

Georgie and the Giant Germ
**A Very Different
Birthday**
a coloring book



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Dear Parents/Caregivers,

Your well-being matters as much to our team as that of your children. We know that parents have been universally exhausted by the extra demands and the cumulative stress due to COVID-19. When we are tired or stressed, we often don't have the same resources to cope as well as we might when not under this much pressure. *Georgie and the Giant Germ: A Very Different Birthday* was designed to help families navigate through the intense feelings and worries that this year has evoked in all of us.

Indeed, as of the time of writing this letter, the CDC announced new recommendations this week indicating that people do not need to wear masks outdoors, and that vaccinated individuals may not need to wear a mask in a number of indoor situations. In most places, schools continue to require that children wear masks and maintain social distancing. While this means that some of *Georgie's* experiences might look different now than at the time it was written, we think this captures something very important: how quickly things have changed, and the ways that many of us are still trying to make sense of current experiences, all while still processing our recent past. We decided not to change this "episode of *Georgie's* life" following CDC changes as we believe it will still offer parents and children an opportunity to acknowledge and reflect upon all the experiences of the past year and validates that, while things change and continue, we hope to change for the better—we all still need time and space to process the feelings and experiences we have had, as well as our feelings in the present, which may take some time to heal.

We wanted to share several other of our reflections with you, and summarize these as follows:

- COVID-19 has affected every child, family, and community differently. There is no one story that could hold all of that but we wanted to share with you the ways we tried to create opportunities for you and your child to see yourselves in parts of the story. For example, some people feel relief with the introduction of effective vaccines and others of us are grieving those lost.
- In addition, COVID-19 revealed stark racial health disparities. Through news and social media, many in our nation saw firsthand the violence so often perpetrated against Black and Asian individuals. This year grew our awareness of a dual pandemic, and of the impact of white supremacy, oppression, and structural racism, revealing the heavier burdens that some families faced,

including around COVID-19. We hope that you and your child might 'see' some of their own experiences in at least one of the characters, or in the ways we acknowledge a variety of impacts. We recognize, however, that the story is incomplete, and that your ongoing conversations with your child are critical to ensure that their experiences and feelings are seen, heard, and validated.

- We hope our book gives you an extra way to talk with your child about their thoughts regarding COVID-19. When children feel understood, they do not need to act out their worries, fears, and anger. We hope this book serves to lessen some of the stress you may be feeling by giving you a road map to support your child in voicing their thoughts and feelings.
- In the absence of clear information, children often "fill in the blanks" of what they do not understand in ways that are scarier to them than actual information. Even as mask guidelines change, and/or schools and programs re-open, children will be full of feelings and questions. We hope this book gives you an additional avenue to communicate with your child about COVID-19, and about their worries, thoughts, and feelings about this past year.
- The language of young children is play. Offering creative outlets such as playing make-believe, coloring, and telling stories are ways we can help children "show" us how they feel. This offers them the opportunity to gain a sense of mastery over worrisome things. When children keep too much to themselves, their worries can come out as challenging behavior, such as increased whining, hitting, temper tantrums, withdrawing, clinging, and sleeping or eating problems. We hope this book helps your child let off some of the steam that builds up when they are worried, afraid, or stressed.
- Taking care of ourselves is taking care of our children. We hope you have people that help you, or ways to feel calmer when you feel worried, stressed, anxious, or sad—AND share in moments of joy. When parents are supported and their stress is manageable, we can be more patient and reassuring with children. The challenge for all of us is to give ourselves extra compassion and reduce unrealistic expectations during this extraordinarily hard time.

This has been such a challenging year, and we hope this book helps you and your family know that you are not alone in the struggles that you've experienced. This is one step on your journey in healing together.

We hold you in our hearts,

Sara, Julie, Kate, and Paige



Georgie woke up early. Today was his birthday!



Last year, his mom made him cupcakes to bring to school, and then his grandparents, cousins, and friends all came over for a party. Just thinking about his last birthday made him smile.



This birthday didn't feel like last year's though. This year it felt like the germ had been ruining everything.



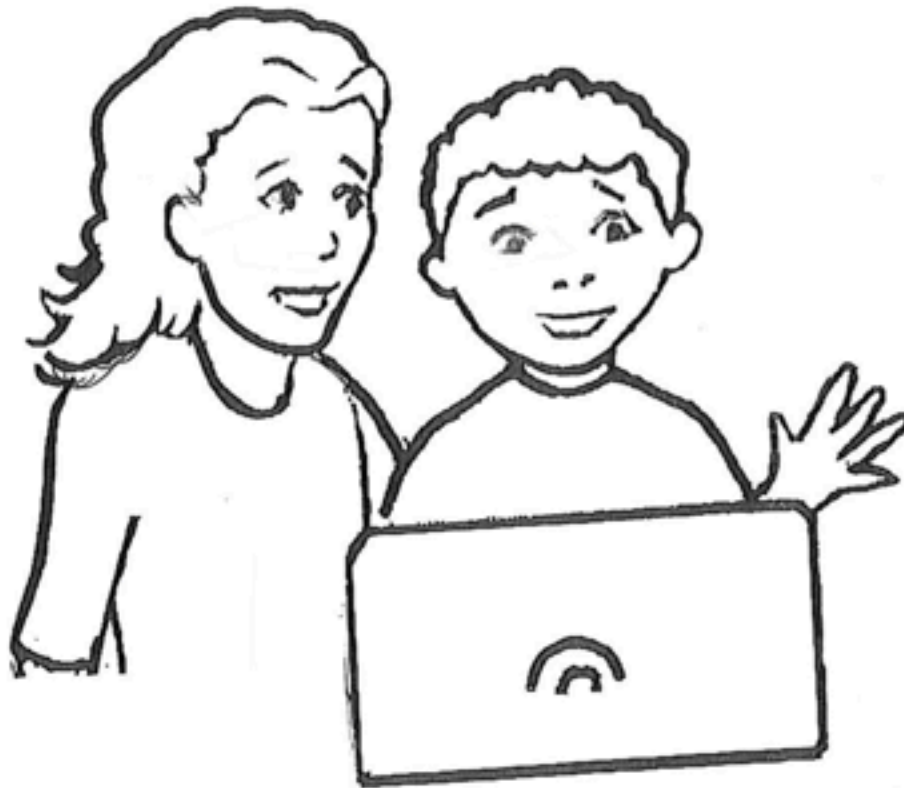
First, the germ made it so Georgie couldn't go to his friend's houses. Now, Georgie was worried that it might ruin his birthday. "I'm sick of this germ," he thought, and his tummy started to hurt.

Georgie was mad at the germ, and he was tired. Tired of being mad, tired of being scared, and tired of waiting for things to go back to normal.



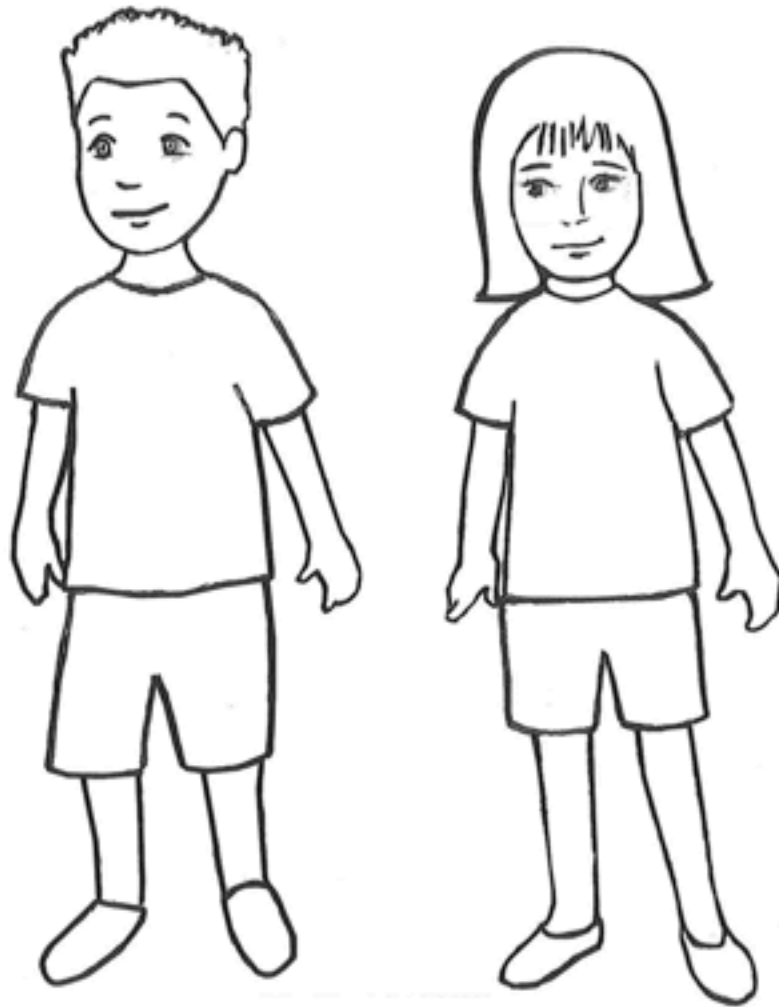
Georgie's mom came into his room wearing a party hat. "Happy Birthday, Georgie!" she said, "I have lots of fun things planned for today," and gave him a big hug. "I know your birthday won't be like last year, but we can still make it special." Georgie smiled. His heart felt warm. Maybe his birthday would be okay after all.

Georgie got dressed and went downstairs. His grandparents were on video chat.



They all sang "Happy Birthday" to him. Georgie wished he could hug them, so he hugged his mom instead. That was good enough for now.

Later that day, Georgie's friends and some of his cousins were going to stop by his house, outside, to wish him a happy birthday. Georgie was SO excited to see his friends Jackson and Mei.



Georgie had seen Jackson when they were allowed to go back to school, but not Mei. She lived with her grandparents and was still attending school on the computer.

Georgie felt lucky that he would get to see his friends, but he felt sad for them, too. Jackson's dad was a doctor helping people sick with the germ. When the germ was first discovered and scientists knew less about it, he had to live in a hotel so he wouldn't bring the germ back home to his family.



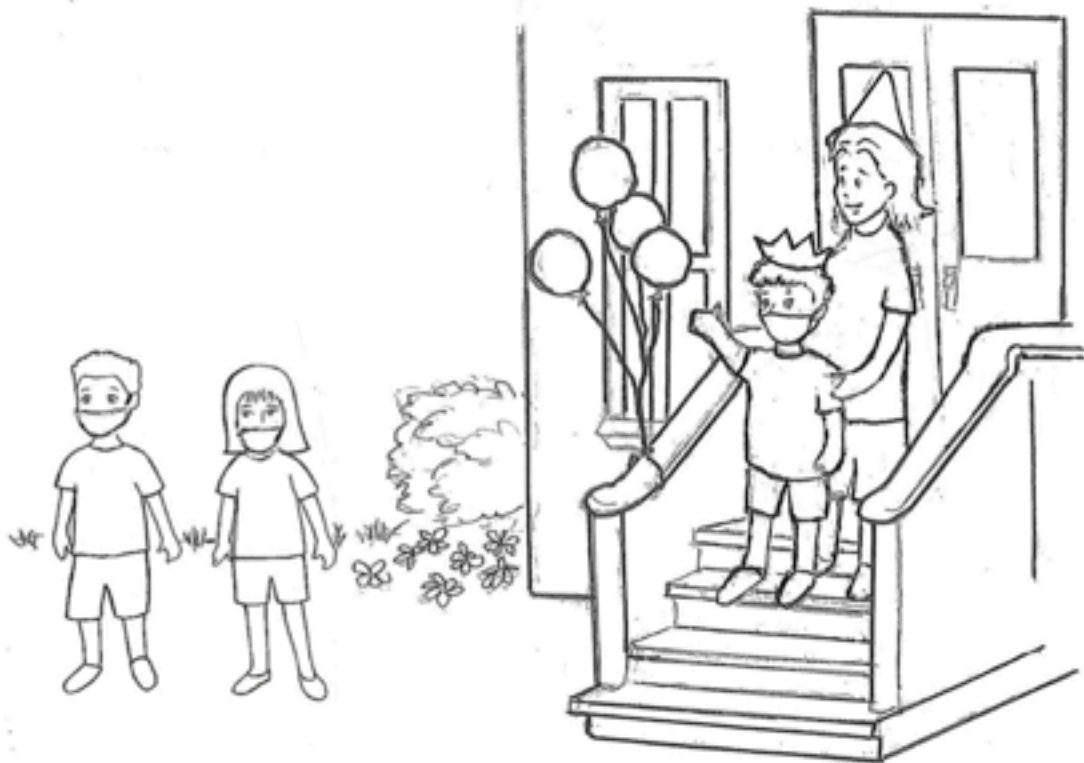
Jackson's dad was one of the strongest people Georgie knew. He felt relieved knowing Dr. G was battling the germ. But Georgie also knew how much Jackson worried about his dad.

Sad thoughts started swirling in his head. Mei's grandma had gotten really sick because of the germ and was in the hospital. Her family hadn't even been allowed to see her. She was much older than Jackson's dad, and Georgie thought it was probably extra hard for her to fight off sickness from the germ.



Georgie's stomach hurt every time he thought of Mei's grandma. He wanted to stop being sad and just feel happy that it was his birthday, but it was hard.

Georgie and his mom went outside. Georgie's mom gave him a birthday crown. "Don't forget your mask!" she reminded him, "Kids still need to wear masks when they're together." Georgie knew his mom was trying really hard to make his birthday special, and he also saw how tired she seemed lately. He knew she was mad at the germ, too.



One by one, his friends and family stopped by. He hopped with excitement every time he saw people he loved! It was so much fun to see everyone and forget about the germ for a little while.

Afterward, Georgie went inside and laid on the couch. He was so tired. His mom sat next to him and stroked his hair. "How are you feeling, Georgie?" she asked. Georgie thought about it for a minute, "I never feel older on my birthday, but this year, I do." This year felt so long, and Georgie felt different.



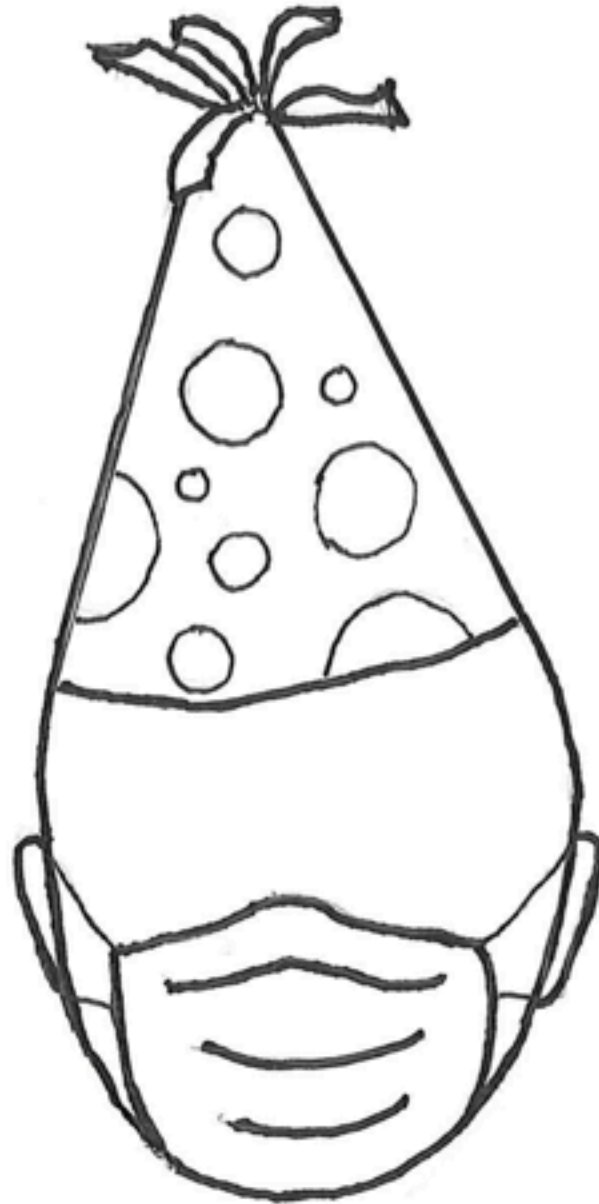
He thought about the times he had been scared—for his mom, Mei's grandmother, Jackson's dad, and his grandparents. "I understand, Georgie," his mom said, "And I'm so proud of you because you care so much about other people. But it's okay to have fun and not think about the germ." Georgie nodded, "Do you think it will still be like this next year?" he asked. "I don't know," said his mom, "but I hope not. Many grown-ups are now able to get vaccines, and that helps protect all of us. I got the vaccine, and that's why it's safe for me to not wear a mask outside. Soon we may be able to visit your grandparents in person!"



Georgie hugged his mom and let out a sigh. His body felt calm. Even if everything wasn't exactly like before, this was a good birthday. The germ couldn't stop him from being with his friends and family, even if sometimes they had to wear masks or use the computer. Most importantly, it couldn't stop him from remembering the people he loved. It was great to be one whole year older and to feel like things were starting to get better.



Draw yourself as a guest at Georgie's Birthday!



Contact us

We would love to see your child's colored-in version of Georgie and the Giant Germ or original drawings related to their experiences of staying at home during this time! Post the drawings to our Facebook page facebook.com/tenderpressbooks or email them to us at tenderpressbooks@gmail.com. Visit our website at tenderpressbooks.com.

Resources

Additional resources for caregivers, families, and mental health professionals about supporting children during the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) can be found at zerotothrive.org/covid-19.

Additional trauma-informed resources for adults can be found at strengthsofallparts.com.

Acknowledgements

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To all the families and children who have given us glimpses into their challenges and moments of joy as they navigated the past year.

About Tender Press

Tender Press is a coalition of social workers and psychologists who have specialized interest and training in supporting relational health, from conception through adulthood. Our aim is to support caregivers of young children in meeting the emotional needs of infants and young children. We began by developing a coloring book, *Cecilia and the Long Walk*, for children who were separated from their parents as a result of the 2018 family separation immigration policy. *Georgie and the Giant Germ* is a new coloring book created to address children's fears, worries, and misunderstandings about COVID-19.

Julie Ribaudo, LMSW, IMH-E is a Clinical Professor of Social Work at the University of Michigan and a faculty member of Zero to Thrive, as well as a doctoral student at Wayne State University School of Social Work. Her practice, teaching and research interests focus on relational health, including parent-infant relationships, teacher-child relationships, and therapeutic and supervisory relationships. She lives with her supportive husband and has an adult son who long ago taught her about the wisdom of young children. jribaudo@umich.edu

Paige Safyer, PhD, LLMSW is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Arizona State University. She completed her PhD in Social Work and Developmental Psychology at the University of Michigan. Her work focuses on utilizing novel brain imaging methodologies as a basis for understanding early social-emotional development, as well as interventions with young children and their families. As a social work practitioner, Dr. Safyer is dedicated to using play-based therapies to explore the internal world of the child and believes strongly in the power of play as a mechanism of change (especially when it involves puppets). psafyer@asu.edu

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Kate Rosenblum, PhD, ABPP, IMH-E is a clinical and developmental psychologist and a Professor of Psychiatry and Obstetrics and Gynecology at Michigan Medicine. She co-directs Zero to Thrive (www.zerotothrive.org), a program at the University of Michigan that aims to support family resilience and relational health from pregnancy through early childhood through research, service, partnership, and training. She lives with her partner and their children in Ann Arbor, MI, and is very proud of both kids as they are social justice champions. katier@med.umich.edu