

Rh a Dufresne • Julien Castani 

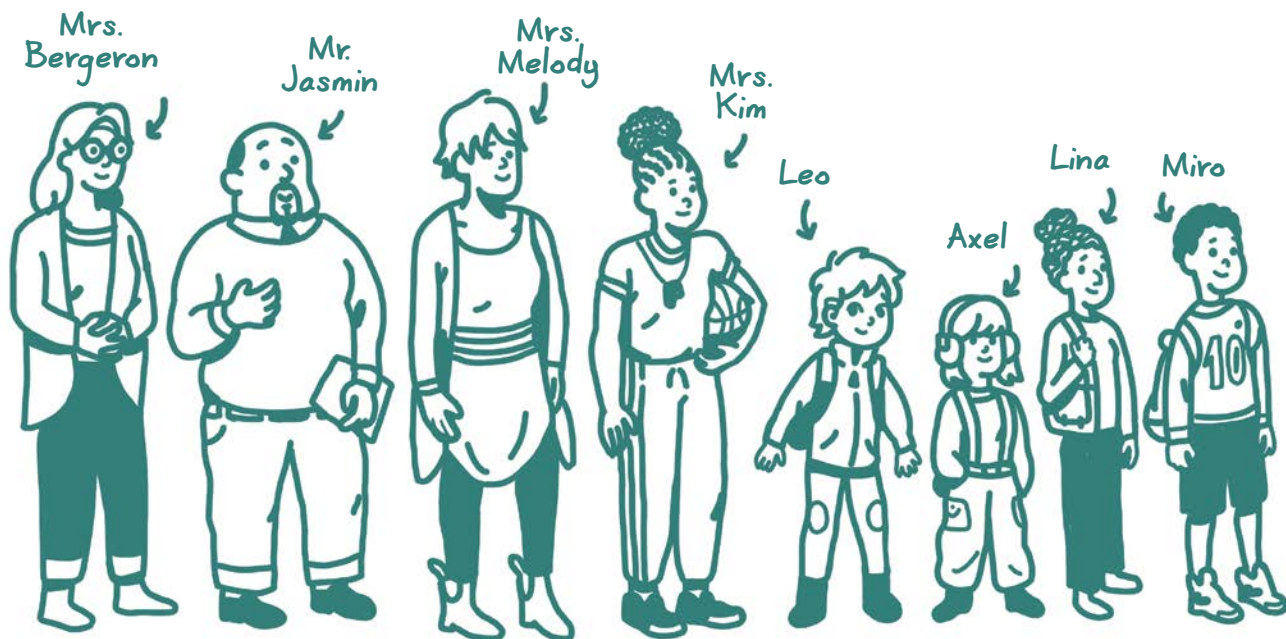
LEO's classroom



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Translation of Katherine Sehl



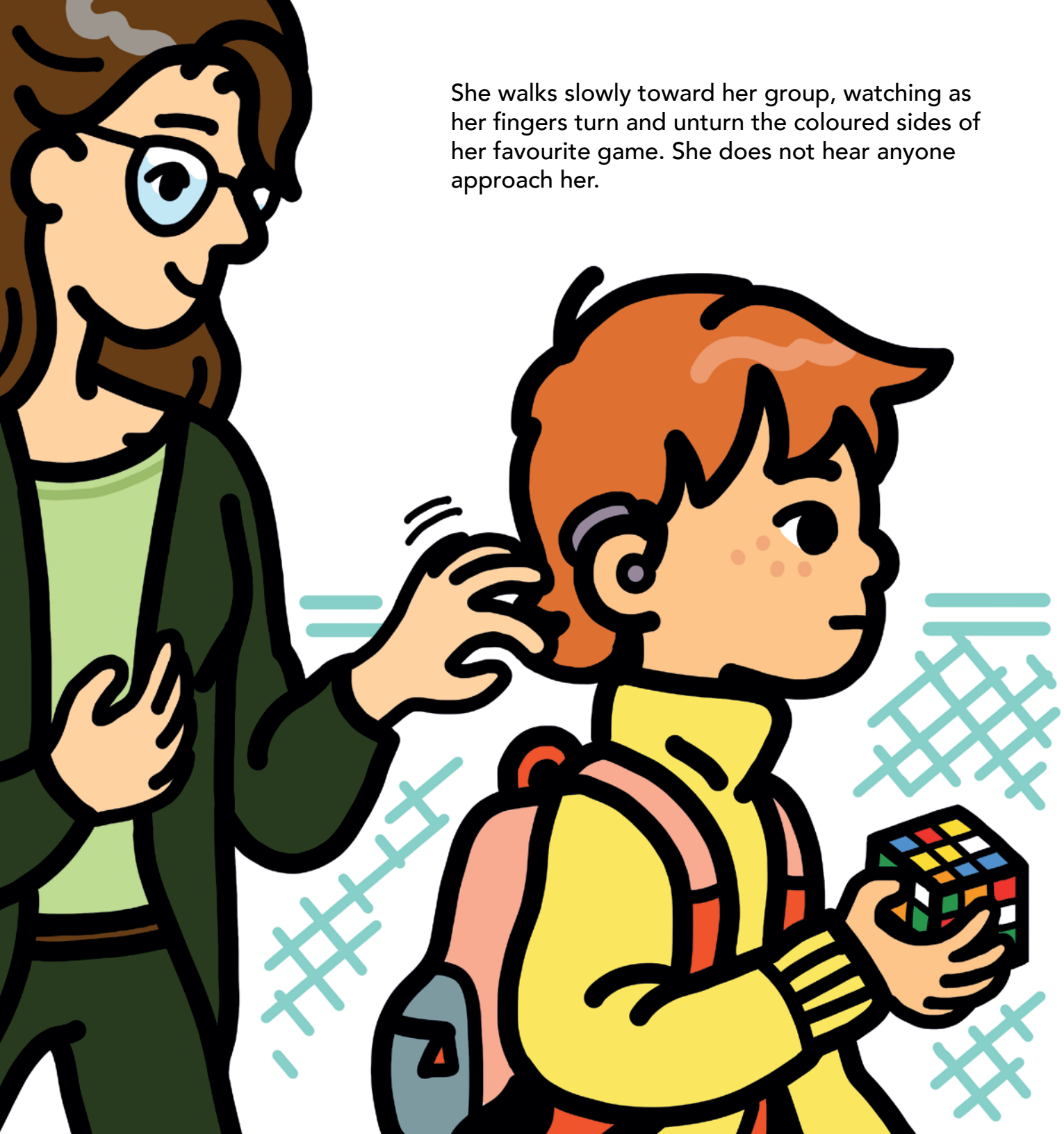


In the noisy schoolyard, Leo is in her own little quiet corner. Leaning against the wall, she concentrates on her cube. She is trying to beat her speed record.



Suddenly, the bell rings. All the students get ready to go into the school. Leo watches from a distance. She's in no hurry to join the others.

She walks slowly toward her group, watching as her fingers turn and unturn the coloured sides of her favourite game. She does not hear anyone approach her.



"Come on, Leo, hurry up and join the others," says Mrs. Bergeron, tickling her neck.

Leo rubs the back of her neck where the principal's fingers had been a few seconds earlier. Sulking, she moves forward.



Inside, Leo stands in the middle of the hallway. Everyone is jostling in front of the lockers. As the special educator, Mr. Jasmin, arrives, he urges her on:

"Hurry up, Leo, we've got a big day ahead of us. Don't forget that we're preparing our art exhibition for the parent-teacher meetings."

"I'm waiting for there to be more room," replies Leo.

"You know that the locker area is always crowded."

"I don't like feeling stuck," adds the little girl, her eyebrows furrowed. She dashes off to her classroom without removing her coat and boots.





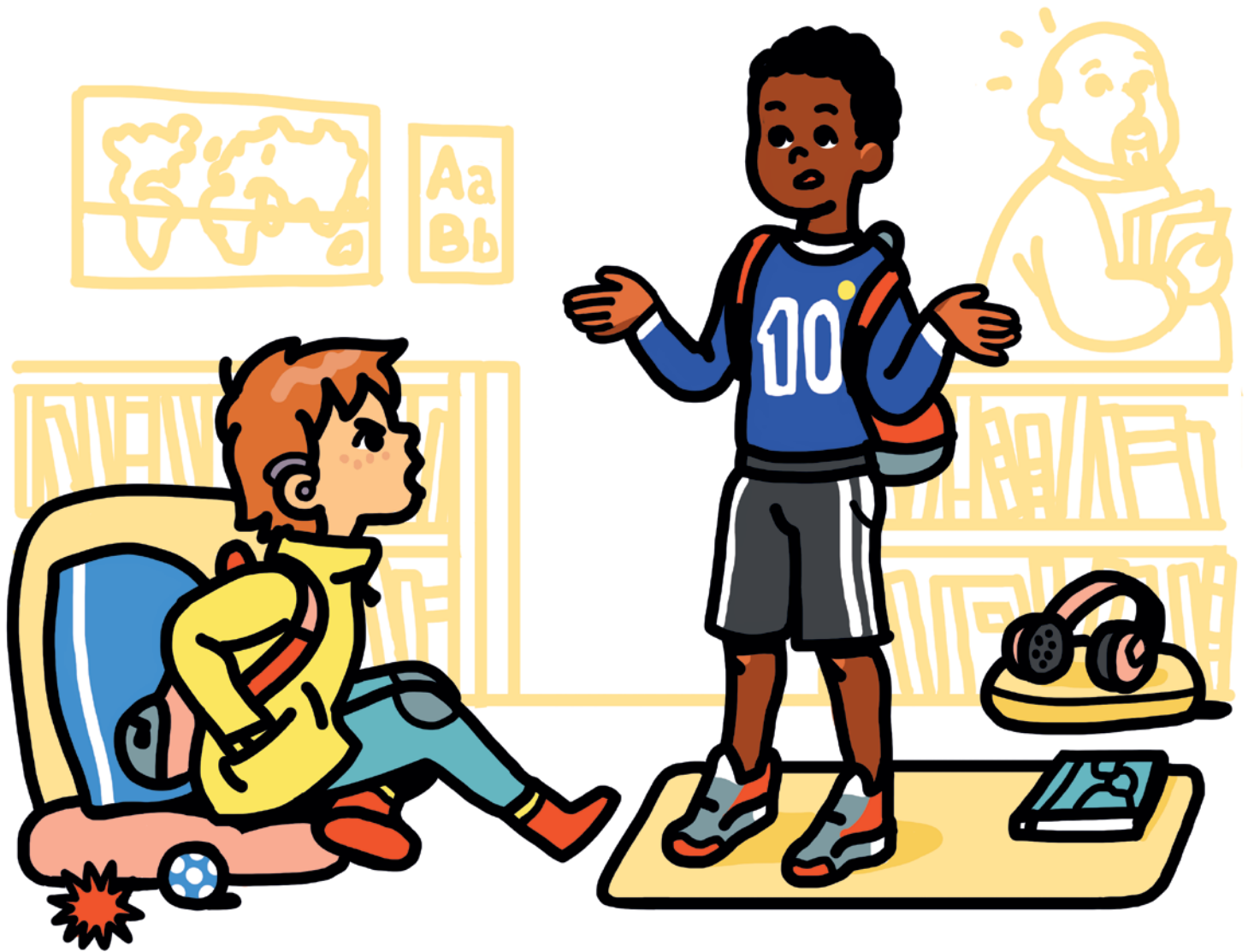
She barely takes three steps before her teacher, Mrs. Melody, appears.

"You look grumpy this morning. I know what will put a smile on your face."



Before Leo can react, Mrs. Melody gives her a big hug.
The little girl stands very still.

"Leave me alone," she shouts as she walks away.



As she sits on the big cushions in the reading corner, Leo shoves her hands in her pockets and tucks her head into her coat. A friend approaches:

"What are you doing here? And why are you dressed to go outside? What's in your pockets?" asks Miro.

"Leave me alone," Leo cries.

"Miro, take your seat," says Mr. Jasmin. "I'd like to talk to Leo."



The special educator sits down beside Leo on the big cushions and speaks again:

"What's going on? You seem to be having a hard time this morning."

Leo crosses her arms and hangs her head. She doesn't feel like talking.

"Why don't you try to tell me what's wrong?" insists Mr. Jasmin.

Leo shakes her head. Mr. Jasmin keeps silent and smiles at her.

Curious, Leo finally looks up.

"You don't have to talk if you don't want to, but it's easier for people to know what you like and don't like if you speak up."

She sighs.

"I don't like it when people touch me... and I don't like being stuck in the middle of a crowd."

"You have the right to say no to being touched. You can say, 'No, stop.' You have your bubble, and you can decide who enters it."

"What do you mean I have a bubble?" asks Leo.

"It's your personal space — the space you need around you to feel comfortable. We all have bubbles, and everyone needs to respect them."

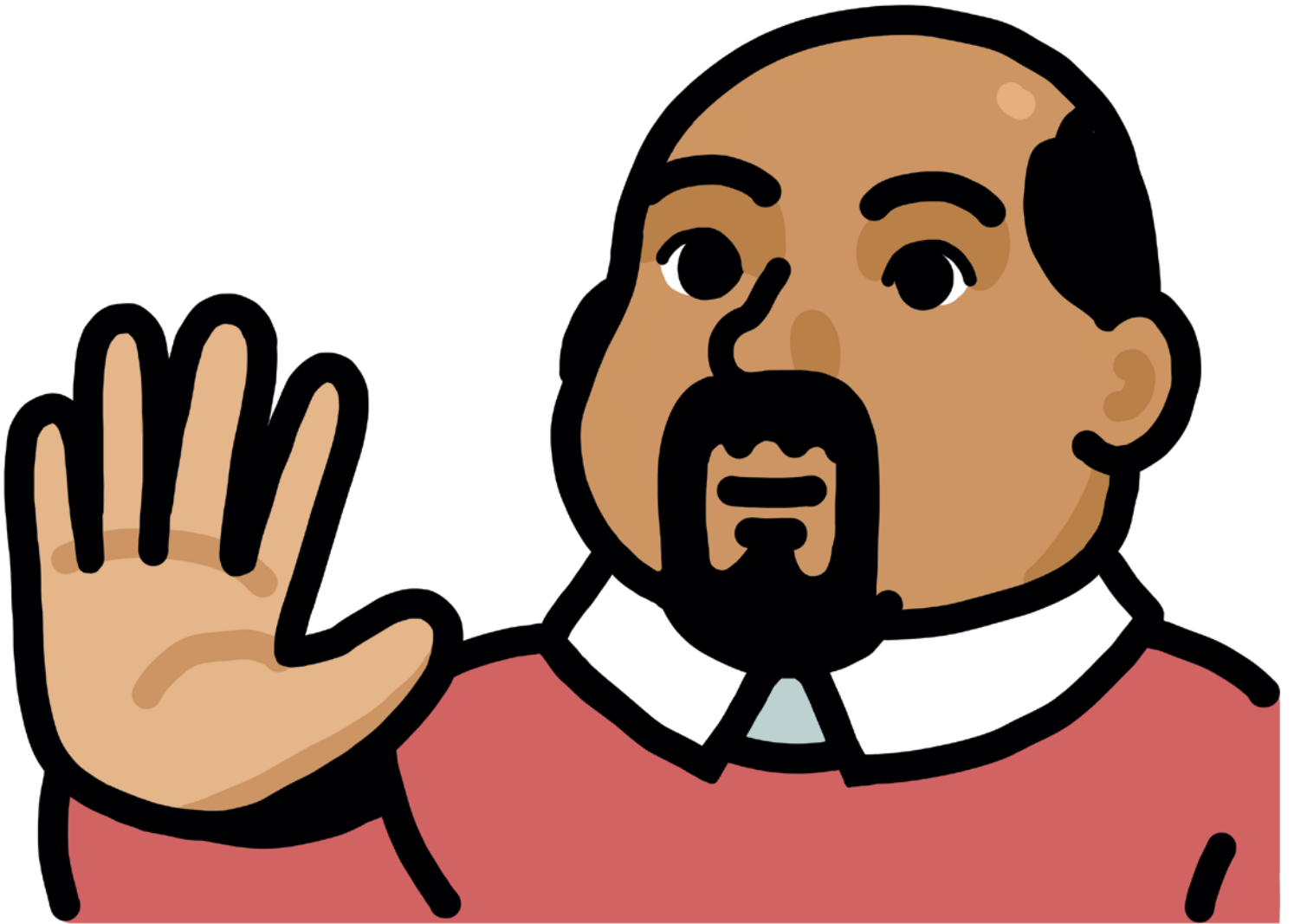
"Even adults?"

"Yes, you have the right to say no to your friends, family, and other adults around you."

"I try, but it's hard sometimes," Leo adds, a little embarrassed.



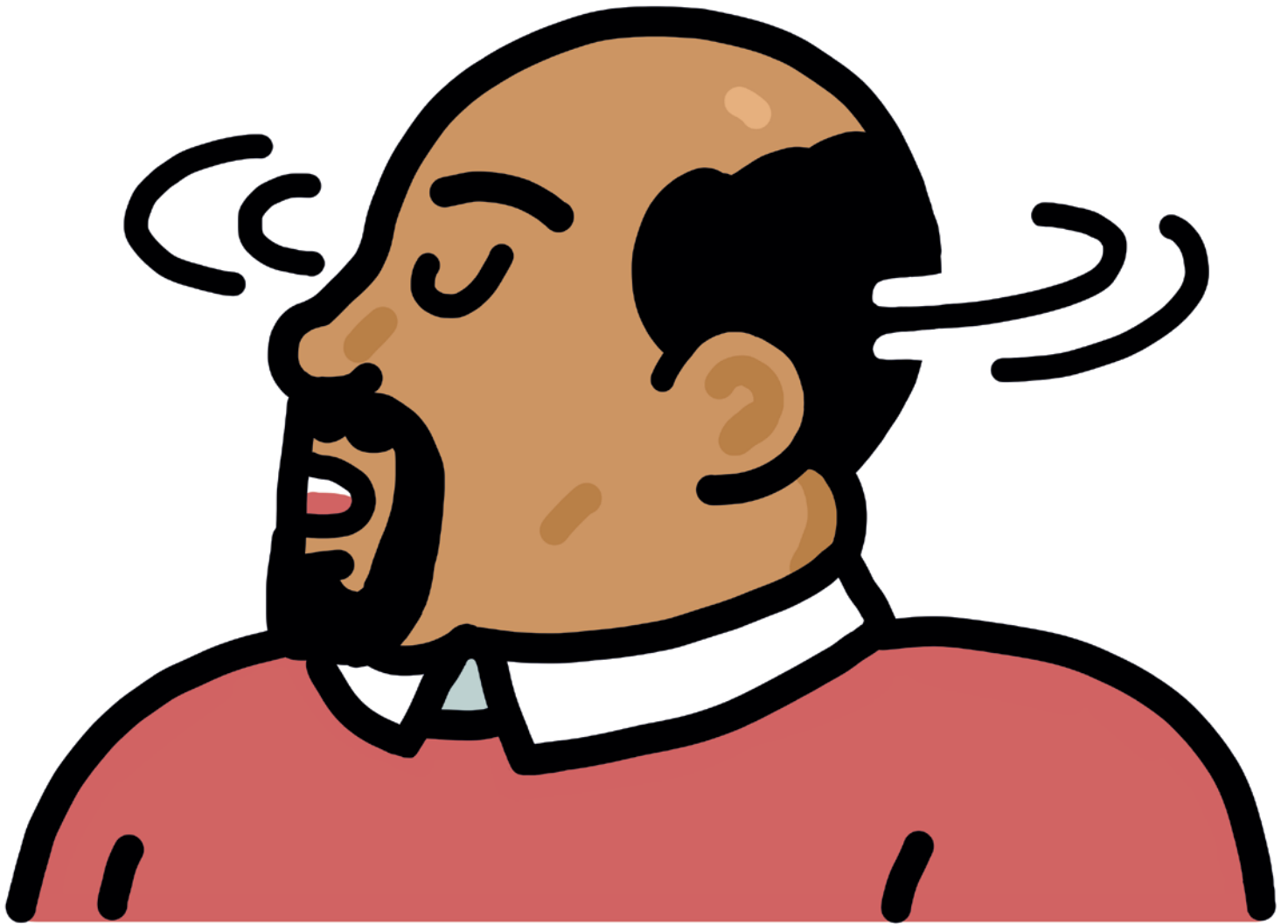




Mr. Jasmin smiles at Leo.

"It's normal. It's not always easy to express yourself with words. It takes practice. And did you know that you can also communicate without speaking?"

Leo looks at him, astonished.



"When someone approaches you too fast or gets too close, you can stop them like this," explains Mr. Jasmin as he puts his hand out in front of him.

"You can also say, 'No. Stop!'"

Leo starts to smile again a little.

"Now go hang your coat and come back and settle in.
We have a big exhibition to prepare."

Mrs. Melody has shared the instructions. The students take out paint and sheets of paper and form teams to create their artwork for the exhibition. Leo was quick — she is already behind the big table, paintbrush in hand.

Lina runs toward Leo.

"I'm so happy to be on your team," she says, as she kisses Leo on the cheek.





Leo takes a deep breath and holds her hand in front of her.

"What are you doing?" asks Lina.

"I don't want you in my bubble," says Leo.

"You don't want to be my friend anymore?"

Leo doesn't know what to say. She doesn't want to hurt Lina's feelings, but she doesn't want Lina in her bubble, either.

Before she can think of a way to respond, Miro chimes in:

"I don't always like hugs and kisses either, but that does not mean we're not friends."

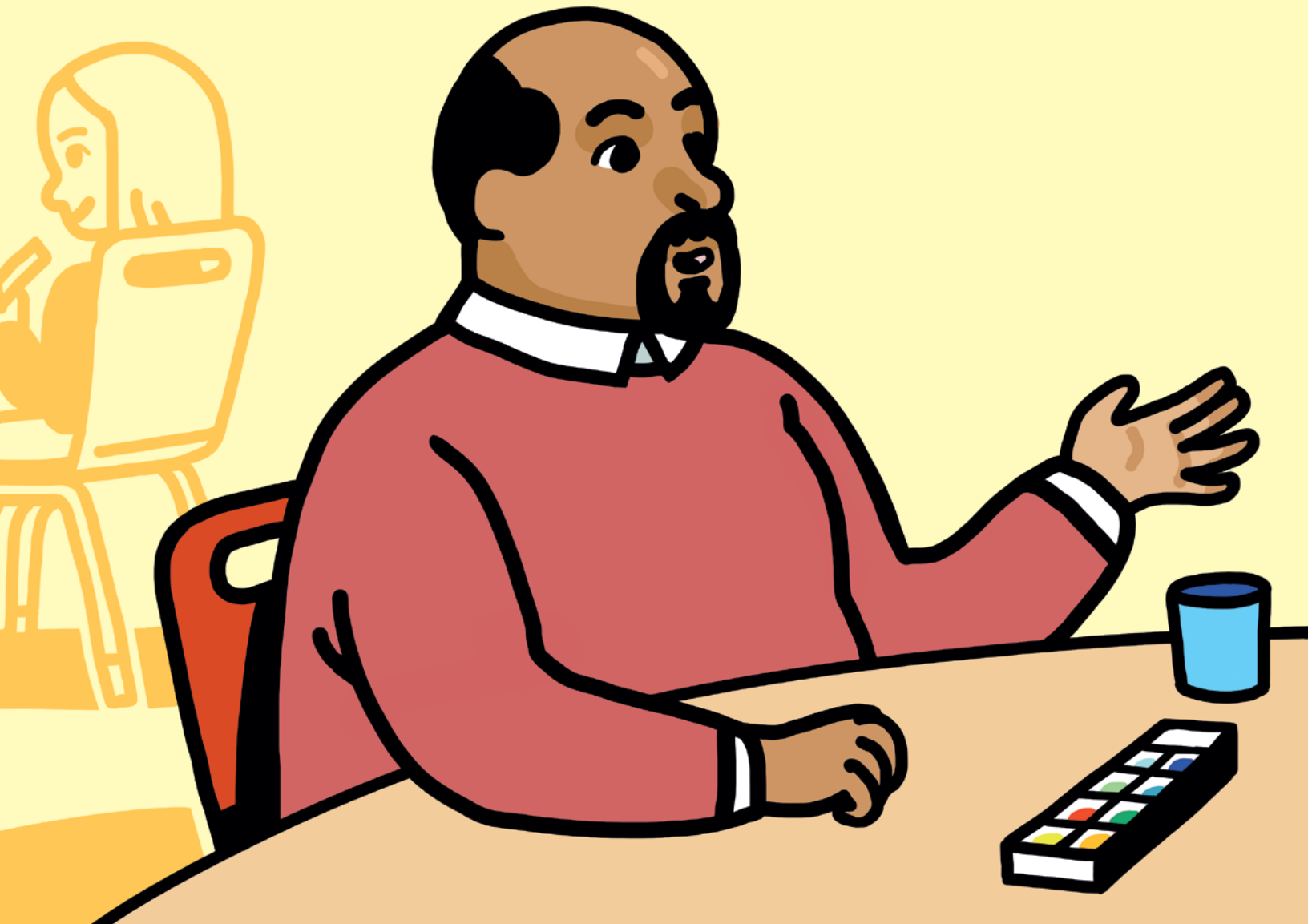
Mr. Jasmin, who was watching the exchange, steps in:

"Well said, Miro. It's important to ask for permission before touching others."

"But what if someone doesn't respect my bubble?" Leo asks.

"That's a great question. I'm glad you asked. You can always talk to a trusted adult if something feels wrong."

"What is a trusted adult?" Leo asks.



"It's someone you feel comfortable with — an adult who can help when you need support. Most importantly, they respect your bubble. It's always up to you to decide who you want to talk to."

"But I love to give hugs and kisses," says Lina, after listening to the conversation.

"I understand, but there are other ways to show someone you are happy to see them."

"I like it when someone gives me a big smile," Miro says.

"And I think a wink is funny," Leo adds.

"Those are great ideas, kids! That way, everyone's bubble is respected. Now, grab your paintbrushes!"



Once the artworks are set out to dry, it's time to clean and wash up. There's almost as much paint on the smocks as there is on the paper. At the sink, there's a lot of action.

"Mrs. Melody, Lina has paint on her nose and forehead,"
Leo announces.

"Come here," says the teacher, wetting a towel before rubbing
Lina's nose.

Lina pulls back.

"No!"

"You need to wash your face, or you will get paint everywhere."

"I can do it myself."

"We're kind of in a hurry. The lunch bell is about to ring."

"I can do it," Lina insists.

"I like doing things myself, too," says Leo, smiling at her friend.

"So do I! Me too!" the other students shout.



Now, with everyone joining in, it's time for Mrs. Melody to take a deep breath.

"Alright, I understand you want to do things yourselves. That's normal. And it's true, you are capable."



Mrs. Melody gives everyone instructions for washing up and supervises the students as they clean. By the time the lunch bell rings, everyone is neat and tidy.

"Enjoy your meal," says Mrs. Melody.



After lunch, the children check to see how their paintings are drying when Mr. Jasmin announces:

"It's time for physical education with Mrs. Kim."

"Go and get into your gym clothes."

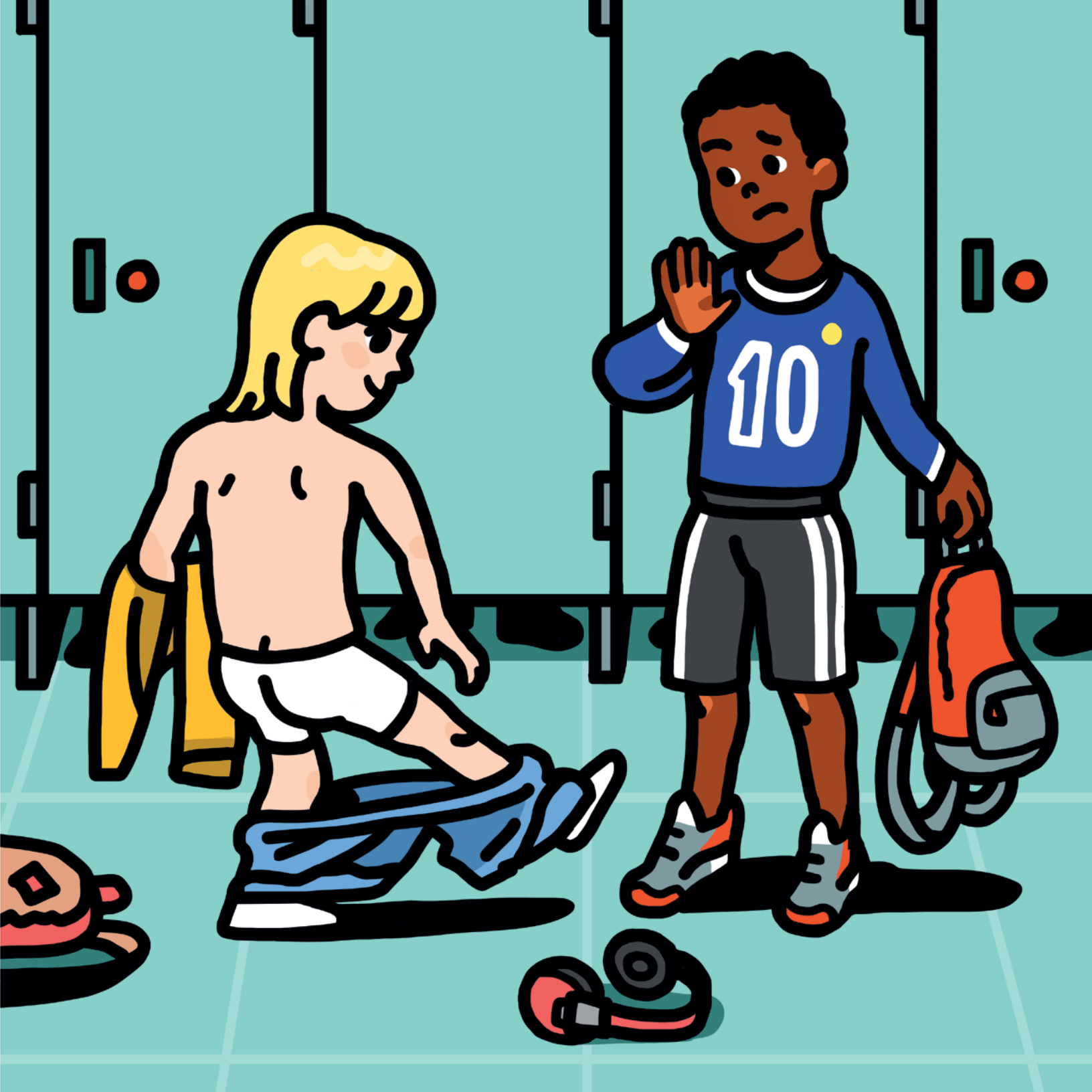
In the boys' changing room, all the stalls are taken. Impatient, Axel starts to undress in the middle of the room. He even takes off his underwear before Mr. Jasmin can intervene.

"Axel, wait until you're in the stall."

"No need, I'm not embarrassed," the boy says.

"It's embarrassing for me," replies Miro. "I don't want to see your private parts!"

"There are some things you should do in privacy, when you're alone," explains Mr. Jasmin. "It's important to close the door to the bathroom or find cover when you change. Other people shouldn't see our private parts."





On the other side, in the girls' changing room,
Leo hears Lina crying in one of the stalls.

"What is happening, Lina?"

"I need help in the bathroom..."

"Do you want me to get Mr. Jasmin?"

"No, I'd prefer for Mrs. Kim to come."

The gym teacher arrives and knocks on the stall door.

"Lina, do you want me to come in and help?"

"Yes, I had a little accident."

"Okay, I'm going to open the door."

A few minutes later, Lina comes out of the bathroom, a bit embarrassed. Leo looks at her and says:

"I sometimes need help in the bathroom, too."

"It's normal," adds Mrs. Kim. "When it happens, ask a trusted adult. They can help you and explain what to do."



In the gym, Mr. Jasmin listens as the children discuss the things they like to do on their own. Miro likes to pick out his outfits. Leo enjoys reading quietly. Axel likes playing in the bath.

"I don't like baths or showers," says Lina.

"Ew! If you don't wash, you will stink," shouts Miro.

"I didn't say I don't wash. I just said don't like it."

"It's important to wash," adds Mr. Jasmin. "We sweat during the day, and you get dirty, too."

"I don't want help with washing," Axel adds, "or with going to the bathroom."

Mr. Jasmin smiles.

"I understand you want to do things yourself and in your own way. But remember, if you need help, trusted adults are here to support you."

"And now, it's my turn to show you a new game," announces Mrs. Kim.

"Let's get the balls out!"







Mrs. Melody welcomes the students back from gym class, out of breath and flushed with red cheeks.

"Now it's time to hang your artwork for parent-teacher night."

"Can we do it ourselves?" asks Leo.

The teacher grins and replies:

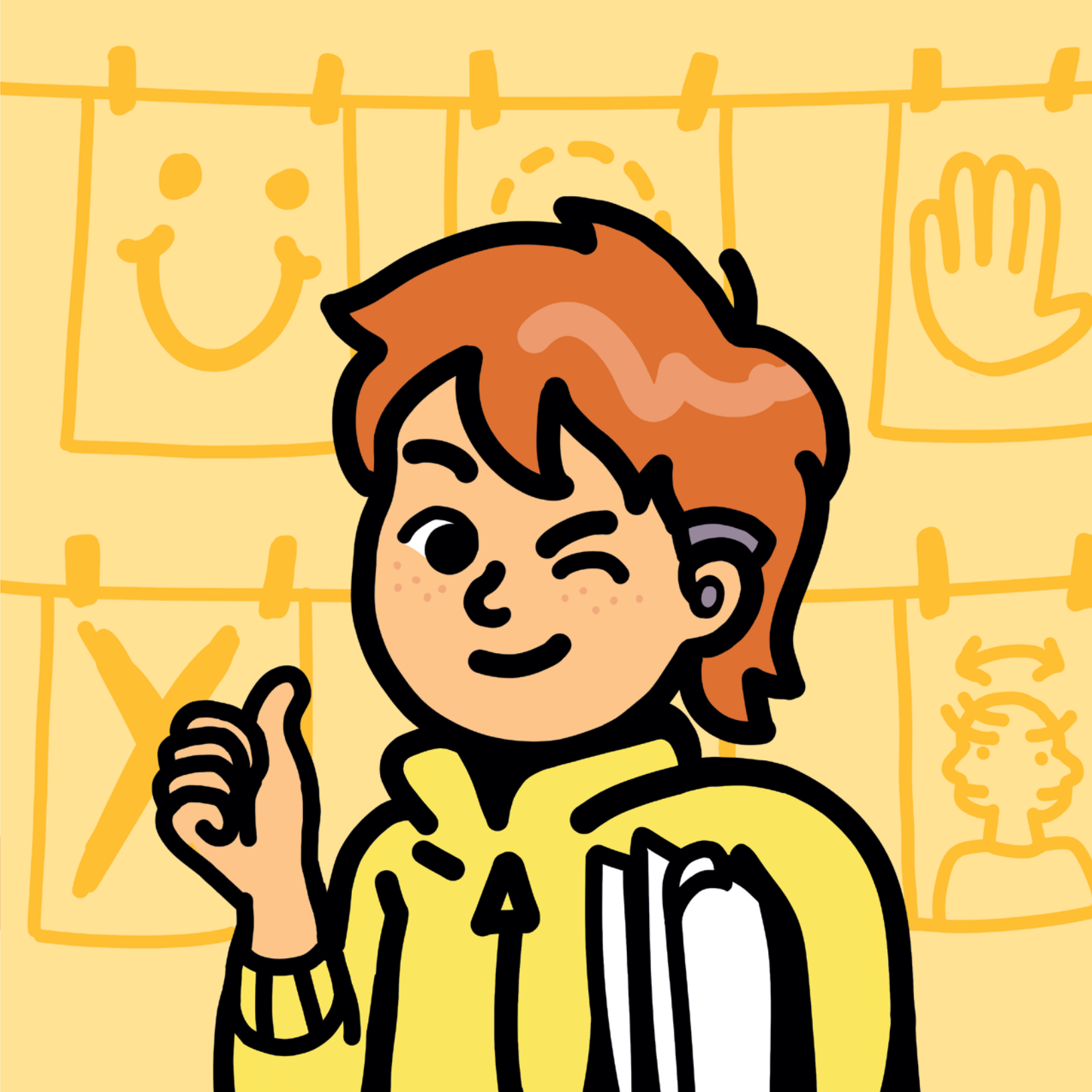
"Let's try. I'll explain each step first, and then we will get to work."

The children are excited about preparing this big exhibition.

Leo looks at Lina and says:

"Our artwork is beautiful. I'm so glad we were on the same team."

She finishes her sentence with a wink that makes her friend smile.



READING NOTES

- *Leo's Classroom* consists of several key moments. To optimize attention and comprehension, we recommend reading the story in two parts, corresponding to the following themes:
 - Part 1: Bubbles and Privacy (pages 1-19)
 - Part 2: Privacy and Autonomy (pages 20-31)

Once you've addressed the different themes with the children, feel free to read and reread the story to help them internalize the concepts the story covers.

- The story features a special education teacher, Mr. Jasmin. Although many children may have experience with a special education teacher in their classrooms, the job title may raise questions. Here is a brief definition of the role in case it is needed:
 - Special education teachers, also known as special educational needs (SEN) teachers, are people who help children with difficulties in learning and adapting. These adults work to ensure children feel comfortable at school and support their social inclusion.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

EMOTIONS

Leo is upset when she walks into the classroom. When Mr. Jasmin asks her what is wrong, at first, Leo does not want to talk.

- *Do you ever feel like you don't want to talk? Or that you're not able to talk? Can you share what you feel in your heart when that happens?*
- Acknowledge the children's emotions. Remind them that they have the right to express their feelings and that it's important that they do so others can understand how they feel.

BUBBLES

Lina wants to give Leo a kiss because she's happy to be on her team. Leo doesn't want a kiss and expresses it to Lina by putting her hand in front of her.

- *When you don't want someone to enter your bubble, how do you let them know? How can you tell if other people want to be touched or hugged?*
- Remind children that they have a right to their bubble and that it's important to respect their personal space, just as it's important to respect others' space.

TRUSTED ADULTS

Mr. Jasmin tells Leo to see a trusted adult when things aren't going well.

- *Tell me about the trusted adults around you. Who are they?*
- Allow the child to recognize the trusted adults in their lives. Emphasize that you are there to help if needed.

PRIVACY

In the changing room, Axel undresses in front of everyone. This makes Miro uncomfortable, who asks him to change in a stall.

- *What are the private places at school? What are the private places at home? And what activities should be done in private places?*
- Encourage the children to differentiate between public and private spaces (examples of private places: bedroom, bathroom at home, changing stalls, etc.), and the things they should do in private spaces (examples of actions: washing, using the bathroom, undressing, etc.).

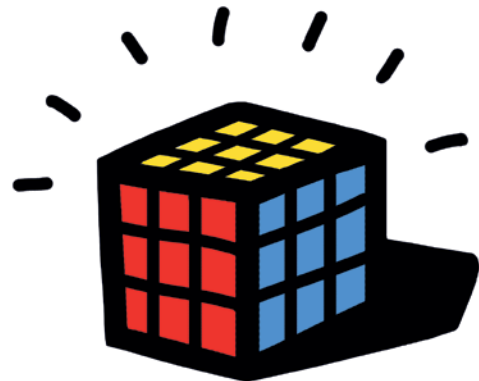
AUTONOMY

The children in *Leo's Classroom* like to do things on their own. Miro likes picking out his outfits. Leo enjoys reading quietly. Axel likes playing in the bath.

- *What about you? What activities do you like to do by yourself? What are you able to do without an adult's help?*
- Highlight the things the children can do independently. Remind them that it's normal to want to try things on their own but not to hesitate to ask a trusted adult for help when needed or if they are in a risky situation.

Marie-Vincent

For more discussion ideas, visit:
www.marie-vincent.org



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Fondation Lucie
et André Chagnon



It's a big day for Leo and all the students in her class: they are going to prepare an art exhibition. Over the course of the day, the children will face several challenges that they will learn to overcome.

A story about interpersonal boundaries, privacy, self-assertion, and fostering autonomy in children, including those with special needs.

