

Shame

A Guide for Teachers



Primary Education

CONTENTS

1. Introduction and Objectives	3
2. Recommendations for teachers	4
3. Why is it important to work on shame?	5
4. Central guiding points for teachers	6
5. Day 1 – Recognising and understanding shame	
• Activity 1: Voting with cards – "I would feel ashamed if..."	7
• Activity 2: The portrait game – Where does shame hide?	9
6. Day 2 – Recognising triggers and support strategies	
• Activity 1: Brainstorming – When do I feel shame?	11
• Activity 2: What helps me when I feel shame	13
7. Supplementary activities	
• Supplementary activity 1: Anonymous stories about shame	15
• Supplementary activity 2: The shame traffic light	17
8. Printable materials and resources	
• Checklist of materials per session	19
• Day 1	
◦ Activity 1: Voting with cards – "I would feel ashamed if..." and Shame traffic light	20
◦ Activity 2: The portrait game – Where does shame hide?	22

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Shame is a **universal and profoundly human emotion** that plays an essential role in how children perceive themselves and relate to others. It often appears when we feel **exposed, excluded, or judged** and, although it can be painful, it also serves as an internal signal that helps us recognise our limits and our **need to belong**.

In the school context, shame can arise in very common situations: **making a mistake** in front of classmates, not being chosen for a team, receiving a correction, or being mocked by others. If not addressed properly, this emotion can lead children to **hide, shut down, or react defensively**. Over time, repeated experiences of shame can affect their **confidence, participation, and their sense of emotional safety** within the classroom.

This module offers a safe and structured space to **give voice to this emotion**, helping students to recognise it, **normalise it**, and learn to manage it in a healthy way. Through **playful activities, body dynamics**, and moments of group reflection, children discover that feeling shame is not a weakness, but a shared human experience. Furthermore, they learn to identify how it manifests in the body, how it is expressed in behaviour, and what can trigger it, thus developing **empathy and emotional self-regulation strategies**.

Main objectives:

- **Recognise and understand** the emotion of shame in different everyday contexts.
- Identify how **shame manifests in the body** and how it manifests in behaviour and thoughts.
- Explore the **triggers** that often cause shame (such as exclusion, exposure, or lack of recognition).
- **Normalise the experience of shame** as part of human development.
- Promote **empathy, respect, and mutual** support within the classroom.
- Develop strategies to **transform shame into understanding** and connection with others.

Keywords

- Shame
- Social emotions
- Self-regulation
- Self-esteem
- The gaze of others
- Belonging
- Acceptance
- Rejection
- Respect
- Emotional expressiveness
- Empathy
- Personal boundaries
- Safe classroom climate
- Emotional support
- Body awareness and shame

Expected Results Module 6

By the end of this module, students should **recognise how shame shows up in everyday life**, reflect on its effects on **self-esteem and communication**, and develop strategies to handle it more **consciously, empathetically, and freely**.

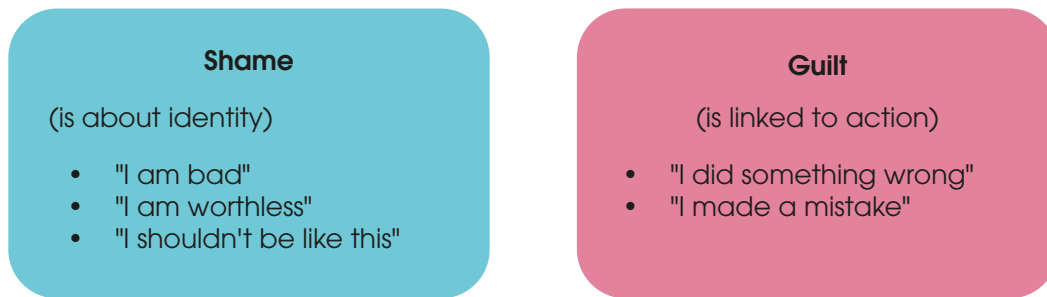


The proposals in this module are indicative. You can adapt them based on the characteristics of the group or your class dynamics. If you consider it necessary, divide it into two shorter sessions or integrate it into cross-curricular emotional education projects.

The material can be used in both paper and digital format, depending on what is more practical.

Why is it important to work on shame?

Although they are often confused, **shame and guilt are not the same thing**.



Talking about shame naturally helps children develop a **healthier relationship with their emotions**. They learn that everyone can feel vulnerable and that **mistakes do not define them**, but are opportunities for growth.

Working on this emotion from an early age **prevents patterns of self-criticism, perfectionism, or avoidance**. Furthermore, it strengthens the **sense of belonging and emotional security**, essential pillars for learning and co-existence.

For the teacher, addressing shame is also an **observation tool**: it allows for understanding group dynamics, identifying moments of **exclusion or ridicule**, and promoting a **culture of respect, trust, and empathy**.

Key recommendations for teachers

- **Create a safe environment:** validate all emotions and ensure that no student feels under pressure to share personal experiences.
- **Normalise the emotion:** remember that we all feel shame at some point; it is not a weakness, but a shared experience.
- **Model empathy and respect:** the way the teacher responds to mistakes influences how students treat each other.
- **Use the activities as a starting point:** rather than looking for results, prioritise reflection and emotional awareness.
- **Observe emotional cues:** body language, tone of voice, or silence also communicate.
- **Promote peer support:** publicly recognise gestures of care, listening, or help.
- **Close each session emotionally:** conclude calmly, ensuring that no one leaves feeling exposed or uncomfortable.

Reflection questions for teachers

- When do I notice that shame emerges in my class?
- How do I react to my students' shame?
- In what way can I accompany a mistake without reinforcing humiliation?
- How can I lead by example in self-compassion and self-respect?
- What practices can I incorporate to create a classroom where everyone feels safe to be seen?

"When we manage to talk about shame, it loses its power."

— Brené Brown

A1 Day 1: Shame – Recognising and understanding the emotion (40 minutes)

ACTIVITY: Voting with cards – "I would feel ashamed if...?"
(15 - 20 minutes) Adapt it to the pace and age of your group.

1.1.1 Objective

1. Recognise that shame is an emotion that we all feel, even if in different ways, and open a safe and fun space for reflection on different situations that can cause it.

Materials

- ☐ Coloured cards (red/green)
- ☐ Printed or projected list of phrases
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart and markers
- ☐ Classroom arranged in a circle or semi-circle
- ☐ (Optional) Soft music for the closing or reflection moment

1.1.2 Activity procedure:

1. Introduction and context:

- Explain to the group that today they will talk about an emotion we all know: shame.
- You could say something like:
 - *"Sometimes we feel shame when we think others are looking at us or when we do something that makes us uncomfortable. But we don't all feel shame for the same things. Today we will discover which situations make us feel this way and we will see that each person experiences it in their own way."*

2. Explanation of the dynamic

- Give the two cards to each student:

No, I wouldn't
feel ashamed

Yes, I would feel
ashamed.

- Explain that you will read different phrases and they must raise the card that best reflects how they would feel in that situation.

3. Reading of the phrases and voting

- Read the following phrases one by one, leaving a few seconds between each to observe the reactions:

- I would feel ashamed if I hadn't realised I didn't have enough money until I had to pay at the till.
- I would feel ashamed if I slipped and fell in front of my friends.
- I would feel ashamed if I accidentally put my t-shirt on inside out and went to school with it like that.
- I would feel ashamed if I realised I was the only one in the class who hadn't been invited to a party.
- I would feel ashamed if someone took my phone and read my messages.
- I would feel ashamed to get a bad mark in a subject I am usually good at.
- I would feel ashamed to have to sing alone in front of the whole class during a music lesson.
- I would feel ashamed to have said something mean about a friend.
- I would feel ashamed if a friend behaved very inappropriately at the cinema.

4. Guided reflection

- After several rounds, start a brief dialogue:
 - *"In which situations do we agree? In which ones do we think differently? Why?"*
- Write on the whiteboard the words or key phrases that emerge (for example: fear of being mocked, body shame, making mistakes, the gaze of others).

5. Conclusion and emotional connection

- Conclude by remembering three important ideas:
 - **We all feel shame sometimes.**
 - What makes us feel shame **can be different for each person.**
 - **Talking about what we feel** helps us to understand ourselves and respect others.

Note for the teacher:

- **Maintain a curious, non-judgemental tone.**
- **Observe the reactions:** nervous laughter, silences, avoidance, or spontaneous comments are clues as to how the group handles exposure.
- **Do not force anyone to justify their response;** the goal is not to "be right", but to open an emotional conversation.
- If a delicate situation emerges (for example, exclusion or mockery), take note of it to work on it later in the mural or in the Day 2 dynamics.

A2 Activity: Portrait Game - "Where does shame hide?" (20 Minutes)

Adapt it to the pace and age of your group..

1.1.1 Objective

1. Help students identify how **embarrassment** manifests on the face and body, distinguishing it from other emotions, and **promote empathy** towards those who experience it.

Materials

- ☐ Cards or images with faces expressing different emotions (joy, sadness, fear, surprise, shame, etc.)
- ☐ Blank sheets and pencils or colours
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart and markers
- ☐ Ample space for free movement

1.1.2 Activity procedure

1. Introduction to the topic
 - Explain to them that they will observe different faces and try to **discover what each of them is feeling**.
 - *"Emotions can be seen in the body and the face. Today we will become emotion detectives."*
2. Observation and classification
 - Show the images or distribute them among small groups.
 - Ask them to **observe each face carefully** and say which emotion they think it expresses.
 - **Record the answers** on the whiteboard.
3. Identification of shame
 - When the corresponding image is shown, ask them:
 - *"What signals tell us that this person might be feeling shame?"*
 - Guide the reflection:
 - Do they look downwards?
 - Do they blush?
 - Do they seem to want to hide?



4. Creative variant (optional)

- Invite students to **draw their own "shame face"** or how they feel when they experience shame.
- Afterwards, they can share it voluntarily (only if they wish to).

5. Group closing

- In a plenary session, write on the board the words or **sensations that are repeated**: heat in the face, looking at the ground, silence, wanting to disappear...
- Conclude with a simple idea:
 - *"When we recognise what we feel, it is easier for us to understand others. We all feel shame, and this also unites us."*

Note for the teacher:

- **Reinforce respect**: do not allow **mockery or imitations**.
- If a student shares something personal, **thank them for their trust and normalise the emotion**.
- You can take the opportunity to **introduce vocabulary** related to emotions: **tension, blushing, shyness, nervousness, discomfort**.
- If the group is participative, **you can conclude with a mini game of body expression** (showing different emotions through gestures).

A1

Day 2: Triggers of embarrassment and mutual support (45 minutes)

Activity: Brainstorming – "When do I feel shame?" (20–25 Minutes)

Adjust the time based on the group's participation.

2.1.1 Objective

1. **Identify everyday situations** that can trigger shame in the school environment and understand that this feeling **occurs differently in each person**.

Materials

- ☐ Index cards or Post-it notes
- ☐ Felt-tip pens or pens
- ☐ Whiteboard, mural, or large display board
- ☐ (Optional) Soft background music to encourage concentration

2.1.2 Activity procedure:

1. **Introduction Start with a brief explanation:**
 - "Embarrassment can manifest in many moments. Sometimes it is due to something we do, other times to the way we think others see us. Let's think together about situations that make us feel embarrassed."
2. **Individual work or in small groups**
 - Distribute the cards or Post-it notes and ask them to write or draw situations that could cause shame (they do not need to be personal).
 - "You can write something that happened to you or something that you think could embarrass someone."
3. **Creating the mural**
 - Each student or group **attaches their cards to the mural**.
 - Read some of them and **group them into categories**, writing them on the board:



4. Joint dialogue and reflection

- Guide the conversation with questions:
 - *Are there situations that repeat?*
 - *Why do some things make us more embarrassed than others?*
 - *What could we do so that no one in class feels embarrassed?*

5. Emotional closing

- Thank the participants for their participation and summarise the main ideas in three messages:
 - We all feel shame, and **this unites us**.
 - We can **learn to recognise it** and take care of ourselves when it appears.
 - In class, we can all contribute to making sure **no one feels to blame** for making a mistake.

Note for the teacher:

- Let the activity proceed **without applying pressure** for participants to share their experiences.
- Pay attention to the **themes that emerge** (mockery, comparisons, exclusion). These are important indicators of group dynamics.
- If delicate situations arise, **validate the emotion** and suggest revisiting them in the next activity ("What helps us when we feel shame?").

A2 Activity: "What helps me when I feel shame" (10 - 20 minutes)

2.1.1 Objective

1. Explore with empathy which attitudes and gestures help us feel better when experiencing shame and **build a collective mural** of group support and care.

Materials

- ☐ Blank cards (one per student)
- ☐ Felt-tip pens or coloured pencils
- ☐ String, mural, or panel to hang the cards
- ☐ Pegs, paperclips, or adhesive tape to fix them
- ☐ Poster or visible title: "Our mural of support and understanding"

2.1.2 Activity procedure:

1. Introduction Link to the previous activity:
 - *"We have already seen what things can make us feel shame. Now let's think about what helps us when we experience this feeling. What words, gestures, or actions make us feel better?"*
2. Individual work
 - Ask each student to **write or draw one thing** that helps them when they feel shame.
 - They can think of examples such as:
 - Someone listening to me.
 - That they do not laugh at me.
 - That they say something kind to me.
 - That they give me time to calm down.
 - That they remind me it happens to everyone.
3. Sharing and mural
 - When they have finished, invite the students to **read (voluntarily)** their cards and attach them to the mural or the string with the pegs.
 - **Give the mural a title**, for example: *"Our mural of support and understanding"*.
4. Module closing
 - Gather the group in front of the mural and make a final brief reflection:
 - *"This mural reminds us that we can all feel shame, but also that we can all help each other. Every word here is a way to accompany, take care of, and make our class a safe place."*

Our wall of support and understanding



Note for the teacher:

- **Encourage voluntary participation.** Not everyone will want to share their cards, and that is fine.
- If very valuable ideas emerge (such as **empathy, respect, or humour**), highlight them with examples.
- You can **leave the mural visible** for a few weeks as a reminder of the group's emotional work.
- Conclude the session with a brief moment of breathing or a **collective round of applause** to close with positive energy.

AC1

Complementary Activity

Activity 1: Anonymous stories of shame (15 - 20 Minutes)

4.1.1 Objective

1. **Promote empathy and mutual understanding** through the recognition of experiences of shame, in a **safe and respectful environment**.

Materials

- ☐ Blank sheets or small slips of paper.
- ☐ Box, large envelope, or bag to keep the stories.
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart and markers.
- ☐ (Optional) Decorative label: "Things that unite us" (for the box).

4.1.2 Activity procedure:

1. Introduction

- Explain to the group that they will do an activity to better understand what it feels like to experience shame, **without talking about anyone in particular**.
 - *"Everyone has experienced something they felt ashamed of at least once. Sometimes it's a silly thing, other times it's something we remember for a long time. Let's write it down anonymously to see that we are not the only ones."*

2. Individual Writing

- Ask each student to **write (or draw) a situation** in which someone might feel shame.
- Clarify that **they must not write their name** and that they can make up the story if they prefer.

3. Collection and reading

- Collect the papers in a box and, at random, **read some stories aloud**.
- After each one, start a brief dialogue:
 - ***Why can this situation cause shame?***
 - ***What could we do if this happened to a classmate?***
 - ***What can be helpful in these moments?***

4. Conclusion and reflection

- Conclude by emphasising the **empathy of the group** and the normality of this emotion.
 - ***"Embarrassment is something we all feel. When we talk about it without fear, we understand each other better and take more care of one another."***



Note for the teacher:

- Maintain an **attentive and warm tone**, avoiding humorous interpretations or imitations.
- If delicate situations emerge (e.g., mockery, exclusion, or family issues), **validate the emotion** and take note to address it later during tutoring.
- You can keep the stories in a symbolic box called "**Things that unite us**" to reinforce the message of community.

4.1.1 Objective

1. Help students **recognise the intensity** with which they feel shame and understand that **each person can experience it differently**.

Materials

- ☐ Coloured card or circles in three colours: red, yellow, and green (one of each colour per student).
- ☐ List of situations prepared by the teacher.
- ☐ Free space to move or position the colours (cards can be attached to three walls or areas of the classroom).
- ☐ (Optional) Large posters with the colours and their meaning.

4.1.2 Activity procedure

1. Introduction

- Explain that they will use a traffic light to represent **how embarrassed they would feel** in various situations.
 - *"Just like traffic lights, each colour represents something: Red indicates a lot of shame, yellow indicates a little shame, and green indicates little or no shame."*

2. Reading situations and voting

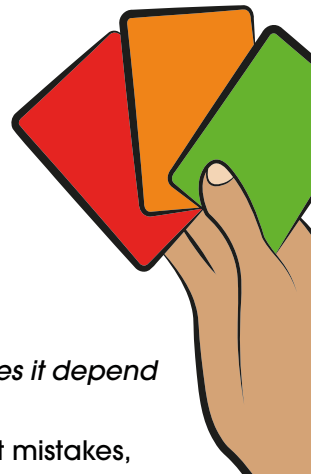
- Read different situations aloud, one by one, and ask them to **raise the corresponding card**.
- For example:
 - Forgetting the lyrics to a song during a music lesson.
 - Tripping and falling in the playground.
 - Getting a bad grade in a subject I am normally good at.
 - Someone reading aloud something I have written.
 - Arriving late when everyone is already seated.

3. Brief debate

- After several rounds, comment with the group:
 - *"Why do some of you feel more or less shame in the same situation? What does it depend on?"*
- Note on the board some ideas that emerge: **trust, fear of laughter, concern about mistakes, respect, self-confidence...**

4. Conclusion and collective reflection

- Conclude the activity by emphasising the **value of emotional diversity**:
 - *"Everyone feels shame in a different way, and that is okay. The important thing is learning to recognise it and knowing how to support each other when it appears."*



Note for the teacher:

- This activity works very well as a **review or introduction**.
- If the group is participative, you can carry it out with **movement** (e.g., positioning the three colours in different corners of the room).
- **Reinforce respect** and prevent anyone from laughing at others' responses.
- At the end, you can ask:

"What can we do so that no one feels 'in the red' in this class?"

Lista de control del material

DAY 1 – Recognising and understanding the emotion of shame

1.1 Voting with cards: "I would feel ashamed if...?"

- ☐ Coloured cards (red/green)
- ☐ Printed or projected list of phrases
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart and markers
- ☐ Classroom arranged in a circle or semi-circle
- ☐ (Optional) Soft music for the closing or reflection moment

1.2 The portrait game: "Where does shame hide?"

- ☐ Cards or images with faces expressing different emotions (joy, sadness, fear, surprise, shame, etc.)
- ☐ Blank sheets and pencils or colours
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart and markers
- ☐ Ample space for free movement

DAY 2 – Identifying triggers and support strategies

2.1 Brainstorming: "When do I feel shame?"

- ☐ Cards or post-it notes
- ☐ Markers or pens
- ☐ Whiteboard, mural, or large display board
- ☐ (Optional) Soft background music to encourage concentration

2.2 "What helps me when I feel shame"

- ☐ White cards (one per student)
- ☐ Markers or coloured pencils
- ☐ String, mural, or board to hang the cards
- ☐ Clothes pegs, paperclips, or adhesive tape to fix them
- ☐ Poster or visible title: "Our wall of support and understanding"

Supplementary activities (optional)

3.1 Anonymous stories of shame

- ☐ Blank sheets or small slips of paper
- ☐ Box, large envelope, or bag to keep the stories
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart and markers
- ☐ (Optional) Decorative label: "Things that unite us" (for the box)

3.2 The shame traffic light

- ☐ Cards or circles in three colours: red, yellow, and green (one of each colour per student)
- ☐ List of situations prepared by the teacher
- ☐ Free space to move or position the colours (it is possible to fix the cards on three walls or areas of the classroom)
- ☐ (Optional) Large posters with the colours and their meaning

Before starting the module, check that:

- The cards are **cut out and ready**.
- Materials are **accessible and organised** by activity.
- The classroom space **favours visual communication** (circle or semi-circle).
- You have soft music or elements to signal the start/end of the session at hand (for example, a bell, a candle, or a chime).

Yes, I would feel ashamed.

**No, I wouldn't be
ashamed of it.**

I'd feel a bit ashamed.



Shy





Disappointed





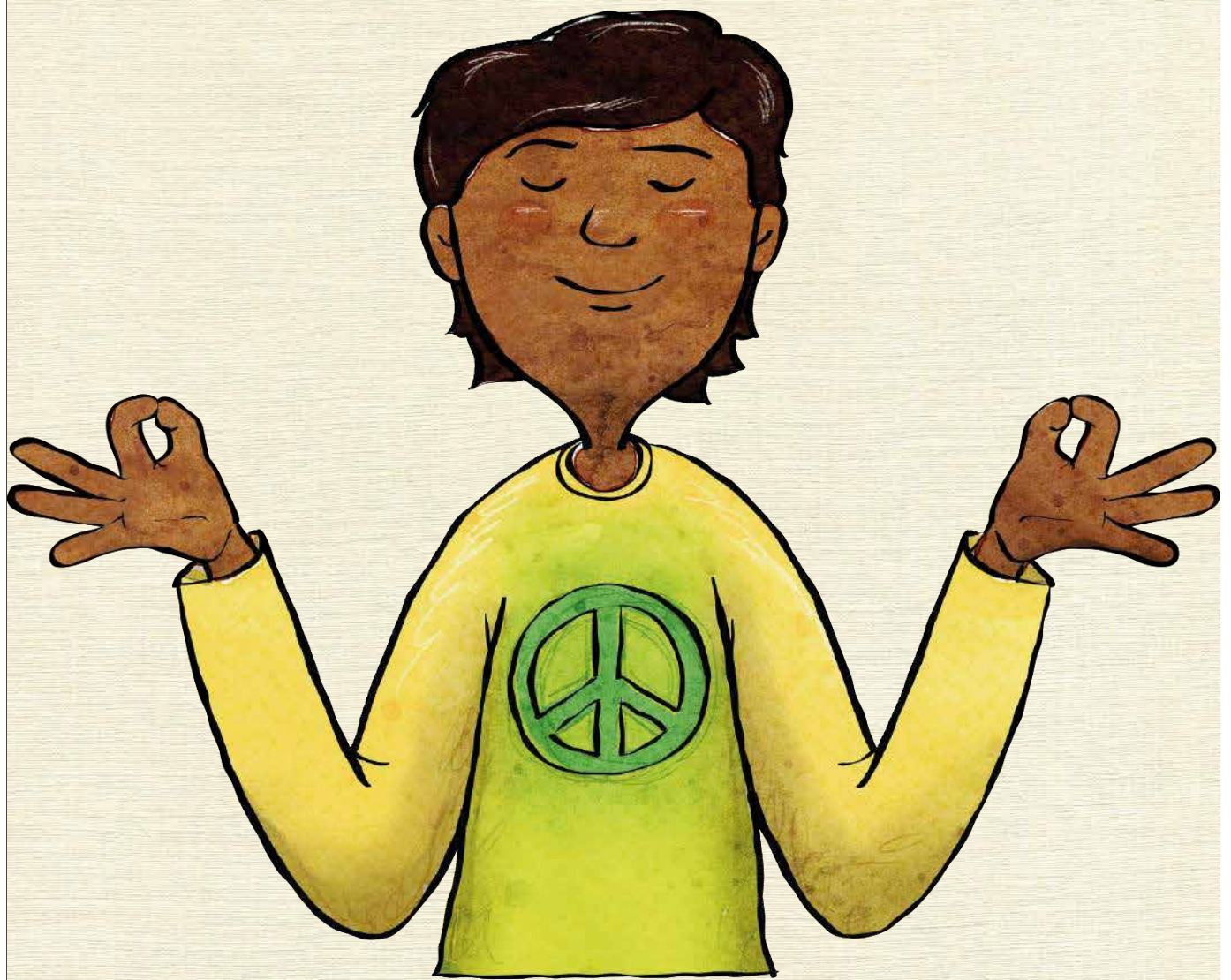
Curious





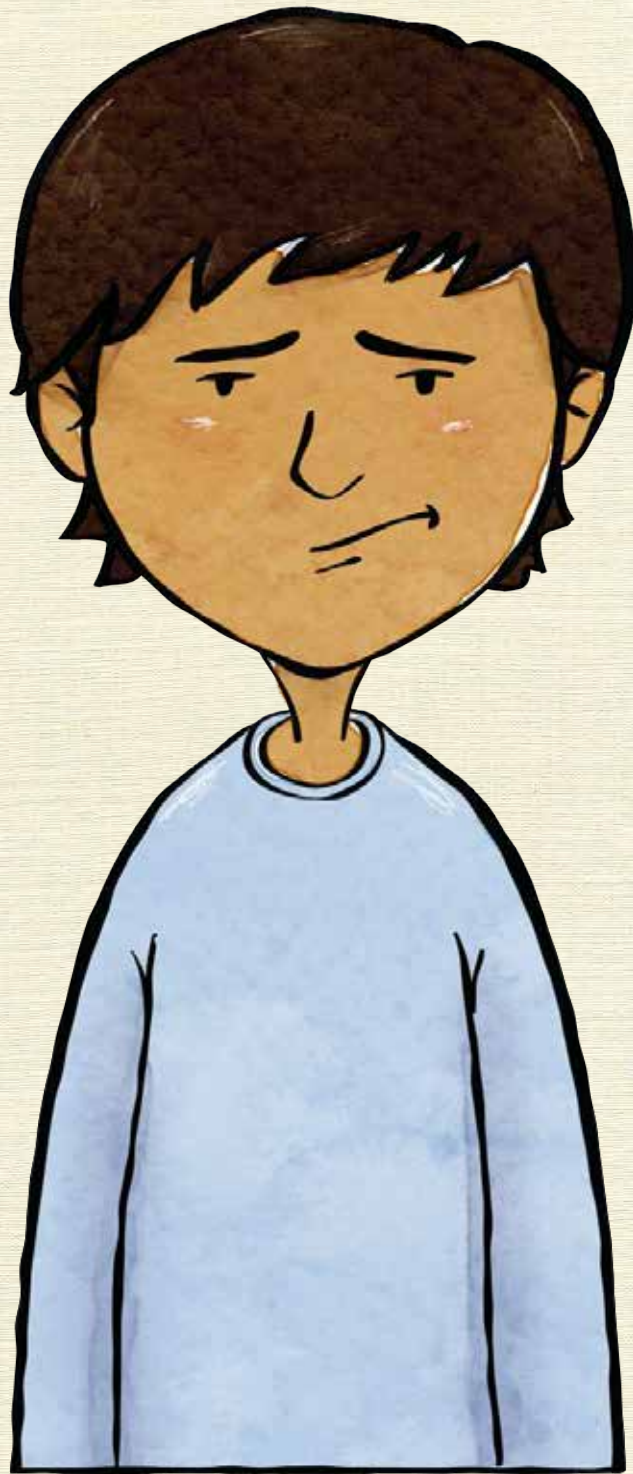
Thirsty





Relaxed





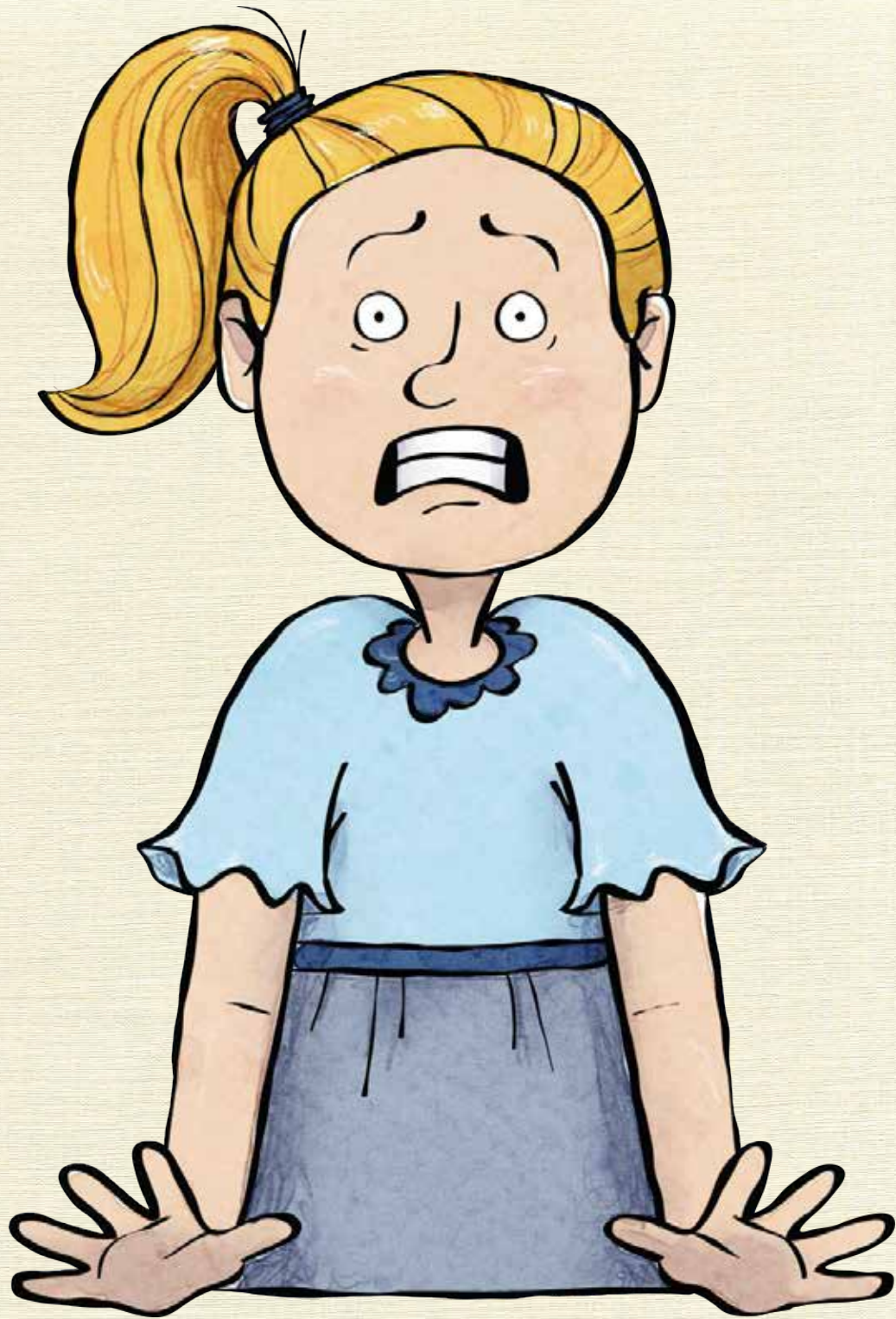
Bored





Strong





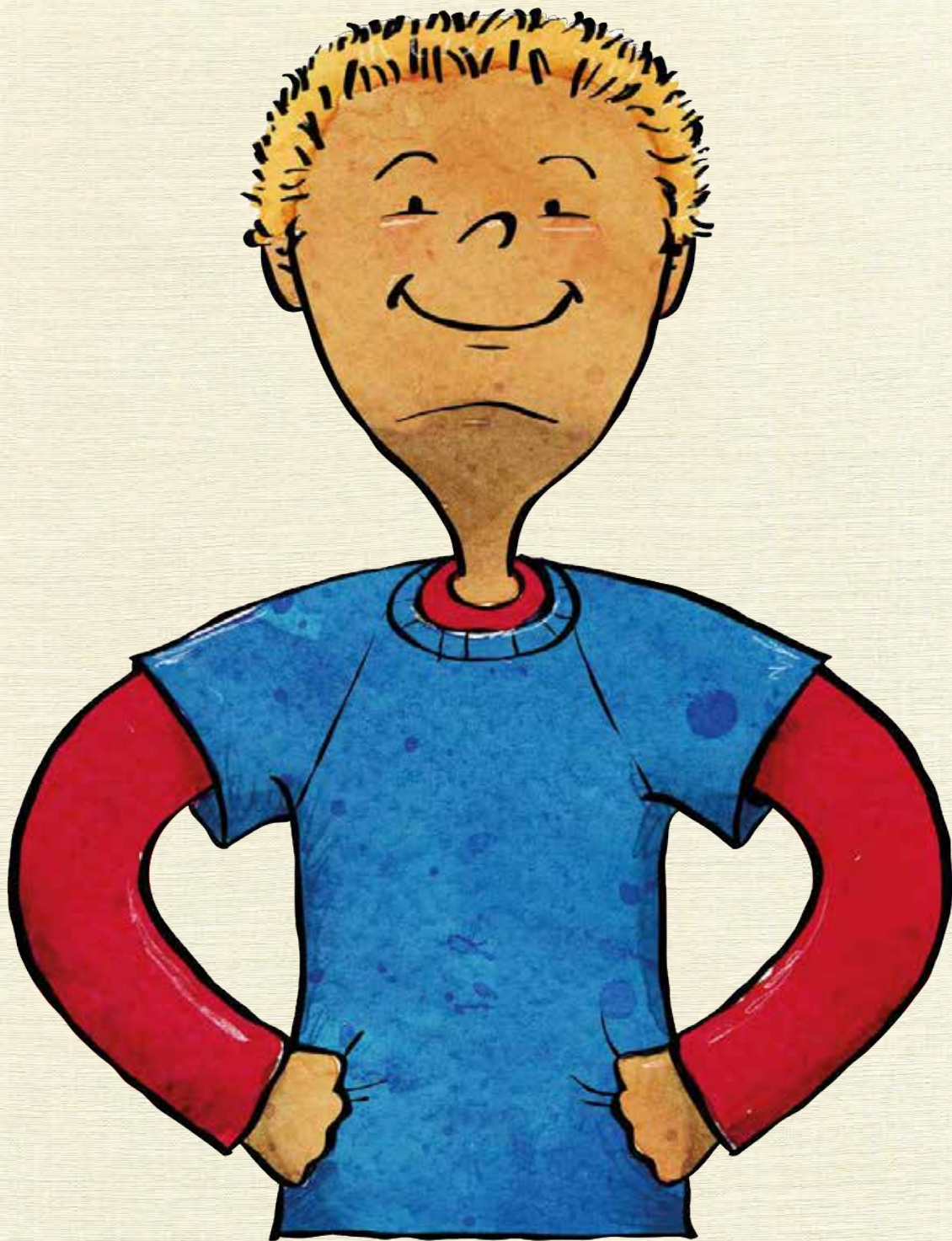
Scared





Active





Brave





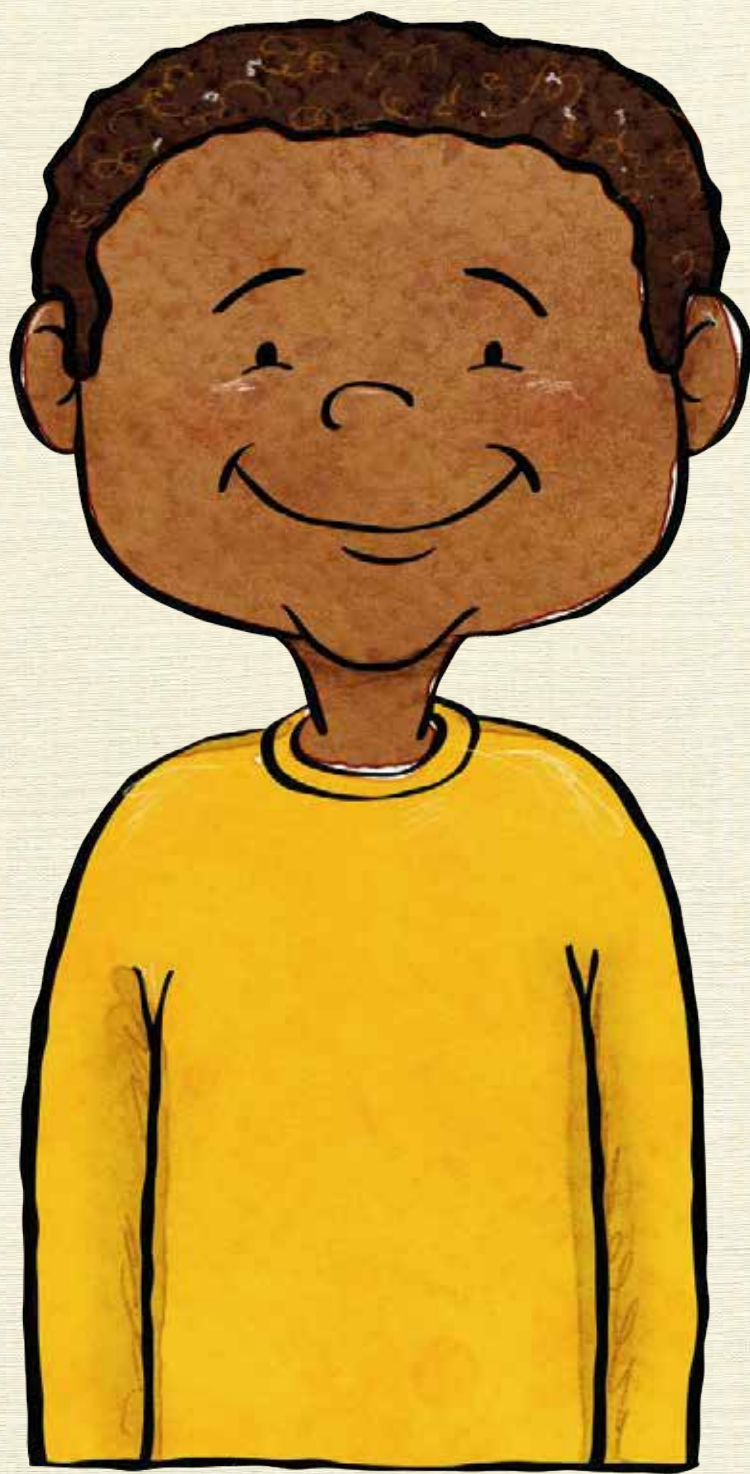
Ashamed





Offended





Happy





Hard-working /
Diligent





Confused





Awake





Motivated





Tired





Offended





Amused





Proud





Enthusiastic





Frustrated





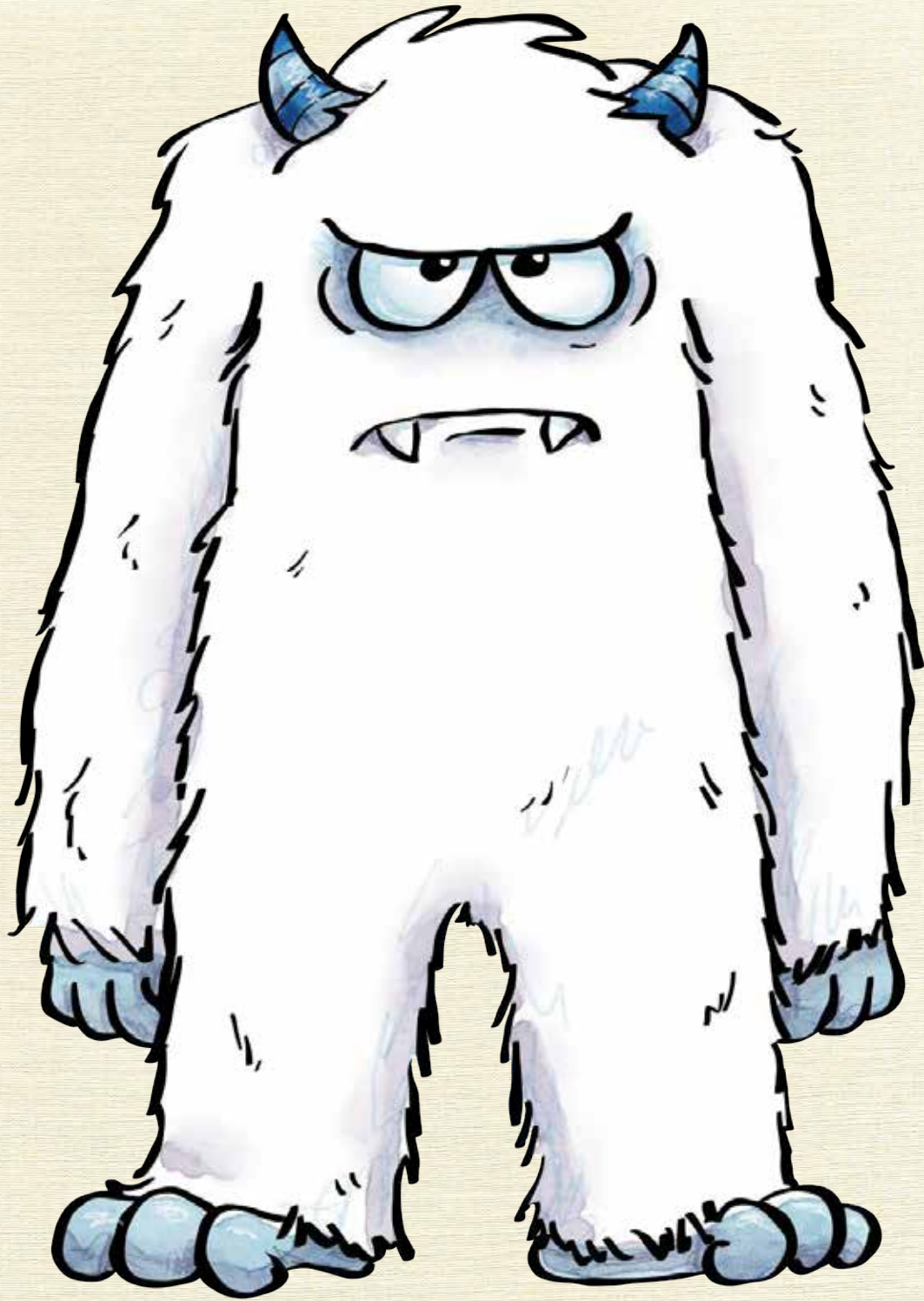
Excluded





**Amazed /
Surprised**





Strange / Funny





Angry





Nervous





Surprised





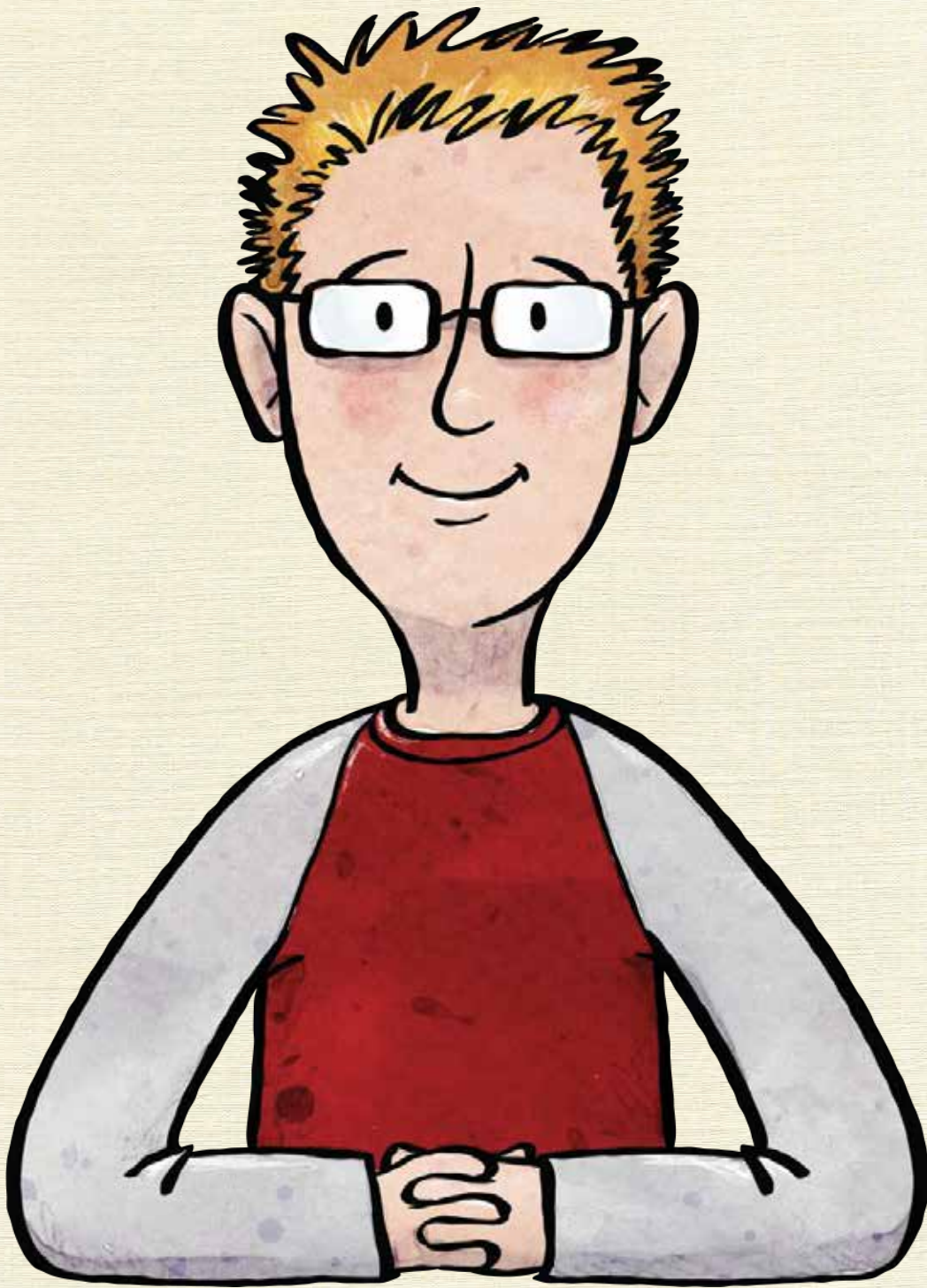
Sad





Amused





Aware





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