



Gizmo's PAWESOME



Guide to
Mental Health

Early Childhood Introduction

Activity Book

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This symbol indicates an activity to be done with an adult



Introduction to Young Children's Mental Health

This activity book will help your children learn how to **recognize and respond to their emotions**. It has fun activities to introduce common emotions and promotes mental health through activities kids can do on their own or with you. **Pages where a child may need an adult's help with instructions or an activity done together will have this picture in the top right corner:**








Just like it is important to take care of your physical health, it is also important to support your mental and emotional health by paying attention to and caring for your FEELINGS, THOUGHTS, and ACTIONS.

It's never too early to start: children begin to understand their own and others' emotions between the ages of **3 and 5**. They can even experience depression and other mental health concerns. That's why it's so important to teach young children **coping skills** they can use to take care of their emotional health and ask for help when they need it. Children can learn to **regulate their emotions** and work through difficult times with **positive activities** and coping skills like the ones in this activity book. **Parents, caregivers, and other close adults play an essential role** in helping children learn and practice these skills, coaching them on managing their emotions and behavior, modeling healthy coping skills, and providing a supportive relationship **where kids feel safe and supported to express their feelings**.

How can you tell if a young child is struggling with their mental health?

There are key signs you can watch for, including changes in:

-  **Sleep**
-  **Appetite**
-  **Activity level**
-  **Mood**, such as being more angry or irritable, appearing less joyful than usual, or showing less enjoyment from activities they usually like
-  **Behavior**, such as an increase in temper tantrums, problems getting along with peers, or difficulty cooperating with adults

When attending to the mental health and well-being of young children, there will be times when it is necessary to get the support of a mental health or medical professional. Some things to look for are challenging behavior that is excessive when compared to developmental and culturally expected norms.

This may look like behaviors that:

-  **Limit a child or family's participation in everyday activities or routines.**
-  **Limit a child's ability to learn and develop new skills.**
-  **Interfere with a child's developmental progress.**

When a child or family experiences a traumatic event or experiences ongoing traumatic stress—like violence, death of a loved one, or life-threatening experiences—it may also be necessary to seek the support of mental health professionals.

When the help of a professional is needed, pediatricians, mental health professionals, and Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation programs are good resources. **Learn more about finding the right support for your child in the Resources section at the back of this book.**

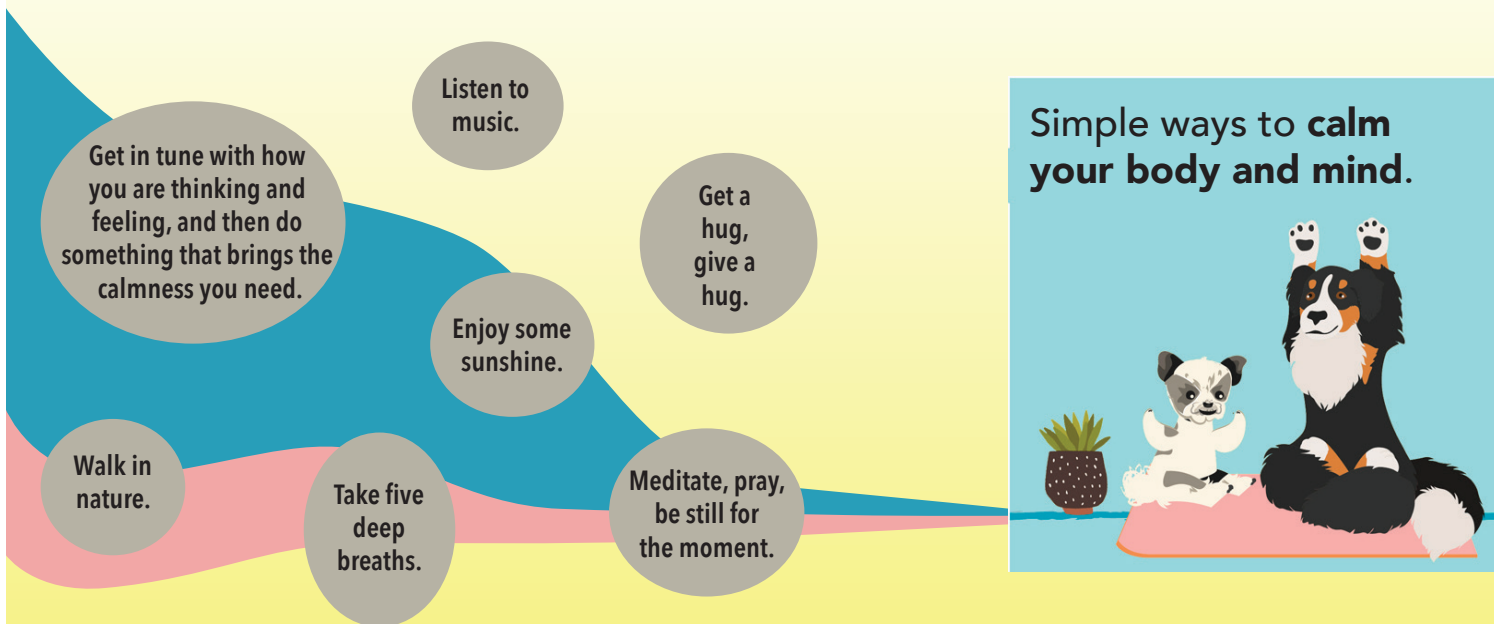


Taking Care of Feelings

Your child can learn ways to calm themselves or distract themselves when they are feeling mad, sad, or worried. Some things they can do on their own to help their feelings include coloring, hugging a stuffed animal, or doing a breathing exercise.

Most of these activities involve playing or other things kids enjoy and already know how to do. Some activities involve **MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES** that calm the mind and body and help focus thoughts on the present moment.

You can help your child learn and use these strategies and coping skills. Young children need **SAFE, CALM,** and **SUPPORTIVE** adults to help them identify their emotions and coach them through choosing healthy ways of coping. You can help your child practice these skills and remind them of these tools if they seem to be struggling. Because children learn by example, another powerful way your child can learn these skills is by watching you use them, too! Practice using your own mindfulness and distraction strategies, such as the ones below, when you are feeling overwhelmed or stressed. Talk to your child about how you're using these strategies as you use them, so they can see how you help yourself.



It is important to support not only your child's well-being but also your own.

Resources and activities to support your own well-being can be found at

<https://www.gizmo4mentalhealth.org/adults>

Take the pledge to care for your mental health, prioritize checking in on your feelings, and complete the mental health plan for steps to take when your mental health needs attention!








Trusted Adults

Children need an adult who cares about them and supports them, and who they feel safe talking to if they're having a hard time. When children have a positive relationship with at least one adult, it helps them cope and stay healthy during difficult times and experiences.

There are many ways to build a positive relationship with your child and help them feel more comfortable talking to you about their feelings. **LISTENING** and **STAYING CALM** when your child is upset or acting out, and showing that you care about how they feel shows that you're a safe person to share their feelings with – now and as they grow.

Young children may need your help understanding how they're feeling.

-  Your child may have strong feelings but not understand what is happening and may not be able to explain how they are feeling. If their behavior or facial expressions look like they are upset/angry/scared, you can help them to label their feeling by saying “It looks like you might be feeling angry (or sad/scared).”
-  Your child might tell you something like, “I’m mad/sad.” You can ask them about what is making them feel that way and what would help (e.g., taking a breath together, getting a hug, doing something silly).
-  They might say, “I don’t know how I’m feeling” or “I don’t like how I’m feeling.”
 -  If you believe they are feeling a certain way, you can tell them that that you’re so glad that they told you how they are feeling, and then tell them what you notice to help them learn to identify their feelings. You can say, “I notice your eyebrows are scrunched up and you’re crossing your arms. You look mad.” or “You look like you’re going to cry. You look sad.”
 -  You can ask them questions like “How does it feel in your body?” “Was there something that happened that made you feel this way?” or “What do you think would help you feel better?”








For more tips on how to talk to kids about mental health, go to <https://www.gizmo4mentalhealth.org/adults>

Try practicing talking about feelings with your child. You can help them practice telling you what they're feeling and asking for your help, or you can practice together using toys, stuffed animals, or a mirror.



Here are some activities you and your child can try:

-  When you notice them feeling a certain way, you can ask them how they would tell you what they are feeling.
-  Use stuffed animals or toys and have them practice telling each other how they're feeling and asking for help.
-  When you're reading a book or watching a show with your child and a character is feeling mad, sad, or worried, you can talk about what they might say to a trusted adult to share how they're feeling and ask for help.
-  For younger children who may not be able to put their feelings into words, you can tell them what you notice their face and body doing, what feeling that looks like to you, and coach them on using a skill, taking a break, hugging a stuffy, or whatever else they might need to manage their feelings.
-  If your child seems overwhelmed or unsure of what they're feeling, you can tell them “Sometimes when you have big feelings it is confusing, and it might be hard to tell a grownup how you are feeling. Let's pause, take some slow deep breaths, and slow down so you can think and try to tell me what you are feeling.”

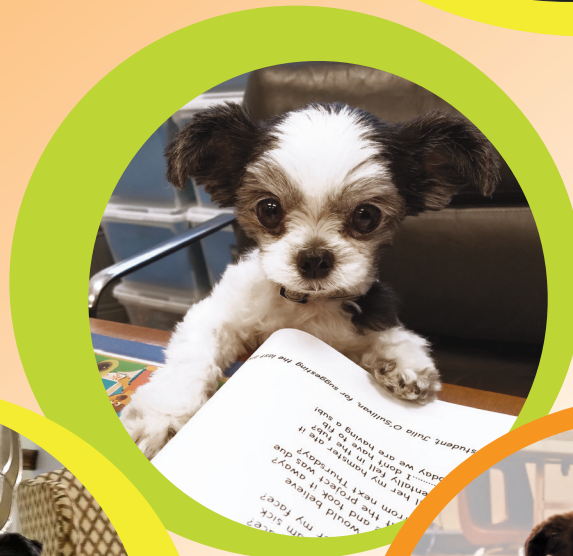
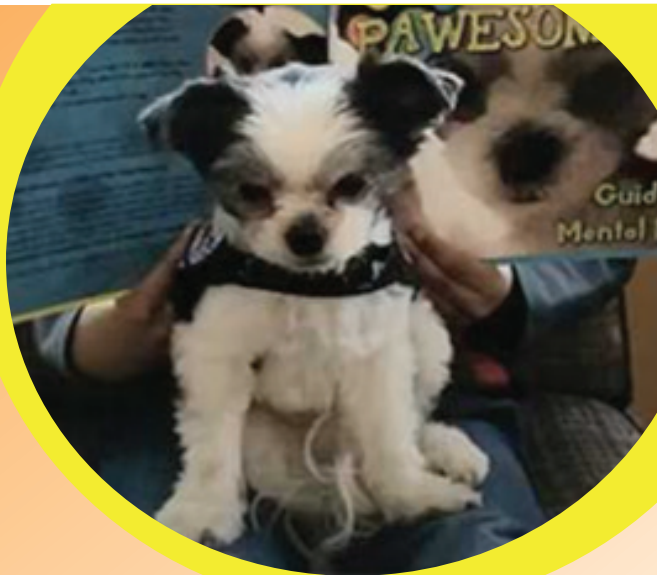


Hi! I'm Gizmo.

I'm a therapy dog – that means I visit people in schools and other places to comfort them when they are feeling sad, mad, or worried. We all feel sad, mad, or worried sometimes. Kids who feel sad might feel heavy inside and want to cry. If they're feeling mad, kids might feel hot or tight inside and want to yell or hit. When they're feeling worried, kids might feel jiggly inside and want to run away and hide. I can tell how someone else is feeling by seeing what their face and body are doing. How do you know how someone is feeling?



Therapy dogs like me have to be friendly and calm so we can help people feel better. You know how you have to take care of your body to keep it healthy? Well, to stay calm and friendly and do my job, I have to take care of my own feelings by making sure I do things that make me feel good each day. I like to play with toys, snuggle with my family, and go for walks. When I'm feeling sad, mad, or worried, I do something that I like to help me feel better.



Today I'm feeling mad because my favorite toy broke. I know it's ok to feel mad sometimes, but I feel better when I'm calm. Are there activities you can put in my dog bowl that will help me when I'm feeling mad?



A lot of the time I play, color, or dance to take care of my feelings. I also learned that if I try to be still and pay attention to my breath, that helps me feel calm. I pretend I'm smelling a flower and breathe in through my nose, then pretend I'm blowing bubbles by breathing out through my mouth. Can you practice with me?



Thanks for helping me think of what to do. Doing something by myself helped, but I'm still feeling a bit mad. When doing something by myself doesn't help enough, I try doing something with a friend or someone in my family. Playing with my friends outside, getting hugs from my family, and reading a book with someone special are my favorite things to do with other people, but I also like playing games, playing catch, and playing pretend together. What can I do with someone else that might help me when I'm feeling mad?



Doing something fun with someone else helped, but my mad feeling is still bothering me. Sometimes when I'm mad, I bark at my friends even when I don't want to. I just can't stop myself, I'm too mad! When my body is hurting and doesn't feel better quickly, I ask one of my grown-ups for help. I can do the same when my feelings and actions are bothering me and don't feel better when I try on my own.



That's when I find one of my grown-ups who cares about me, makes me feel safe, listens to me, spends time with me, and helps me – those are my trusted adults.

For me, my parents, my soccer coach, and my teacher are my trusted adults.

Who are your trusted adults?

When I fell and scraped my paw, I told my trusted adult what happened and what was hurting so they knew how to help me. It helps to talk to my trusted adult when I'm having trouble with my feelings too, but I don't always know what to say.

Sometimes I talk to myself in the mirror or to one of my toys to practice what I want to say before I talk to my trusted adult.

My mad feeling is still bothering me – I'm having trouble playing nicely with my friends and listening to my grown-ups. I don't like it, but I can't figure out how to stop. What can I say to my trusted adult if I'm still feeling mad about my broken toy so that they know how to help me?



Thank you for showing me what I could do to feel better!

I'm not feeling so mad anymore after my trusted adult helped me. I hope you'll remember to take care of your feelings by doing activities you like to do every day.

And remember, if your feelings are bothering you, try doing something you like, taking a breath, playing with a friend, or asking a trusted adult for help. Your grown-ups want you to be healthy and love to help, just like I do!

Color in the picture of me!

You can hang the picture up in a special spot so that I can help remind you of what to do to take care of your feelings.



Refrigerator Artist -

Color Gizmo and cut him out! Put him where you can see him everyday!

GIZMO



Gizmo asks -

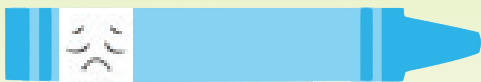
Can you help show me what the children are feeling so I know who might want my help?



Show Gizmo which children are:



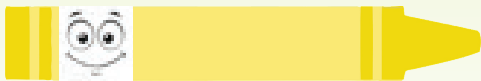
feeling **MAD** by circling them in **RED**



feeling **SAD** by circling them in **BLUE**



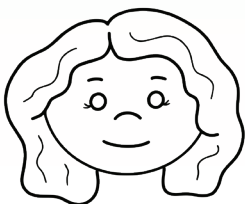
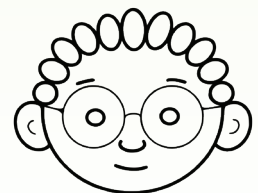
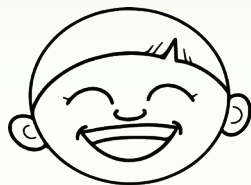
feeling **CALM** by circling them in **PURPLE**



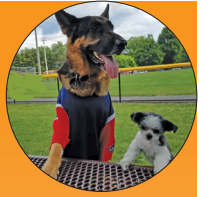
feeling **HAPPY** by circling them in **YELLOW**



feeling **WORRIED** by circling them in **GREEN**



Sometimes you can tell how someone is feeling by looking at their face.
Can you spot the differences between these faces?



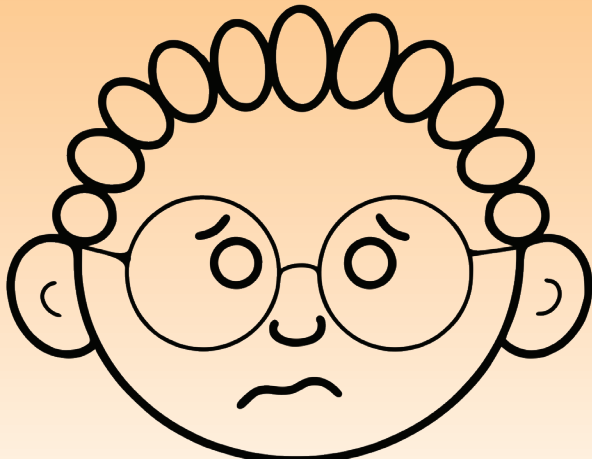
Circle the differences in each pair of faces



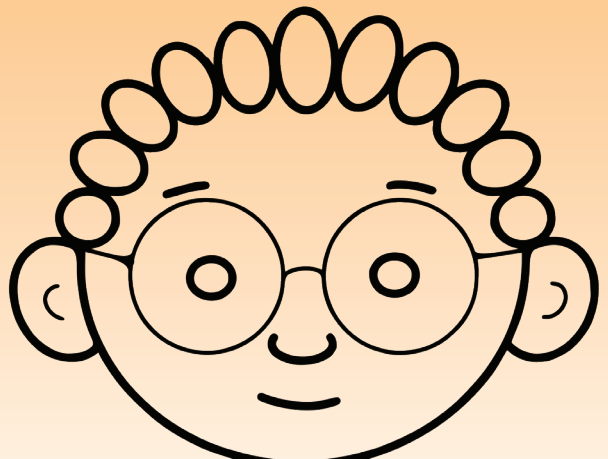
Happy



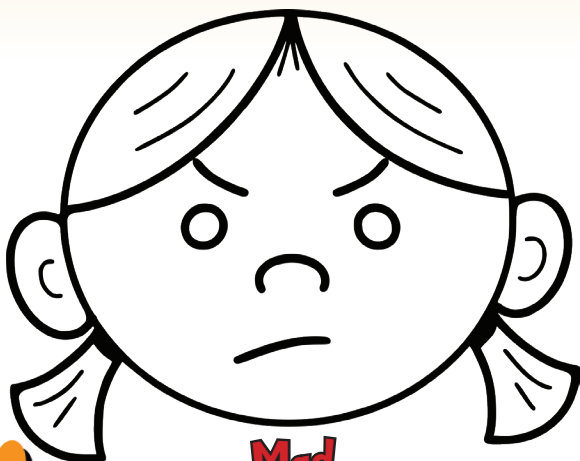
Sad



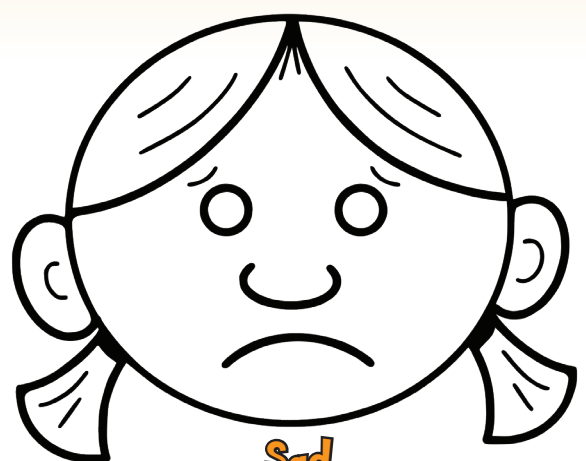
Worried



Calm



Mad



Sad

Things I can do to take care of my - FEELINGS, THOUGHTS, AND ACTIONS



Instructions: What activities do you like to do when you are feeling sad, mad, or worried?
Circle each one you would add to Gizmo's bowl!



Draw



Laugh



Play an Instrument



Do a Puzzle



Move



Breathe Slowly



Play Outside



Paint



Take a Nap



Play Dress-Up



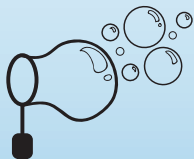
Play with Toys



Dance



Read



Blow Bubbles



Hug a Stuffed Animal



Smile



Play with Clay



Kick a Ball



Listen to Music



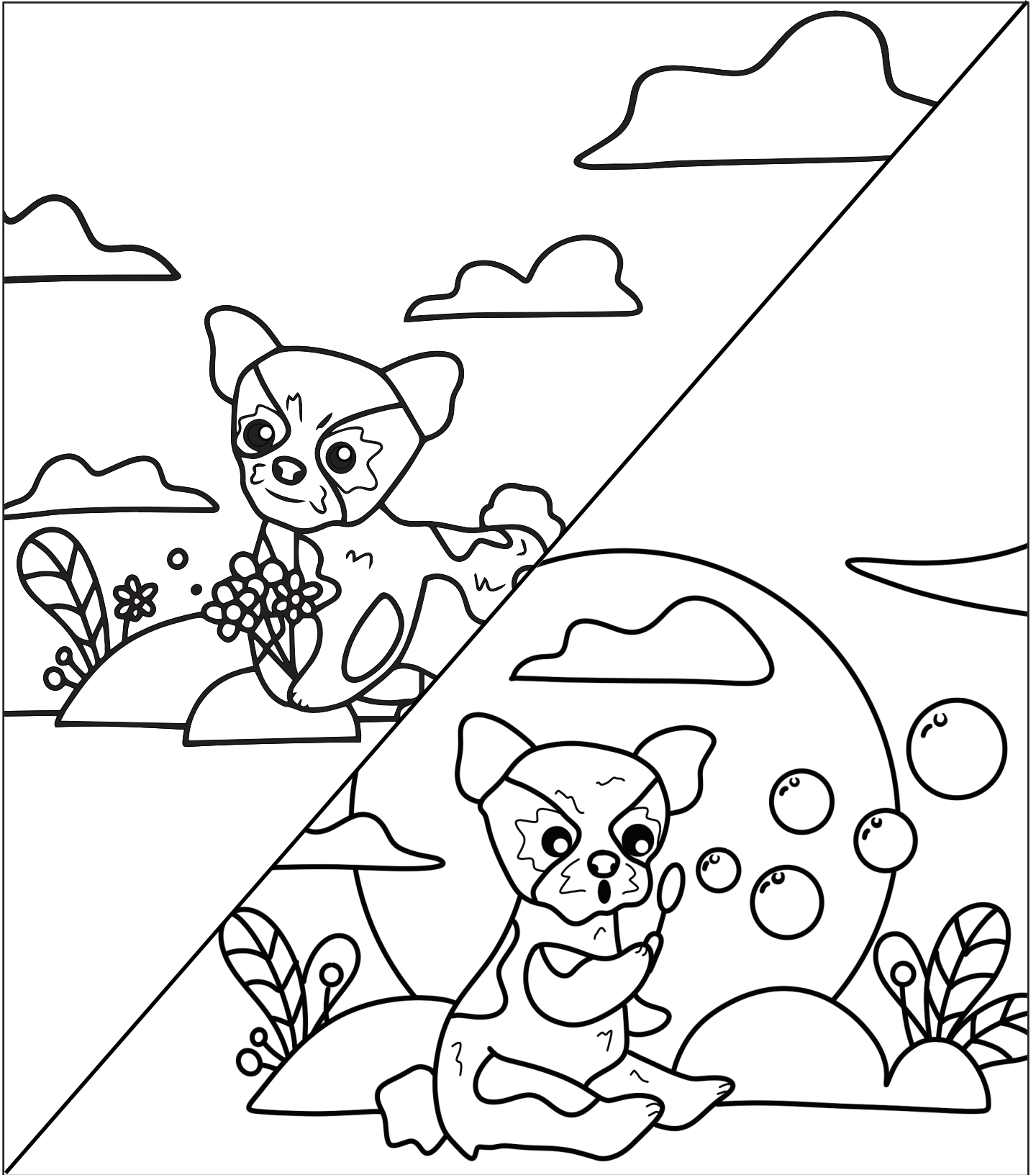
Sing



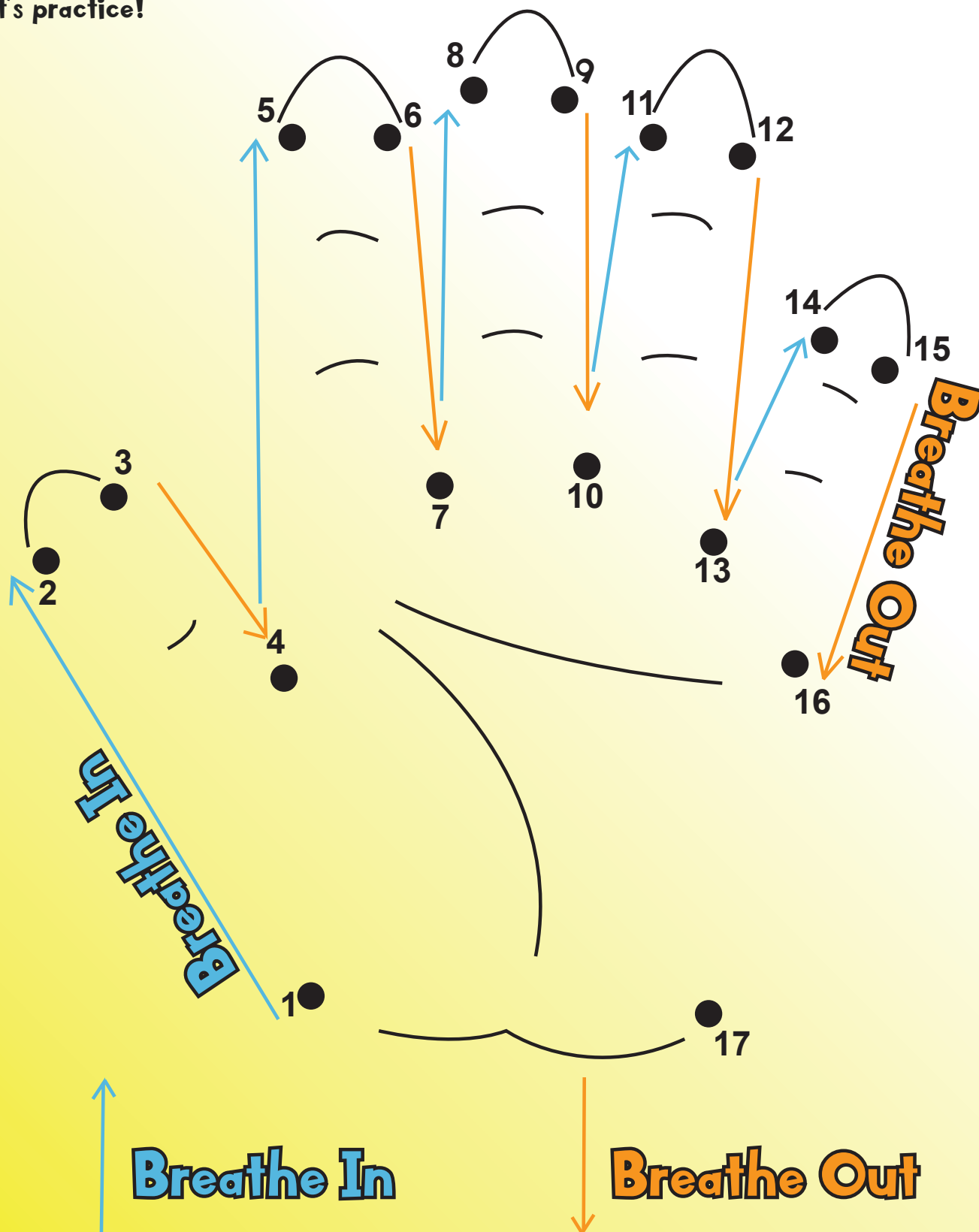
Play Games



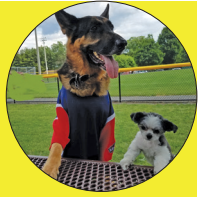
Gizmo likes to practice his breathing when he wants to feel calm.
Color the picture of Gizmo smelling the flowers and blowing out bubbles



If you're feeling mad, you can use your hands to help you practice your breathing. Use your finger to trace your hand as you breathe in and out. Start at your wrist and trace up your thumb as you breathe in deep. Then trace down your thumb and breathe all the way out. Continue with each finger, and before you know it you will have taken 5 deep breaths in and out. Connect the dots and color the picture. Let's practice!



Circle the activities that let you move and wiggle in **red**.
Circle the activities that let you be still and calm in **blue**.



Play a game with your grown-up: Point to a wiggly activity and do it for 30 seconds, then point to a still activity and do it for 30 seconds. Keep going from wiggly to still activities until you've done them all!



Color Gizmo and his friends!

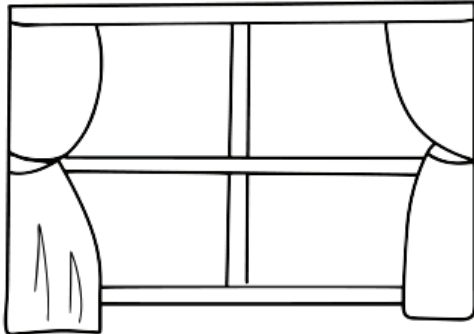


Gizmo likes to do activities that make him feel calm.

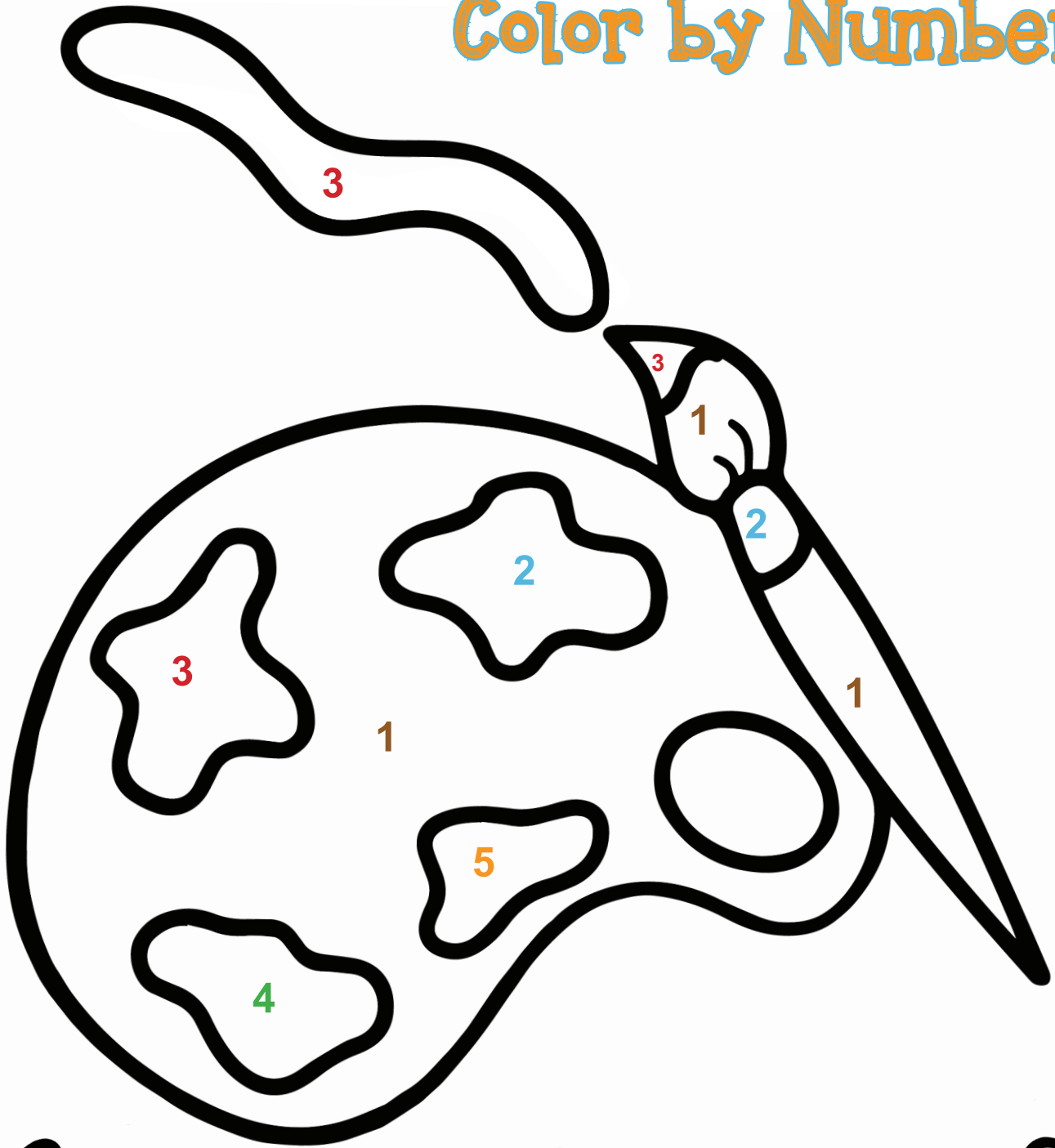
Color the pictures of Gizmo reading his favorite book and playing with clay!



GIZMO



Color by Number!



Brown



Blue



Red



Green



Orange



Circle the 6 pictures where Gizmo is doing something with others in **red**

Circle the 3 pictures where Gizmo is doing something by himself in **blue**



Gizmo is sad. Walk him along the path of things he can do to feel better.
Can you guess what each step is?



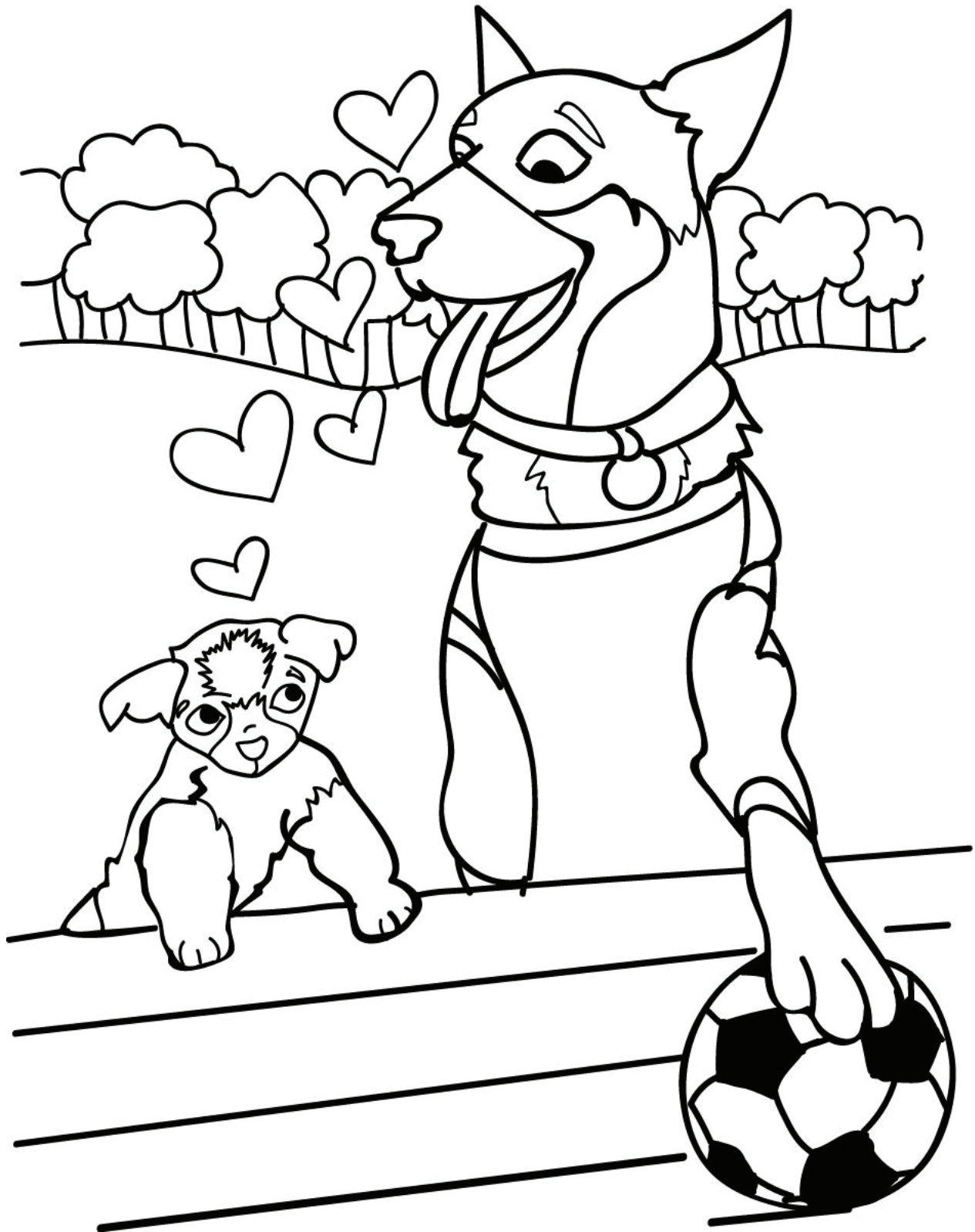
Start



Finish



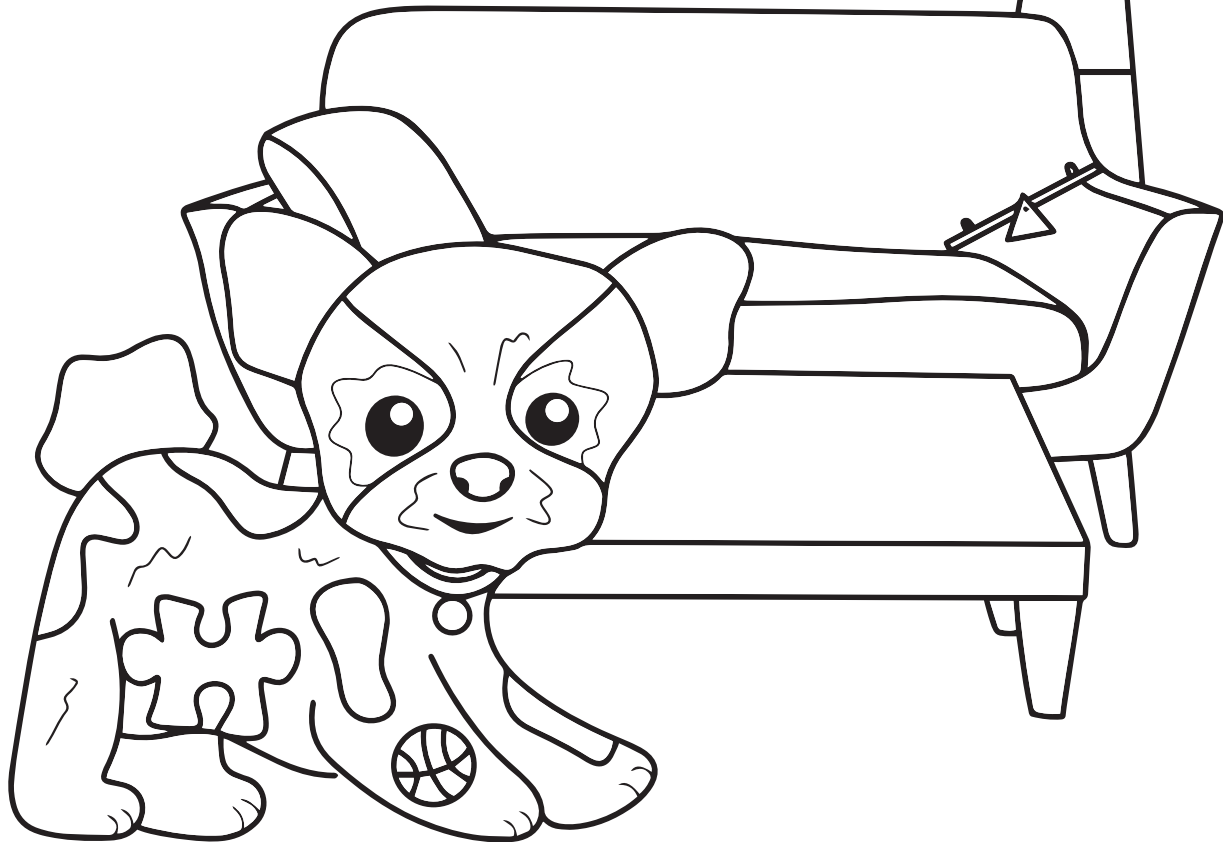
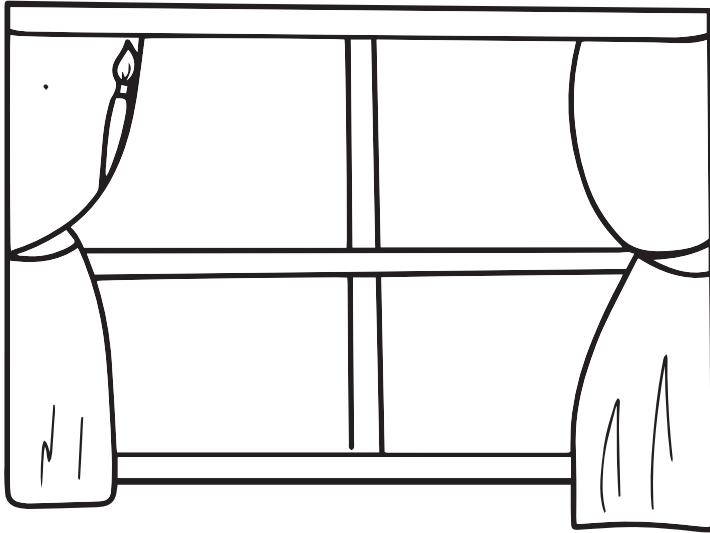
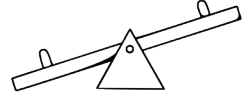
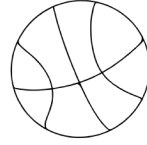
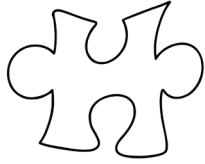
**Gizmo likes spending time with his trusted adult.
Color the picture of Gizmo playing soccer with his trusted adult.**



Hidden Picture

Can you find these shapes in the picture below?

How can Gizmo use each one?



Resources for Families:

The Gizmo Project: www.gizmo4mentalhealth.org



Child Health and Development Institute: www.kidsmentalhealthinfo.com

Child Development Infoline: cdi.211ct.org/



This guide was developed by the Katie Newkirk, PhD, and Mackenzie Wink, PhD of the Child Health and Development Institute in partnership with the CT Office of Early Childhood, CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, CT Department of Children and Families, UConn School for Social Work, and the United Way of Connecticut/2-1-1.

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