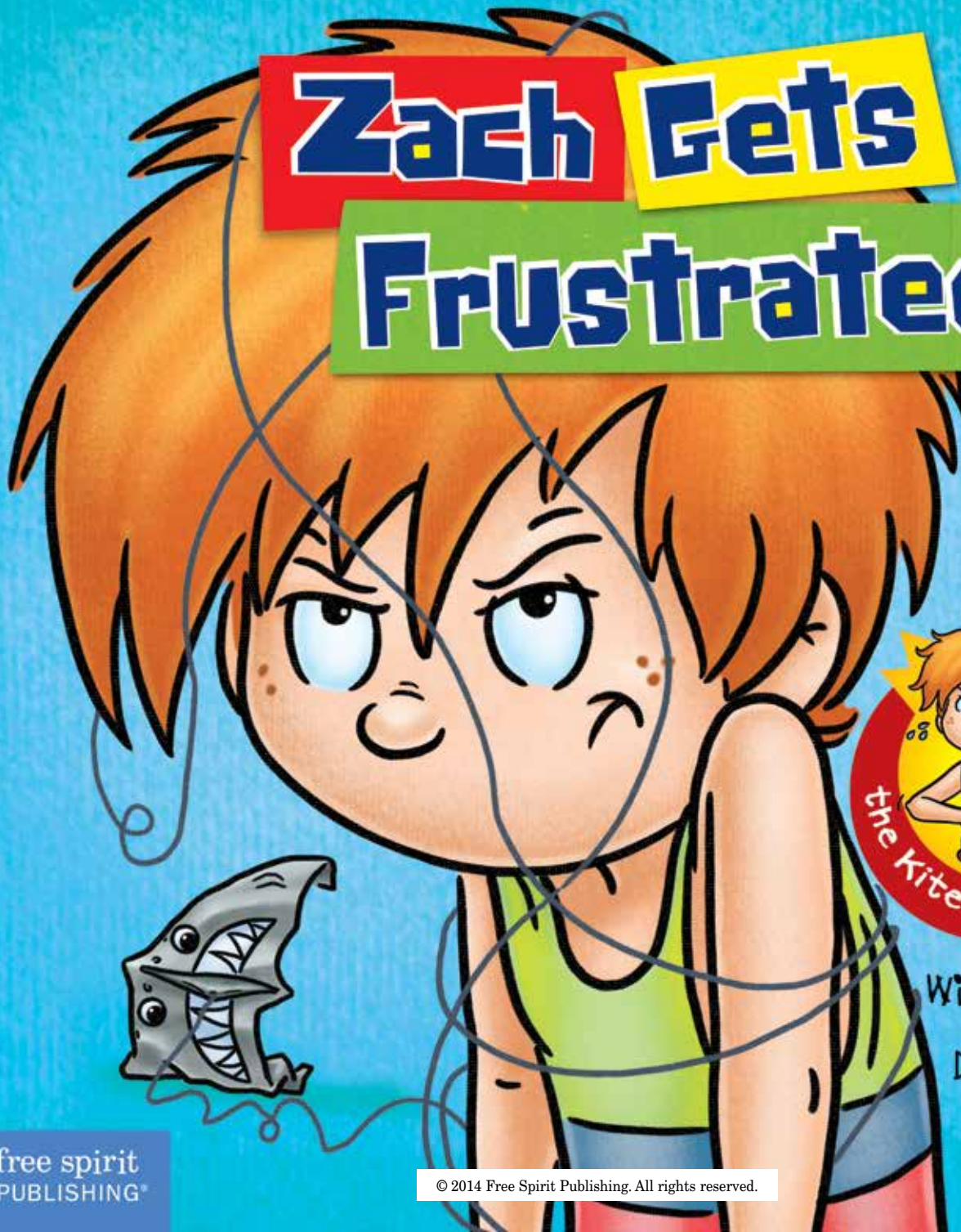


Zach Gets

Frustrated



William Mulcahy
illustrated by
Darren McKee

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

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Dedication

To Liam, Luke, and Jack:
Enjoy the moment

Acknowledgments

Deep gratitude to all of those who have entrusted me with their care and well-being; I am deeply honored to be your therapist. A special thanks to my colleagues at Family Service of Waukesha and Carrie and Melissa at Stillwaters. Lastly, to the wow-moment in Aunt Kelly's kitchen with Kristen, Ryan, and Meghan: Thanks for helping out. You rock.

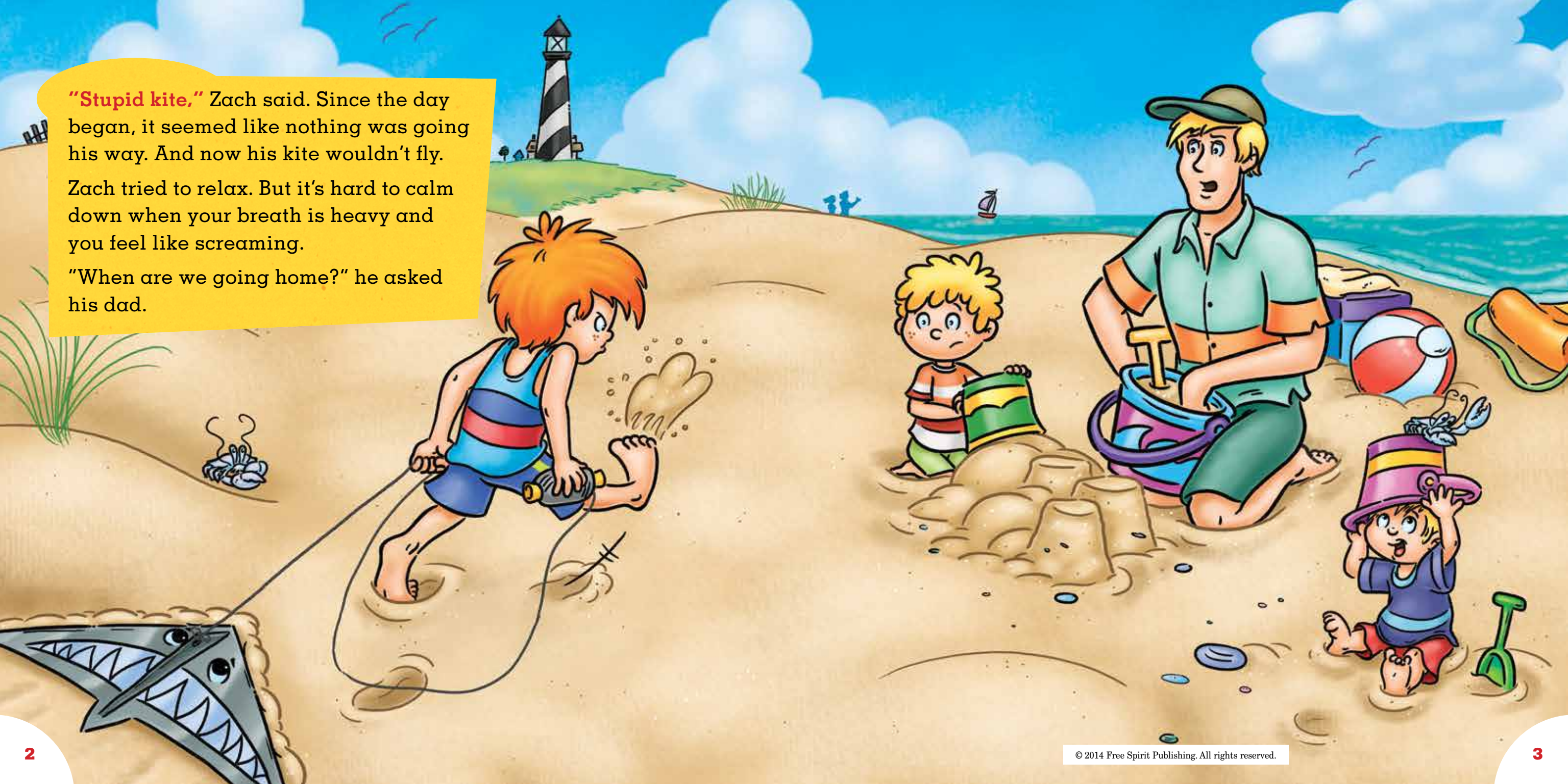
Zach lifted his kite and ran across the beach. He hoped this time the breeze would catch it. But like the other times he'd tried, the kite just fluttered and dived into the sand.



"Stupid kite," Zach said. Since the day began, it seemed like nothing was going his way. And now his kite wouldn't fly.

Zach tried to relax. But it's hard to calm down when your breath is heavy and you feel like screaming.

"When are we going home?" he asked his dad.



Helping Children Handle Frustration

As young children grow up, they continually encounter new tasks to accomplish and grow from—and also to become frustrated by. In many instances, children’s success depends on their ability to endure or overcome frustration—the feeling we get when we can’t do what we are trying to do or we can’t solve a problem facing us. Showing children how to cope with frustration in a way that puts them in charge of their thoughts and feelings not only helps them accomplish particular tasks, it helps prepare them for a lifetime of success.

The frustration triangle is a three-step process that helps kids develop the inner awareness and control they need to endure and manage frustration. While each of the three steps is important on its own, together they create a gentle but powerful tool to manage emotions.

The frustration triangle is most successful when adults and children are partners in learning about and practicing the three steps. Unfortunately, adults often misunderstand frustration; or worse, they take it personally as an affront to their parenting skills. Keep in mind that frustration is a naturally occurring emotion that all people experience. Approach frustrated children with understanding and compassion. Modeling understanding and compassion will also help children treat themselves that way while frustrated.

The frustration triangle has the power to

- build confidence
- increase a sense of peace and calmness
- decrease the likelihood of the fight-or-flight response in the brain
- increase the likelihood of successfully dealing with frustration and other difficult emotions in the future
- lift feelings of sadness and anxiety
- enhance relationships

Important: The frustration triangle is not about stuffing emotions. Help children understand that frustration is a natural emotion and that emotions are not bad or good. It’s what they do with their emotions that matters. Ideally, children can feel, identify, and deal with their emotions in a healthy way.

If children are constantly frustrated or often intensely frustrated, seek professional help.

Here is more information about the three parts of the frustration triangle. With practice, most children will be able to move fluidly from step 1 (name it) to step 2 (tame it) to step 3 (reframe it).

- 1. Name it.** In this step, children make themselves aware of what is causing their frustration. This may sound overly simple or obvious, but naming the source of frustration increases people’s awareness of their emotional state. This increased awareness puts them in a stronger position to cope with their emotion. With coaching and practice, most children are able to identify their emotions very accurately, including frustration.
- 2. Tame it.** Help children move out of their automatic thoughts and into the present moment by using relaxation skills (what are referred to in this story as “chill skills”). Using these skills helps the mind let go of the frustration. These skills may include slow deep breathing, counting to ten, progressive relaxation, spending time in nature, prayer, meditation, listening to music, playing, and mindfulness practices (focusing on the senses).
- 3. Reframe it.** At first, teach children to be specific in reframing frustrating situations. For instance, “This kite won’t fly, but the beach is awesome. I love jumping in the waves.” As children become more efficient, they often learn to reframe frustration with a simple “Everything’s okay” or “This too will pass.”

A few other tips:

- Teach children the frustration triangle before it is needed, when frustration isn’t high, so they know what to expect. Let them know that you believe they can handle their frustration.
- Encourage children to develop their own ways to name it, tame it, and reframe it. As long as they are following the basic structure, let them be playful and use their imagination.
- Use the frustration triangle yourself. You might be surprised at how helpful it can be!
- Encourage kids not to be too hard on themselves. Everyone gets frustrated.