

# THE Awfulizer

LEARNING TO **OVERCOME** THE SHAME GAME

BY

**Kristin Maher**

ILLUSTRATED BY

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One afternoon as I was riding the bus home with my sister Lucy, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around and looked into the eyes of a strange monster. He was fluffy, with a giant nose, a black hat on his head, and breath that smelled like pickles.

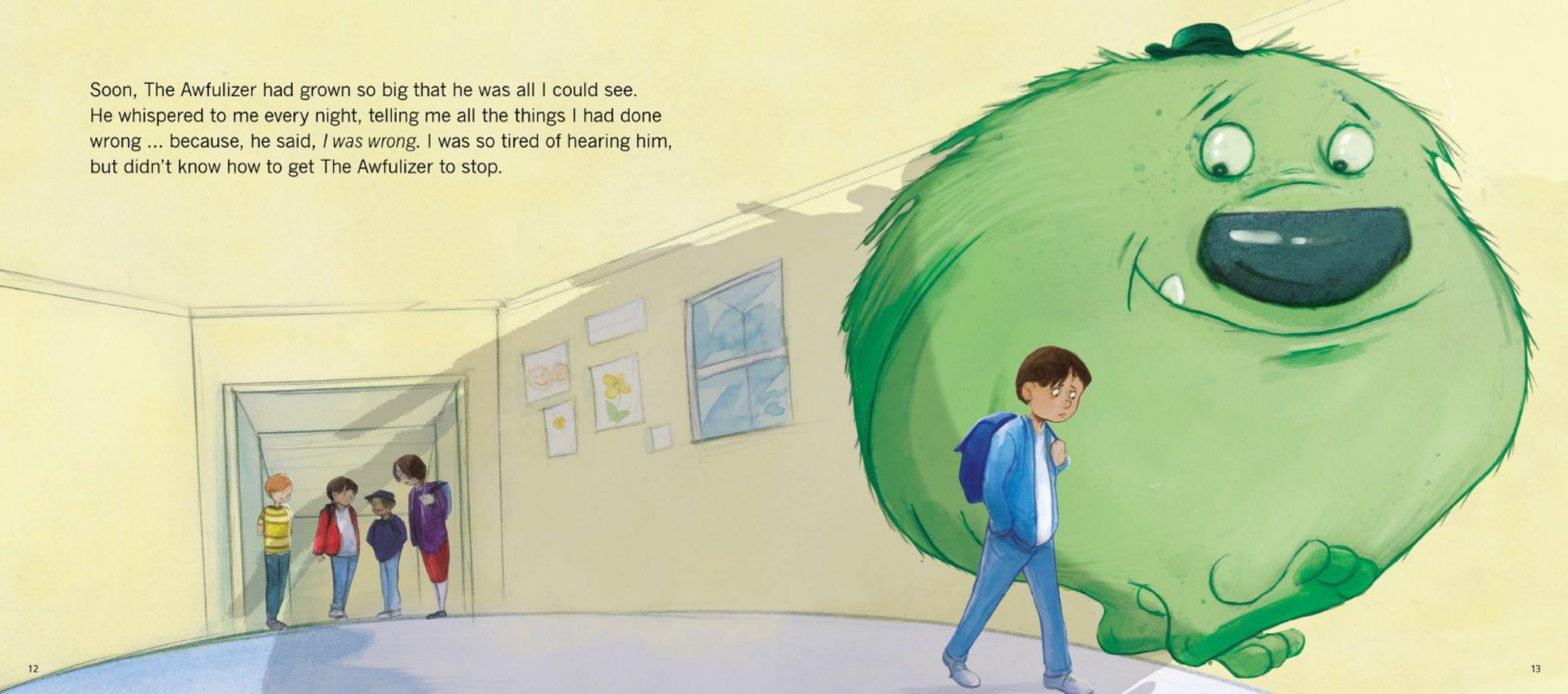
“Hello, James,” he muttered. “I’m The Awfulizer. Terrible to meet you.”

*The Awfulizer?* How weird.

I looked at Lucy and she didn’t seem to notice or hear him, so I turned back around in my seat. *I must be seeing things.*



Soon, The Awfulizer had grown so big that he was all I could see. He whispered to me every night, telling me all the things I had done wrong ... because, he said, *I was wrong*. I was so tired of hearing him, but didn't know how to get The Awfulizer to stop.



“Trust me. The Awfulizer and I go WAY back,” Mom said. “It took a long time to realize that *I may make a mistake, but that doesn't mean I am a mistake*. When you know you've done something wrong, you apologize, learn from it, and let it go.”



“The Awfulizer wants you to feel shame. Shame is that feeling you get when you make a mistake and think that it makes you a bad person. The Awfulizer plays the Shame Game to try to convince you that you are no good and no one likes you. And that, James, is a lie.”



The Awfulizer still tries to visit me sometimes and make me play the Shame Game. But now, any time I feel him tapping me on the shoulder, I turn into The Awesomizer.

I talk to my friends about how I'm feeling.



I talk to my parents and laugh about the silly things The Awfulizer said to them when they were kids.

I talk to my teachers and school counselor because they've had lots of practice helping kids learn to tune out The Awfulizer.

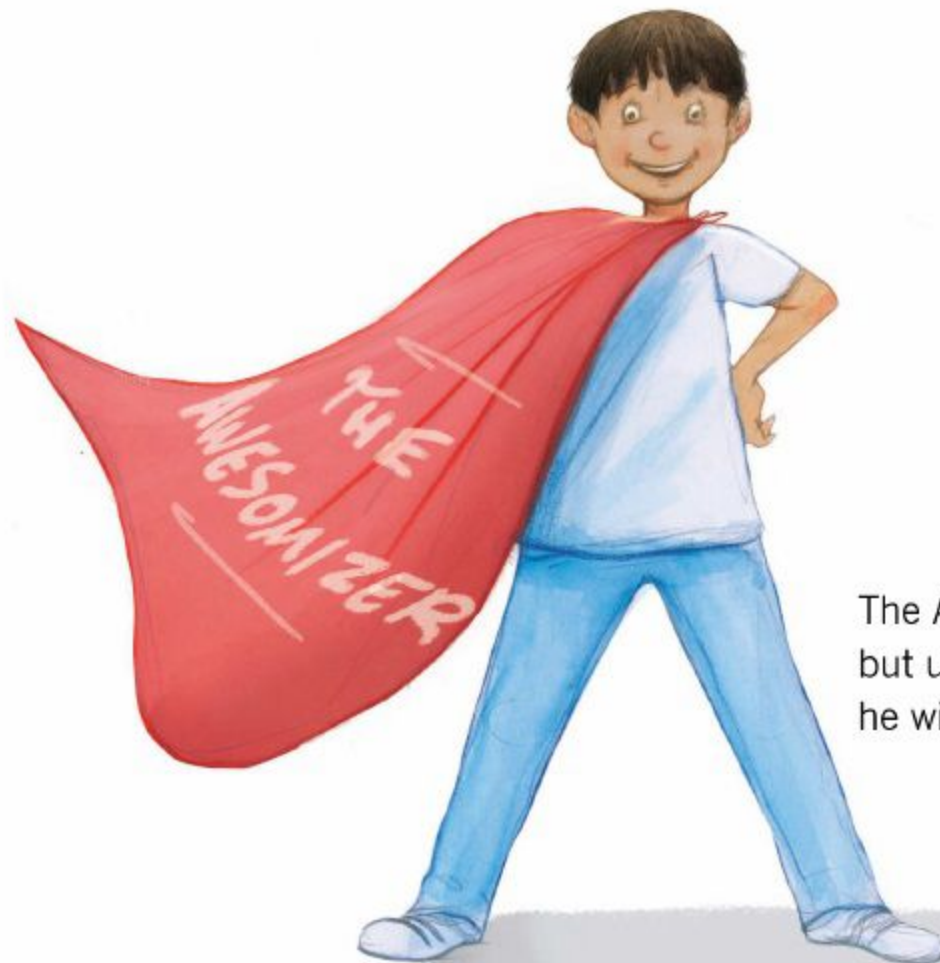


And I talk to him directly and tell him that his Shame Game is for the birds!



And most importantly, I talk to myself. I remind myself who I am. I am brave, strong, smart, and funny.

**I am James, The Awesomizer!**



The Awfulizer might be big and persistent, but up against The Awesomizer, he will always lose.

"*The Awfulizer* tells the story of that negative voice inside our heads which reminds us of our mistakes and shortcomings. As a teacher, I believe that this book has an important message that children (and adults) need to hear! Not only is the book a great starting point for a meaningful discussion, but it also includes helpful strategies for parents and teachers."

JENN LARSON @theteachernextdoor

## He was fluffy, with a giant nose, a black hat on his head, and breath that smelled like pickles.

In *The Awfulizer: Learning to Overcome the Shame Game*, author Kristin Maher gives shame a name and face, showing just how real and big it can be for children; how it keeps them feeling isolated and alone, and makes them question their self-worth.

"I feel like there's a monster in my head. And all he does is say awful things to me. He tells me all the things I am doing wrong and how I am wrong, and it makes me sad and scared."

Shame is a powerful emotion for children, and when they get sucked into the Shame Game and start believing lies about themselves—that they don't just MAKE mistakes, but they ARE a mistake—their world can become a dark place.

James' life changes the day he meets The Awfulizer, a strange monster who follows James everywhere he goes and reminds him of all the things he's done wrong.

When James finally tells his parents all about The Awfulizer, they help him understand that talking about his feelings gives him a super power. It turns him into The Awesomizer! And James realizes that even though The Awfulizer might be big and persistent, up against the Awesomizer, he will always lose.



truth tellers

speaking truth over  
negative emotions



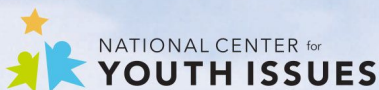
**Kristin Maher** is an advocate, writer, and speaker on topics dealing with negative emotions. Being on the client side of therapy gave Maher

tools for learning to regain control over negative emotions, which led her to write her first book. Aimed at young children, Maher teaches language and strategies for managing shame at its earliest stages. A major catalyst for writing the book was seeing the early signs of shame in her own children. She knew from her own experiences that having the right tools at the right time can prevent future struggles with shame and other limiting emotions. Maher has expanded her focus into a platform she now shares around the country through podcast, her website, and speaking engagements. She lives in Nashville with her husband Matt and their three children.



**Leigh Bagwell** most recently served as the Director of School Counseling Services at the Tennessee Department of

Education. She has led transformational work in school counseling throughout the state of Tennessee. Leigh has also shared her experiences and knowledge with school counselors and school counseling leaders in Georgia, Texas, Kentucky and Iowa as well as working with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA).



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