

Just Because I Am

A Child's Book of Affirmation



Lauren Murphy Payne • illustrated by Melissa Iwai

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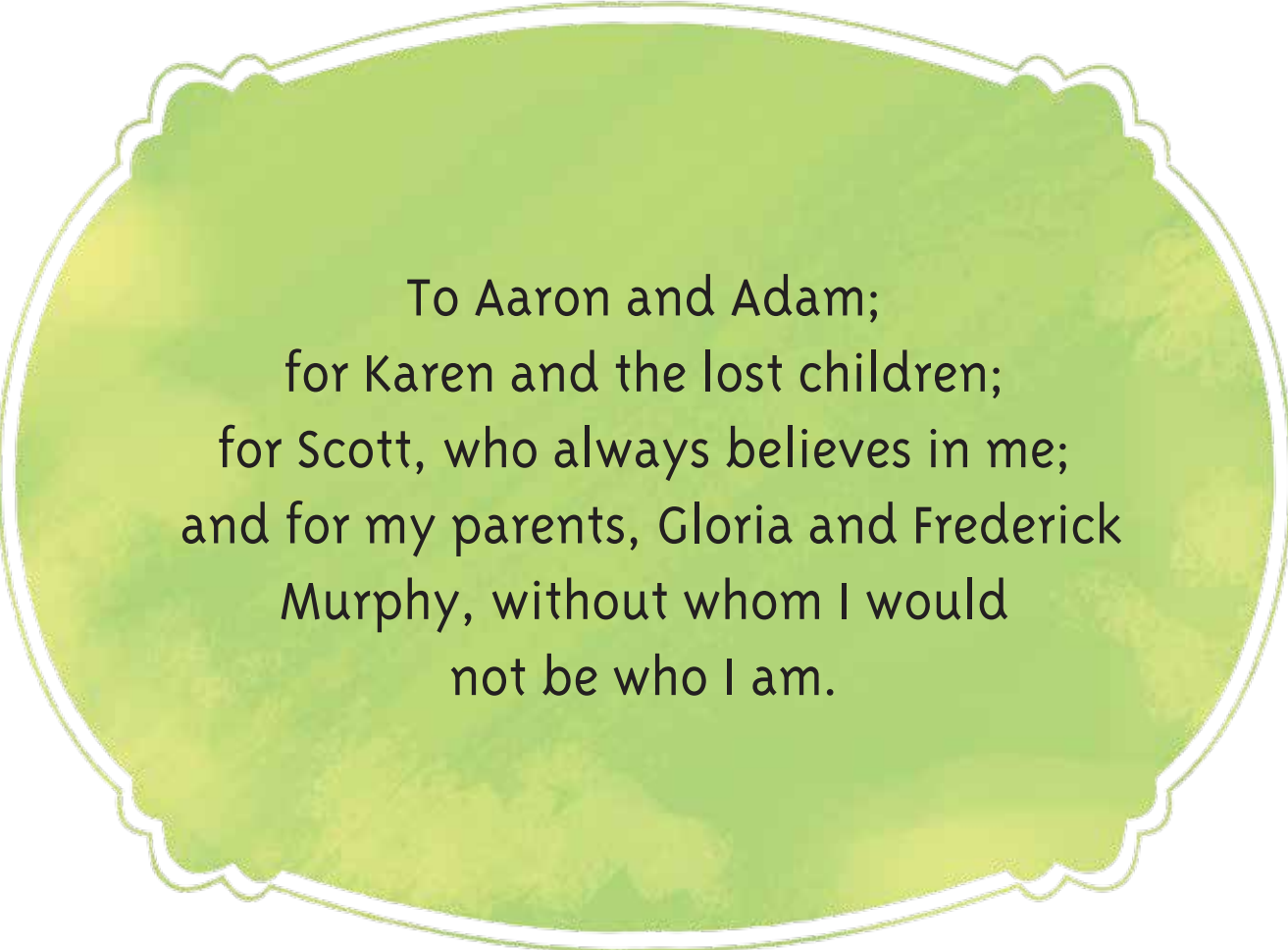
(612) 338-2068

help4kids@freespirit.com

www.freespirit.com

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To Aaron and Adam;
for Karen and the lost children;
for Scott, who always believes in me;
and for my parents, Gloria and Frederick
Murphy, without whom I would
not be who I am.



I am a person.

I am special.

I am important.

Not because of what I look like,
not because of what I have...



Just because I am.



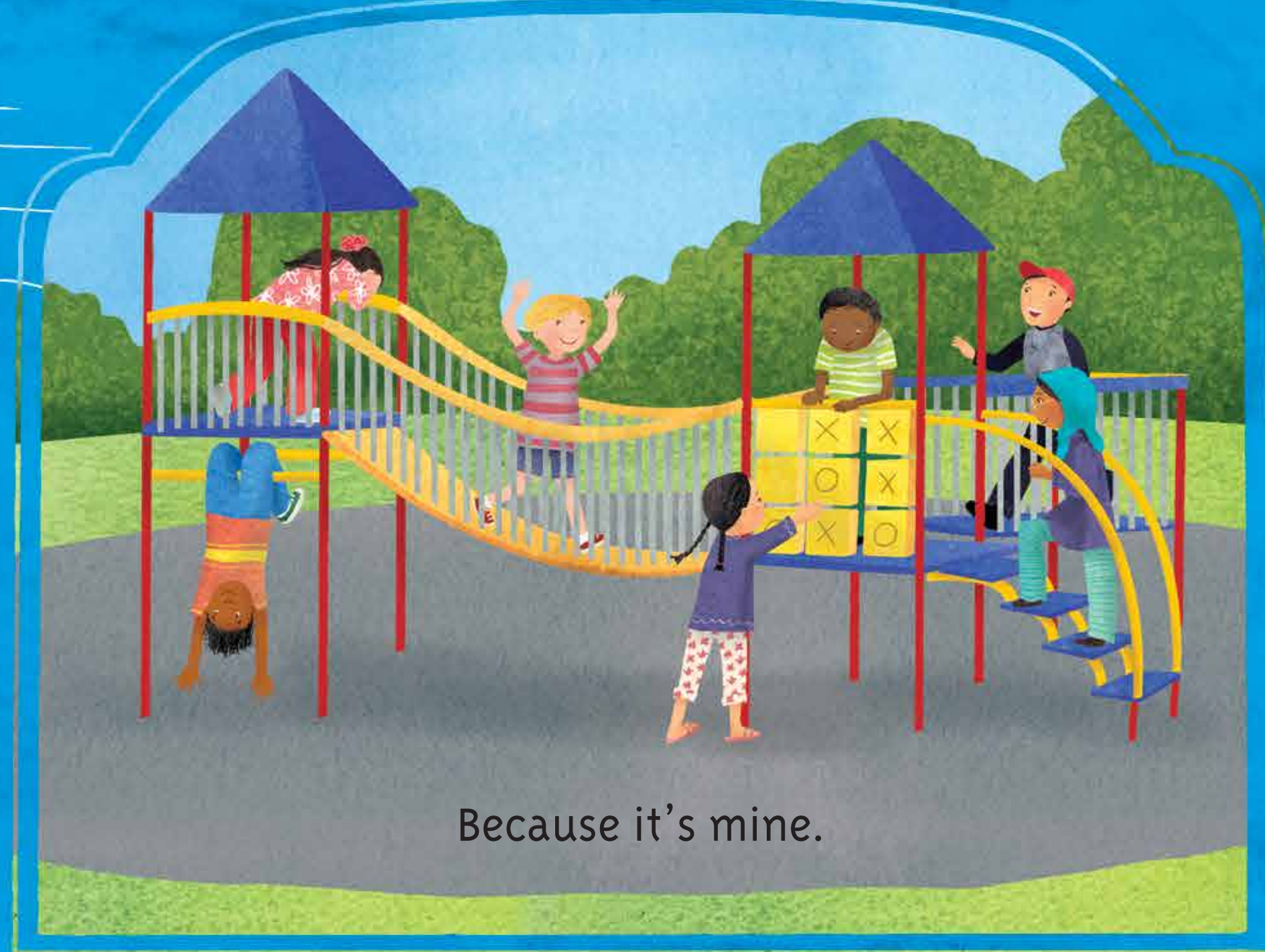
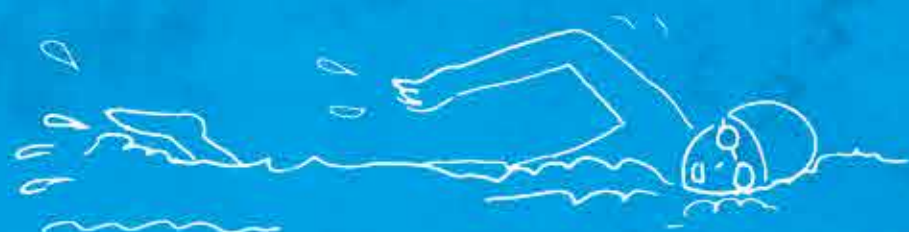
This is my body.

It is special.

It is one of a kind.

It is growing and changing.

I want to take care of my body . . .



Because it's mine.

A Note to Caring Adults

Nothing is as important to a child's well-being and success as strong self-esteem. Positive self-esteem increases a child's ability to be happy, healthy, and well-adjusted. Many social and psychological problems can be traced to a lack of self-esteem. And children's feelings about themselves affect the choices they make and help shape their plans, hopes, and dreams for the future.

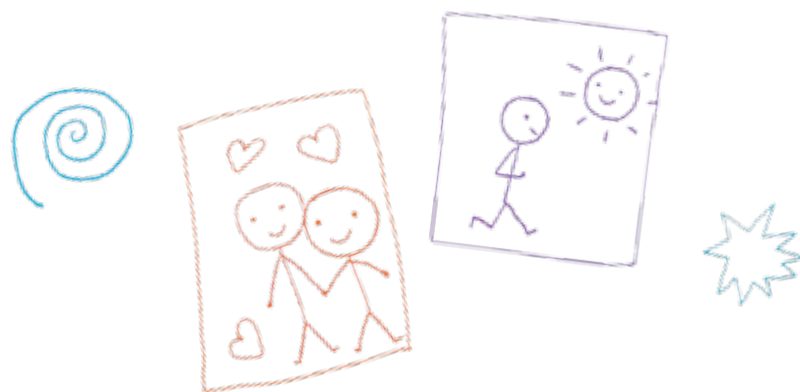
Just Because I Am: A Child's Book of Affirmation can be read and enjoyed with young children in many settings from preschool, school, and childcare to home, religious school, or a counseling group. The book is based on the beliefs that:

- ☉ All children are inherently valuable without regard to gender, race, religion, family background, economic status, appearance, abilities, health, possessions, or any other factor.
- ☉ All children have the right to feel good about themselves exactly as they are.
- ☉ A child's *value* is unconditional. Nothing the child does, says, or chooses can change it.
- ☉ Children can learn to accept and value their own bodies and learn to recognize what they need.
- ☉ Children need to know that having needs is part of being human and that their needs are acceptable and will be met appropriately.
- ☉ Children need to be taught that all of their feelings are acceptable, and that feelings are also "signals" that communicate important information.
- ☉ Children need to live in an environment free from danger and fear, whether real or imagined. The need for physical and psychological safety is the most important of the basic human needs.

- ☉ Children need to have a sense of power over some of the things that affect them directly and to be able to make some decisions. When we let children make decisions, we are showing them that we trust them and their abilities and in this way we let them know that they can trust themselves.

The activities and discussion starters that follow will help you build on these beliefs in a way that's fun for everyone and that makes the book's concepts come alive for children. Use the activities to encourage children to consider how they feel about themselves and to explore their individual ideas and values. The activities are designed to be flexible, so feel free to adapt them. You know your group best, so do whatever works for them. These suggestions may spark your own ideas and may serve as jumping-off points for wonderful and creative learning experiences that you invent with the children in your group. And remember to enjoy yourself! If you have fun with this book and these activities, children will have fun, too. I hope that you enjoy using *Just Because I Am* to help young children understand and appreciate how special and unique they are.

Lauren Murphy Payne, MSW, LCSW



Activities and Discussion Starters

What I Like About Me

Ask children to identify five things that they like about themselves. Say several things that you like about each child, and invite other children to add their own positive comments. Encourage children to focus on traits that are not about appearance. For example, "Carlos is good at sharing toys," or "Alexandra draws really well."

"My Body Is Mine"

Explore children's beliefs and attitudes toward their bodies. Ask questions like:

- ☉ What things does your body like to do?
- ☉ What are things that your body does well?
- ☉ What things are hard for your body to do?
- ☉ When does your body feel healthy and happy?
- ☉ What things can you do to treat your body well and take good care of it?
- ☉ What does your body tell you? What can you learn by listening to your body?

Have children complete the sentence: "I like the way my body feels when _____."

Learning and Talking About Feelings

Talk with children about the wide range of feelings they might experience—even within a single day. Ask questions like:

- ☉ What are some of the strong feelings that you have?

- ☉ Where do you feel your feelings in your body?
- ☉ Who can you talk with about your strong feelings?
- ☉ How can you tell the difference between your feelings? For example, does anger feel the same as fear? How do they feel similar? How do they feel different?
- ☉ What are some words you can use to name your feelings?

Reinforce children's right to have and feel their feelings. Acknowledge and validate their ideas, problems, fears, and concerns.

Teaching About Body Safety and Secrets

When teaching children about their bodies and feelings, it's important to talk with them about keeping their bodies safe. It's also important to discuss secrets. Children need to know the difference between a surprise (such as a birthday party) and a secret that feels bad (such as a touch that makes a child feel uncomfortable). Let children know that they *never* have to keep secrets (especially those that feel bad to them), and that there is nothing that they can't talk about with a trusted adult—even if someone else (including another adult) has told them they will get in trouble or that something really bad will happen if they tell.

If a child does disclose something to you, or if you suspect that a child is being abused, follow the established protocols of your school and district immediately if you are working in a school. You can also contact your local social service department or child welfare department, or obtain information about what to do and how to report child abuse from your local police department or district attorney's office. *Never* attempt to interview a child yourself. Instead, leave that to professionals who have been specially trained to deal with this sensitive issue.