

Shame

Guide for teachers



Secondary activity

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Shame is an emotion very much present during **adolescence**. As students begin to build their own **identity** and attribute greater importance to the **opinion of others**, this emotion can be perceived with greater intensity. It manifests when someone feels **exposed, judged or different, and can influence participation, coexistence and self-confidence**.

In class, shame can manifest in many ways: fear of making mistakes, a desire to go unnoticed or even defensive attitudes such as anger or derision. Although it is often experienced as something uncomfortable, **shame plays an important function, as it helps us to recognise limits, to empathise with others and to strengthen our sense of belonging to the group**.

This module proposes to **recognise, understand and normalise shame**, encouraging students to express it without fear of being judged. Through **participatory dynamics, dialogue and reflection**, it invites exploration of **triggers and typical responses** to this emotion and discovery of healthier ways to deal with it in school life.

Module objectives:

- Make shame visible as a **shared emotion** but experienced in a **personal way**.
- Identify the **most common triggers** of shame, according to Stephan Marks.
- Analyse **behaviours and responses** to shame using **Donald Nathanson's Compass of Shame**.
- Reflect on **school situations** that generate shame and build **prevention and mutual support strategies**.

Key words

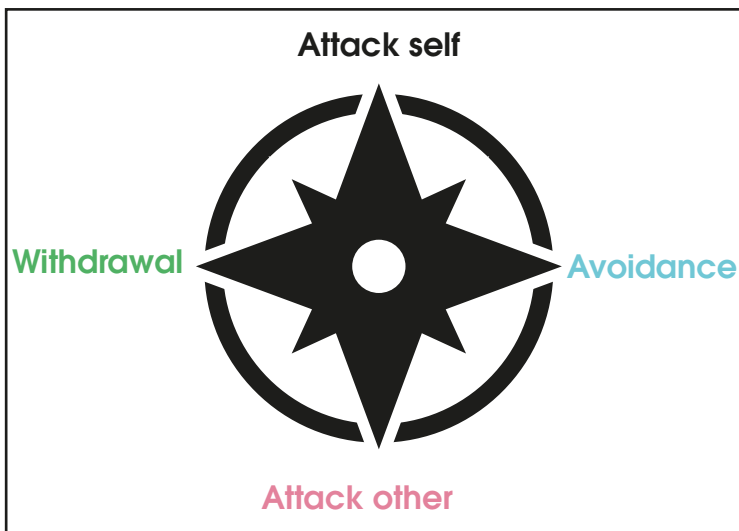
- Shame
- Social emotions
- Self-regulation
- Self-esteem
- The gaze of others
- Belonging
- Acceptance
- Rejection
- Respect
- Emotional expressivity
- Empathy
- Personal boundaries
- Safe school climate
- Emotional support
- Body awareness and shame

Module 6 Expected Results

By the end of this module, **students** should be able to recognise how **shame manifests in daily life**, reflect on its effects on self-esteem and **communication**, and develop strategies to deal with it in a more **mindful, empathetic and free** way.

The compass of shame (Donald Nathanson)

When we feel shame, we tend to react in different ways. Nathanson identifies four main directions:



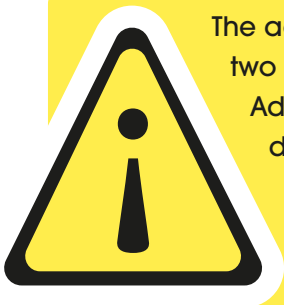
- **Withdrawal:** moving away, hiding or avoiding being seen.
- **Avoidance:** joking, distracting oneself or minimising what happened.
- **Attack other:** blaming or mocking others to deflect attention.
- **Attack self:** criticising or punishing oneself internally.

The objective of the work in class is for students to learn to **recognise these responses, to understand them and to transform them** into healthier and more empathetic attitudes.

Shame triggers (Stephan Marks)

- Feeling **marginalised** or **excluded**.
- Feeling **defenceless** or **exposed** (for example, in personal or intimate matters).
- Not feeling **recognised** or **seen**.
- Acting against **one's own values** or **norms**.
- Feeling shame for the **behaviour of others**.

"When we understand shame, it stops controlling us."— Inspired by Brené Brown



The activities in this module can be carried out in a single 90-minute session or divided into two 45-minute blocks.

Adapt the pace to the group: if you notice intense emotions emerging, dedicate time to dialogue and emotional closure.

The material can be used in paper or digital format and can be integrated into the tutoring plan or as part of the work on coexistence and emotional well-being.

Recommendations for teachers

- Create a **space of trust** where participation is valued without judgement.
- Use examples relevant to **their age group** (friend groups, social media, class, etc.).
- Avoid exposing students unnecessarily: offer **anonymous or group participation** options.
- Reinforce **empathy, listening, and respect** as core group values.
- Conclude each session with a brief reflection to provide emotional closure to the topic.

P1 PHASE 1 – Introduction: "The individuality of shame" (10 Minutes)

1.1.1 Objective

1. To introduce the theme of **shame** in an experiential and participatory way, showing that we all feel it, even though every person experiences it differently.

Materials

- ☐ Coloured cards: (red/green)
- ☐ List of phrases on everyday situations
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart and markers
- ☐ Classroom arranged in a circle or semi-circle
- ☐ (Optional) Soft music or a bell to mark the start or end of the activity

1.1.2 Activity procedure:

1. Presentation of the topic: start by briefly explaining:

- *"Today we are going to talk about an emotion we all know: shame. Sometimes it appears when we think others are looking at or judging us, or when we feel we have done something different or wrong. It is not a negative emotion; it helps us understand how we feel with others."*

2. Card game: "Would I be ashamed if...?"

- Explain that you will read several phrases and each student must raise a card:
 - Red: "Yes, I would be ashamed."
 - Green: "No, I would not be ashamed."
 - Suggested phrases:
 - Falling over in front of my friends.
 - No one reacting to one of my social media posts.
 - Making a mistake while reading in class.
 - Being the only one not invited to a party.
 - Getting a bad grade in a subject I am good at.
 - Public speaking.
 - Someone seeing my room in a mess.

3. Brief debate and observation

- After each round, invite the group to comment:
 - *"Do we agree on the same things? Why are some situations more embarrassing than others?"*
- Note key words on the whiteboard (fear, laughter, error, group, judgement).

4. Closing the phase

- *"Every person feels shame for different things. The important thing is not to avoid it, but to understand what happens to us when it appears."*

No, I would not be ashamed

Yes, I would be ashamed

Note for the teacher:

- Avoid analysing or judging **personal responses**.
- If laughter breaks out, explain it as a **natural way** of managing discomfort.
- Maintain a **warm and light tone** without trivialising the subject.

P2 PHASE 2 – Development: "Understanding shame" (30 Minutes)

1.1.1 Objective

1. To understand what shame is, how it manifests, what triggers it, and its function in social coexistence.

Materials

- ☐ Whiteboard, flipchart, or digital projection
- ☐ Markers or coloured felt-tip pens
- ☐ Visual diagram or support slide with: Shame triggers (Stephan Marks) and Compass of Shame (Donald Nathanson).
- ☐ Everyday examples of school or social situations
- ☐ (Optional) Printed emotion sheets or emojis to visualise feelings.

1.1.2 Activity procedure:

1. Initial activation

- Write the word SHAME on the whiteboard.
- Ask the group to share words or ideas they associate with it.
 - "There are no right or wrong answers. What we say now will help us understand how we perceive this emotion."

2. Presentation: what is shame?

- Explain that shame is a natural emotion we all feel when we believe others are judging us or that we might lose group acceptance.
 - **How does shame manifest?** It is painful; one feels small/inferior, can no longer concentrate, and wants to "sink into the ground".
 - **What does shame look like?** It varies, but often involves blushing and lowering one's gaze.
 - **What is the purpose of shame?** To conform to the group, to behave according to one's own ideas / shame as a fire alarm.
- **Discussion:** Is the feeling of shame positive or negative?

3. Stephan Marks' Triggers

- Explain and comment on everyday examples:
- Feeling **excluded or outside** the group.
- Feeling **defenceless or exposed**.
- Not feeling **recognised or seen**.
- Acting against **one's own values**.
- Feeling shame for the **behaviour of others**.

4. Ask:

- "Do you recognise any of these in real situations at school or in the group?"

5. The Compass of Shame (Donald Nathanson)

- Draw a circle divided into four parts and describe them:
 - **Withdrawal:** hiding, avoiding.
 - **Avoidance:** joking or minimising.
 - **Attack other:** blaming, mocking, or deflecting attention.
 - **Attack self:** criticising or punishing oneself.
- Ask:
 - *"Which of these reactions is most familiar to you? Which do you think helps most to improve relationships?"*

6. Paired exercise (5 min)

- Each pair invents an embarrassing situation and decides what the most likely reaction would be according to the compass.

7. Sharing and summary

- Note the examples on the whiteboard and classify them according to the compass.

"We cannot avoid feeling embarrassed, but we can choose how to act. When we understand it, it stops controlling us." Quando lo capiamo, smette di controllarci".

Note for the teacher:

- Use **relatable examples** (class, social media, friend groups).
- Maintain an **analytical approach**, not a confessional one.
- Reiterate that **all emotions are valid** and serve a function.

P3

PHASE 3 – Consolidation: "Identifying and classifying shame" (15–20 Minutes)

2.1.1 Objective

1. To apply theoretical knowledge through case analysis. To identify triggers and reactions, promoting empathy and reflection.

Materials

- ☐ Sheets or cards with examples of real or hypothetical situations.
- ☐ Whiteboard or model of the Compass of Shame.
- ☐ Pens or pencils.
- ☐ Clock or stopwatch.

2.1.2 Activity procedure:

1. Work organisation.
2. Divide the class into groups of 4–5 students.
3. Give each group a card with an example situation.
 - Explain the instructions:
 - "You will analyse each case to discover what causes the embarrassment and how the person reacts. Then we will see what healthier alternatives exist."

Group work examples:

01 Sabrina has a group of five friends. When she goes to the shopping centre with her mother, she sees that the other four are there and, apparently, have made plans without her. Sabrina approaches and insults them.

Trigger:
marginalisation or exclusion.

Verhalten:
Angriff auf andere

02 Matías, Simón's best friend, is ill. During break, Simón spends time with other boys who start making fun of Matías. Simón joins in the laughter.

Once home, he thinks: "I am a terrible friend! I don't deserve to have friends!".

Trigger:
acting against one's own values.

Behaviour:
attack self.

03 Steffi confides a personal secret to her best friend and later regrets it. She feels uncomfortable and avoids seeing her for several days.

Trigger:
feeling defenceless or exposed.

Behaviour:
avoidance/withdrawal.

04 Lukas gets an excellent mark in maths. When he gets home he wants to tell his mother, but she is on the phone and sends him away. Lukas shuts himself in his room for the rest of the day.

Trigger:
not feeling recognised.

Behaviour:
withdrawal.

4. Group analysis

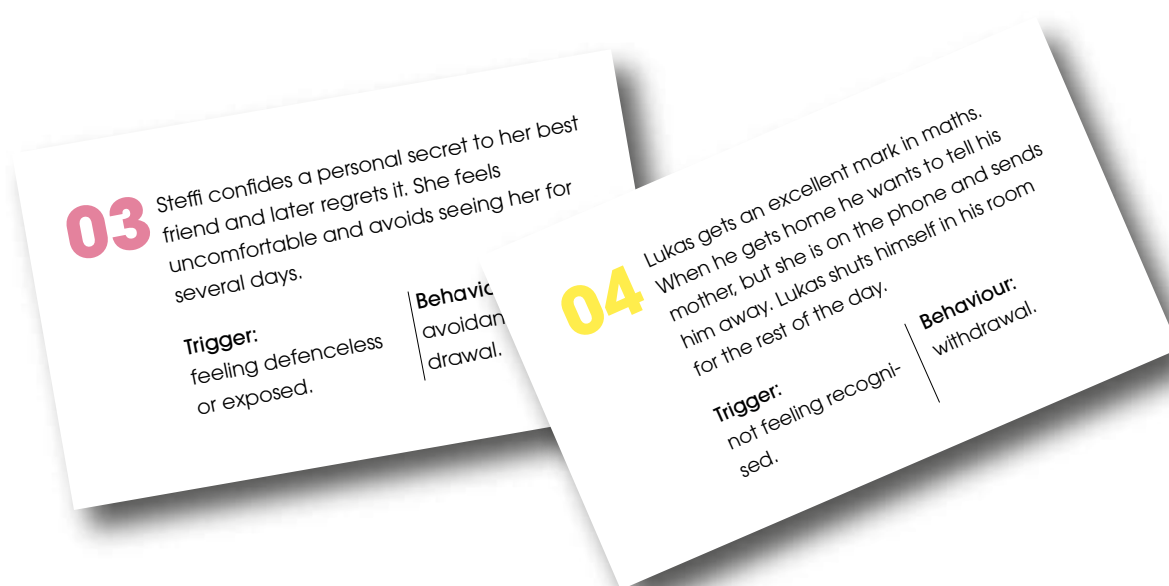
- Each group identifies:
 - Which trigger appears.
 - What type of reaction manifests.
 - What more empathetic or constructive alternative could be applied.

5. Sharing

- Each group shares its conclusions.
- Write key ideas on the whiteboard.

Closing the phase

"Understanding why we feel shame and how we react gives us power over the emotion. We can respond with empathy instead of impulsivity."



Note for the teacher:

- Keep the Marks and Nathanson diagrams visible during the exercise.
- Avoid turning the examples into moral judgements.
- If real experiences emerge, validate them without prying.
- Promote listening and mutual respect.

P4

PHASE 4 – Conclusion: "Shame at school and prevention" (30 Minutes)

2.1.1 Objective

1. To reflect on how shame manifests in the school environment and to build, together, strategies to prevent or reduce it.

Materials

- ☐ Large sheets or flipchart paper (mural style)
- ☐ Markers or coloured felt-tip pens
- ☐ Sticky notes or post-its
- ☐ Large poster with the title: "How can we create a school without shame?"
- ☐ (Optional) Adhesive tape or drawing pins to hang the mural in the classroom
- ☐ (Optional) Box or envelope to collect anonymous messages with personal commitments

2.1.2 Activity procedure:

1. Small group work

- Ask students to think of school situations where shame often appears (e.g. presentations, confrontations, public mistakes, being teased).
- Each group writes the examples on sticky notes.

2. Creating the mural

- Each group places its sticky notes on the mural under three columns:
 - Situations that generate shame.
 - How they make us feel.
 - What we can do to improve the situation.

Situations that generate shame

How they make us feel

What we can do to improve the situation

3. Group discussion and closing

- Comment on the completed mural with the class:
 - *"What patterns do we see? What could we change as a group?"*
 - *"What do I need to feel more at ease when I feel shame about something?"*
- Propose closing the workshop with a collective phrase or a **written commitment**.

4. Suggested emotional closure

"Embarrassment decreases when we treat each other with respect and empathy. We can all contribute to creating a classroom where no one is ashamed to be themselves."

Note for the teacher:

- Maintain a **safe and collaborative** environment.
- Reinforce **constructive suggestions** and avoid focusing solely on the problems.
- Leave the mural visible during the week to **keep the message alive**.

4.1.1 Objective

1. To promote **empathy** and emotional normalisation through the anonymous sharing of situations where shame emerges.

Materials

- ☐ Small slips of paper or paper cut into strips
- ☐ Box, large envelope, or decorated bag
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart
- ☐ (Optional) Decorative label: "Things that unite us"
- ☐ Markers or pens

4.1.2 Activity procedure::

1. Explain that **we all experience shame** and that sharing it anonymously helps us understand each other better.
2. Each student writes down (real or invented) a moment when someone might feel shame, **without using names**.
3. Collect the papers, read a few aloud, and comment:
 - *"Why does that situation cause shame?"*
 - *"What would help that person?"*
4. Conclude by emphasising:
 - *"We have all felt shame. Understanding this unites us and makes us more respectful."*

Note for the teacher:

- Maintain a **respectful and confidential** tone.
- If a sensitive case arises (harassment, exclusion), **validate** it and handle it at another time.
- You can keep the box as a **symbol of the group**.



AC2

Activity 2: The shame traffic light (Dauer: 10–15 Minutes)

4.1.1 Objective

1. To help students assess the **intensity of shame** and recognise that everyone experiences it differently.

Materials

- ☐ Cards or circles in three colours: (Red/Yellow/Green)
- ☐ List of situations prepared by the teacher
- ☐ Free space in the classroom for moving or grouping by colour
- ☐ (Optional) Large posters with the three colours and their meanings

4.1.2 Activity procedure:

1. Explain the dynamic:
 - *"Each colour indicates how much a situation would influence you."*
2. Read the phrases one by one.
 - E.g.:
 - Posting something and receiving no reaction.
 - Making a mistake during a presentation.
 - Arriving late to a lesson.
 - Being corrected in public.
 - Ask them to raise the corresponding card.
3. Conduct a brief discussion on the differences:
 - *"Why do we feel different intensities?"*
4. Conclude by emphasising that all emotions are valid and personal.

Note for the teacher:

- Do not allow confrontations or teasing.
- Reinforce **emotional diversity** as a learning point.
- You can use the corners of the room to **represent the colours**.



AC3

Activity 3: Respect mural (20–25 Minutes)

4.1.1 Objective

1. To strengthen **group cohesion** and promote a collective commitment to coexistence based on **respect and empathy**.

Materials

- ☐ Cardboard or large-scale wallpaper
- ☐ Coloured markers and stickers
- ☐ Suggested title: "What makes me feel safe in my classroom"
- ☐ (Optional) Relaxing music during the writing or the conclusion

4.1.2 Activity procedure:

1. Present the outline:
 - *"Let's think about the things that make us feel at ease and respected in class."*
2. Each student writes an idea or draws on a note.
 - E.g.: *"That they don't laugh if I'm wrong" / "That they listen to me".*
3. Attach all the notes to the mural and organise them by topic: respect, empathy, cooperation.
4. Read some of them and conclude with the following reflection:
 - *"This mural represents how we want to treat each other. It is our commitment to creating a classroom without shame."*

Note for the teacher:

- Reinforce **privacy and sincerity**.
- You can accompany the session with relaxing music.
- Leave the mural on display as a **reminder**..

What makes me feel safe in my classroom

Don't laugh if I make a mistake.

That we support each other when someone is nervous.

That we can ask for help without feeling inferior.

We shouldn't laugh at other people's mistakes.

Being able to exchange ideas without the feeling that they will be criticised.

That we support each other when someone is nervous or insecure.

That we address other with kindness, even when we don't agree.

We should celebrate when someone tries, even if they don't manage to do everything perfectly.

Equipment checklist

PHASE 1 – Introduction: "The individuality of shame"

- ☐ Coloured cards: (red/green)
- ☐ List of phrases on everyday situations
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart and markers
- ☐ Classroom arranged in a circle or semi-circle
- ☐ (Optional) Soft music or a bell to mark the start or end of the activity

PHASE 2 – Development: "Understanding shame"

- ☐ Whiteboard, flipchart, or digital projection
- ☐ Markers or coloured felt-tip pens
- ☐ Visual diagram or support slide with: Shame triggers (Stephan Marks) and Compass of Shame (Donald Nathanson).
- ☐ Everyday examples of school or social situations
- ☐ (Optional) Printed emotion sheets or emojis to visualise feelings.

PHASE 3 – Consolidation: "Identifying and classifying shame"

- ☐ Sheets or cards with examples of real or hypothetical situations.
- ☐ Whiteboard or model of the Compass of Shame.
- ☐ Pens or pencils.
- ☐ Clock or stopwatch.

PHASE 4 – Conclusion: "Shame at school and prevention"

- ☐ Large sheets or flipchart paper (mural style)
- ☐ Markers or coloured felt-tip pens.
- ☐ Sticky notes or post-its.
- ☐ Large poster with the title: "How can we create a school without shame?"
- ☐ (Optional) Adhesive tape or drawing pins to hang the mural in the classroom.
- ☐ (Optional) Box or envelope to collect anonymous messages with personal commitments.

Supplementary activities

5.1 Anonymous stories of shame

- ☐ Small slips of paper or paper cut into strips.
- ☐ Box, large envelope, or decorated bag.
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart.
- ☐ (Optional) Decorative label: "Things that unite us".
- ☐ Markers or pens.

5.2 The shame traffic light

- ☐ Cards or circles in three colours: (Red/Yellow/Green)
- ☐ List of situations prepared by the teacher.
- ☐ Free space in the classroom for moving or grouping by colour.
- ☐ (Optional) Large posters with the three colours and their meanings.

5.3 Respect mural

- ☐ Cardboard or large-scale wallpaper.
- ☐ Coloured markers and stickers.
- ☐ Suggested title: "What makes me feel safe in my classroom".
- ☐ (Optional) Relaxing music during the writing or the conclusion.

Yes, I would feel ashamed.

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

I'd feel a bit ashamed.

I would feel
ashamed if I fell
over in front of my
friends.

I would feel
ashamed if no one
commented on my
social media post.

I would feel
ashamed if I got a
bad mark in a
subject I am good
at.

I would feel
ashamed to speak
in public or to
make mistakes
while reading.

I would feel
uncomfortable if
my parents said
something
embarrassing on
my posts.

I would feel
ashamed if I
tripped while
getting off the bus
in front of the whole
school.

I would feel
uncomfortable if I
were tagged in an
old photo where I
look terrible.

I would feel
ashamed if I forgot
my part during a
group presentation.

I would feel
uncomfortable if I
realised I didn't
understand
something in class
and everyone was
looking at me.

I would feel
uncomfortable if
my friends found
my drawings or
personal writings.

I would feel
uncomfortable if a
video was
uploaded in which
I look ridiculous.

I would feel
uncomfortable if
someone saw me
crying over a bad
mark.

PHASE 2: Project development – Understanding shame

Shame triggers (Stephan Marks)

Feeling excluded

Feeling helpless

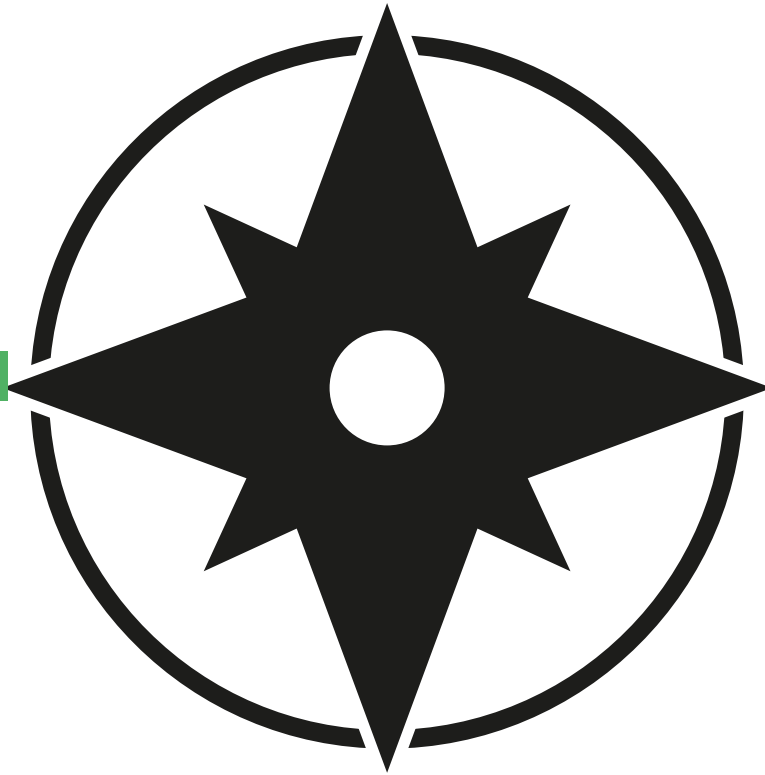
Feeling unrecognized / unseen

Acting against one's own values / ideas

Other people's shame can trigger shame.

Attack self

Withdrawal



Avoidance

Attack others



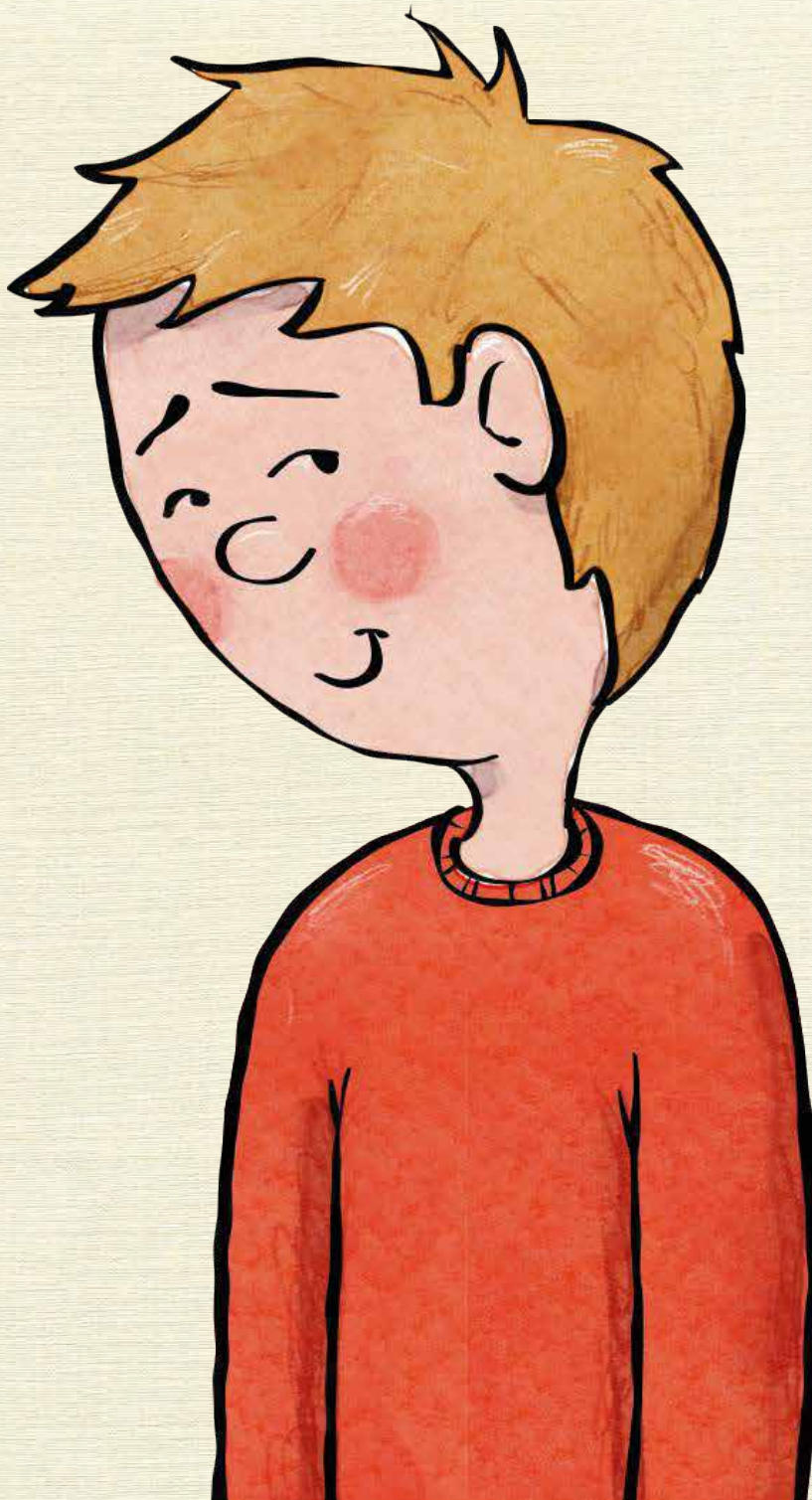
Sad





Amused





Shy





Disappointed





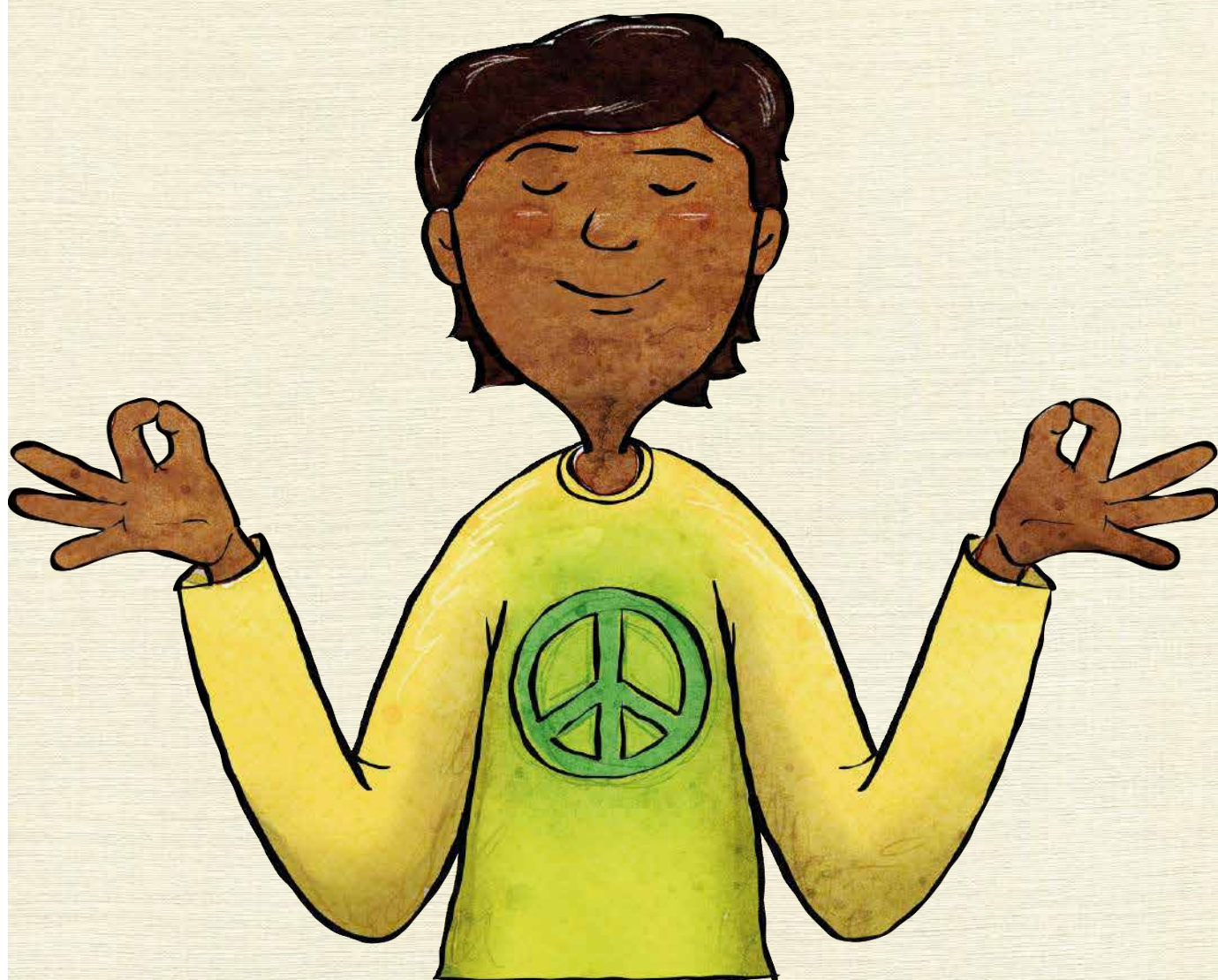
Curious





Thirsty





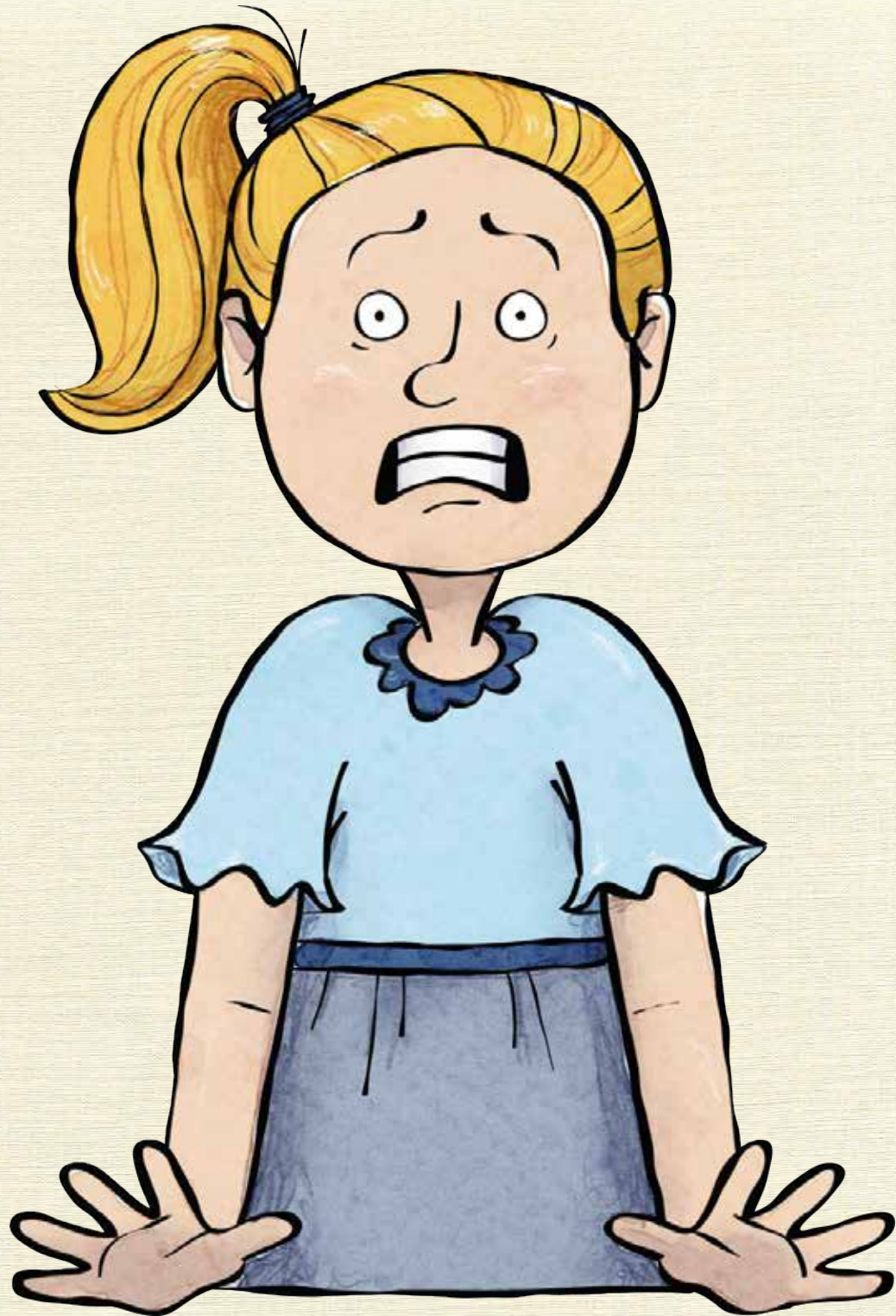
Relaxed





Bored





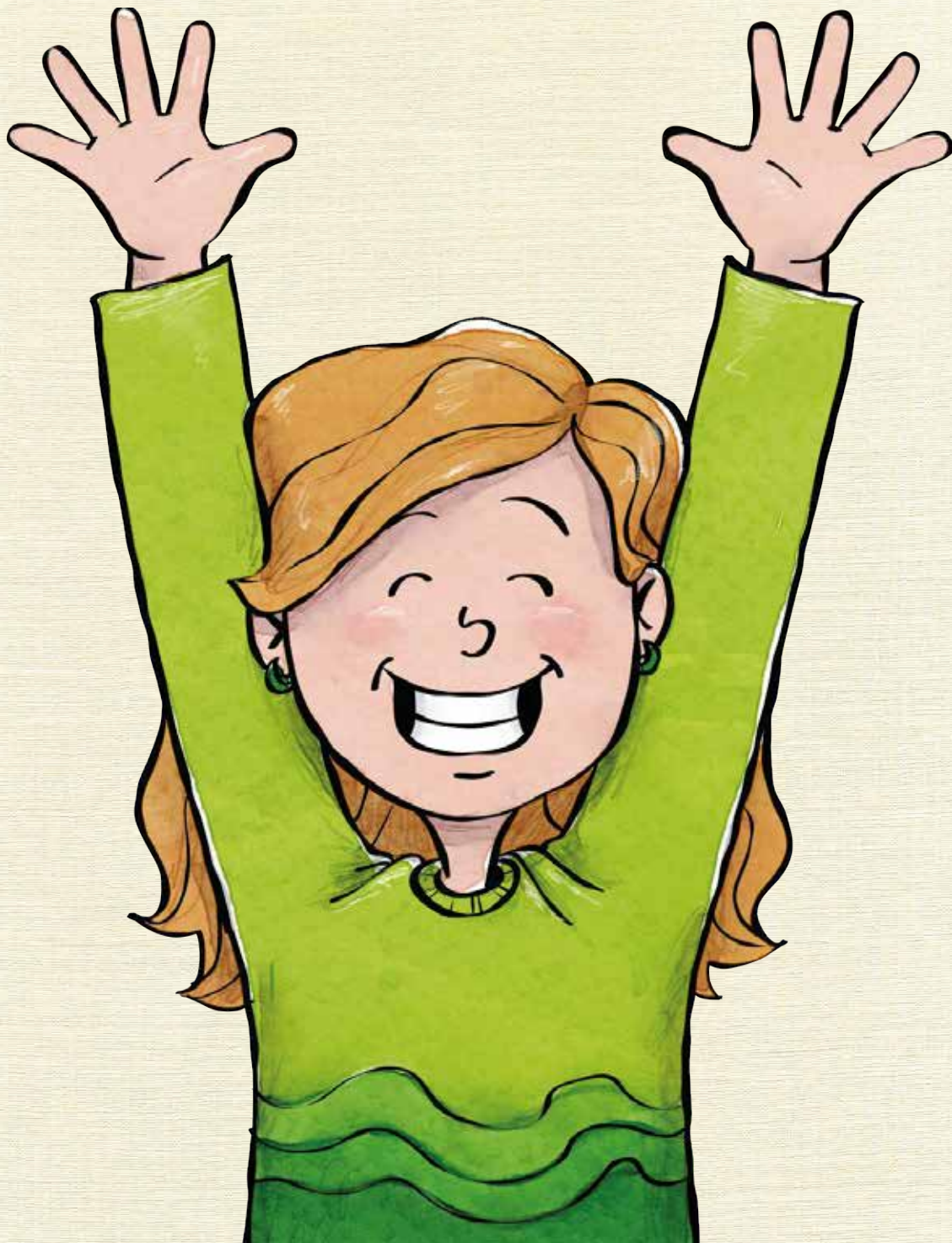
Scared





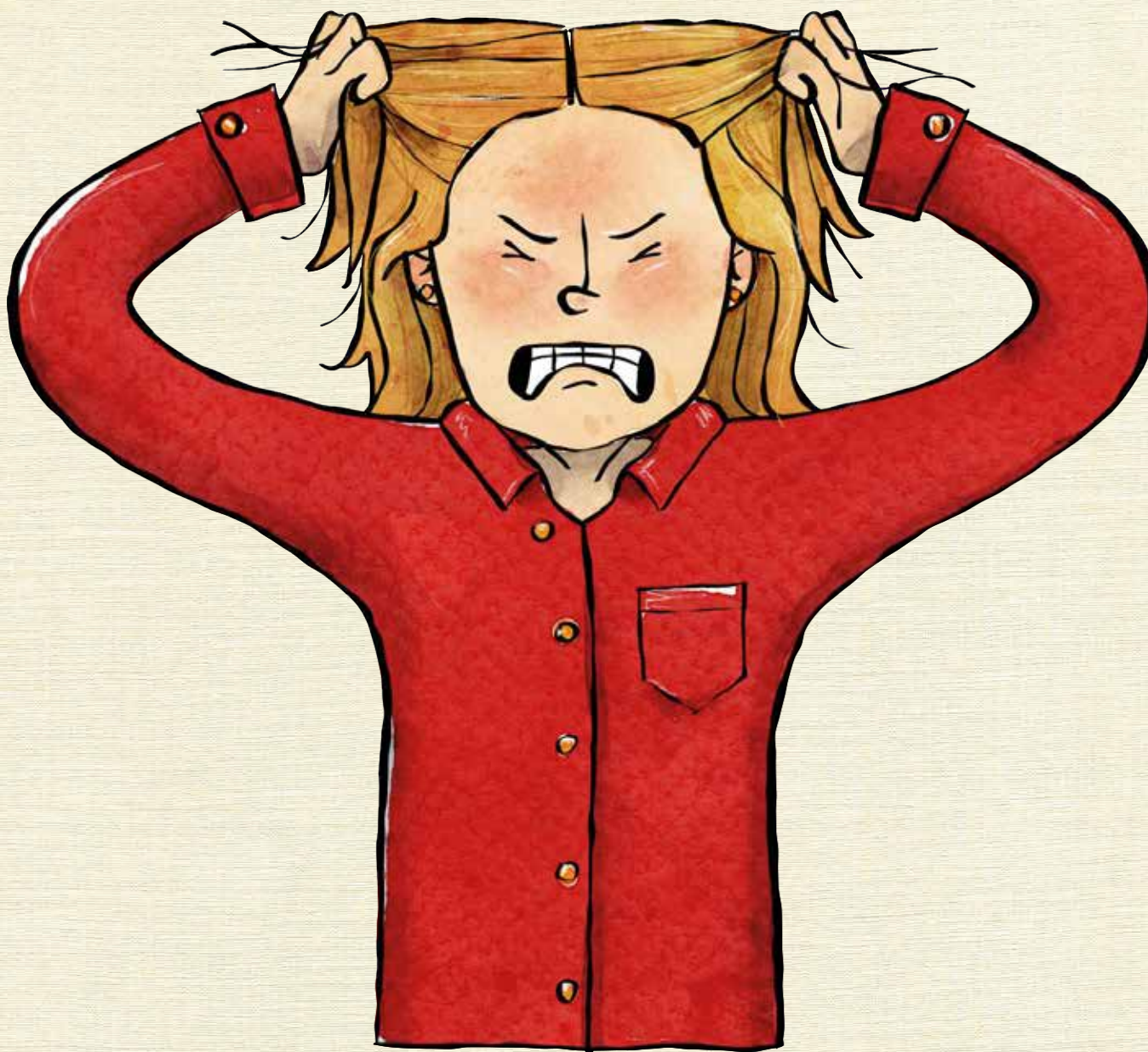
Proud





Enthusiastic





Frustrated





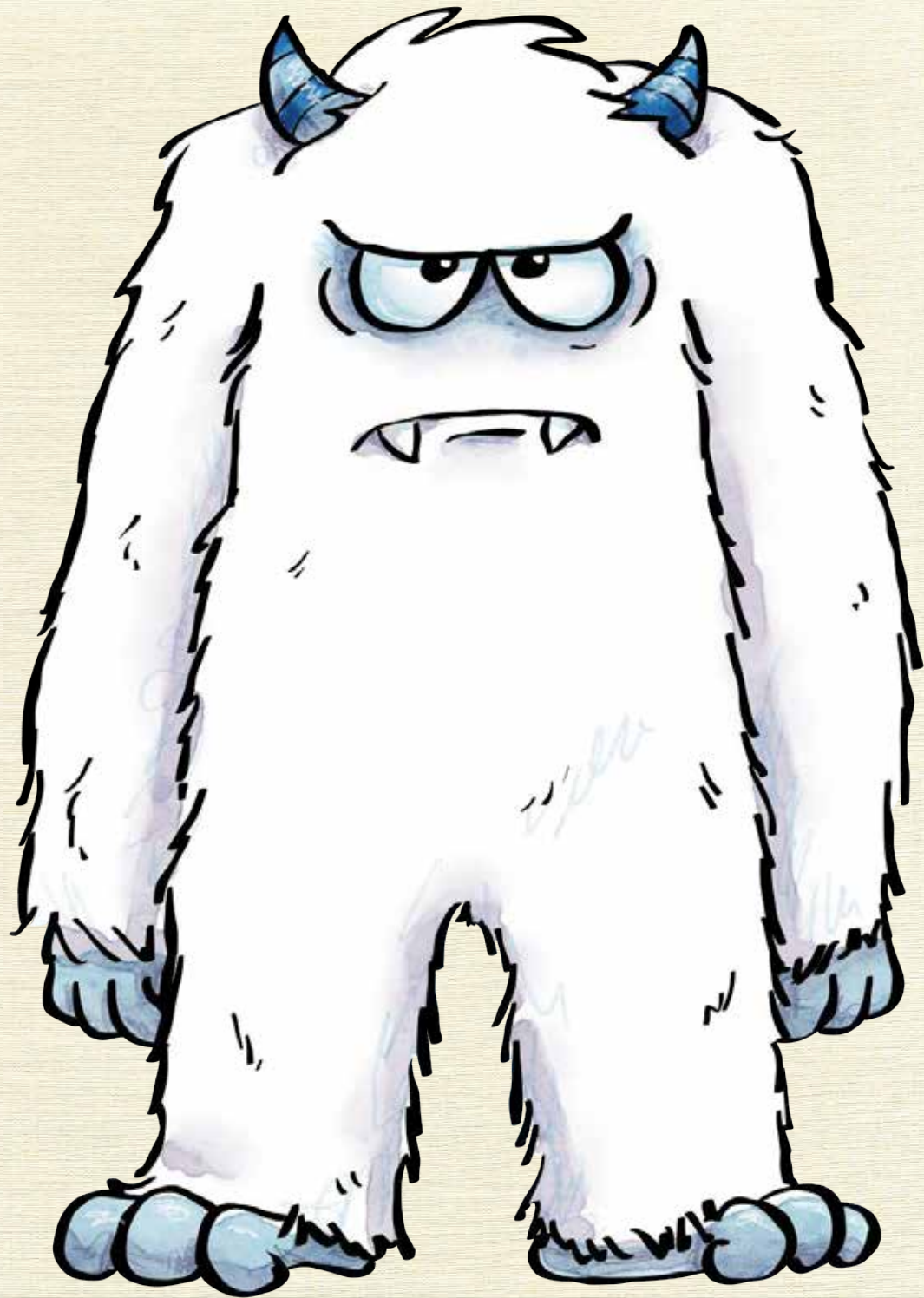
Excluded





Amazed /
Surprised





**Strange /
Funny**





Angry





Nervous





Surprised





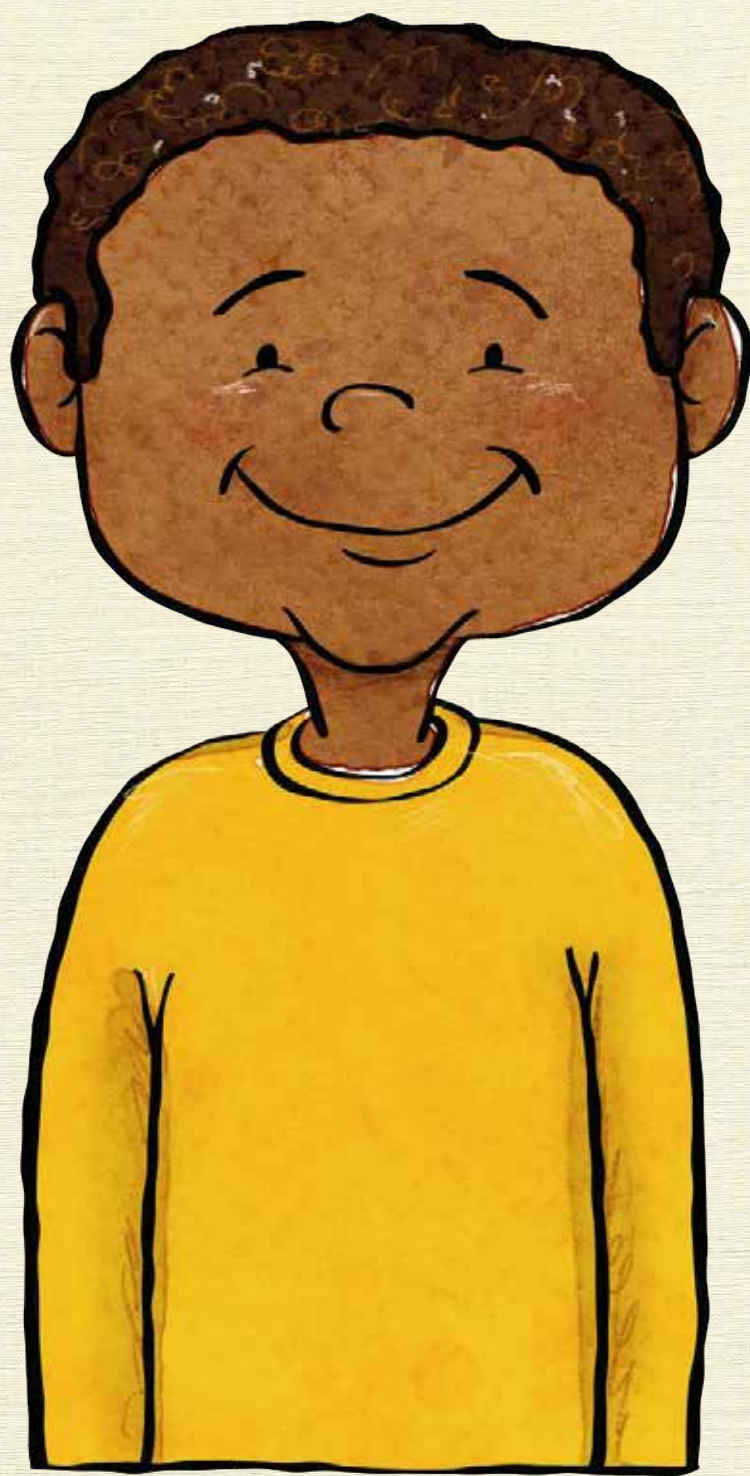
Ashamed





Offended





Happy





Hard-working
/ Diligent





Amused





Strong





Tired





Confused





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