, more than ever. Suddenly, Noah saw Ball floating outside the window!



I am worried about you and want to check if you're okay! Although I can't get in, you can still talk to me in your mind.



Maybe she just didn't hear you or she was nervous too.

I'm so glad you're here! I'm so nervous! I'm afraid I will mess up and I can't make any friends.



Do you remember that when we met for the first time, you were afraid too? But now, we're good friends.

It is normal for us to feel worried or scared when we meet people for the first time. But once you take a brave step, you'll soon find out that the real situation is not as scary as you imagine, and you can even enjoy making new friends!

But I used to get ignored when I said hi to a kid in the playground...



“It takes steps to become friends with others. The first step is to look in the person’s eyes and say hi,” Ball suggested.

Just then, Felix, one of the kids, noticed Noah. He walked towards Noah and said, “Hey! We’re still missing one person to start the game. Do you want to come?”

Noah wanted to be brave and talk to Felix but he froze and felt his heart beating rapidly and his mouth as dry as sandpaper.





Ball encouraged, "Noah, now they are not saying no to you! Let's take several slow and deep breaths first. Then, you can try and imagine that you're just talking to me!"

Noah listened to Ball and took a moment to pace his breath. He felt better but his eyes were still looking in all directions except at the boy in front of him. Then he saw Ball putting its hands up and saying, "You got this!" with blinking eyes full of encouragement.

He thought about what Ball had told him. He looked straight into Felix's eyes and said, "Thanks for inviting me! I'm in!"

While Noah was running towards the football field with Felix, he looked at the group of other boys who were already there.

“They’re laughing. They must be talking about me,” Noah whispered.

“Yes, those boys are laughing, but how can you be sure that they are laughing at you? Why don't you walk over and see what it's really about,” Ball suggested kindly.

Noah walked towards the boys and looked more closely at them. Noah could now hear their conversation. “Hurray! We finally got enough players for the game!” The boys exclaimed happily.



“They are looking at you because they want you to join them. They are welcoming you! Do you think you can do the same and look at their eyes when you talk to them?” Ball asked.



“I can!” Noah said confidently and rushed happily onto the football pitch.



Parents' Corner

What do parents need to know about social anxiety?

Social anxiety is a condition where people are very worried about being judged negatively or rejected by others. Children who experience social anxiety are not just shy or misbehaving. The anxiety can make them feel very afraid of being embarrassed and make them avoid things that they need or want to do. For example, in Noah's case, Noah was starting to feel afraid that his new classmates were thinking negatively about him, and that made him want to stop playing with them.

This fear usually becomes less intense when children start to get used to the new routine and environment. However, when a child feels anxious for a long time and that starts to interrupt their daily activities, such as by preventing them from going to school or seeing friends, then it becomes a condition that requires professional support such as from a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Signs of social anxiety can start to show up in children from the age of four, and include:

- Bodily reactions to social situations, such as trembling, shortness of breath, sweating heavily, stomachache
- Asking many anxious questions repeatedly, such as "What if they think I'm stupid?", "What if I say something wrong?", "What if they don't like me?"
- Finding it very challenging to meet new friends or join a group
- Getting upset days or weeks before the social situation that they're afraid of occurs
- Avoiding situations where they are placed in the spotlight, such as performances or public speaking



How do we help children with adjustment-related anxiety?

Accept your child for who and how they are.

- There's no need for them to pretend to be more courageous than they really are.
- The child has the right to be who he/she is; fearful at times, courageous at others.

Tell them about how you felt afraid of being in the spotlight or meeting people for the first time, and how you faced your anxiety.

- This will help your child to learn that it is OK to have fears and to talk about them.
- They may then feel that you truly understand and support them.

Prepare your child so that they know what to expect.

- E.g. use role-play to help them get used to the situation that makes them feel afraid or worried.

Gently and lovingly encourage your child to join new social activities and to do things around other people.

- Remember to do this gradually, starting with simpler tasks such as greeting a new friend, before trying more complex tasks such as maintaining eye contact while talking to someone.
- Parents can try to do a deep breathing exercise with their children before an exciting situation.

Remember to patiently go through the process with your child.

- There is no need to force, scold or punish them if they are afraid because that will only make their anxiety worse.
- Sometimes they won't succeed and that's to be expected.
- Just reassure and comfort them. Say that it's OK and that they will manage to do it another day.

Let the school know about your child's anxiety so that your child can receive consistent support from home and school.

If you are worried about your child's social anxiety or notice that it is starting to get in the way of going to school or joining activities, it's important that you speak to a mental health professional such as a psychologist or psychiatrist. You are not alone in facing this and your child can get better with professional help.

Visit our website to learn more mental health tips: howareyou.msf.hk/en/anxiety/

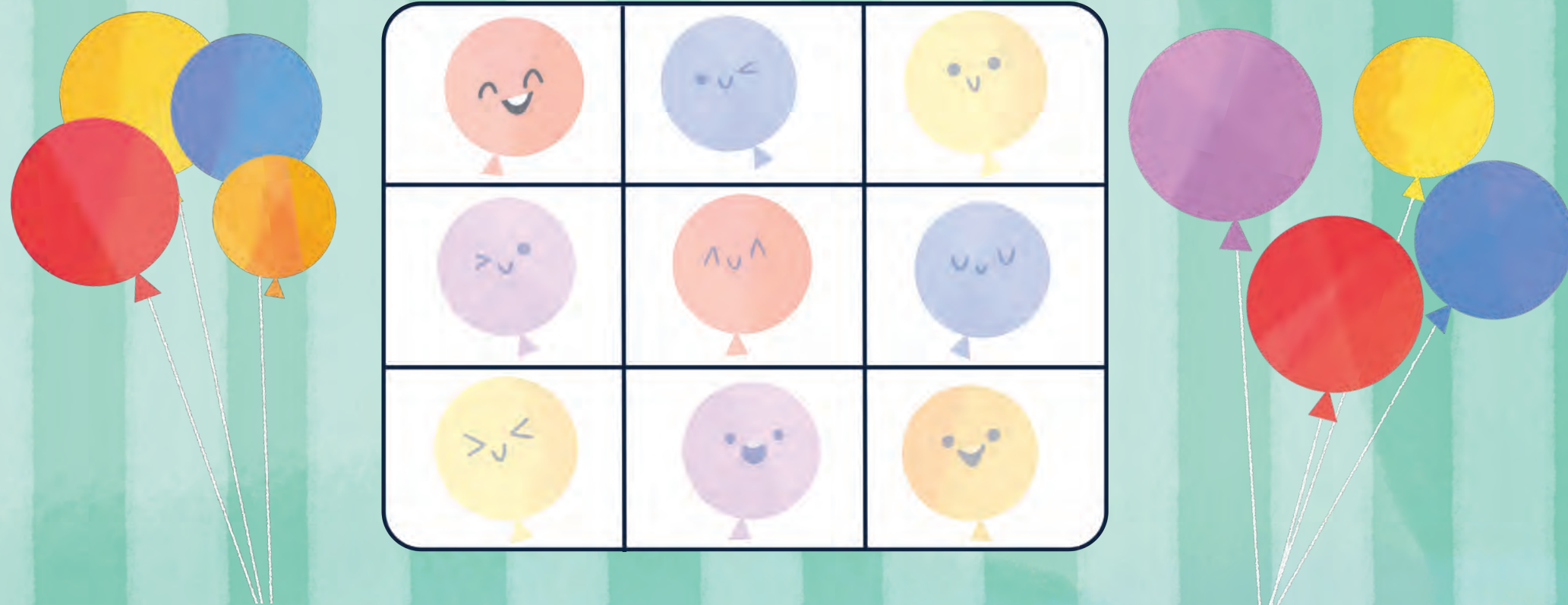



Relaxation Time for Parents and Kids

Aim High, Reach High

Think of nine social goals you would like to achieve in the coming three months, and fill in one social goal per box in the grid below. When a goal is achieved, put an X in that grid. When three goals are crossed out in a horizontal, vertical or diagonal line, you will be rewarded with a gift. Parents can discuss the rewards with their children in advance to make sure they are motivated to work harder to achieve social goals.

Suggestions: making three new friends




 *Tip: Having experiences of "success" will help your child become more confident and manage social situations.*

Self-Appreciation Diary

How do you feel today?

Please write down why you are thankful for today on the line below and draw your emotions of the day on the balloon!



 *Tip: It helps a lot to have a parent who shows that it is not a bad thing to feel shy or anxious. With the support of an understanding parent, the child can tolerate and manage many difficult feelings that will eventually subside.*

There are many ways to help your child cope with anxiety. Explore the best way with your child!

About Médecins Sans Frontières

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an international, independent, medical humanitarian organisation that delivers emergency aid to people affected by armed conflict, epidemics, natural disasters and exclusion from healthcare. We offer assistance to people based on need and irrespective of race, religion, gender or political affiliation. In 1998, MSF formally recognised the importance of providing mental healthcare as part of its emergency work.

About “Noah’s Growing Up Diary”

“Noah’s Growing Up Diary” is a series of three storybooks on mental health created and produced by MSF Hong Kong with the support of MSF psychologists. The story is centred around Noah, a six-year-old boy, who started attending primary school and who will soon be a big brother. The stories are designed to help children to prepare for and go through challenging circumstances and as a support for parents to draw out conversation with their kids. Noah’s emotional experience is normal and common amongst kids going through transitions. We highly recommend parents to read the storybook series with their kids.



I don't want to be a brother



First day of School



I am sick!



First published in December 2021

Publisher: Médecins Sans Frontières Hong Kong

Address: 22/F, Pacific Plaza, 410 - 418 Des Voeux Road West, Sai Wan, Hong Kong

Printing: ManGraphic Production Company

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