

The ABCs of Speaking Up for Yourself

A workbook to help families talk to their children about self-advocacy and have a voice in the IEP process

Early Elementary Level (Pre-K through 2)

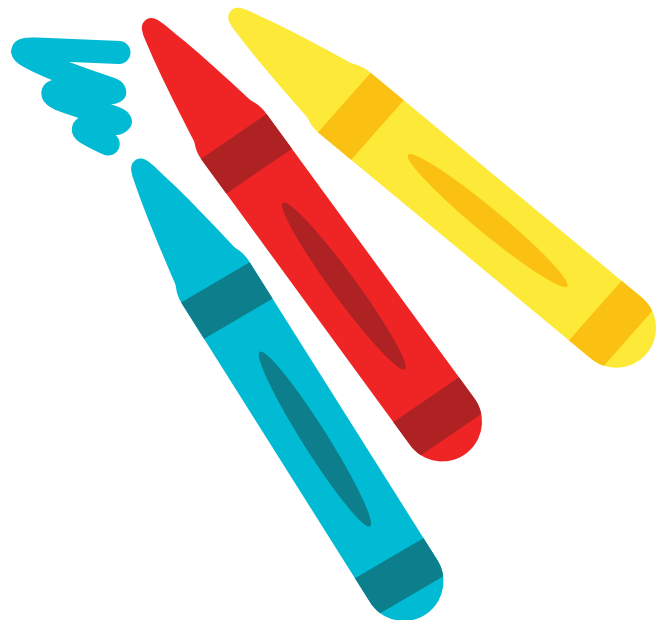


RUTGERS HEALTH
The Boggs Center
on Disability and Human Development
Robert Wood Johnson Medical School



Developed by The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development with the NJ Department of Education, Office of Special Education, funded by IDEA Part B 2024-2025. May 2025.

This book belongs to:



Dear students and families,

This workbook was developed to support families in developing self-advocacy and self-determination skills that can support each child's path to a meaningful life.

The planning for a good adult life starts now. Self-advocacy skills are essential for all people and having them helps children express to educators and others what they need to succeed.

No matter the person's age, everyone has strengths and preferences that can be shared. If your child has a disability and is supported by an Individualized Education Program (IEP), they also have an IEP team. The IEP includes planning for adult life (transition planning) the year the student turns age 14, or younger if appropriate. Your family and your child are a key part of this team and with your input, an effective IEP can be developed.

Directions:

This tool can be used in part or whole to help bring person-centered information into the IEP. You can share the information in these activities before and during the IEP meeting with your case manager.

For more information please visit the [New Jersey Department of Education Office of Special Education Policy](#) webpage.

Terms we use and what they mean:

IEP: The **Individualized Education Program** is designed to meet each eligible child's unique education needs and when appropriate, includes planning for a successful adult life.

IEP Team: Includes the parent, the student when appropriate, the case manager, teachers and other educators, and others as appropriate.

Person-Centered Planning: Is a holistic strength-based process that involves supporting people in making well-informed choices and identifying respectful supports.

Self-Advocacy: Being able to express to others what you want, what you need, and what you don't want.

Self-Determination: A process by which a person controls their own life.


Modifications: A modification changes what the student is taught or expected to learn (e.g., the content of instruction).

Accommodations: An accommodation changes how the student is taught or expected to learn (e.g., instructional methods used, support strategies, environmental factors, etc.).



Speaking up for me

When you speak up, you let people know what you need and want. Here are some examples of what it means to speak up.



I'm hungry!

Speaking up for me means asking for what I need.



I need help!

It means asking for help.



No, thanks!

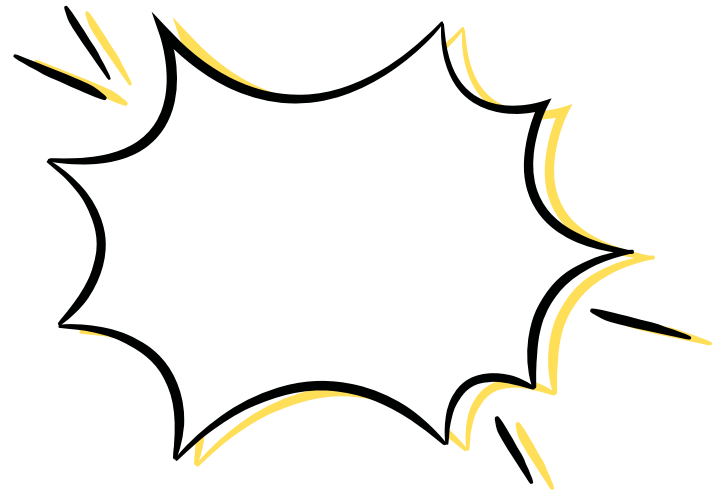
It also means telling others what I don't want.

Speaking up for me

How could you speak up for yourself using the examples below?

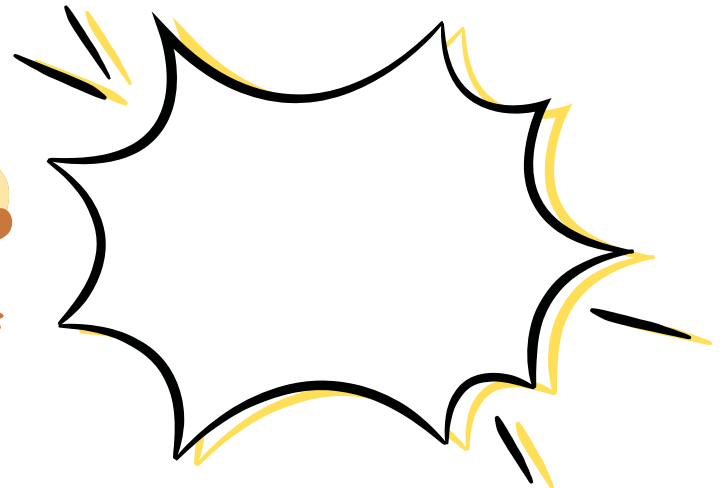
At home:

**My toy is broken.
What can I do?**



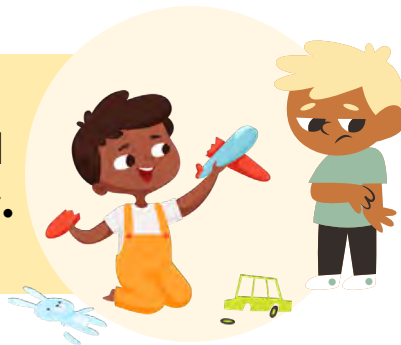
At school:

**My belly hurts.
What can I do?**



With friends:

**A friend wants to
play a game that I
don't want to play.
What can I say?**

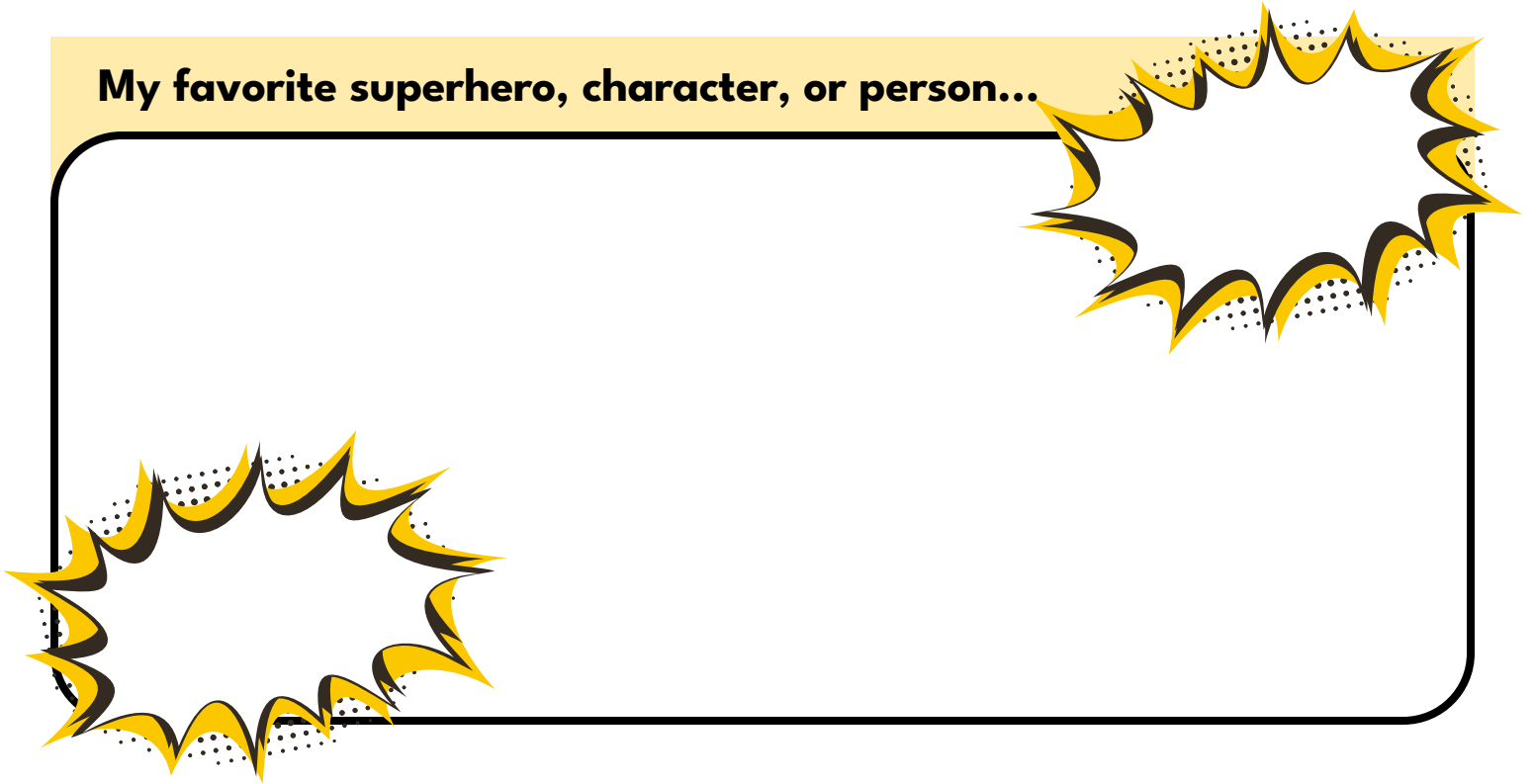


Tip: Self-advocacy is a skill that can be taught and learned. The more opportunities children have to practice self-advocacy, the more likely they will be able to use the skill in new situations. How can you support your child to share preferences at school or with new people? Is there something they use to effectively let others know what they need or want?

My Power Card

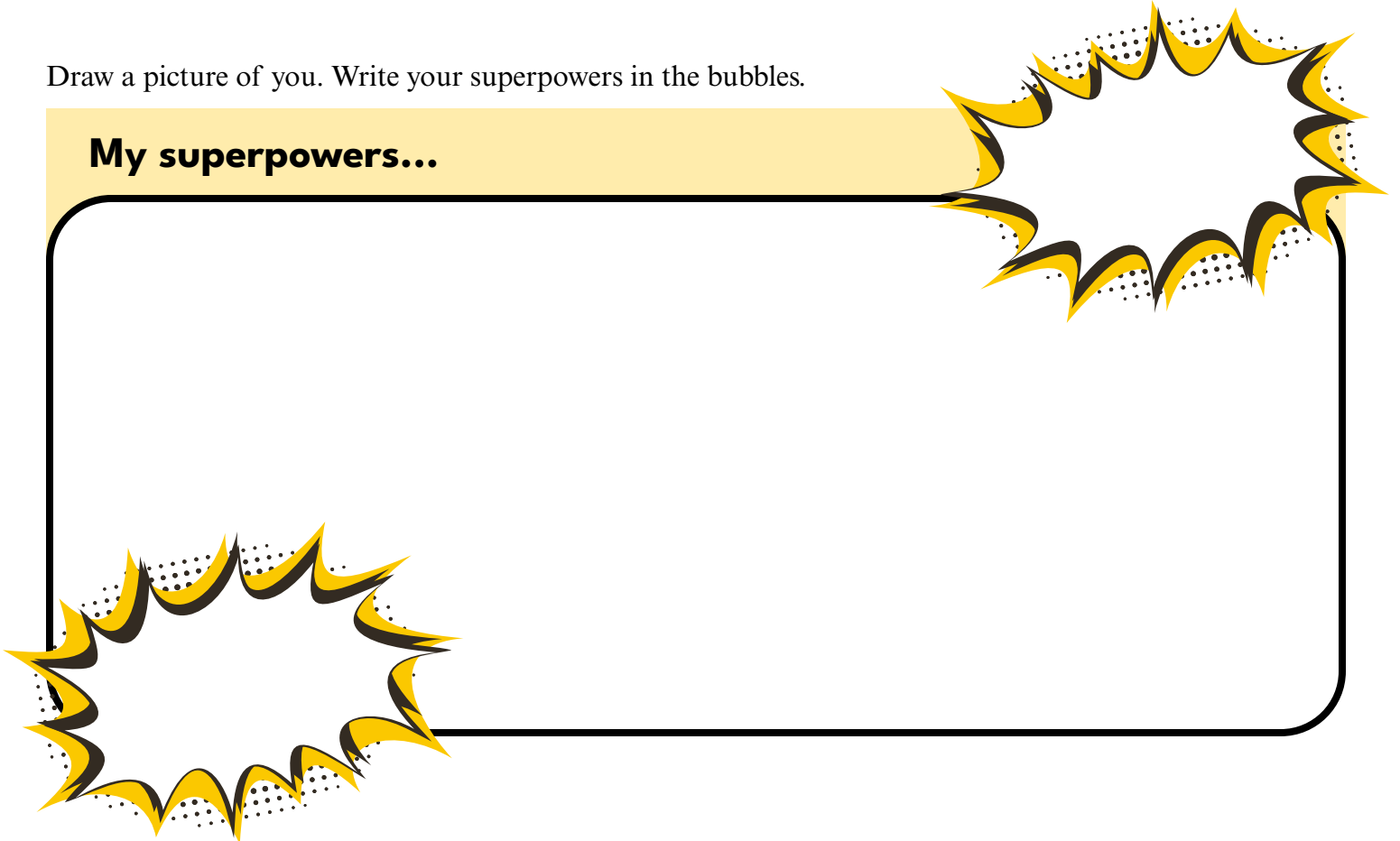
Draw or add a picture of your favorite superhero, character, or person. Write their superpowers in the bubbles.

My favorite superhero, character, or person...



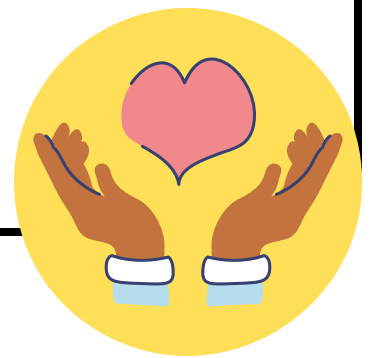
Draw a picture of you. Write your superpowers in the bubbles.

My superpowers...



I like you!

Draw or add a picture of an adult that cares about you at school.



Draw a picture of you and one friend you like to play with.



Tip: Part of self-advocacy is knowing who to go to. As students get older, it is important that they develop a circle of support just for them. It should include those who will be trusted advisors in the future.

Amazing me!

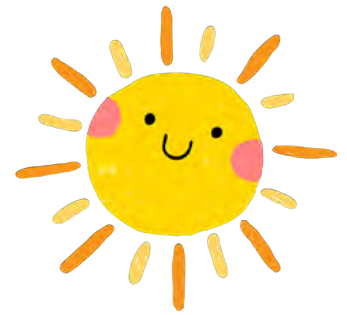
It is super important to tell others what you are good at. Have someone in your family check or color 3 things that make you awesome in green. You check or color in 3 things you like the best in your favorite color!

 Being a good friend	 Helping others	 Sharing toys	 Being honest	 Working hard in school
 Playing outside	 Art	 Waiting your turn	 Dancing	 Singing
 Playing sports	 Running fast	 Listening	 Swimming	 Playing music
 Playing video games	 Taking pictures	 Reading	 Building with Legos	 Math
				

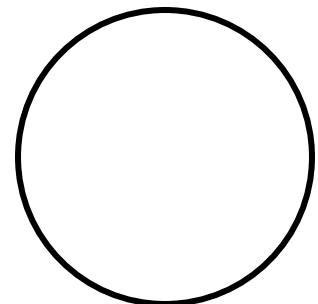
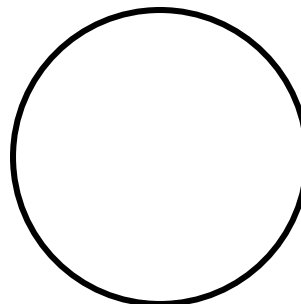
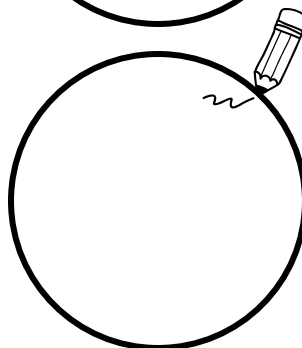
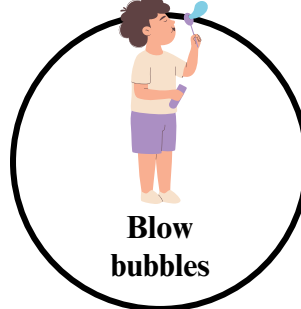
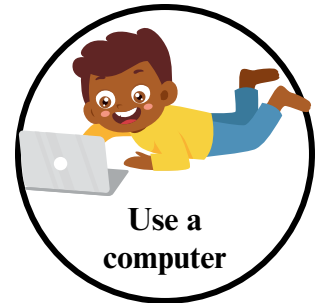
Tip: Write in your own! Help your child learn and own their gifts. They can be anything that makes them who they are!

Good days!

Color or check the 5 bubbles that make you happiest.



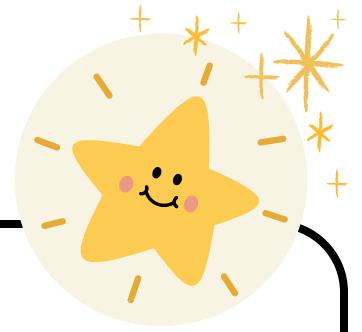
I feel happiest when I get to:



My favorite toys are:

Great day!

A great day for me looks like...



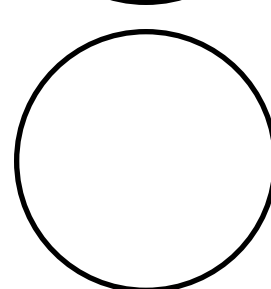
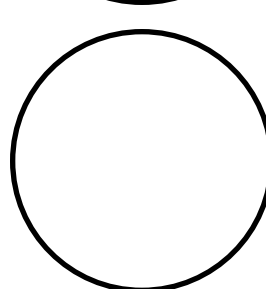
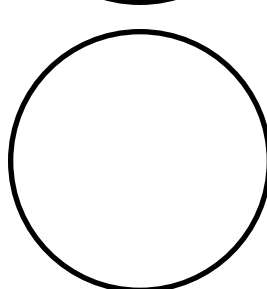
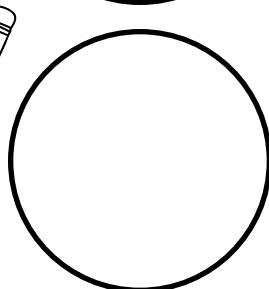
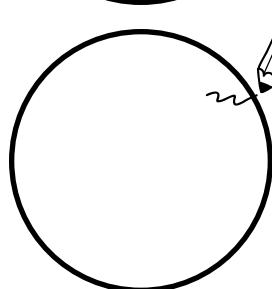
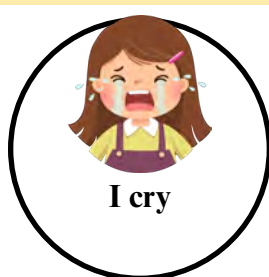
Tip: Be specific. What makes a great day for your child? At home? At school? Who are they with? Where are they going? What are they doing?

Red light, yellow light, green light

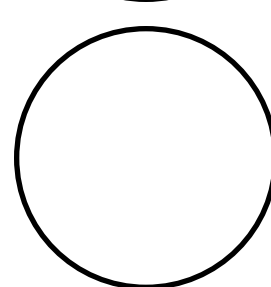
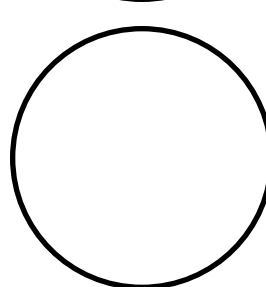
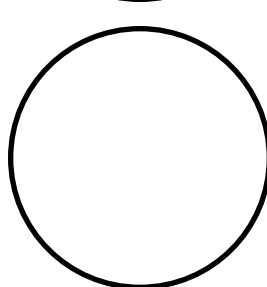
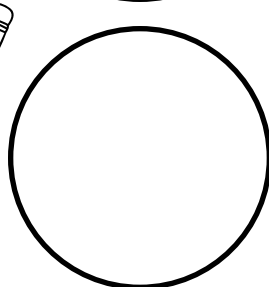
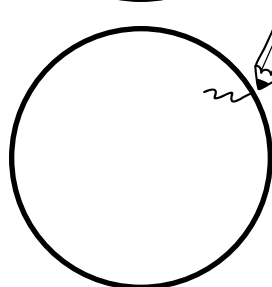
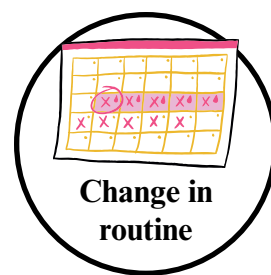
Check the circles that apply to your child and write in others as needed.



When I feel upset:



Things that I dislike:



Things that make me feel better when I'm upset:

Big kid dreams

Places I like going now:



Things I want to do when I am bigger:

Check “yes” for things you want to do when you are bigger. Check “no” for things you don’t want to do when you are bigger.



Do things by myself

Ride a bike

Go to work

Go to a dance

Play a sport

Learn to cook

Have a pet

Have friends



Yes



No

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In the future...

What are some experiences you would like your child to have in the next school year and further into the future?

For students and families

What will make you most comfortable at the IEP meeting?

What would make you feel uncomfortable at the IEP meeting?

If you only had 2 minutes to tell educators what they need to know about your child, what would you share?

Would you feel comfortable having your child join the IEP meeting room? If not, why?

How could the IEP team accommodate your child so you would be comfortable with them sitting in? For example, provide coloring books and toys off to the side of the room.

What can you share on your child's behalf?



Tip: Think about some ways that you can support and prepare your child to attend the IEP meeting. Also consider sharing your responses to these questions with your case manager before the IEP meeting.

Notes & questions I have:



References & Additional Resources



New Jersey Department of Education Office of Special Education Policy
<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/policy/index.shtml>

NJ Transition Toolkit
<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/programs/njtransition/>

PCAST Webpage
<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/programs/pcast.shtml>

SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
<https://spanadvocacy.org>

The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development: *Act Early Resilience Toolkit*
<https://boggscenter.rwjms.rutgers.edu/resources/act-early-resilience-toolkit>

The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development: *The Next Steps: Addressing Concerns about Your Child's Development Quick Guide*
<https://boggscenter.rwjms.rutgers.edu/resources/publications/the-next-steps-addressing-concerns-about-your-childs-development>

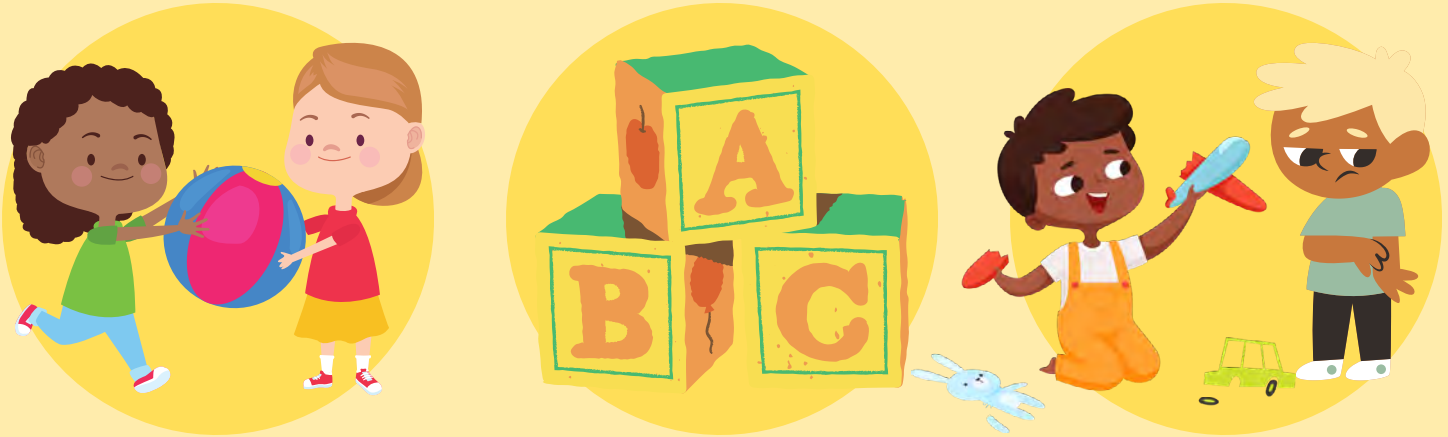
Special Thanks

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