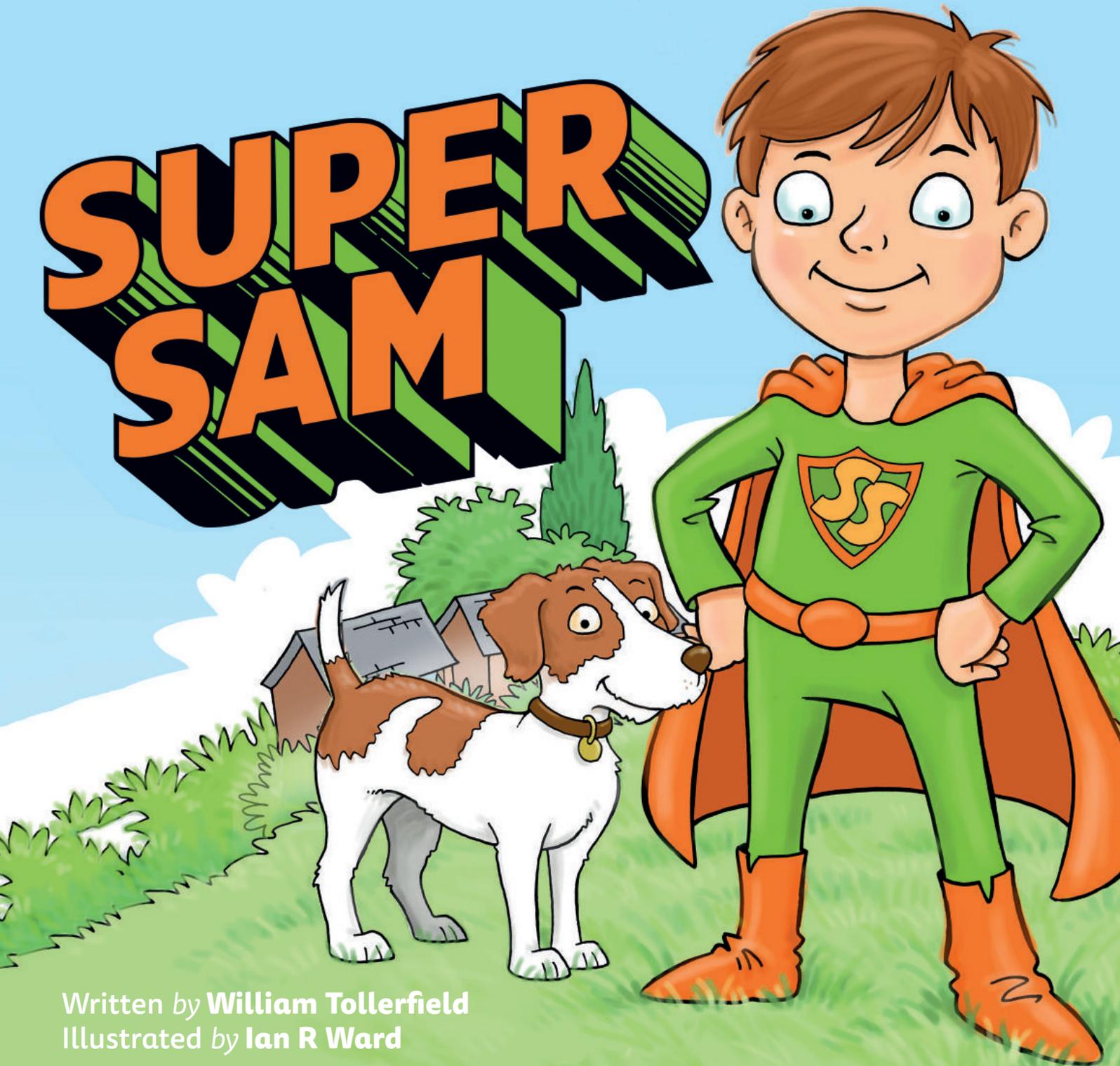


SUPER SAM



Written by **William Tollerfield**
Illustrated by **Ian R Ward**



Doncaster Council Young Advisors have developed this book as part of the national trailblazer pilot programme 'With Me in Mind' which is aimed at improving mental health support in schools.

This book is intended to be used as a resource to raise awareness of mental health issues and to encourage children and young people to talk about their feelings.

For further information on mental health support services available visit: www.withmeinmind.co.uk

Doncaster Young Advisors would like to thank:

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Doncaster & Rotherham NHS CCG.



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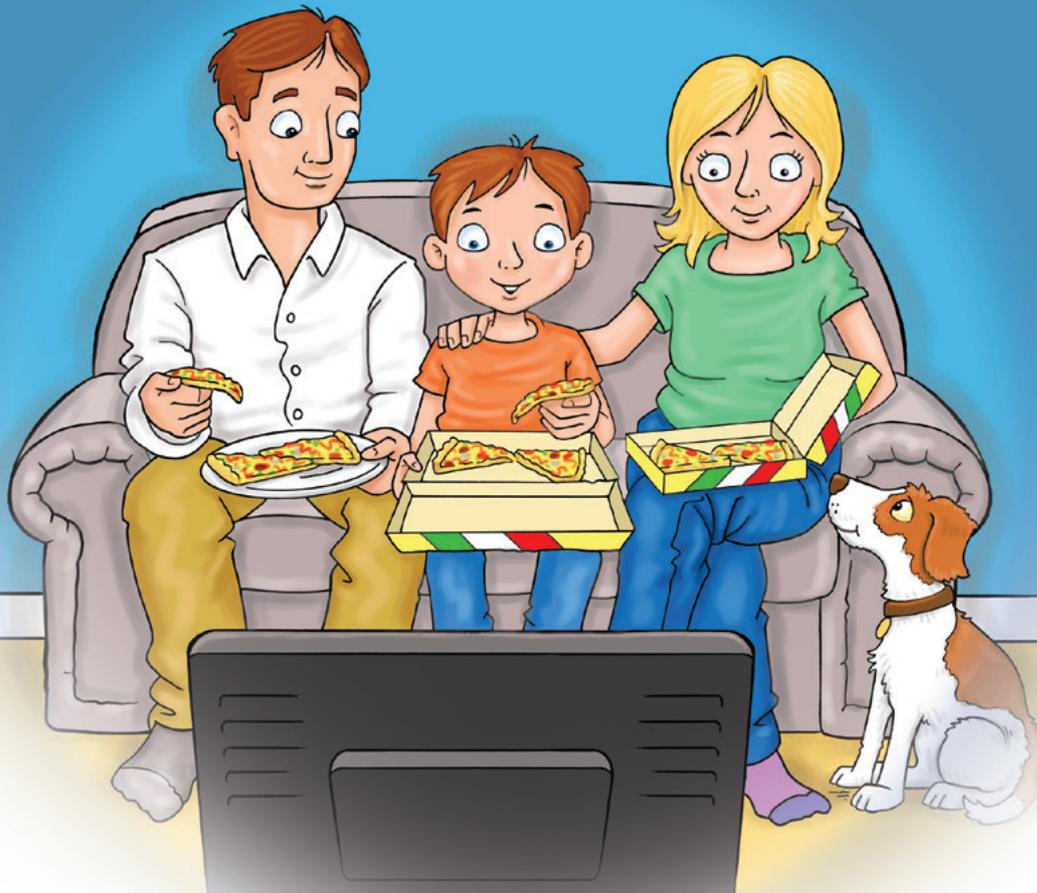


Sam is a cheerful, thoughtful and funny nine year old boy. He likes superheroes, pizza and spending time with his friends.

Like every nine year old, he has good days and bad days. Sometimes he is happy, but sometimes he can feel sad - even when he is not sure why.

Sam lives at home with his mum and dad, and their pet dog Roger. Every Friday night after school, Sam's dad orders three large pizzas and they curl up on the sofa to watch a superhero movie together - even Roger, but he's not allowed pizza!

Friday nights are the best part of Sam's week, spending quality time with his family.





Sam enjoyed going to school. He had nice teachers and the lessons were fun - literacy was his favourite lesson because he got to write adventure stories and draw illustrations to go with them.

Every playtime he would play games with his friends where they would pretend to be superheroes protecting the earth from danger. Sam's alter ego, his superhero name, was 'Super Sam'.

Friday after school came around again and Sam couldn't wait to tell his dad about the latest adventures of Super Sam from that week.

He walked the short distance home with his friend Evie and her Mum, waving them goodbye before he ran into his house, taking his pumps off at the door. Roger was sat at the bottom of the stairs, wagging his tail.

Sam put down his book bag and shouted, 'Mum! Dad! I'm home.'

He rushed into the kitchen, expecting to see his mum filling Roger's food bowl or washing the dishes, however, Sam stopped in his tracks.

Instead, Mum and Dad were sat at the table with a cup of tea each and a worried expression on their faces.

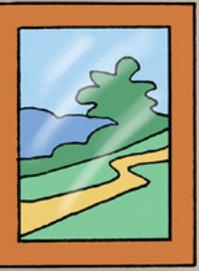
Sam felt different, like he was worried. He knew something was wrong. 'Are we having pizza tonight?' he asked.

'Not tonight, sweetheart,' replied Mum. 'Your dad and I need to talk about some things.'

Sam felt a strange feeling in his tummy and chest.

He headed up to his bedroom and closed the door behind him.

Something was wrong and Sam knew it, they always had pizza and watched a superhero film on Friday nights. Roger scratched at the door and Sam let him in. They snuggled up on his bed together.



Sam's feelings never went away all night. He sat on his bed and didn't move, Roger stayed with him the entire time. He felt rubbish, like he was stuck in mud and couldn't move, worried about his mum and dad.

Later that evening, Sam's mum came up to see him. She brought him a ham sandwich and a bag of crisps.

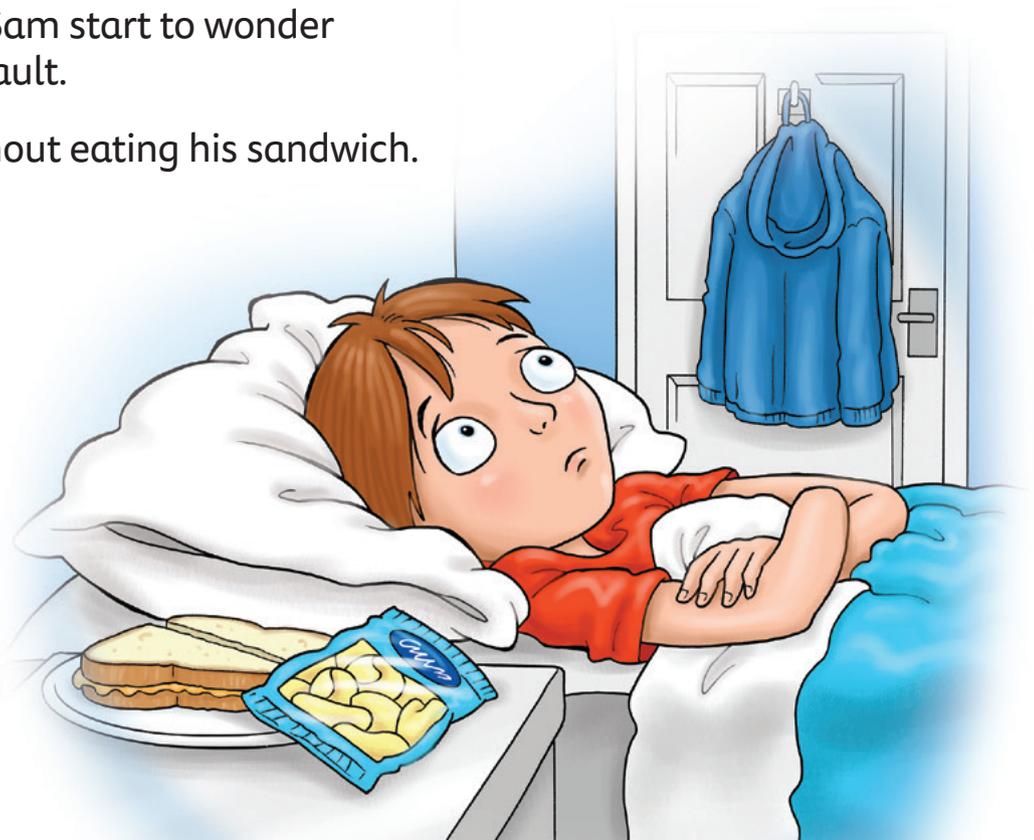
'Are we not watching a movie with Dad tonight?' he asked.

'Dad's had to go away for a while. I'm not sure when he will be back,' Mum said.

Sam felt the feelings get worse. It felt like a voice kept telling him, 'what if Dad doesn't ever come back?'

The feelings made Sam start to wonder whether it was his fault.

He went to bed without eating his sandwich.





Monday finally came around. Sam got up, brushed his teeth, got dressed, ate his cereal and, as normal, walked to school with Evie and her mum. He hadn't seen Dad all weekend.

Sam usually enjoyed the walk to school with Evie, but today was different. He felt a bit sick and like his chest was heavy. He didn't want to go to school. He was still worried about his Mum and Dad, worried if things would go back to normal.

Evie's Mum noticed Sam was very quiet on the way to school and not his usual, happy, funny self. She asked him if he was okay?

'I'm fine,' replied Sam. He didn't know how to explain how he was feeling and thought it was better to keep it a secret. He was embarrassed and worried that he might be poorly.



School that day was hard for Sam. He couldn't even enjoy the literacy lesson.

When the school bell rang for playtime, Sam hoped he would feel better. As usual, he played superheroes with his friends. But the truth was he didn't feel like playing. He knew that playtime was supposed to be fun and he should feel happy. But he didn't, he felt sad and worried.

He didn't feel like being Super Sam today.

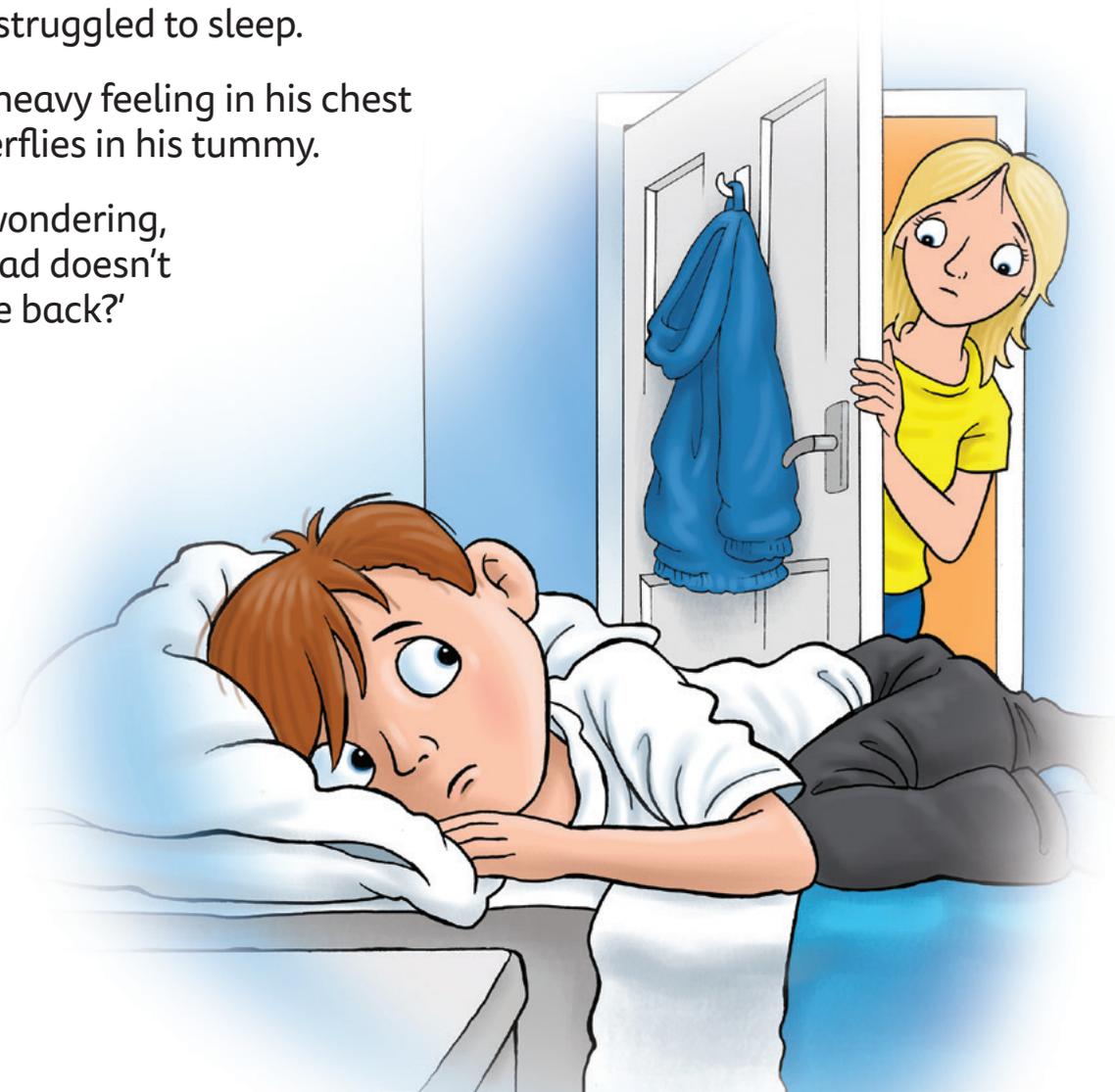
When Sam got home, Roger was sat at the bottom of the stairs, wagging his tail, as he usually was. Mum was in the kitchen, but there was no Dad.

Sam spent most of the evening in his bedroom, only coming out to have his tea, which he didn't feel like eating, and for bathtime. Mum kept popping her head in to check on him, but each time she did Sam pretended to be asleep.

But Sam struggled to sleep.

He felt a heavy feeling in his chest and butterflies in his tummy.

He kept wondering, 'what if Dad doesn't ever come back?'



As the week went on, the feelings got worse for Sam. The longer Dad was away, the more it worried him. He kept wondering what he had done wrong, if he could have done something differently so maybe Dad would stay.

Sam didn't want to go to school, but like every nine year old boy or girl should, he knew he had to.

But it was hard pretending everything was okay.

Friday came around and Sam felt even worse. Friday was supposed to be pizza and superhero movie night. It was when Sam would tell Dad all about Super Sam's latest adventures.

That lunchtime, Sam's teacher, Mrs Morris, noticed that Sam didn't quite seem himself. He didn't seem to enjoy literacy as he normally did and he had stopped playing superheroes with the other boys and girls during playtime.

Mrs Morris approached Sam in the playground and sat beside him. 'Sam, is everything okay? Is there something bothering you? You can talk to me,' she said kindly.



Sam thought about it for a moment. Mrs Morris was kind, but he wasn't sure what to say about his feelings or how to describe them, like he was trying to explain to a space alien from another planet what the colour blue was without saying the word 'blue' or pointing at something blue.

He felt like it was silly, so he simply replied, 'thanks, Mrs Morris. I'm okay.'

Mrs Morris didn't seem so sure. 'Why don't you go sit with Evie,' she suggested. 'Maybe you can talk to her?'

Sam noticed Evie alone at the other side of the playground. It then occurred to him that she had not been playing with the other boys and girls either. He noticed Evie had been quiet all week.

He sat alongside her and the two ate their packed lunches.

'How come you're not playing with the others?' asked Sam.

'I'm not feeling well,' replied Evie, 'What about you? I thought you were Super Sam.'

'Not today. I'm not feeling well either,' said Sam.

'I've got this funny feeling in my tummy,' Evie said.

Sam stopped eating his sandwich and moved closer to her. 'What kind of funny feeling?' he asked.

'I've been feeling a bit rubbish since my big sister left to go to university and it's been making me tired and worried. It's scary knowing she isn't there to look out for me,' she said.

Sam then started to wonder, were these feelings something other people felt too?



Evie continued, 'my Mum told me it's okay and normal to feel rubbish when things change. And sometimes it's okay to feel rubbish even when things don't change.'

Suddenly, Sam realised something. As he sat listening to Evie, the rubbish feelings didn't quite feel so bad anymore. He thought, maybe it was okay to talk to other people when you were feeling rubbish, maybe it wasn't something to be embarrassed by.

He knew it was okay to talk.



Sam and Evie walked from school that day with a spring in their step. They seemed more cheerful than before and giggled about things on the way home.

Evie's Mum smiled. 'Looks like you two had a good day,' she said.

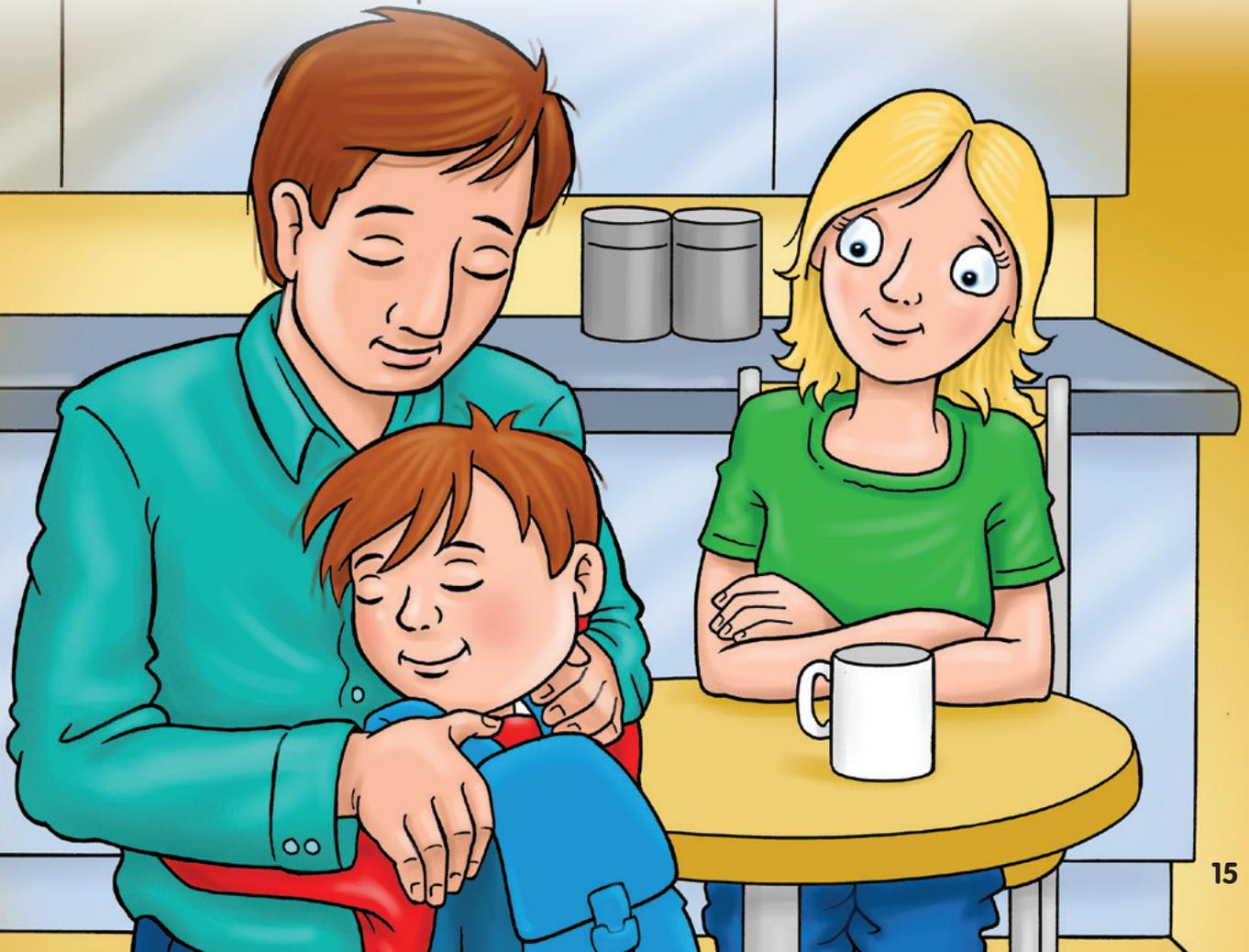
When Sam came through the front door, he noticed Roger was not sat at the bottom of the stairs, wagging his tail, like he usually was. Sam shouted out, 'Mum...?'

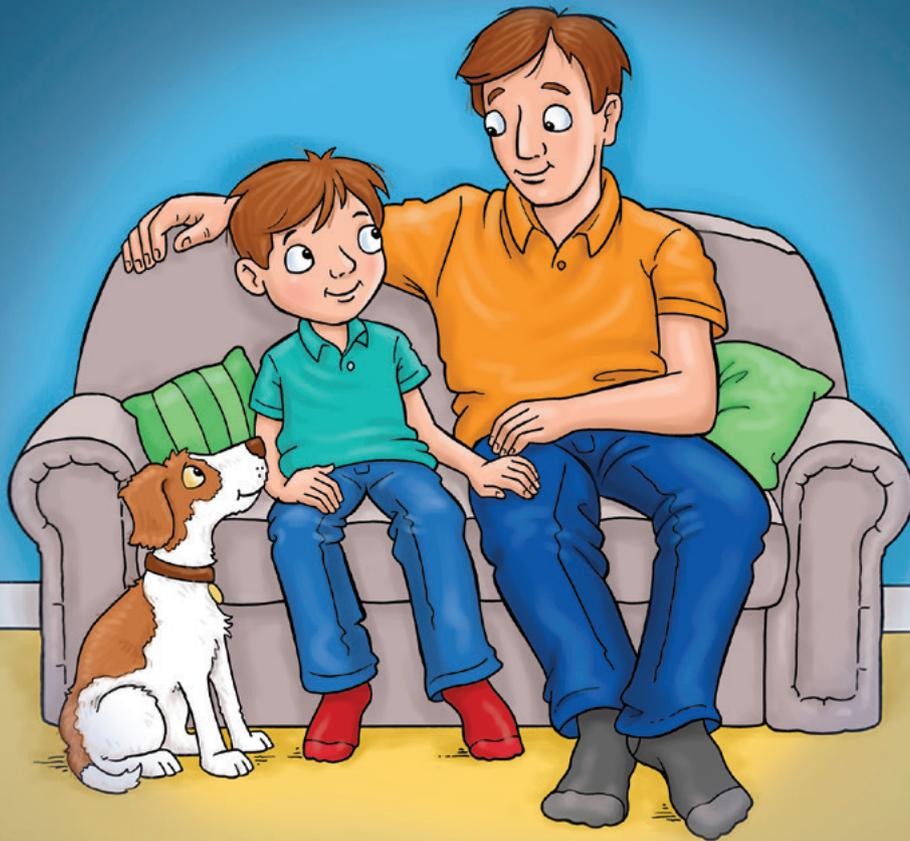
'In here, kiddo,' a familiar voice said.

Sam rushed into the kitchen without even stopping to drop his bag or take off his shoes. Roger was drinking water from his bowl. And sat at the table with a cup of tea, across from his mum, was Dad!

Dad jumped to his feet and gave Sam the biggest hug. 'I've missed you,' he said.

'I missed you too,' Sam replied, gripping his dad tightly.





Later that evening, Sam asked if he could talk with his dad. Snuggled up on the sofa together, Sam's dad said, 'You can tell me anything, Sam. I'll always be here to listen.'

Sam took a deep breath and told his dad exactly how he had been feeling this last week - that he was scared of Dad leaving him, and that he'd been having bad thoughts and feeling rubbish. He asked Dad if he had done anything wrong.

'Of course not,' Dad replied, 'you haven't done anything.'

'Sometimes,' he said, 'grown ups can feel a bit rubbish too, like they're stuck in a thick fog that just won't go away. It can sometimes make you feel tired or like you don't want to do the things you normally like to do.'

Sam couldn't believe what he was hearing.
'Grown ups get these feelings too?' he asked.

'Anyone can get them,' Dad replied, 'even superheroes.'

Sam was shocked. 'Even superheroes?!' he thought.

Dad continued, 'they can make you feel scared or worried. Sometimes you can feel rubbish for no reason at all. It just means you're a bit poorly, even your feelings.'

'Like a tummy bug?' Sam asked.

'Exactly,' said Dad. 'And like a tummy bug,' he continued, 'sometimes it takes a while for it to go away. And sometimes, like a tummy bug, the rubbish feelings can come back. But that's okay.'

The best thing you can do to make you feel better is to talk about how you're feeling.'

Dad explained he had been feeling rubbish himself lately and he needed some time to get some help. Mum didn't want to worry Sam, so she decided not to tell him why Dad had to leave for a few days. But perhaps this didn't help, they realised. They should have talked about it with Sam.

'It's always better to talk,' said Dad.

Dad said he had been to talk to a Doctor and that had made him feel better, being able to talk about his feelings, and he was now ready to come home again.

Sam hugged his dad tightly. Even though they weren't completely gone, like Dad had explained they might not, he felt the bad feelings drift away a little. His chest was less heavy and the butterflies in his tummy had nearly disappeared.

Mum thought it would be fun to invite Evie round to watch a superhero movie with them, and she arrived about 15 minutes later.

Later that evening, they ordered four large pizzas between them - but Roger still wasn't allowed! They sat around the television together.

'So,' said Dad, his arm around Sam, 'what sort of adventures has Super Sam gotten into this week?'

Sam smiled.





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