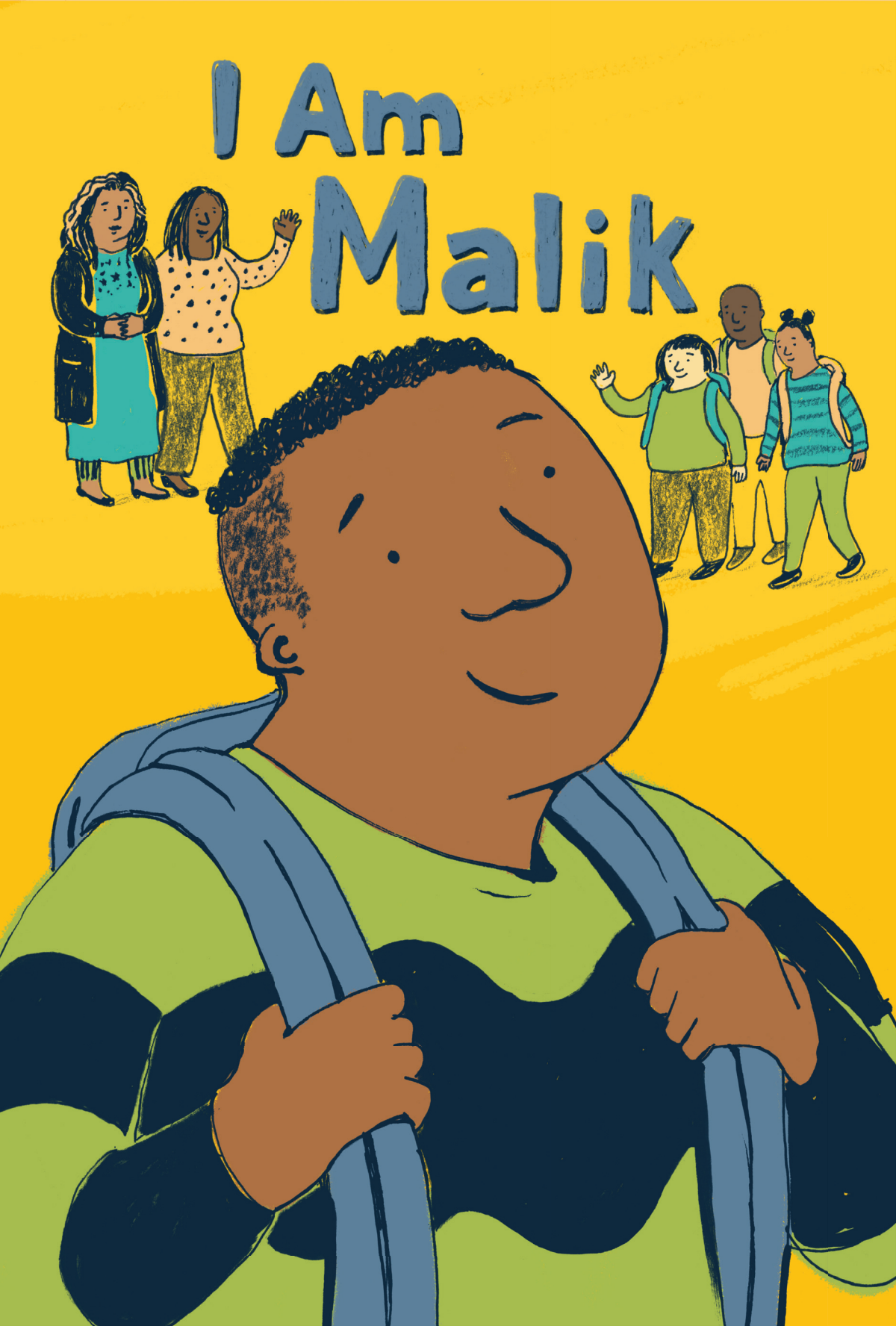
I Am Malik



You're going through a lot right now.

Things might feel really confusing. You might have a lot of questions and different feelings about what's going on.

This book is here to help you figure some of that out.

You'll find stuff about:

- Who all the people you might see or talk to are
- What could happen next
- How to deal with your feelings and ways to feel better

This is Malik's story. His experience might be different than what you're going through, but it might help you understand what's going on.

No matter what happens, you should know that you're not alone. These kinds of things happen to other kids, too.

There are lots of ways to get help and support. Don't be afraid to ask for it.

This book is yours to keep. Read it, write on it, draw on it, or do whatever you want with it. We hope it helps.

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Part 1.

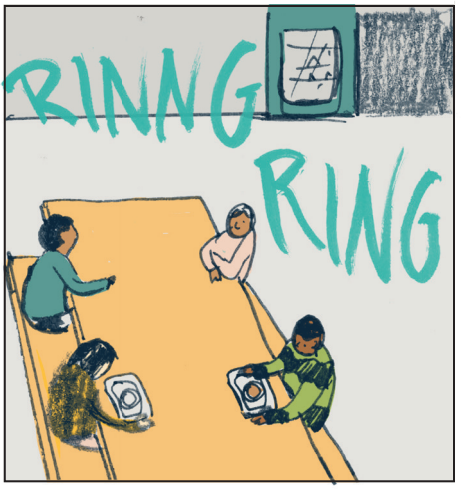
Something Happened

OCTOBER MENU

What's wrong, Malik? You're usually done before I even sit down!

Huh? Oh, nothing.

I can't tell Alex about what happened. I know she'll think something's wrong with me.


RINNG
RING

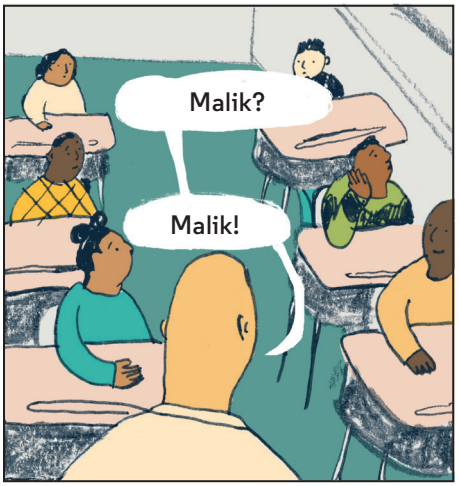
Every time I think about what happened, my stomach hurts.

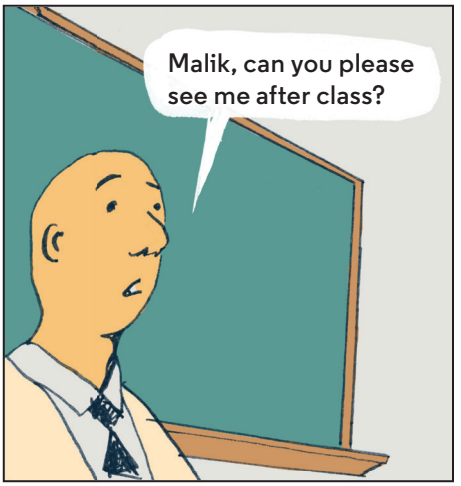
Right, Malik?

Huh? Oh yeah. Me, too.

Today we're talking about the Constitutional Convention. Who can tell us....

Ugh! Who cares?!

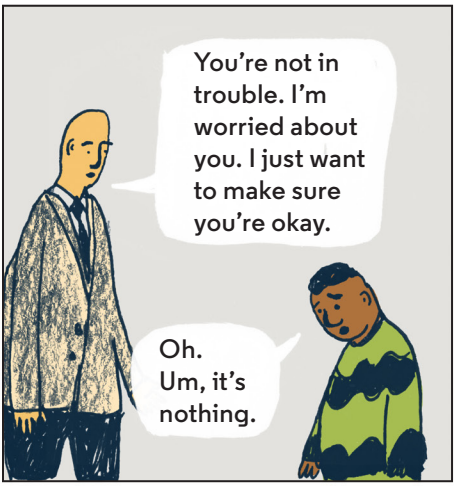

Malik?
Malik!


Malik, can you please see me after class?

Oh no...

RIING

Hey Malik, how are you doing today? You seem distracted. Not your usual self.
I'm sorry I wasn't paying attention.


You're not in trouble. I'm worried about you. I just want to make sure you're okay.
Oh. Um, it's nothing.

I can't believe he noticed.

I guess... well... there's just... a lot... going on at home right now, I guess.

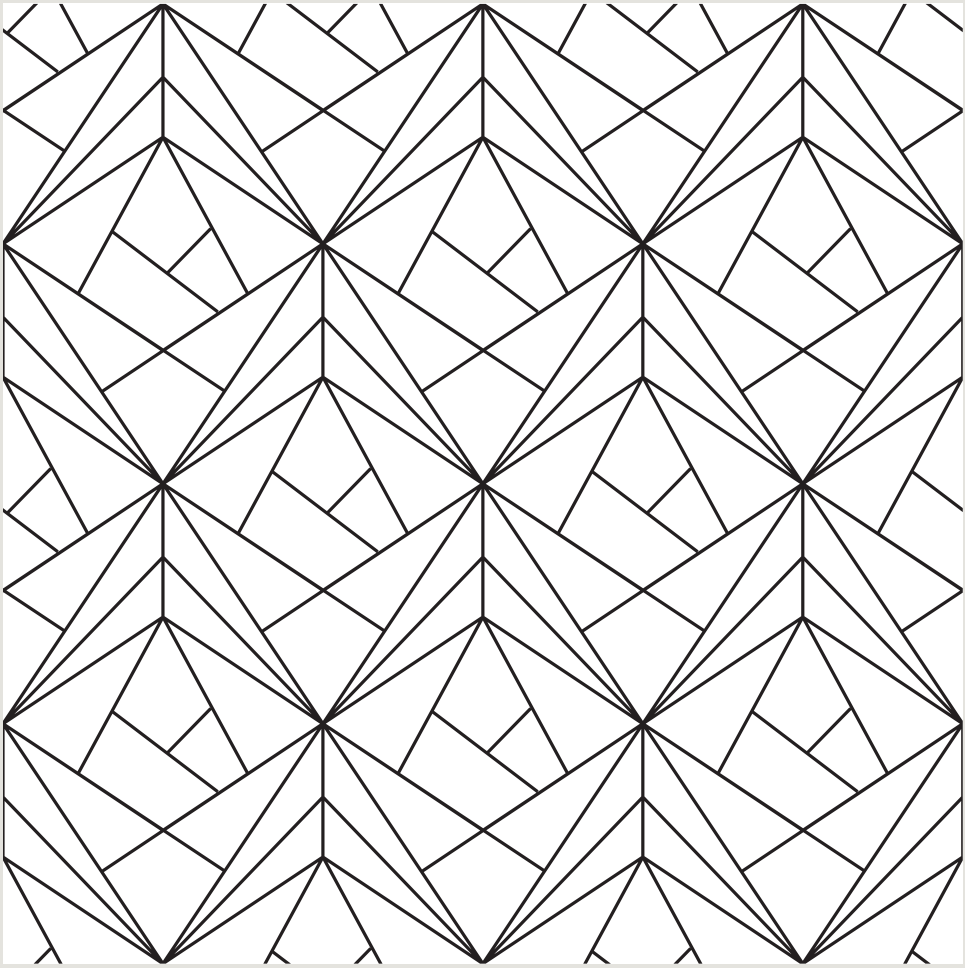
Do you want to talk about it?
Um no. I'm okay. Uh. I gotta go. Okay?
Okay. Well, I'm here if you change your mind. And I know the school counselor is pretty great, too.
Uh-huh. Okay. Thanks.
Okay. This is bad.
Everyone can tell something's wrong! I can't hide it!
Maybe it's good I have to go talk to that lady today.
I gotta tell somebody or I'm gonna explode!

A few hours later, at the therapist, Ms. Priya's, office...
You like to draw?
Yeah...a little.
It's actually a really great way to deal with stress.
You're welcome to draw or color while we talk, if you want.
I know coloring sounds like it's for little kids, but I have one of these adult coloring books if you want to check it out.
I like using them, too!

Something to Color

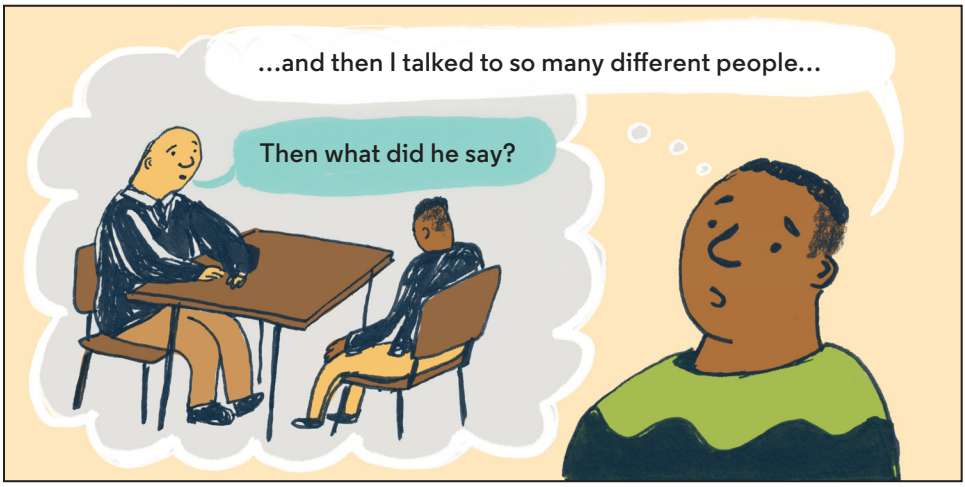
Ms. Priya told Malik that drawing and coloring could help him feel more relaxed.

You can try it and see if it helps you, too. Use this coloring page just like Malik did. Or try drawing in your own notebook.



It kind of did feel better to be doing something with my hands while we talked.
Do you want to talk a little more about how you're feeling?
I guess...
UGHH I HATE TALKING ABOUT FEELINGS!
But the coloring thing worked, so...
It's just...

...the police came the other day...
We're going to ask you to come talk to someone about what happened.


...and then I talked to so many different people...
Then what did he say?

...about what happened...
What's this from?

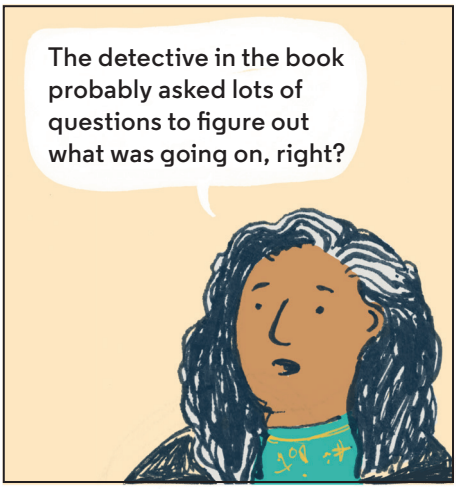
...But I did talk to this lady. She said she's an advocate. She was okay...
Hi, Malik, I'm Chantelle. Do you have any questions for me?

There are so many people in my business!

Why don't the grown-ups just talk to each other?!

I know what you mean!
It sounds like the police and other grown-ups are trying to figure out what happened.
Uh-huh.

Have you ever read a book with a detective in it?
Yeah.


The detective in the book probably asked lots of questions to figure out what was going on, right?

Yeah, I guess.

I just don't like that all these different people have to know.

It's embarrassing!
I know it can be really hard to keep talking about it.

Yeah...

... but they asked me about stuff that has nothing to do with it! Like how I'm doing in school and where I go when my mom has to work late. Why does that matter?

I know it seems weird, but they're just trying to understand you and what your life is like.

Do... do you know what's going to happen?

I'm sorry, Malik.
I know it's hard not knowing.

I think the police are trying to figure out if they have enough information to make an arrest and keep going with the case.

But you mentioned your advocate, right?

Yeah. Chantelle?

She'll be able to tell you more about what could happen next.

Will you see her again soon?

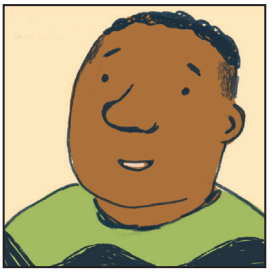
Yeah. Tomorrow.

Oh good. I'm glad to hear that.
I know you have to go soon. Why don't we make an appointment for next week?
Yeah.
Thanks for the drawing, Malik!
Thanks, Ms. Priya.

What Are You Feeling?

Malik talked with Ms. Priya about his different feelings. What do you think Malik felt? How do you feel?

Happy



Sad

Angry

Calm

Surprised

Yucky

Worried

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

If someone might have broken a law or hurt another person, the police start a case and try to figure out what happened. That's called an investigation.

In Malik's story, he was a "witness" because he saw what happened and a "victim" because he was hurt. He met different adults working on the case, and they asked him questions about what happened.

The adults will talk to different people to find out more information. Information about what happened is called evidence.

At the end of this, if the police can't find enough evidence, the case is over. But that doesn't mean the thing didn't happen.

If they do find enough evidence, the case will go on to the next step.

Part 2.

The Advocate

Do I really have to go, Mom? I'm so tired of talking to grown-ups.
I know, Malik. But isn't this the one you liked?
Yeah, she's the one that let me ask questions instead of just asking me a million questions.
That's good! I bet you have a lot of questions now, huh?
I guess.
Do you want me to come with you?
No, Mom. I want to go alone, okay?
Okay. I'll be right here if you need me.

Chantelle was really nice.
She knew what was going on with the case, too.
Malik, I don't know if anyone told you yet, but the police arrested your neighbor.
Oh.
How do you feel about that?

Do you understand what that means?
Uh. No...Not really.
It means the police found enough evidence for the case to go to the next step.
So he goes to jail now?
The lawyers who work for the government – the prosecutors – will decide what to do with the case.
Huh?

When the police think someone broke a law, the prosecutors work on the case.
But they have to decide which cases to work on. They think about different things.
Like, if they think there isn't enough evidence to show that someone did something, they might not keep going with the case.

So, if they decide not to work on this case...?
Then it would end.

I think we'll know soon.

You're going to meet the prosecutor working on this case soon. Her name is Nadia.
Oh great, another grown-up. I bet she's going to want to ask me questions...
I think you'll like her. She's really nice.
Can't wait.
I know she also wants to make sure you're safe.
What do you mean safe? I'm fine.

Plus, I'm going to my cousin's house after school now, so I don't have to stay at my neighbor's house anymore.
That's great, Malik. I'm glad you have somewhere safe to go after school.
Hey, do you want to take a break? I know this is a lot to think about.
Yeah. That sounds good.
That sounds way better than talking about my feelings!
Let's try this breathing trick I know...

The Breathing Trick

Chantelle showed Malik how to use breathing to feel calmer. You can try this when you're feeling stressed or upset.

Put your hands on your stomach. Take a big breath in for a count of three, letting your belly fill up with air.

Hold your breath for a count of two.

Then breathe out slowly and let out all the air in your stomach.

Repeat this three times.

You can also close your eyes while you breathe.

How did that feel?
Uh, okay, I guess.

I can't believe that kind of worked...

I know we still have a lot to talk about, but maybe we can pick up next time?

Let's talk again as soon as we hear from Nadia, okay?
Yeah sure.

How was that, honey?
Hm? Oh, fine.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

The police arrested Malik's neighbor after they found the evidence they needed.

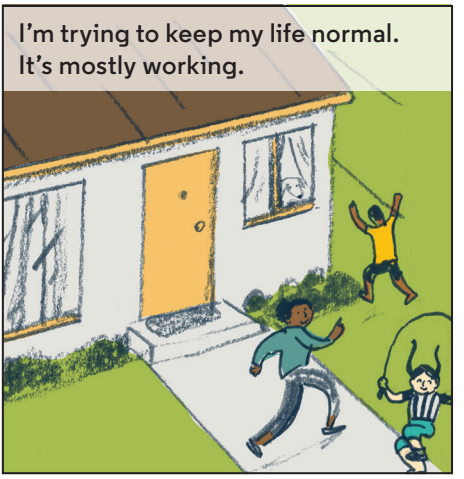
Next the prosecutor, who is a lawyer that works for the government, will investigate some more.

Then the prosecutor will think about whether they found enough evidence and decide whether or not the case should go to the next step.

Even if the case is closed, it doesn't mean the thing didn't happen.

Part 3.

Talking It Out



I go see Ms. Priya a lot.
It's not bad.
We talk about other stuff.
Not just this case.
Like my friends.
And stuff on TV. Or school.

And sometimes we talk about what happened.
...I know, I just feel like it's all my fault. And I don't want him to hate me.
I understand why you feel that way, but what happened is not your fault, Malik.
When I talked to the other grown-ups, I sometimes felt like I was saying the wrong thing.
But Ms. Priya just lets me talk.
I see Chantelle, too.
We talk about stuff like music sometimes. But we mostly talk about the case.

She knows a lot about what's going on.
So, I talked to Nadia.
Nadia?
Sorry, the prosecutor.
Oh. Yeah.
Nadia and her team think there's enough evidence and are bringing a case against him.

Like a court case? Like on TV?
Well, the case might go to trial, or it might not.

Of course. It's never an easy answer! Ahhhh!
I know it can be confusing. There are a lot of steps.
The prosecutor and your neighbor's lawyer will talk.
And they might agree not to have a trial.
They might all agree that your neighbor will say that he's guilty of some things and accept a certain punishment. That's called a guilty plea.
Uh-huh.

If that happens, no trial. But it can take a while, so we won't know right away.
Of course we won't!!!

What is a trial, anyway?

A trial is when a judge and jury of people from the community listen to both sides of the case to understand what happened, and then decide what should happen next.

Just so you know, most cases don't end up going to trial.

But we never know. Some cases do go to trial.

She was right. We really didn't know for a while.
I hated all the waiting.
But then we found out.
The case was going to trial. Lucky me.
I wish I could tell Alex.
Would she still be my friend?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

After a prosecutor decides to continue a case, different things can happen.

Often, the person accused of a crime and their lawyer will negotiate with the prosecutor. If they agree, the accused person might plead guilty to certain charges and agree to a certain punishment. This is called a "plea deal."

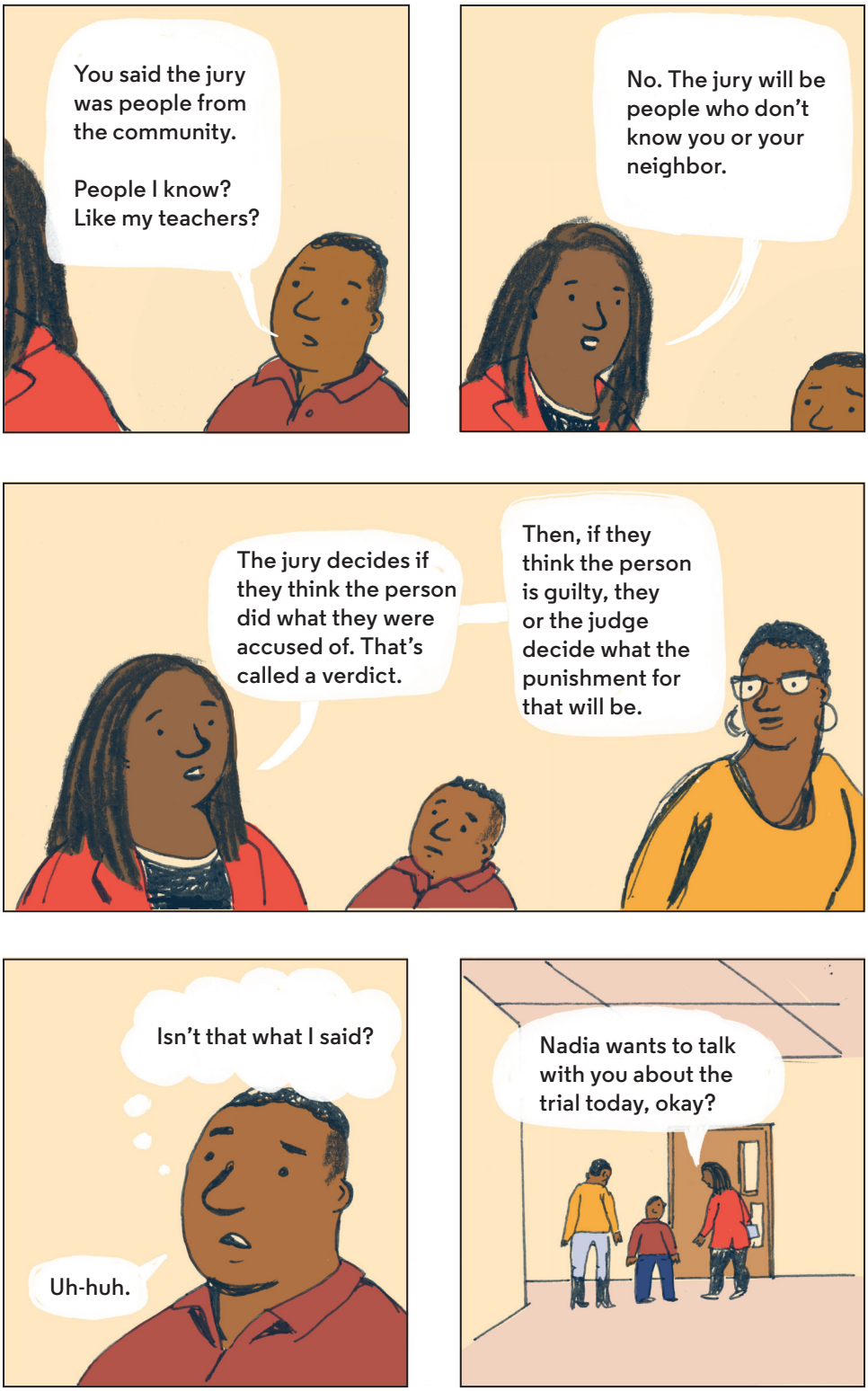
If they don't agree to do that, the case goes to trial.

At trial, the prosecutor will try to show that the person broke the law, and the accused person's lawyer will try to show that the person didn't break the law.

Part 4.

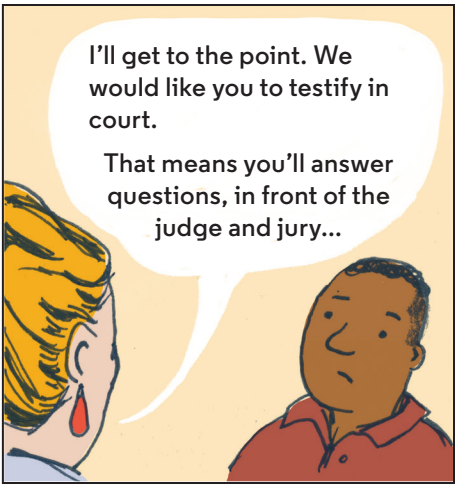
Getting Ready

Malik, you know how the case is going to trial?
Yeah. With a judge and stuff.
Yeah that's why we're meeting with Nadia today.
At trial, the prosecutor will try to show the jury that your neighbor broke the law, and his lawyer will try to show that he didn't.
The judge and a jury of people from the community will listen to everyone and decide what happens next.
Yeah, I've seen that on TV shows, right? Like the jury says "guilty" or "not guilty" at the end.
Kind of.
Really? That stuff you see on TV is real?!
Haha. Some of it is!


You said the jury was people from the community.
People I know? Like my teachers?
No. The jury will be people who don't know you or your neighbor.
The jury decides if they think the person did what they were accused of. That's called a verdict.
Then, if they think the person is guilty, they or the judge decide what the punishment for that will be.
Isn't that what I said?
Uh-huh.
Nadia wants to talk with you about the trial today, okay?

Okay.

Malik, thanks so much for coming in today. I know you've been through a lot, and you're probably pretty tired of talking to us.
You could say that...


I'll get to the point. We would like you to testify in court.
That means you'll answer questions, in front of the judge and jury...

...from me and your neighbor's lawyer, about what happened.
No! My son has been through enough!

I know this has been hard, Mrs. Ahmed. But Malik's experience is an important part of the case.
We try not to ask kids to go to court if it's not necessary, but we think it's important in this case.

We think—
I stopped listening.

Keep It Moving

Chantelle helped Malik when he was feeling overwhelmed by suggesting they take a walk.

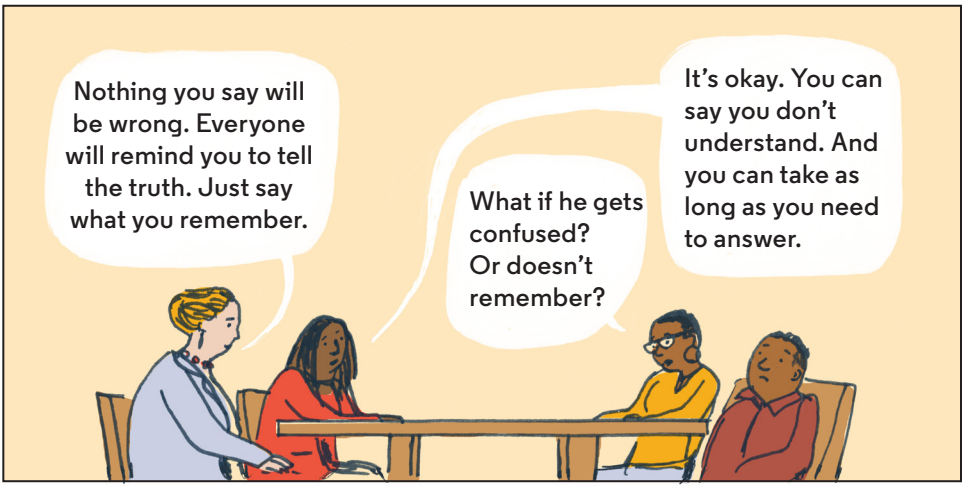
Moving your body can help with stress. It can be as simple as taking a walk, running up stairs, stretching, jumping rope, exercising, or even dancing.

What kind of movement do you think would help you feel less stressed?

It felt really good to get out of that room. But it was time to go back now.
I tried my breathing trick. And we started talking again.
1
2
3
If I testify, will I have to see him?
Yes, he'll be in the courtroom, too. But you won't have to talk to him, and he isn't supposed to talk to you.
And you don't even have to look at him. You can look at me or someone else you trust.
What does Malik have to do? What will it be like?

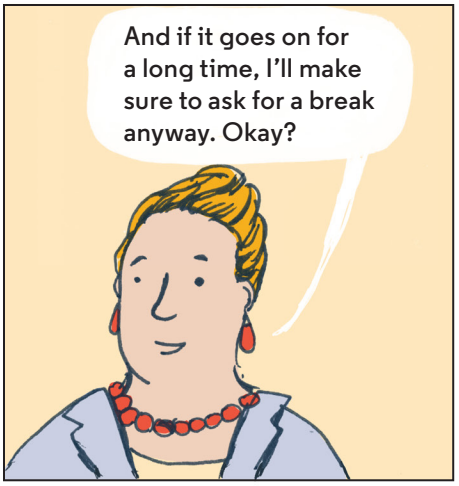
Malik, your job will be to answer the questions from me and from your neighbor's lawyer about what happened.

What if I say something wrong?


Nothing you say will be wrong. Everyone will remind you to tell the truth. Just say what you remember.
What if he gets confused? Or doesn't remember?
It's okay. You can say you don't understand. And you can take as long as you need to answer.

And if you don't remember something, just say you don't remember.

What if I have to go to the bathroom?
It happens! We all have to go. You can always ask for a break if you need one.


And if it goes on for a long time, I'll make sure to ask for a break anyway. Okay?

I know it can feel scary.
I still get nervous when I testify and I do it a lot.
Really?

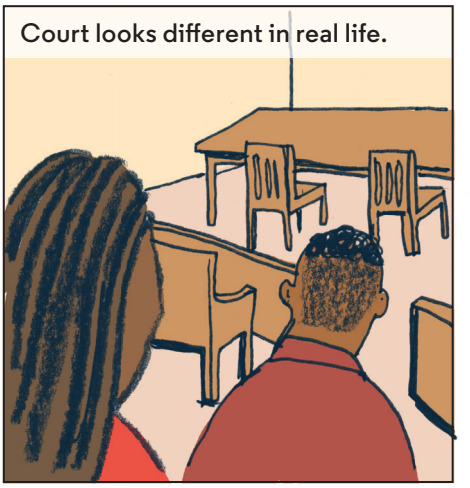
Yeah.
And we can do some things to make it less scary.
Like what?

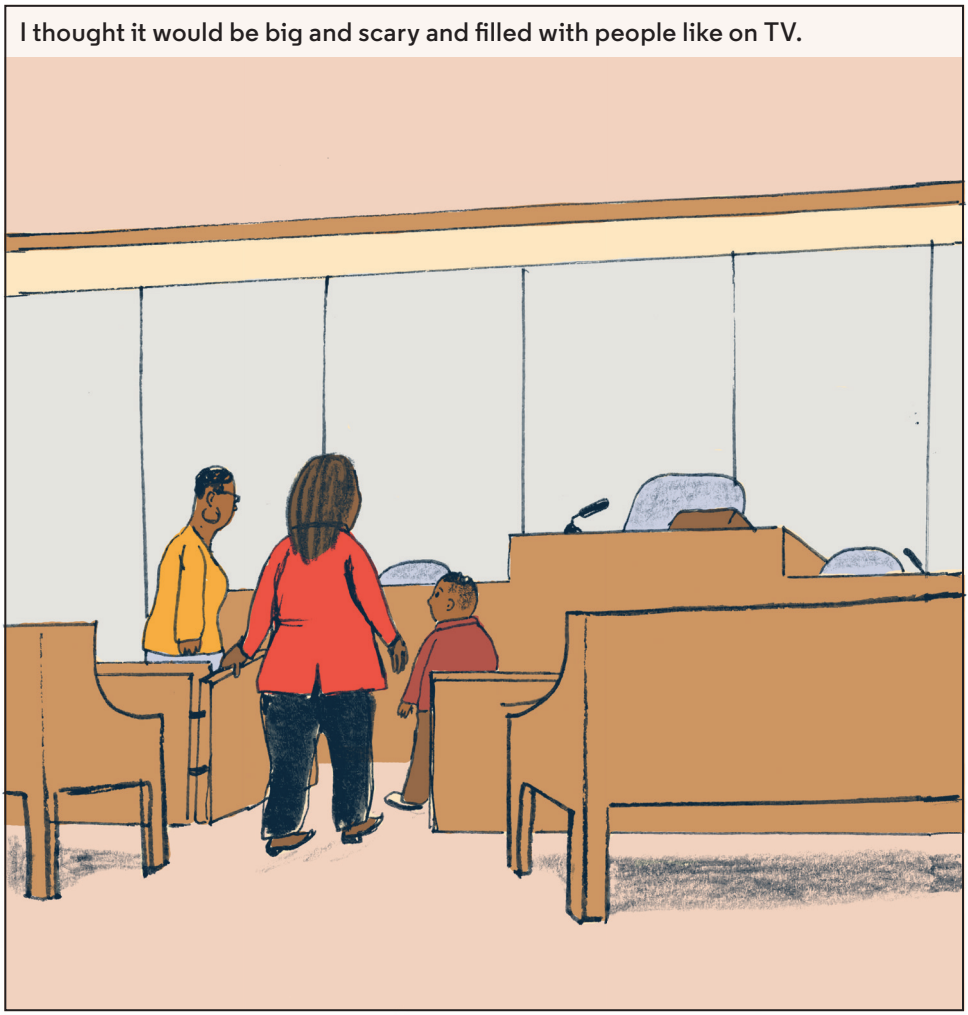
Well, I think it can really help to go see the courtroom.
I can tell you about all the people who will be there.
And show you where you'll have to go when you're called in.

The courtroom is empty. We can go do that now if you want?

What do you think, Malik?

Sure.


Court looks different in real life.


I thought it would be big and scary and filled with people like on TV.

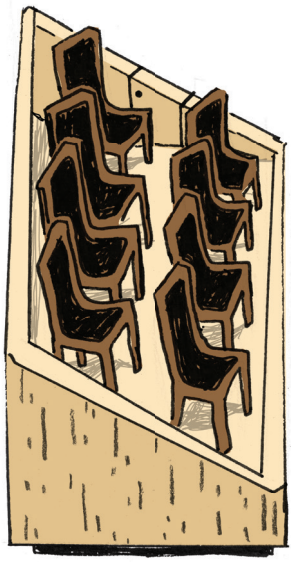
But it's the size of my classroom!

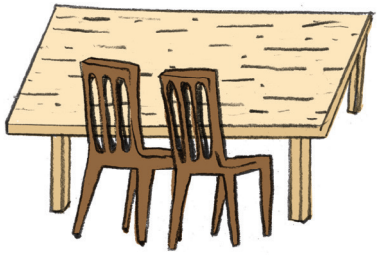
The Courtroom

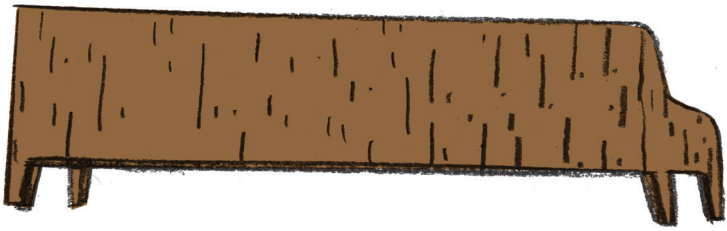
Chantelle took Malik and his mom to see the courtroom, and told him who all the people there would be and what their jobs are in court.

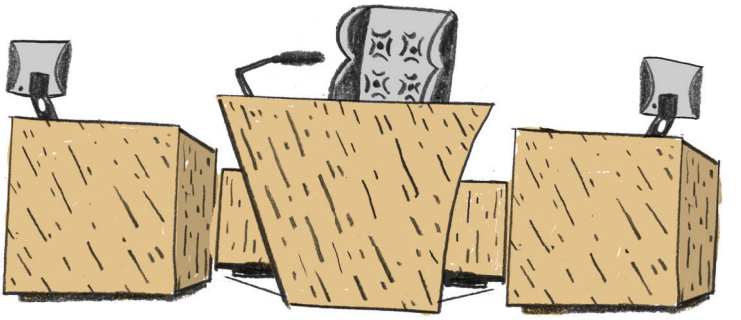
If you have to go to court, your courtroom might look a little different, but will probably have some of the same people.

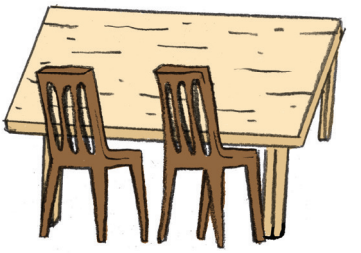
You can use this drawing to talk with one of the grown-ups on your case about who everyone is and what they do.











When will he have to testify?

I'm not sure. It could take a little while to schedule, but I'll let you know as soon as the trial date is set, okay?

Is there anything else he can do to get ready?

Well, on that day, you should dress up a little.
Like in a fancy suit?

No, maybe just a button-down shirt? And make sure to tuck it into your pants, okay?
Oh I'll make sure of that.

And on the day of court, there's always a LOT of waiting. I would definitely plan to bring something to do.

Can I bring my sketchbook?
Yeah. That's a great idea. Or a coloring book, or something to read.
That card game you like?
Oh yeah.
Here's a handout I made about other things you can do to get ready for court.
It's great to have a plan, especially things like knowing what you'll do if you start to feel stressed.
Like what?
Like my breathing trick, right?

Exactly!
Or some kids bring a small thing that helps them feel calm, like a good luck charm, a smooth stone, or something you can keep in your pocket.

Then if you start feeling worried, you can put your hand in your pocket and hold onto it. Whatever helps you the most!

Thank you so much, Chantelle.
Of course! I'll let you know as soon as I hear about the court date, okay?

Bye!
Bye!

Getting Ready To Go To Court

Chantelle showed Malik different things he could do to feel less nervous, and some things he could do to get ready for court.

Here are some of the ones she told him about.

Getting ready

- Try to get lots of sleep the night before.
- Try to eat something before you go to court. It will help you feel better and have the energy to get through it.
- You don't have to dress up, but wear something a little nicer than usual if you can. You should wear something that makes you feel good.
- You'll probably spend a lot of time waiting, so bring something to read, play, or do while you wait.
- If you have a special object that helps you feel calm, bring it with you.

Getting nervous

If you feel nervous, try one of these things:

- Try to picture how you want to react if different things happen. It may sound silly, but picturing things can help you feel calmer.
- Try taking deep breaths in and out a few times. It really helps!
- Tighten your muscles and then relax them. Do this a few times.
- If you can, take a walk or move your body to get rid of some of your extra energy. You can also try walking really fast for a few seconds, then taking a deep breath and walking really slowly for a few seconds, then going fast then slow, fast then slow a few more times.
- If you have a special prayer or song that is important to you, try saying or singing it, either out loud, or in your head.

Getting support

- Think about who can help you figure out how you're feeling and who can help you in court.
- Is there an advocate, friend, or family member who can come with you to court? If so, you can look at them if you get nervous.

Getting through it

- It can feel good to do something you like when it's over, like watch a movie, eat a favorite meal, or spend time with a friend. Think of something you can look forward to.

My Court Day Plan

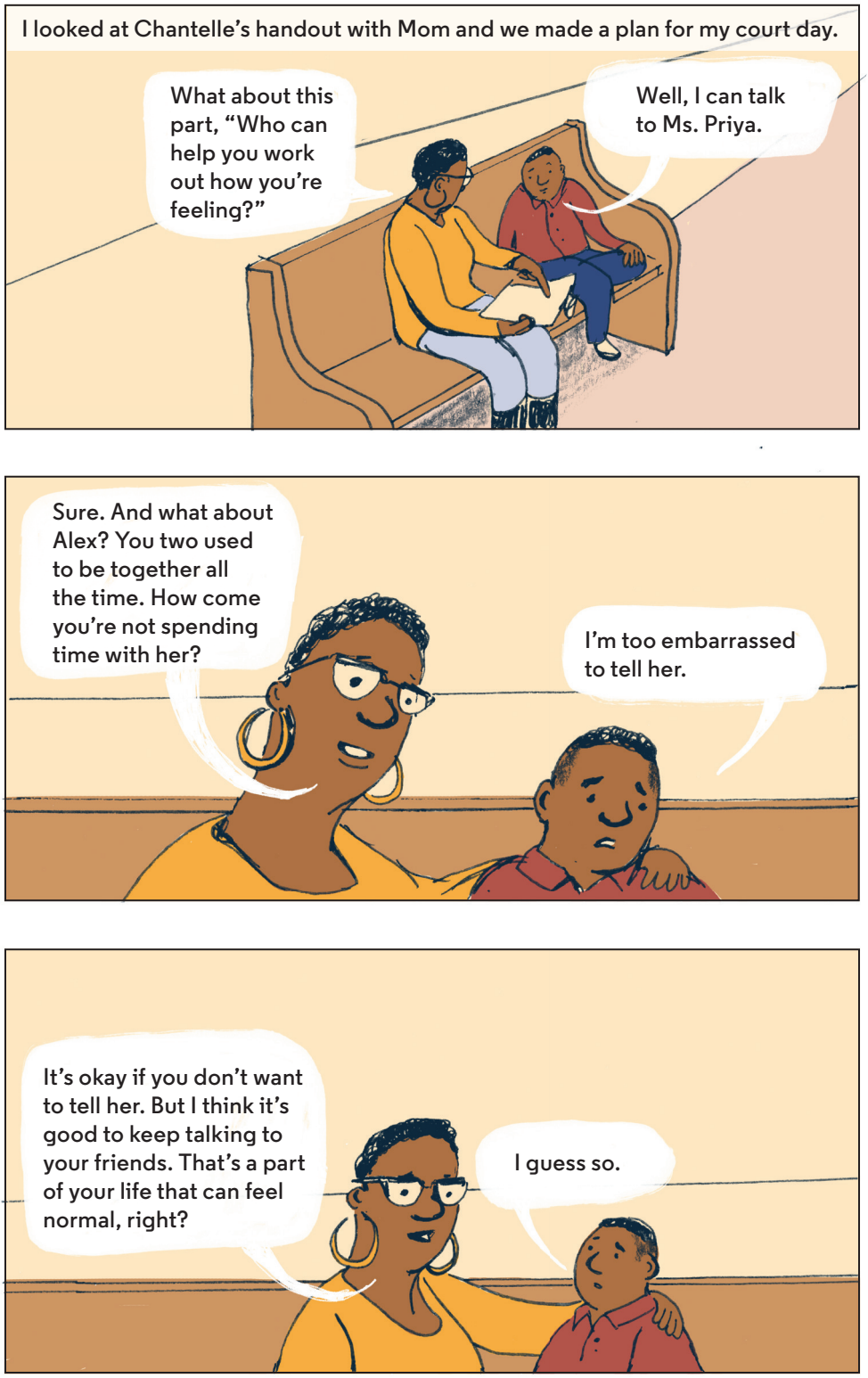
Malik used Chantelle's list to come up with a plan for his court day. If you want, you can use this page to make your own plan.

Things I will do to get ready:

If I get nervous, I will:

I will talk about how I feel with:

After court, I will do something I like:


I looked at Chantelle's handout with Mom and we made a plan for my court day.
What about this part, "Who can help you work out how you're feeling?"
Well, I can talk to Ms. Priya.
Sure. And what about Alex? You two used to be together all the time. How come you're not spending time with her?
I'm too embarrassed to tell her.
It's okay if you don't want to tell her. But I think it's good to keep talking to your friends. That's a part of your life that can feel normal, right?
I guess so.

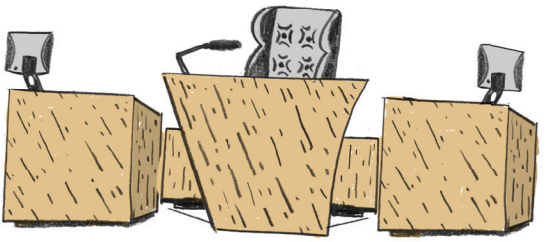
WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Malik's case was going to trial.

The prosecutor asked Malik to come to court to talk about what happened. This is called testifying.

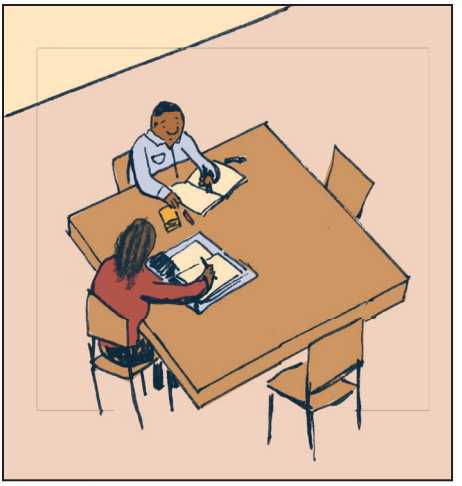
Most kids don't have to testify, but some do. If they do, their job is to talk about what happened and answer questions from the lawyers.

The jury will listen to everyone who talks in court and decide if they think the person is guilty or not.

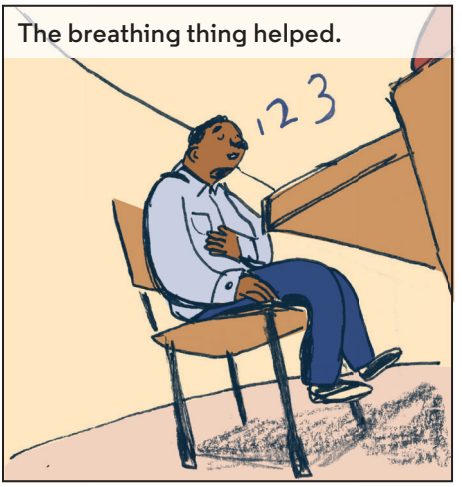


Part 5.

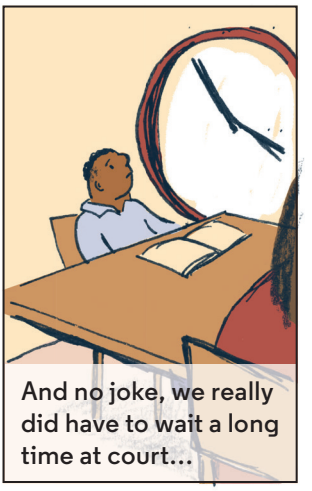
Court



I was so nervous my stomach hurt.


The breathing thing helped.
123

So did humming my favorite song.
HMM
HMM
HMM

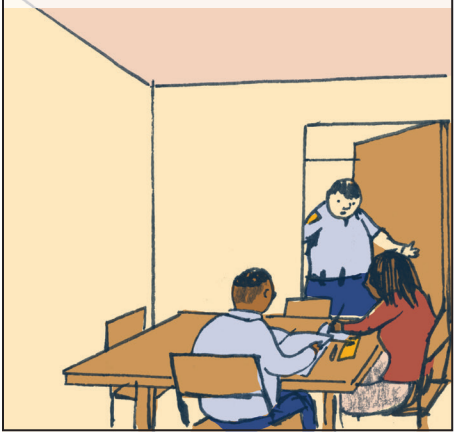

And no joke, we really did have to wait a long time at court...

I thought I was going to run out of pages in my sketchbook!

You okay?
UGHH

Yeah.

But it was just like Chantelle said.

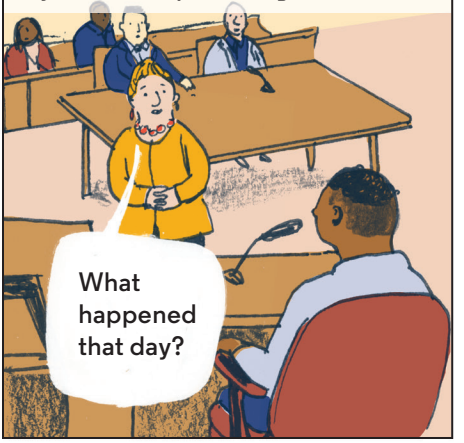


The court officer came to get me.

And we went to the courtroom.

I sat near the judge.

My heart was pounding so fast.



But I remembered to keep breathing.

They asked me questions.

I got confused one time.

But I saw Chantelle...

...and remembered my rights.
Can you repeat the question?

And then it was over.

I'm so glad that's over!

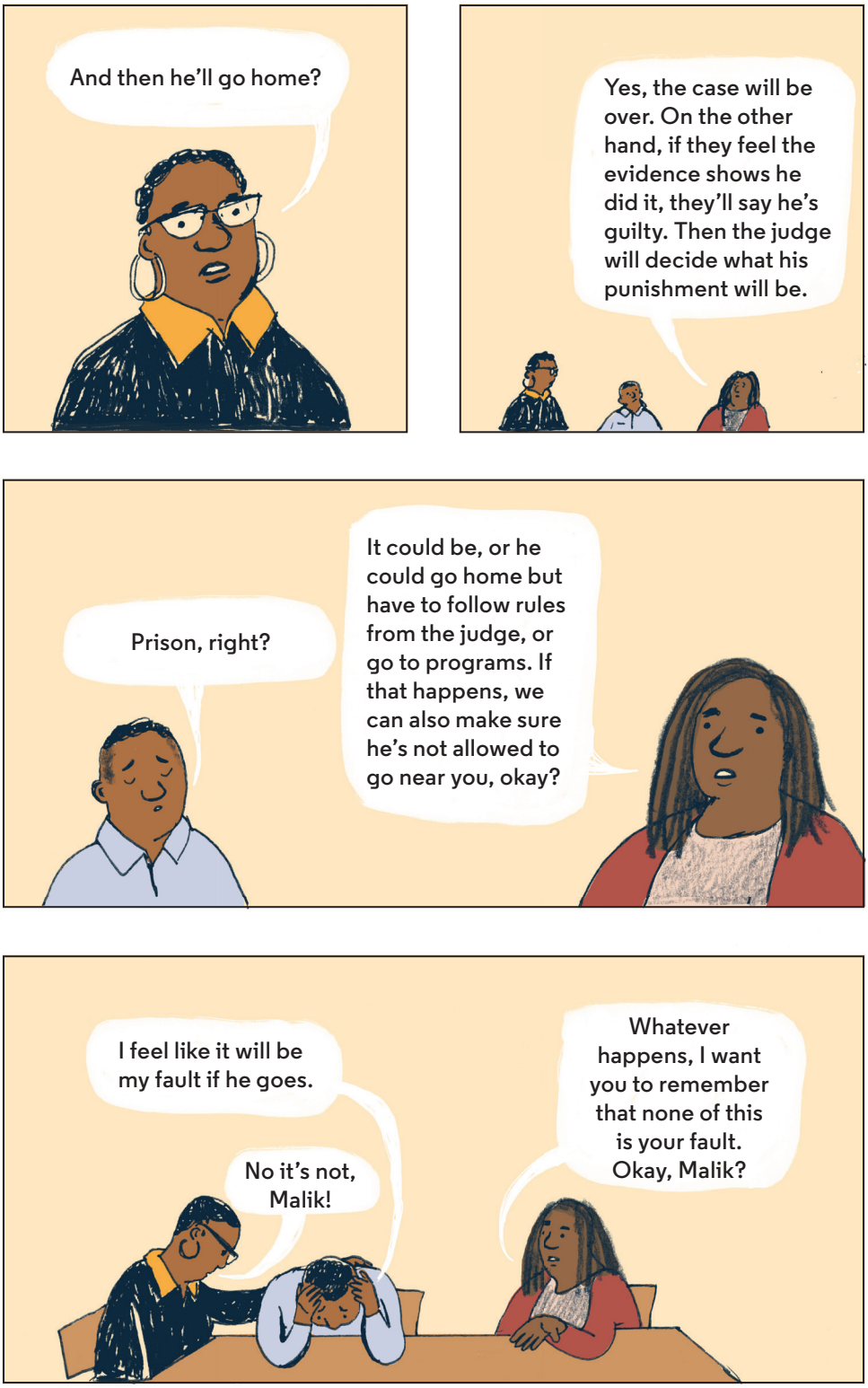
You did great. I know that wasn't easy. How do you feel?

I don't know. I'm glad it's done, I guess.

What happens now?

Well, the jury will hear from different people and then they'll decide if the evidence shows he is guilty or not.

If there isn't enough evidence, they'll say he's not guilty.


And then he'll go home?
Yes, the case will be over. On the other hand, if they feel the evidence shows he did it, they'll say he's guilty. Then the judge will decide what his punishment will be.
Prison, right?
It could be, or he could go home but have to follow rules from the judge, or go to programs. If that happens, we can also make sure he's not allowed to go near you, okay?
I feel like it will be my fault if he goes.
No it's not, Malik!
Whatever happens, I want you to remember that none of this is your fault. Okay, Malik?

I know it can be really hard if they decide something you don't want.

I don't know what I want.
I get that.

I just feel like nothing's going to be the same again.
Hey, I know this has been taking up a lot of your life over the last year and a half. But this case isn't your whole life.
You've got school, and your mom, and your friends.

Yeah.
This experience doesn't define you, Malik. You're still you.
When will we find out what they decide?
I'm not sure, but I'll let you know as soon as I hear, okay?
Yes. Thank you, Chantelle.
Hey, it's been a long day. Do you still want to go for pizza?
Yeah.

I finally talked to Alex again. She said she missed hanging out and was glad I was okay.

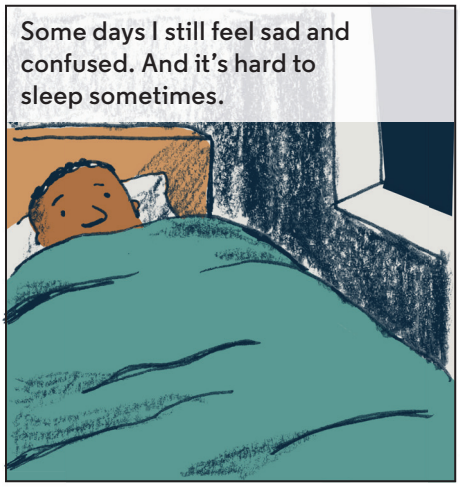
It feels good to talk to a friend instead of a grown-up for a change.

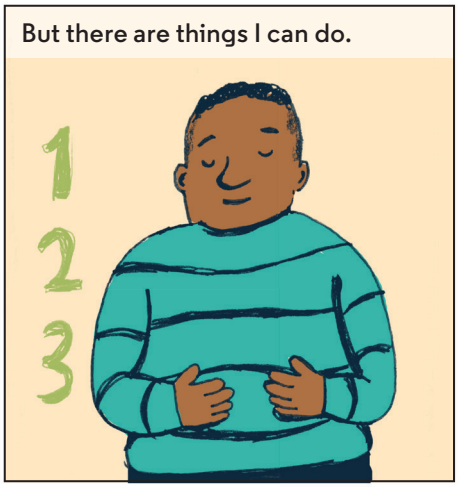
Alex even knows someone else who had to go to court. I guess it's not just me.

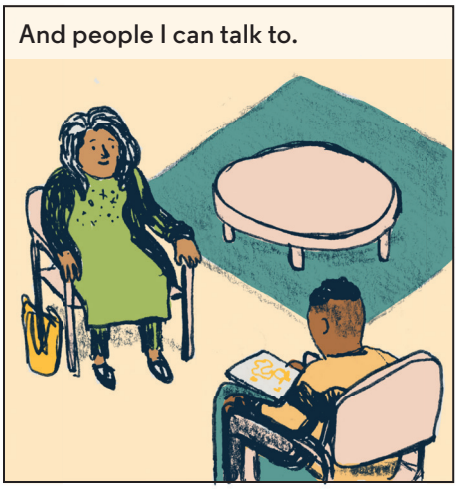
I thought everything would change because of what happened.

Malik?

But it hasn't been so bad.
Yes?


Some days I still feel sad and confused. And it's hard to sleep sometimes.


But there are things I can do.
1
2
3


And people I can talk to.

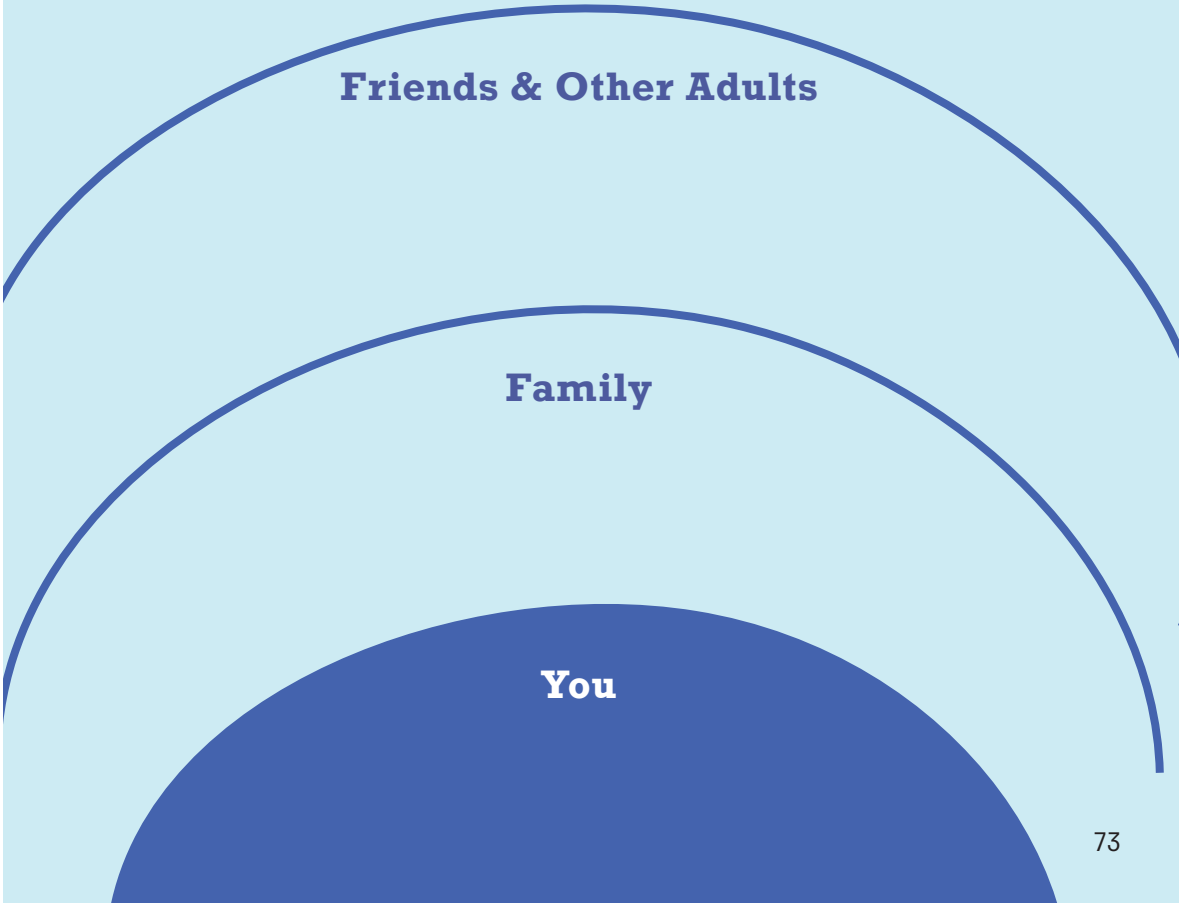
Maybe it sounds dumb, but Chantelle is right...
... No matter how it ends, this case isn't my whole life. I'm still Malik.

Circle of Support

Malik was stressed and confused, but he was able to talk to his therapist, Ms. Priya; his advocate, Chantelle; his mom; and his best friend, Alex, about what he was going through. Who can you go to for support when you are going through something difficult? What do they do to help you?

It can be helpful to remind yourself of the people in your life who you can ask for help.

Write their names or draw them in your circle of support below (you can even include a pet).



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Malik went to court and testified. Other people did, too.

The jury listened to everyone in court. All of the evidence in the case, including what people say in court, are like pieces of a puzzle. If there are pieces missing or that don't fit together, the jury has to decide the person is "not guilty," and the case is over. This doesn't mean the jury doesn't believe you, just that the puzzle isn't complete.

If all the pieces of the puzzle fit together, the jury decides the person is "guilty." Then the judge will decide what that person has to do next.

They might go to jail or prison, or they might be able to go home but have to follow other rules or go to programs.

Afterword.

Your experience might be different than Malik's. But the more you know about what happens, the more ready you'll be and the more you'll be able to ask for things you want or need.

You can have a voice in what happens. Don't be afraid to ask for help, to ask questions, and to find out what rights you have in court.

The Center for Court Innovation's Child Witness Materials Project is a collaborative effort between the Center for Court Innovation and the Center for Urban Pedagogy, and is supported by cooperative agreement #2016-VF-GX-K011, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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www.courtinnovation.org

The Center for Urban Pedagogy is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, in partnership with historically marginalized communities.

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The Center for Court Innovation is grateful to the project partners and stakeholders; and the children, caregivers, and justice system practitioners all over the country who contributed to the development of this product.

NCJ 300645

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Office for Victims of Crime
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