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# WAGGA Learns about Bullying

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# A Guide to the 'Wagga' Book Series

## Brief background

As with most ideas, the 'Wagga' book series was born out of necessity. The series creator, a developmental psychologist, found it frustratingly difficult to obtain appropriate books that aim to teach social and emotional skills to children. There were books that had social and emotional themes but with no clear learning goals. Importantly, available books did not appear to use current research and theory as a basis for framing stories. Thus, the 'Wagga' book series was created to fulfill two needs – (1) a need to teach socio-emotional concepts with specific learning goals, and (2) a need to create stories that were based on clear theoretical frameworks. A fellow psychologist, who happened to draw beautifully, was roped in and the 'Wagga' book series was born!

## Who can use the books?

The 'Wagga' book series is written for children aged 5 to 10 years old. Apart from just considering the recommended age range, it is also worth noting that the books were written for children who are able to understand basic social skills concepts. For example, children who are able to broadly explain what sharing is. Discussion segments are a key part of using the books. Thus, the series is especially suitable for children who are able to provide basic insight into their social environment – children who are able to explain why their classmate cried and how that classmate felt, for instance. These criteria mean that the target audience includes both typically developing children and children with developmental needs, who may have difficulties with socialization, attention, and emotional regulation.

Interactive reading, where a facilitator reads and discusses a story with the audience, is the recommended manner of using the 'Wagga' books. Facilitators may be child professionals (e.g. teachers, psychologists, occupational therapists) or parents. The books may be read in various settings ranging from one on one to the classroom, depending on whether the target child or children require more individualized attention to learn social and emotional concepts.

## The 'Wagga' book series as a tool for developing social competence

Social competence may be defined as the ability to generate positive social outcomes[1], such as forming satisfying peer relationships and successfully dealing with interpersonal conflict. Social competence is an attribute that is not only important in social settings, but also predicts non-social outcomes such as academic achievement and personal resilience. In creating the 'Wagga' book series, the notion of social competence was selected as a theoretical framework for the stories and discussions. Social competence may be broken down into three core components of (1) social awareness, (2) self-regulation, and (3) problem solving[2,3].

### *Social awareness*

Social awareness refers to the ability to accurately interpret the social environment, such as reading facial expressions[4]. The process of social awareness helps children to identify social opportunities and problems[5]. The 'Wagga' books incorporated social awareness by storylines in which the main character, Wagga, learns to look at and listen to others, and by discussion questions that encourage children to attend to salient aspects of the social environment.




### *Self-regulation*

Self-regulation is the process of controlling emotional and behavioral impulses[6]. It plays a key role in reducing inappropriate behaviors, which results in positive attention from others[7]. Throughout the series, Wagga learns to demonstrate different ways of self-regulation, including inhibiting his body movements when listening and calming down when angry.




### *Problem solving*

Problem solving occurs when individuals select successful courses of actions during a challenging social situation[8]. Problem solving is emphasized in each 'Wagga' book, where Wagga encounters a social problem. He first reacts by displaying inappropriate social behaviors, and receives an undesirable consequence. In the second half of the book, he chooses to display more appropriate social behaviors, which lead to more desirable consequences. During discussions, children are asked to think of more appropriate ways for Wagga to behave given the preceding situation where he showed inappropriate social behaviors.

## How to use the books

### *Discussion segment*

The 'Wagga' book series was designed to serve as a tool to help children understand and *apply* socio-emotional concepts, such as identifying emotions in self and others and dealing with losing. Facilitators are highly encouraged to go beyond just reading the stories and actively discuss concepts raised in the stories. Each book includes a discussion segment, which should be conducted where it is placed within the book.

Discussion questions generally increase in difficulty and may be asked in order. Questions are designed to elicit the key learning goals of the book. For example, in the book 'Wagga Learns to Share', a question is, "Once Wagga had given the toy to Abby, what should he do instead of snatching it back?" Correspondingly, the learning goal is for the child to understand that once someone has agreed to share, he/she should not take back the toy until the other child has had his or her turn playing with the toy. The child is also expected to brainstorm what they can do while waiting for the toy.

Key learning goals and answer suggestions to discussion questions are included in the individual guide accompanying each book.

### *Order of books*

It is recommended that facilitators read the book 'Wagga's First Day at School' before reading the other books in the series. This book provides the context for Wagga's social and emotional difficulties and sends a strong message to children that social and emotional skills can be learned. Thereafter, it is advisable to read 'Wagga Learns to Listen', 'Wagga Learns about Feelings', and 'Wagga Learns to Calm Down' because these books feature foundational concepts.

Each book may be read multiple times in the process of teaching a child a concept. In the same vein, some children may not be able to provide an adequate response for more difficult discussion questions the first time around and may need to developmentally mature in order to comprehend the learning goal of the book.

### *Beyond stories*

To reinforce learning of skills and concepts taught in the stories, facilitators are encouraged to conduct complementary activities. A useful framework to help children learn, retain, and apply social and emotional skills is 'Teach, Model, Practice'.

*Teach* refers to teaching a concept through reading the relevant 'Wagga' book and conducting discussions about the concept. For example, facilitators may choose to teach the concept of sharing with others by reading the book 'Wagga Learns to Share'.

*Model* means that facilitators demonstrate a skill to the child, highlighting appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. For example, facilitators may act out appropriate sharing behaviors and inappropriate sharing behaviors. Demonstrations may require involvement of another adult or child.

*Practice* means providing opportunities for a child to demonstrate the above skill by asking the child to participate in role-play. When the child is ready, actual situations may be set up for the child to apply the learned skill. For example, the target child may be asked to play with another child and only given one toy to share between them.


[1]Spence, S. H., & Donovan, C. (1998). Interpersonal problems. In P. J. Graham (Ed.), *Cognitive behavior therapy for children and families* (pp. 217-246). New York: Cambridge Univeristy Press.
[2]Minne, E P, & Semrud-Clikeman, M. (2011). A social competence intervention for young children with high functioning autism and Asperger syndrome: A pilot study. *Autism, 16*(6), 586-602.
[3]Spence, S. H. (2003). Social skills training with children and young people: Theory, evidence and practice. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 8*(2), 84-96.
[4]Minne, E P, & Semrud-Clikeman, M. (2011). A social competence intervention for young children with high functioning autism and Asperger syndrome: A pilot study. *Autism, 16*(6), 586-602.
[5]Spence, S. H. (2003). Social skills training with children and young people: Theory, evidence and practice. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 8*(2), 84-96.
[6]Masten, A. S., & Coatsworth, J. D. (1998). The development of competence in favorable and unfavorable environments: Lessons on successful children. *American Psychologist, 53*, 205-220.
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# A Guide to:

# 'Wagga Learns about Bullying'

### Why is it important for children to learn about bullying and how to deal with acts of bullying?

Bullying is defined here as the repeated intentional act, verbal or physical, of hurting others. Bullying as a concept may be difficult to explain to young children because the manifestation of bullying can be subtle and vary according to the context. In addition, dealing with bullying is a considerable undertaking, which requires a whole school approach. Despite these challenges, bullying is a subject that must be discussed as many times as needed for a child to understand what bullying is and how to deal with acts of bullying. Doing so will help to equip children with the skills to identify antagonistic behavior directed towards them and access helpful strategies in the moment. Children who panic and lash out or stay silent in response to bullying may inadvertently face more episodes of bullying.

The goal of this book is not for children to have a comprehensive understanding of bullying but to provide an introduction to what bullying is, as well as the concept of standing up for themselves when bullied.

## Key learning goals

1) For children to identify different types of bullying behaviors.

2) For children to understand the concept of standing up for themselves.

3) For children to learn basic ways of standing up for themselves.

## Answer suggestions to discussion questions

1. What did Max/Mei Li/Amrit do to Wagga at the playground? Did Wagga get hurt? Was it on purpose?
   *Max pushed Wagga down the slide. Wagga got hurt because he fell down and it was painful. Max pushed Wagga on purpose because he laughed at Wagga.*
   *Mei Li asked Wagga to throw rocks at the flowers, which Wagga did not want to do. Wagga got hurt because he did not feel that it was right to throw rocks at flowers. Mei Li asked Wagga to throw rocks at flowers on purpose.*
   *Amrit called Wagga a mean/silly name. Wagga felt sad and hurt at being called a mean/silly name. Amrit called Wagga a mean/silly name on purpose.*

2. What is bullying?
   *Bullying is when you hurt someone on purpose again and again.*

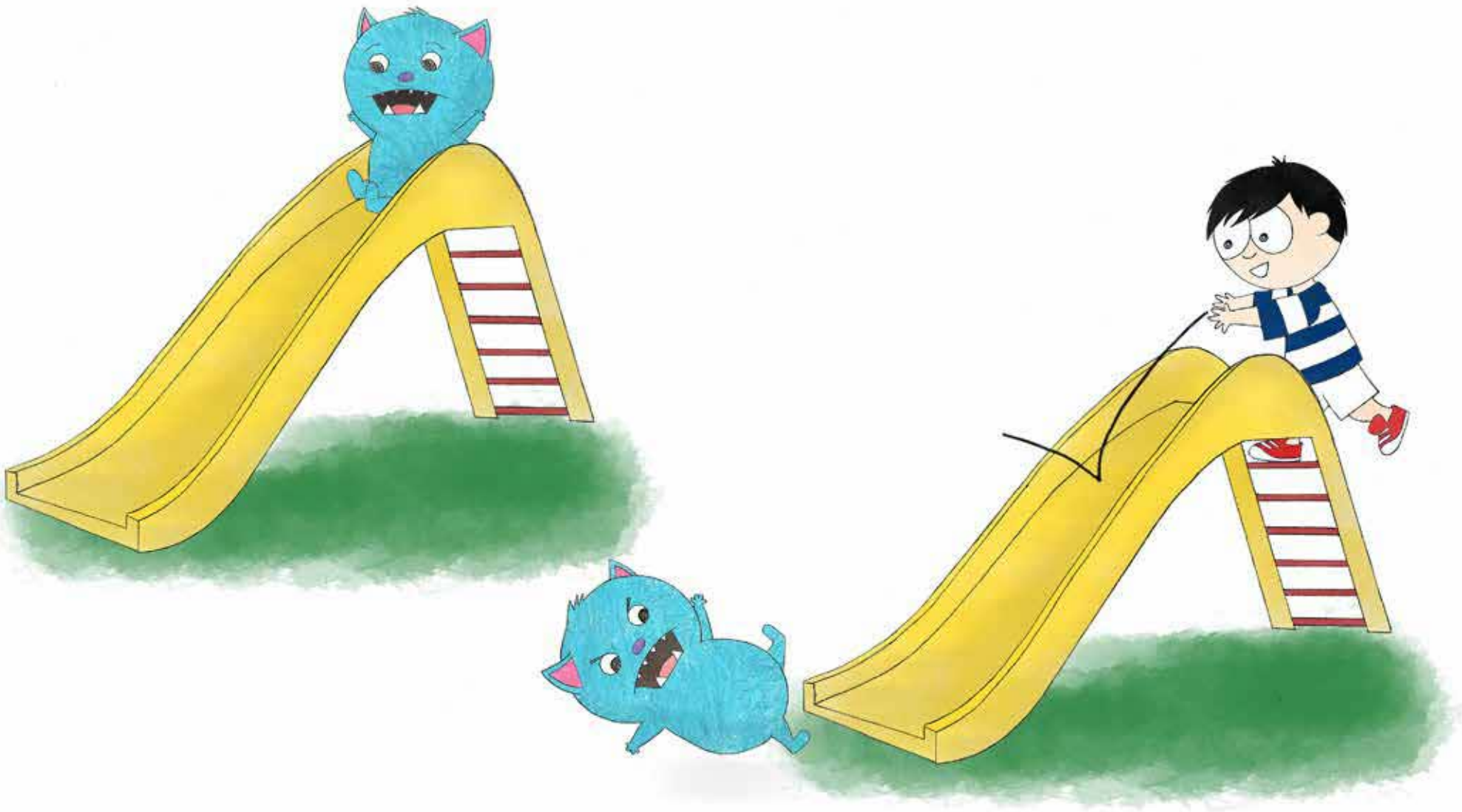
3. What did Wagga do when he was bullied?
   *Wagga did nothing when Max, Mei Li, and Amrit bullied him.*

4. What's going to happen if you do nothing when others bully you?
   *They might sometimes stop but they may also continue to bully you.*

5. What could Wagga have done to stand up to Max, Mei Li, and Amrit?
   *Wagga could have:*
   *Said, "No" firmly;*
   *Said, "I don't like what you are doing";*
   *Walked away;*
   *Told the teacher*

## Other titles in the 'Wagga' book series:

Wagga's First Day at School
Wagga Learns to Listen
Wagga Learns about Feelings
Wagga Learns to Cool Down
Wagga Learns to Share
Wagga Learns to Play Fair
Wagga Learns to Calm Down after Losing
Wagga Learns to Work with Others



One day, Wagga was playing happily at the playground. He sat at the top of the slide with a smile on his face, ready to slide down.

Suddenly, a pair of hands pushed Wagga down the slide. He lost his balance and fell on his side.



Wagga looked up and saw that Max had pushed him. Max sat at the top of the slide and laughed at Wagga.

Wagga did not feel happy anymore. His leg was painful and his heart was beating very quickly. Wagga felt shocked and angry, but he did not say anything.



After Wagga stood up, Mei Li came over to him.

“Wagga,” she said, “let’s throw rocks at the flowers!”

Wagga did not want to throw rocks at the flowers. The flowers would be crushed! Mei Li took a bunch of rocks and threw them, crushing the beautiful flowers.



“I win, you lose!” said Mei Li to Wagga, and then she walked away.

Wagga did not say anything.

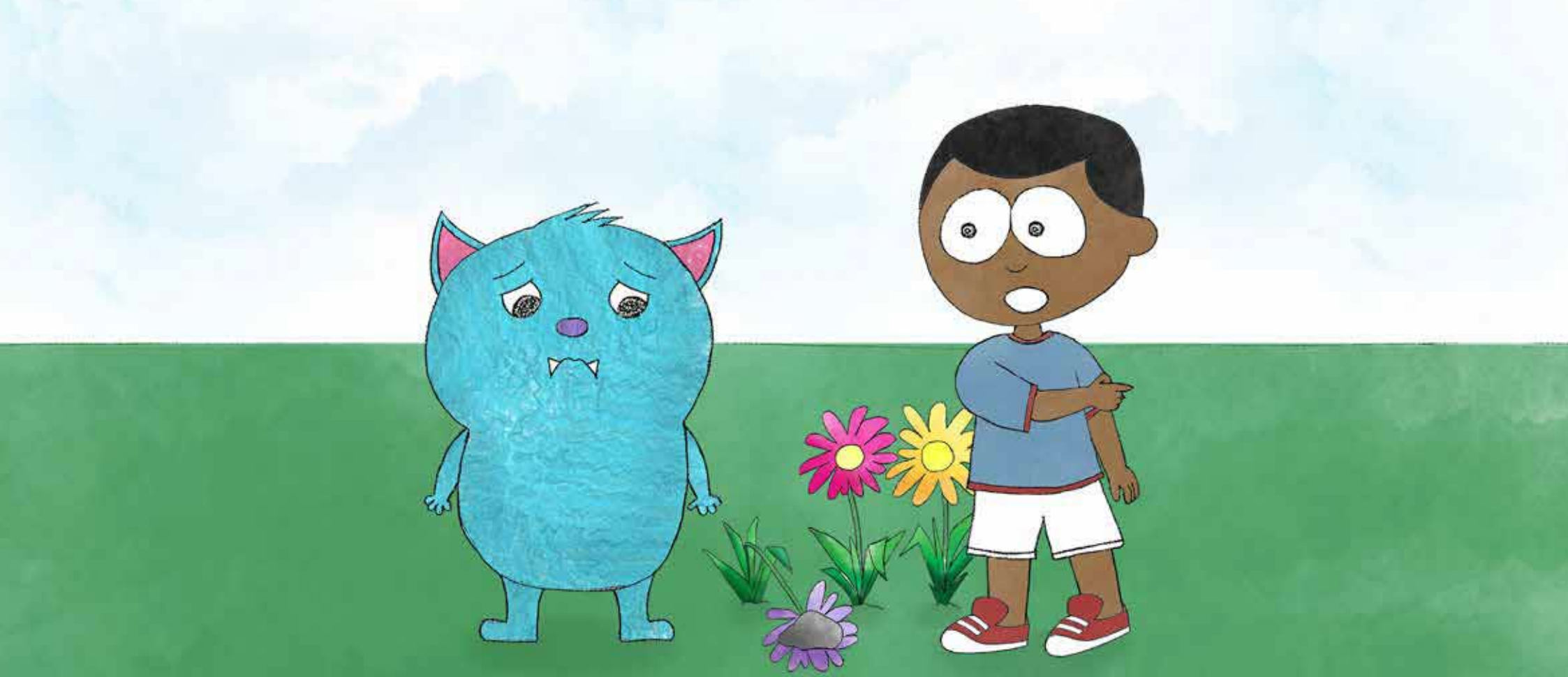


Wagga stood in front of the flowers, feeling sorry for them. Just then, Amrit walked by and saw Wagga standing there.

"Why do you look so blur?" Amrit asked Wagga. "You're a blur blur dumb dumb. Ha-ha!"

Wagga thought that it was mean for Amrit to call him a silly name. He felt sad and hurt.

Still, Wagga did not say anything.

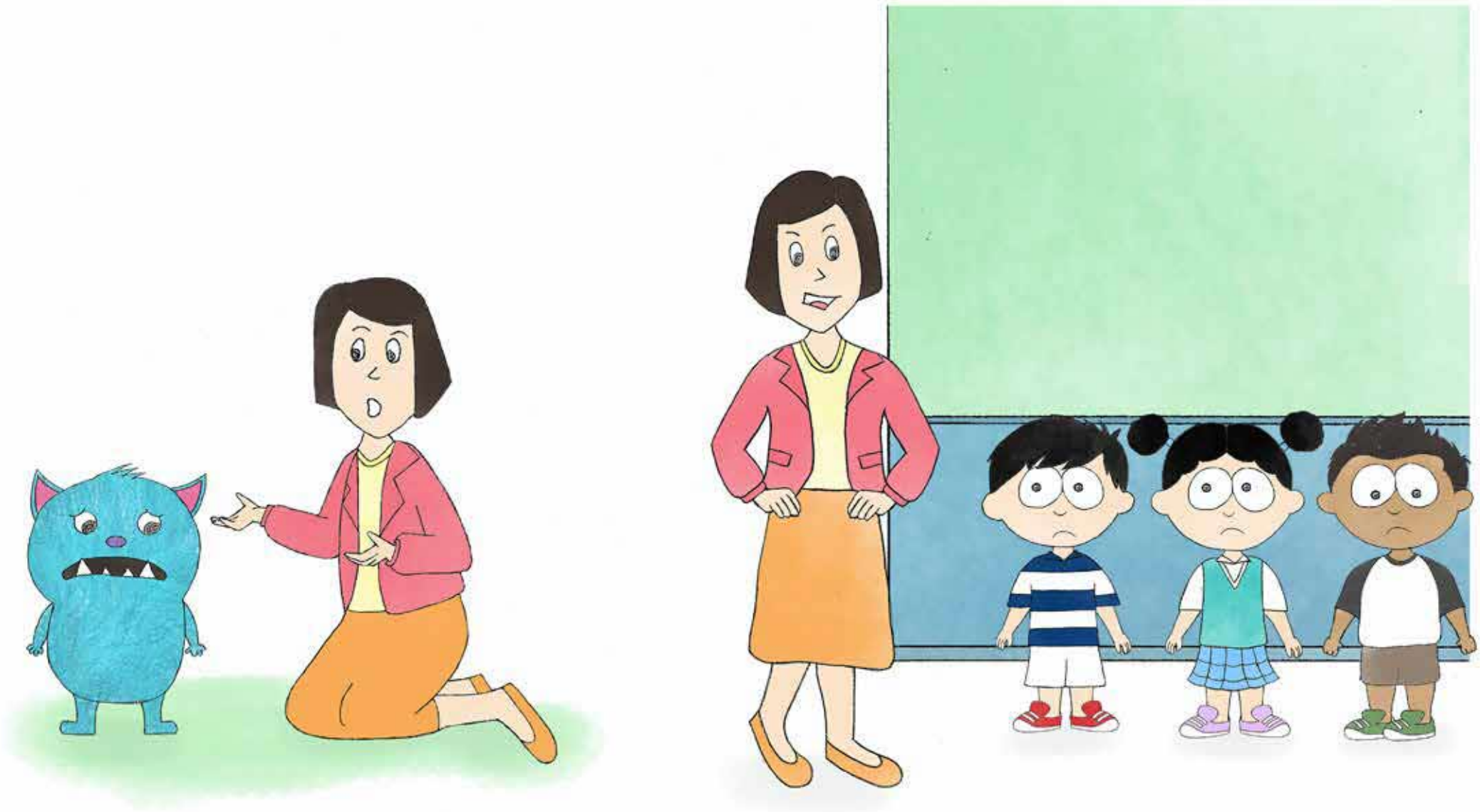


Govind, who had been watching the whole time, came over to talk to Wagga.

"Did you know that Max, Mei Li, and Amrit were bullying you?" Govind asked. "Aren't you going to tell the teacher?"

But Wagga did not know what bullying is. He did not know what to do about bullying, so he kept quiet.

"Well, I'm going to tell the teacher," said Govind. "It's not nice to hurt other people on purpose."



After Govind told the teacher, she came and asked Wagga about what had happened. Then, she brought Max, Mei Li, and Amrit into the classroom and had a very serious talk with them.



Questions:

1. What did Max/Mei Li/Amrit do to Wagga at the playground? Did Wagga get hurt? Was it on purpose?
2. What is bullying?
3. What did Wagga do when he was bullied?
4. What's going to happen if you do nothing when others bully you?
5. What could Wagga have done to stand up to Max, Mei Li, and Amrit?





On another day, Wagga was walking back to class with Max.

Max said to Wagga, “I can do kung fu”.

And then, Max punched Wagga in his stomach.

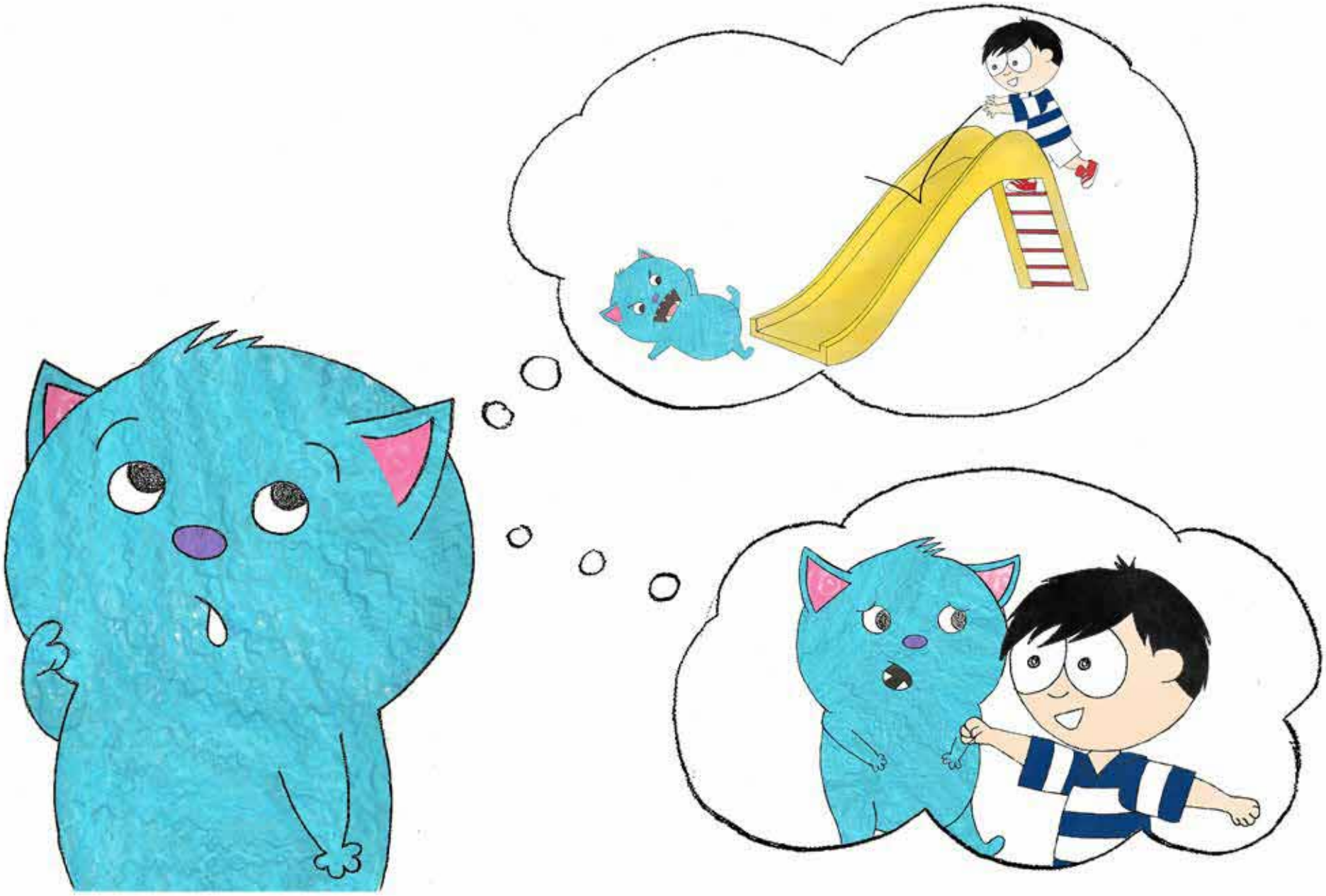
“I just did kung fu on you,” said Max.

Wagga felt shocked. His stomach was hurting and he had to stop walking.




Wagga thought, “That was really mean of Max. If he just wanted to show me kung fu, he could just punch the air. He didn’t have to hit me.”

Max did not try to help Wagga walk or say that he was sorry. Max even looked happy as he walked back to class!



Wagga thought, “I think Max punched me on purpose. He hurt me on purpose and he has hurt me before. I think what Max did was bullying.”



Wagga remembered what he could do. He went back to the classroom and told his teacher what had happened.

The teacher asked Max to say ‘Sorry’ to Wagga, which made Wagga feel a bit better.



But what was even better was that Wagga's teacher and parents said that he was a clever boy for knowing what bullying is. And that he stood up for himself by telling his teacher. Wagga felt like a brave boy that day.

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