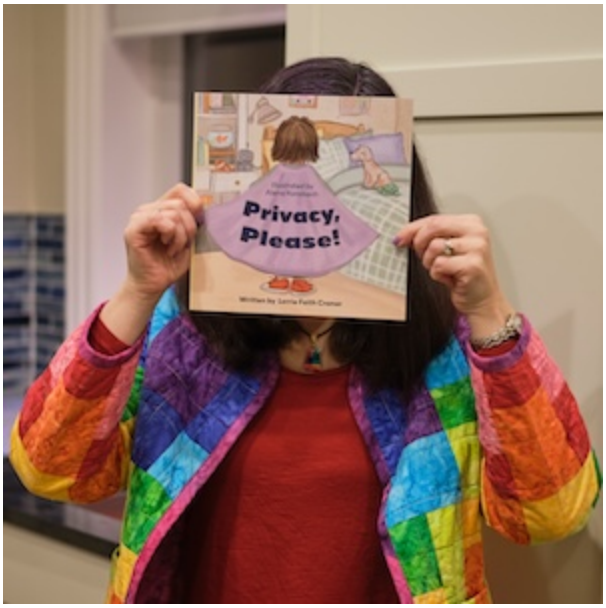
Privacy, Please! Discussion and Activity Guide



This guide is designed for parents, teachers, and other caregivers to gain insights and start discussions with young children.

Suggested discussion topics and activities for young children

Spot examples

Ask children to look for characters in the book who protect their privacy--or who might be invading someone else's.

On most pages of the book you might ask questions about characters protecting their privacy like: Who is protecting their privacy here? What are they doing to protect their privacy? Why do you think they want to protect their privacy? How do you think they are feeling right now? Do you ever [action character is taking to protect their privacy] to protect your privacy? Adults might talk about actions they take to protect their privacy, especially those that would be appropriate for the child to mimic.

On pages depicting privacy invasions, you might ask: Who is invading someone's privacy here? Who is having their privacy invaded? How do you think [the character having their privacy invaded] feels right now? Has anything like this ever happened to you? Adults might talk about situations where children invade their privacy and how it makes them feel.

Talk about feelings

How does it feel when someone comes into your space without asking? How does privacy help you feel calm or safe? Adults may talk about their feelings too, using examples relatable to children.

Practice asking for privacy

Talk about ways you can ask an adult or another child to let you have some privacy. You can offer some scenarios, for example: "Let's pretend you are tired of talking to people and you just want to be by yourself for a little while. What could you say to me [or another adult] to ask for privacy?" Or: "Let's pretend you are playing by yourself and [another child, maybe a sibling] comes and sits down next to you and you don't feel like playing with them right now. What could you say to them?"

Explore reasons for privacy

Talk about times when we might keep things private--like enjoying a surprise, sharing a secret with a friend, or having time alone to think. Ask children to talk about a time when they did each of these things. Adults may provide examples as well.

Find balance

Sometimes it feels good to share our thoughts or open our doors. How do we decide when we're ready? Ask children for examples of when they transitioned from their private place into a more public place. For example, if the child has already talked about going into a space to be alone, you could ask, "After you have been in [private place] for a while, how do you decide you are ready to come out?" For a child who likes to create art or practice skills without people watching, ask a question like, "How do you decide you are ready to show us your pictures [or demonstrate a particular skill]?"

Create privacy together

Even if young children can't close doors for safety reasons, they can still find small ways to have privacy--like sitting in a quiet reading nook, listening to music with headphones, or taking a few deep breaths alone. Think about ways to help children create private spaces in your environment and discuss which options they might like to try next time they want to have some privacy.

Draw a picture

I've collected hundreds of pictures after giving people the prompt: "What does privacy mean to you? Draw a picture." You can see my collection at. You can use this prompt with young children, or try one of these prompts:

- Draw a picture of what privacy means to you
- Draw a picture of something you do when you want privacy
- Draw a picture of a place where you have privacy
- Draw a picture of someone invading someone else's privacy
- Draw a picture of an animal protecting their privacy

Make a door hanger

Children can make door hangers like the door hangers you find in hotels to indicate when they want privacy and when they want to play.

Page-by-page guide

p. 3-5

I introduce the concept of privacy to young children as simply wanting to be alone and not wanting to be seen, heard, or touched. I suggest something a child can say to request privacy ("I want to be alone now. Can I have some privacy, please!"), and offer some ways to have privacy (going to their room, reading a book, listening to music on headphones, hiding under a blanket, closing the blinds). You can point out to children what the child in the book is doing to gain privacy. You can also ask them how they feel when they want privacy and in what

ways they feel different when they are able to have some privacy. Talk about using private spaces as a way to calm down or release negative emotions. Ask children to practice asking for privacy.

Caregivers can talk about appropriate ways to request privacy and places a child can go in their home or school to have privacy. Not all children have their own bedrooms, and at school, it might not be possible for a child to leave the classroom. However, adults can help identify privacy zones within their spaces: for example, a privacy corner, a privacy chair, or a table that a child can sit under. A blanket, scarf, hoodie, or cape may serve as a barrier between a child and other people in the room. Children may be able to create more of a feeling of being alone by facing a wall with their back to other people or putting on headphones. Adults may be able to help a child preserve their privacy by staying nearby but keeping their back turned so the child does not feel like they are being constantly watched.

p. 6

Siblings are often seen as the greatest privacy invaders by children who have them. However, children may experience similar invasions in settings with unrelated kids who may intrude on their play space, for example, at school or at a playground. This page acknowledges the frustrating feeling of having one's space invaded and suggests appropriate ways to handle this. Adults may talk about boundaries and suggest other ways for children to handle unwanted intrusions on personal space in their setting. This is also a good opportunity for discussing how other children or adults may feel when a child invades their privacy, and help children understand why they should show respect for other people's desires for privacy and personal space.

p. 7-8, 11

These pages introduce the idea that we can have privacy together with another person. First, the child invites their friend into their private space and shares secrets with their friend. Similarly, on page 11, the child talks to a teacher at school in private, away from other children. Caregivers might ask children to talk about who the special people are in their lives that they

like to share fun secrets with (special songs, silly jokes, secret password to the clubhouse, etc.), as well as what they can do when they want to talk to an adult without other people hearing the conversation.

p. 9-10

These pages acknowledge that even when we enjoy playing with our friends, sometimes we need a break to be alone. Adults can offer examples about what they do when they need to take a break from other people, and ask children to talk about what they like to do when they take a break. You can also talk about giving friends space and respecting their desire to play by themselves sometimes.

p. 12-13

These pages depict the need people may have for privacy during creative endeavors. It is natural for people not to want to share their first drafts with others or to let people watch them when they are learning a new skill. Some people don't mind others watching them as they create or practice, but other people feel self-conscious and have trouble being creative or practicing while being watched. In the classroom, children are generally encouraged to share and talk about their creative work. Here, we acknowledge that some children (and adults) may want time to create privately and may want to choose when they are ready to share. Adults can discuss how children can gain some privacy for creative endeavors within the space of their school or home environment, as well as why it is fun to share our creations when we are ready.

p. 14-17

These pages focus on bodily privacy. While a lot more could be said about bodily autonomy, I only address issues in this book related to bathrooms and changing clothes. This is a bit tricky with this age group, as four-year-olds may not yet mind if other people see their bodies, and they may be used to changing or going to the bathroom in front

of adults. Six-year-olds, on the other hand, are more likely to want privacy in the bathroom and while changing.

The discussion here may be different depending on the age of the children in the audience and whether the discussion is happening at home or at school. Pre-school bathrooms often do not have doors, and generally, adults are required to be present with children when they go to the bathroom at school. Teachers may want to talk about practices at their school, such as turning around when a child is on the toilet unless the child requests assistance. At home, caregivers might want to talk about closing bathroom doors. In addition, they may want to talk about giving adults privacy in the bathroom. The discussion might also include changing into bathing suits at the pool or beach, and trying on clothes in stores if these activities are relevant.

I've discovered that bathrooms are a great way to discuss privacy with both children and adults. In fact, I use bathroom examples extensively in my college and executive education courses! Check out my potty page to learn more.

p. 18-19

These pages introduce the idea that privacy can actually be fun. The child in the book puts on a fun costume with a disguise. Adults may talk about other ways that privacy can be fun. For example, adults may wrap presents without kids watching so that children will be surprised when they unwrap their gifts. Adults can talk about how much fun it is to be surprised.

p. 20-23

These pages discuss online privacy. This book is targeted at 4-to-6-year-olds, who are likely not spending a lot of time online yet. Chances are they will be spending more time online within a couple of years, so it is useful to start discussing basic online privacy issues. Here, we introduce the concepts of lock screens and passwords, as well as not sharing personal information online. Adults should tailor this

discussion based on the type of online access children have at home or school and introduce other age-appropriate online safety concepts.

I also address the idea that children should have agency to decide when they want their photos taken. This is a little bit tricky as there are many situations in our modern world when we have little or no choice about having our photos taken. In addition, school picture days and family group photos may not be easy for a child to opt out of. An avid photographer myself, I am sometimes conflicted between wanting to take my kids' photos and respecting their desire not to have their photos taken. My recommendation is to explain to children that there are times when we have to have our photo taken, for example, adults have to get their photos taken for their driver's licenses if they want to drive a car. There are also times when we might not really want to have our photos taken, but we do it to make our family or friends happy -- for example, a big family photo at a holiday dinner or a class photo at school. But there are other times when a photo is entirely optional. Adults might explain why they want to take a photo (e.g., "Grandma would love to see how you look all dressed up," or "Your parents would like to see the project you are working on at school today") and offer opportunities for children to choose when they are ready for a photo and what is included (e.g., "Would you rather take the photo after lunch?" or "Would you like to show off your painting in the photo instead of your playdough?" or "Where would you like to stand for this photo?"). But adults should respect a child's desire not to be photographed or their requests that the photo not be shared. You might ask the child who it is ok to share the photo with or let them look at the photo and then decide.

A lot has been written about sharing content related to children on social media. When parents do this, it is sometimes called sharenting. There are many opinions about what threat this poses and whether it is ever safe. My advice is to know the audience for anything you share online about your children. The safest way to share is to send photos directly to the people you want to see them (e.g., via email or text message). You could also put photos and videos in an online album and share the album with specific family and friends -- but make sure you have not accidentally made your album public. If you choose to share photos of children on social media, make sure you do not share them publicly. On Facebook, for example, share only with friends, and make sure your friends list is limited to people

you actually know. You should also avoid sharing photos of other people's children without permission, and you may need to crop them out of group photos. Also, be aware that even if a child's face is not in the photo or has been covered with a sticker or emoji, there may be other things in the photo that could identify the child (house number, license plates, the child's coat and backpack, etc.) so you may still want to limit sharing to people you know personally.

p. 24

This page reminds us to take a break from technology and find privacy outside. Adults might talk to children about where they can find privacy outside. In this picture, the child is playing in a fenced-in backyard. A family that goes on hikes in the woods or canoeing on a lake might talk about privacy in natural environments. While this book is not focused on limiting screen time, this is a good opportunity to bring that up too.

p. 25-27

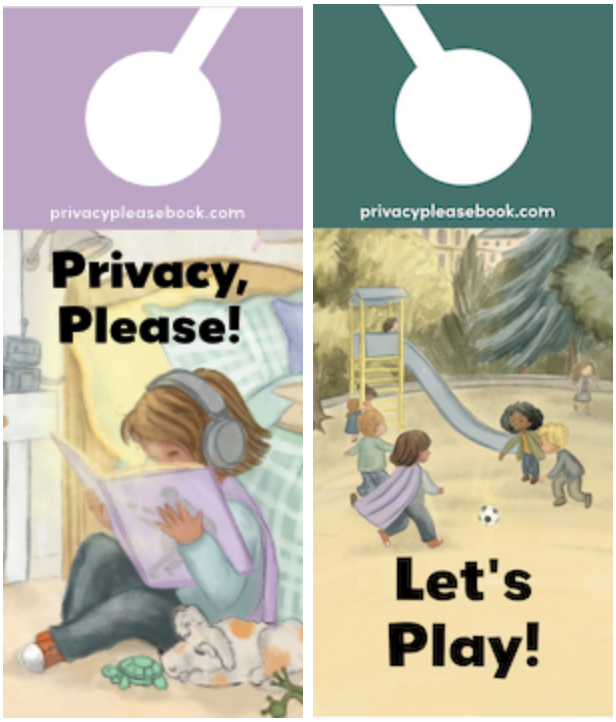
These pages discuss privacy from the perspective of animals and then ask the child to reflect on what they do when they want privacy. Asking children where animals find privacy is a good way to stimulate discussion. You can talk about family or classroom pets, animals at the zoo, or animals in the wild. Some animals find places to hide, some climb trees or fly, some dig holes and burrow, and some use their shells for protection or their coloring as camouflage to blend into their environment. Pet goldfish have more difficulty hiding than many other animals because they live in a glass bowl. But children may point to rocks or plants in the bowl that can afford the goldfish some privacy. Adults can also ask how the goldfish might feel about not having much privacy.

The final page is a natural place for discussion of the question: "What do you do when you want privacy?" This might be accompanied by a drawing activity.

Privacy, Please!
Door Hanger Activity Guide

You've probably seen door hangers in hotels to signal that you don't want to be disturbed by the hotel staff. Now your child can have their own door hanger to use at home! Children can use them to signal when they want some quiet time to themselves, and turn them around when they are ready to play. Older siblings and adults might also use them to signal that they need some quiet time too!

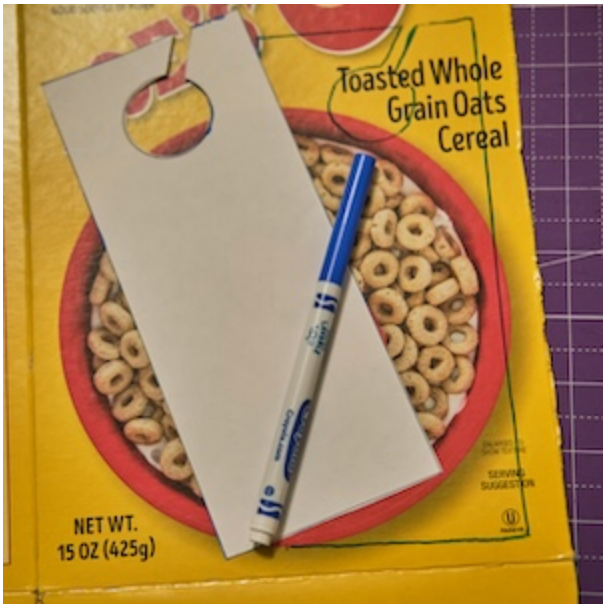
We've designed a door hanger with illustrations from the book that Lorrie will be handing out at events. You can print this on your own printer and make your own hanger at home, or your child can design their own! We use colors and images to make the privacy side and play side recognizable without the need to read the words.

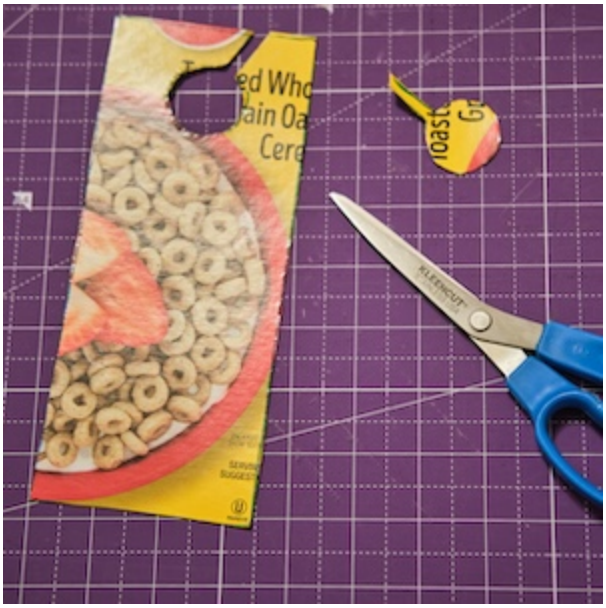


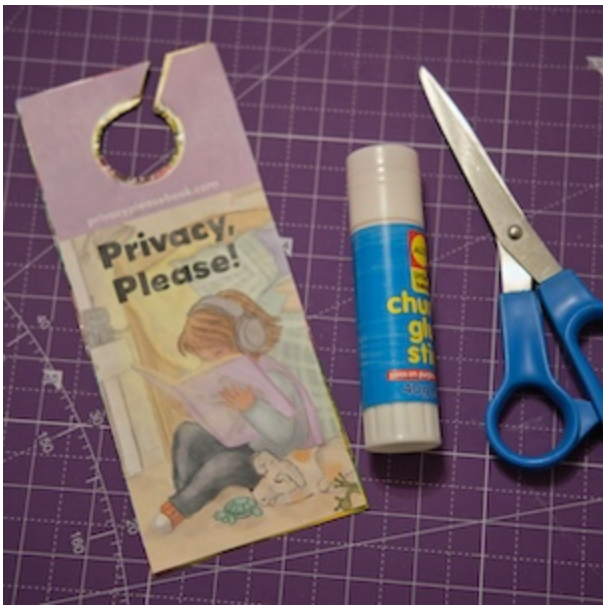
How to make your own door hanger

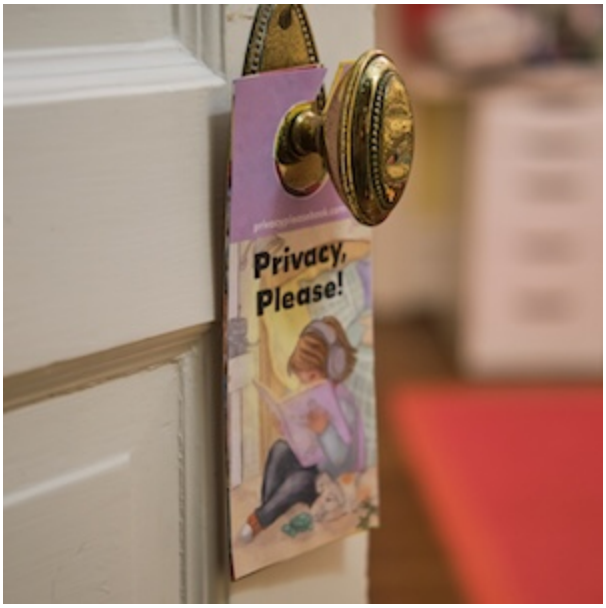
Use heavy paper, poster board, or cardboard to cut out a door hanger with a hook or notch for the doorknob. A cereal box works well. You can print our blank door tag template, cut it out and trace it on your cardboard.

Print our illustrated door tag, cut it out, and tape or glue it to the front and back of your door tag.



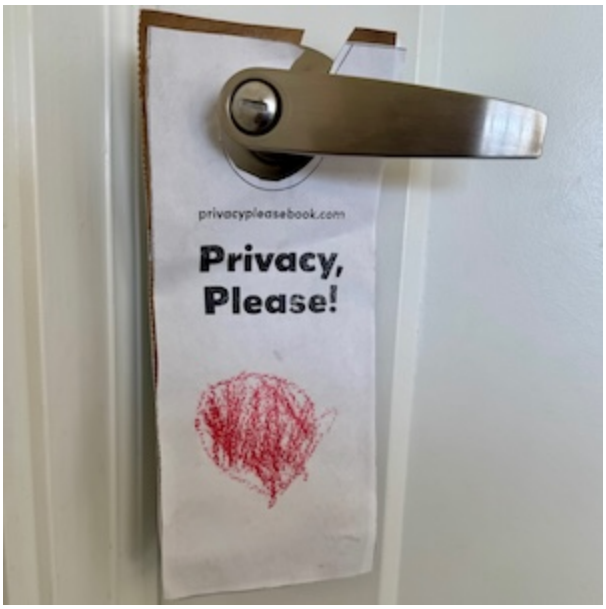






To involve children in a more creative project, print our door hanger that has words but no illustrations. Then ask children to draw their own pictures of privacy and play. When they're done, let them cut out their illustrations (or help them cut them out) and tape or glue them to the front and back of your door hanger.

A young friend drew a red light and green light on his door hanger, as shown below. His older brother also used a red/green theme but drew his door locked and unlocked. Their mother reported that after they made these door hangers, they flipped them repeatedly on their shared bedroom door, mostly to get privacy from their baby brother.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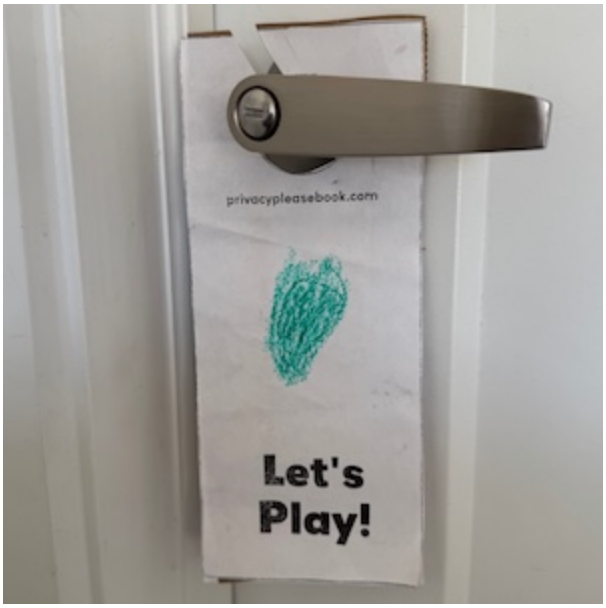
Privacy,
Please!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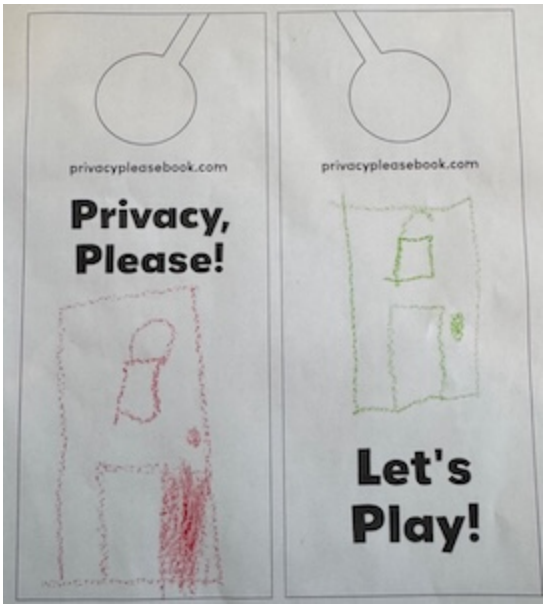
Let's
Play!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Let's
Play!

This Thing
My public diary, feel free to listen in…

Why I wrote a book about privacy for 4-to-6-year-olds

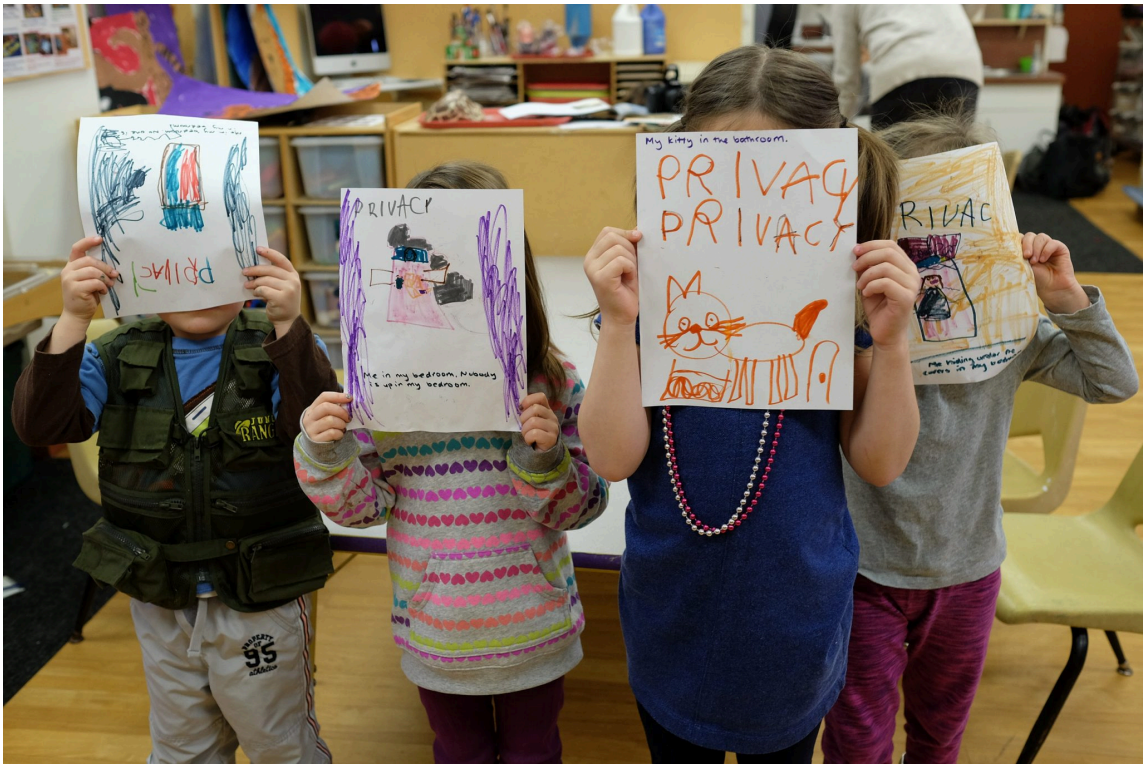
Posted on **December 1, 2025** Lorrie Faith Cranor

I am ridiculously excited about my latest project: a children's picture book about privacy called *Privacy, Please!* You can check it out and order a copy at privacypleasebook.com.

The idea for the book

Let me tell you about how this book came to be…. I decided to write this book about a year ago, in Fall 2024. The Privacy Engineering masters program at CMU was planning an International Data Privacy Day 2025 event at the Carnegie Library in Oakland, and I asked the librarians if I could read privacy books to kids during a preschool story time. The librarians agreed, but did not have any suggestions for privacy-related picture books to read. They suggested a book on limiting screen time, and I found some books on bodily privacy and other very narrow aspects of privacy. I suggested a story for 7-12 year olds about the harms of surveillance, *The Eyemonger*, written by privacy law scholar Daniel J. Solove. The librarians thought it would be too long and too scary for preschoolers. I reached out to Dan and other privacy professionals in search of a book on privacy four younger children. But nobody had any good suggestions.

Back in 2014, I had worked on a project in which I asked people to draw pictures of what privacy means to them. I visited schools and community events, asked my friends, and even bought some drawings from crowd workers. I built a website called Privacy Illustrated that now has hundreds of these drawings. A few years later, my students systematically analyzed the drawings and wrote a research paper about the trends they observed. I've tagged the Privacy Illustrated drawings with some metadata about their content and the age of the artists. So while I was pondering picture books about privacy, I took a look at the drawings from some of our youngest contributors to see what privacy meant to them.



— Kindergarten students with their drawings of privacy at CMU Children's School

I saw drawings of young children in their rooms, snuggled under blankets, hiding from their siblings, playing with friends in a private space, and enjoying privacy in the bathroom (interestingly, many adults also drew bathroom pictures!). I saw that privacy was a concept that young children seem to begin to understand in preschool, and I wanted to write a book to help them make sense of it.

As a parent of three (now young adult) kids, I've also observed that young children sometimes need a "time out" and that they can benefit from some private time to themselves. Giving them the words to ask for privacy rather than waiting for it to be imposed on them can be helpful. I'm hoping that the examples of how the characters in the book achieve privacy can stimulate discussion between children and adults and help young children find appropriate ways to achieve privacy in their own lives. I also hope that the adults reading this book to children will find something to take away from it!

As a privacy researcher who often focuses on online privacy issues, I thought about including these in the book. However, I realized that young children have limited online interactions, so I was tempted to leave online issues out altogether. But I also realized that some mention of online privacy issues could help prepare children for going online, and it could be useful in educating the adults in their lives to think about online privacy issues. In the end, I touch only lightly on online privacy, but in ways that I hope will be relatable to young children and that may lead to more conversations as children grow.

Workshopping early drafts

I wrote the text for a first draft of a book in which a young narrator talks about privacy at home, at school, and out in the world. I found images from the Privacy Illustrated collection to illustrate some of the pages, and then tried using some generative AI tools to fill in what was missing. I quickly realized that to get the sort of look and feel I was after, I would need to hire an illustrator, but the images that I had were useful as

a placeholder to start getting some initial feedback on my draft. I showed my draft to my young adult children and other family members and they were all enthusiastic about it. I shared the draft with some friends who have young children, and even borrowed a couple of children to read it to, and reviews were positive.

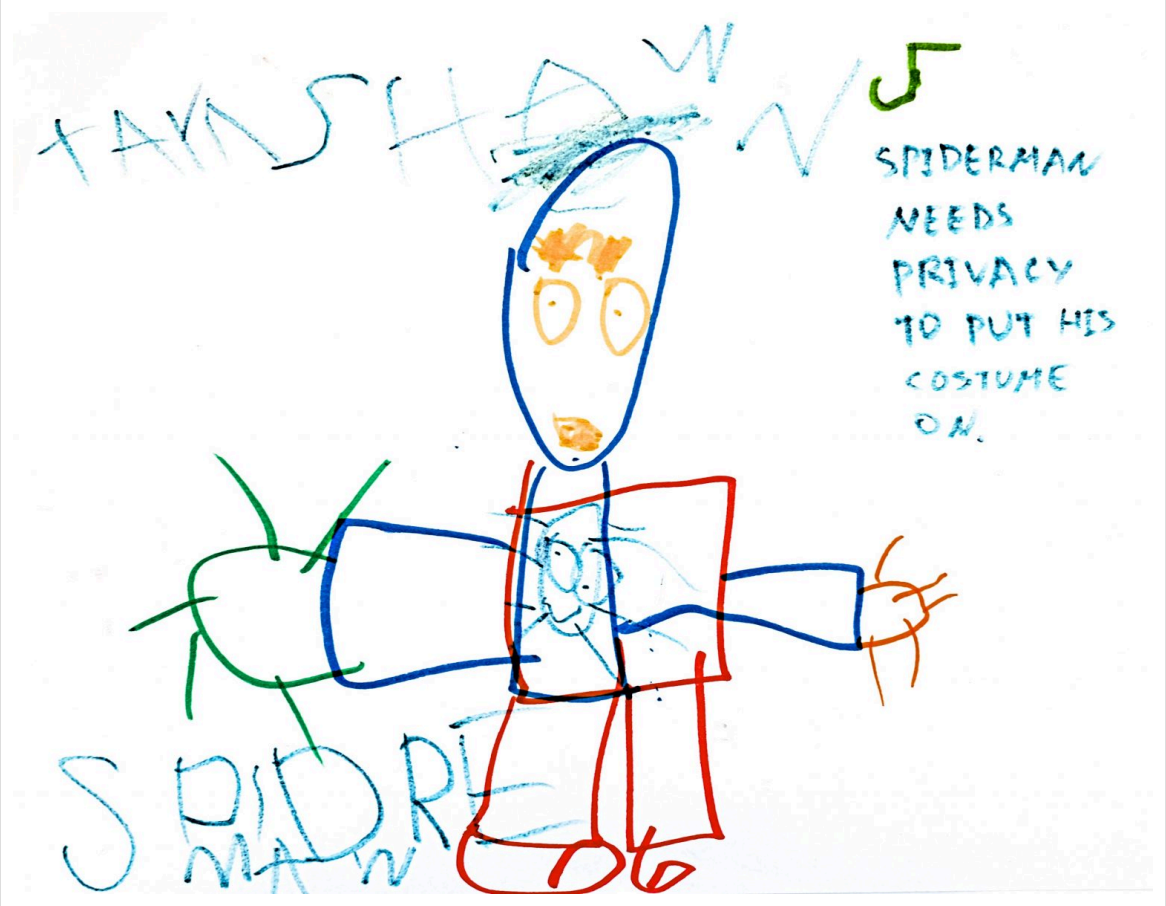
I printed out my book draft and put it in a loose-leaf binder to read on Privacy Day at the library. I also brought *The Eyemonger* to read. The children and parents enjoyed both books. I discovered that preschoolers will sit through *The Eyemonger,* and those I read to did not find it scary at all. While the adults thought the character who looks like a dinosaur with 1000 eyes was rather creepy, my young audience thought he was kind of cool. That said, I think the older kids learned more from the *Eyemonger* book than the younger ones, and they seemed to be pretty engaged with my book. The parents I talked with were all very impressed with my book and encouraged me to finish it and get it published. The kids seemed to like my book, and seemed to especially like the animals in the book. But one child told me it wasn't a real book because it didn't have a properly illustrated cover. I decided to keep working on it and turn it into a "real book."

— Here I am reading an early draft of Privacy Please to children and parents at the Carnegie Library in Oakland.

I reached out to the Carnegie Mellon Children's School (the lab school at CMU where my three kids all attended preschool and kindergarten) and asked if I could workshop my book with their educators. They agreed, and I was delighted to spend an hour with them a few weeks later. The teachers gave me some great feedback about the flow of the story. They suggested adding some specific phrases children could say to ask for privacy. And they reminded me that young children are limited in the amount of privacy they can realistically achieve because they are almost constantly under adult supervision. This is especially true in preschools, which often don't have bathroom doors. The teachers shared some of their

approaches to offering privacy to children while still being able to supervise them. I made substantial revisions to the book after my session at the Children's School.

I made several other changes to the book based on feedback from multiple people. I shortened it a bit, reducing three outdoor privacy scenarios to one, removing a page about parents wrapping gifts in private, and tightening up some of the wording. In early drafts, the protagonist's dog finds privacy in a dog house, but a friend pointed out that these days, dogs are more likely to find privacy under beds, so I updated the book accordingly. I originally included a page about superheroes going into phone booths to put on their costumes, but today's kids have never seen a phone booth, and apparently, superheroes can now put on their costumes at the touch of a button. Nonetheless, I just couldn't let the superhero costume concept go, as it was inspired by an adorable drawing from a five-year-old who explained that Spiderman needs privacy to put his costume on. In the final version the protagonist, who wears a purple cape throughout the book, hides in a closet to change into a superhero costume.



— A kindergartener drew this picture in 2014 and explained, "Spiderman needs privacy to hut his costume on."

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