

# Sticks and Stones

By Heidi Poelman

(Based on a true story)

*"I'm trying to be like Jesus; ... in all that I do and say"*  
(Children's Songbook, 78).

Charlie dropped the soccer ball on the grass and looked at Alex. "First one to five wins!"

Alex grinned. He liked the challenge of playing against his older brother. "You're on!" He picked up the ball

yard. "Score!" he shouted.

The boys kicked the ball around, running and laughing. Soon Charlie had four points and Alex had two.

"This is it," Charlie said. "One more point and I win." He raced around Alex, dribbled a few feet, and kicked the ball hard. It bounced off the fence and soared into the goal. "That's five! I win!"

"Wait, hold on," Alex said, running to catch up. "You hit the fence. That's out of bounds. It doesn't count."

"Oh, come on! We never said that," Charlie said, tossing the ball in his hands.

"But it's *out*," Alex repeated. "You can't do that. You're cheating."

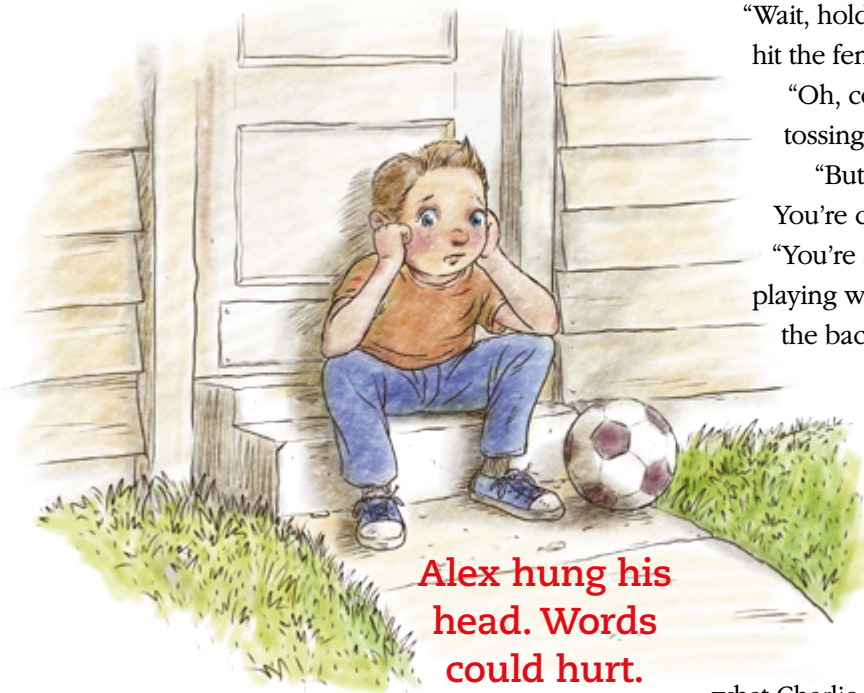
"You're such a baby," Charlie said. "I don't even like playing with you." He dropped the ball and walked in the back door to their house.

"Oh, yeah?" Alex called after him. "Well, sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me!"

Alex sat down on the back steps and hung his head. Why had Charlie said that? They loved playing together outside. At least, Alex thought they did. He felt his stomach tighten as he remembered what Charlie had said. Words *could* hurt.

After a few minutes Alex tried to think about what Jesus would do. When people were unkind to Jesus, He was always kind to them. But it was hard! *It was Charlie's fault!* Alex thought. *I didn't do anything wrong!*

Alex kicked the ball around the yard by himself as he thought. Finally he glanced down at the ball, then looked at the house. It really wasn't much fun playing on his own. He took a deep breath.



**Alex hung his head. Words could hurt.**

and threw it to the middle of the yard. Charlie ran and kicked it between the two trees in the back.

"That's one!" Charlie shouted.

Alex laughed and ran for the ball. He kicked it down the yard, sidestepped Charlie, dribbled left, then right, and kicked hard toward the net at the other end of the



He opened the back door and walked upstairs to Charlie's room. He peeked inside. Charlie was on his bed reading a book.

"Hey," Alex said.

"Hey," Charlie replied, staring at his book.

"Do you want to finish our game?"

Charlie looked up. "I guess so." He set his book down and shrugged. "Maybe I could take back that last goal and not hit the fence again."

Alex smiled. "OK."

The two boys walked down the stairs and went back outside.

"I'm sorry I said what I did," Charlie said. "I do like playing with you."

"I know," Alex said. "Thanks." He smiled and kicked the ball down the yard. He had never realized what a little kindness could do. ♦

The author lives in Utah, USA.

Turn the page for an activity to go with this story! 



My friend Sofia wanted to play with me, and I promised I would. Then I was invited to a birthday party. It sounded like it would be fun. But I thought it over and felt that I shouldn't disappoint Sofia, so I decided to play with her instead.

**Savanna S., age 10, São Paulo, Brazil**

