

Here for Each Other

HELPING FAMILIES DURING AND AFTER EMERGENCIES



Wildfire Family Guide

ADVISORS

- » American Red Cross Scientific Advisory Council
- » Angela D. Mickalide, PhD, MCHES, Emergency Medical Services for Children National Resource Center, Children's National Health System
- » Child Mind Institute's Stress and Resilience Program
- » Myla Harrison, MD, MPH, Medical Director, Bureau of Children, Youth and Families, NYC Department of Mental Health & Hygiene

[Sesame.org/Emergencies](https://www.sesame.org/emergencies)



You have each other. You bring your children comfort and make them feel safe. Your love helps them overcome obstacles. During and after a wildfire, it is your support that soothes your children and allows them to see that everything is going to be okay.

To help you during and after an emergency, we've developed "**Here for Each Other.**" This family guide offers tips and activities to do with your child that offer comfort and assurance.

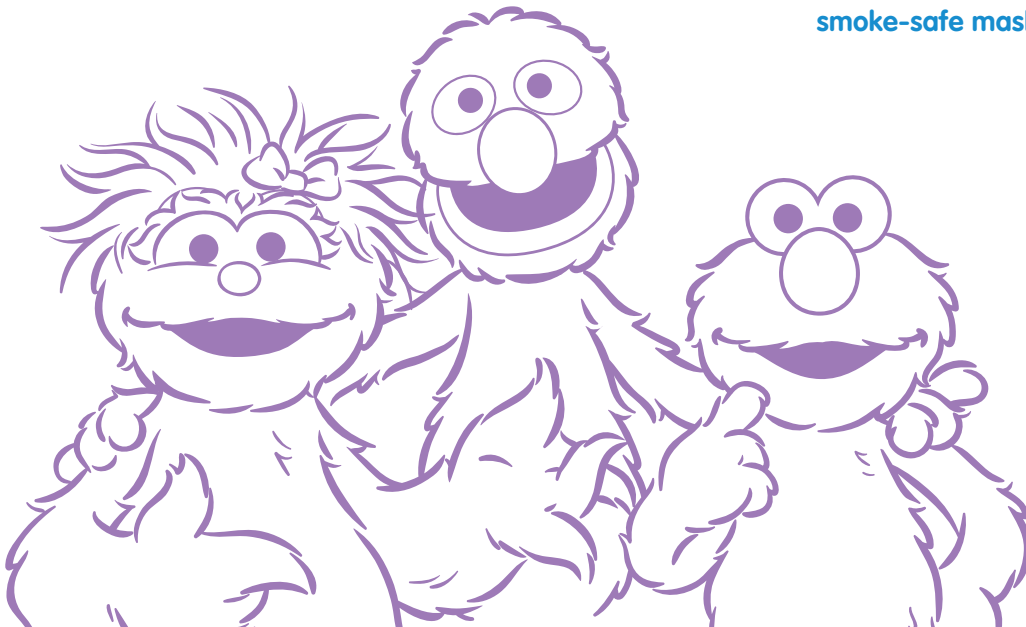
We hope some of these ideas can help you create a soothing environment that will allow both you and your child to look toward sunnier days to come. And remember, you are not alone. **We are here for each other!**

WHAT HAPPENED?

There was a wildfire. A wildfire is a fire that starts outside—in any place that has trees, grass, bushes, or plants—and can spread to other places. Fire is very hot and bright and it makes smoke. Fire burns anything it touches. Wildfires can take time to put out.

SAFETY FIRST

- » **Stay informed about what is happening. Follow officials' recommendations.**
- » **If your air quality is affected, officials may recommend staying inside more. If you have to go out on a high-risk day, consider moving at a slower pace or wearing a smoke-safe mask like an N95 respirator.**



For more information and tips to help your family recover from an emergency, visit [Sesame.org/Emergencies](https://www.sesame.org/emergencies)

Comfort and Reassurance

During and after a wildfire, children need to feel secure. While it may be challenging, here are some simple ways to create a calm environment for your child:

Provide Comfort

Assure your children that they are safe and loved. Let them know that you will take care of them. Young children need physical comfort, so hold hands and snuggle often. Holding a comfort item, like a blanket or toy, may also help.

Model Healthy Ways of Coping

During and after a disaster, children look to the adults around them to see how they should feel and react. As much as possible, try to stay calm. Encouraging your child to talk about their feelings is also very important.

Try to Keep One Routine

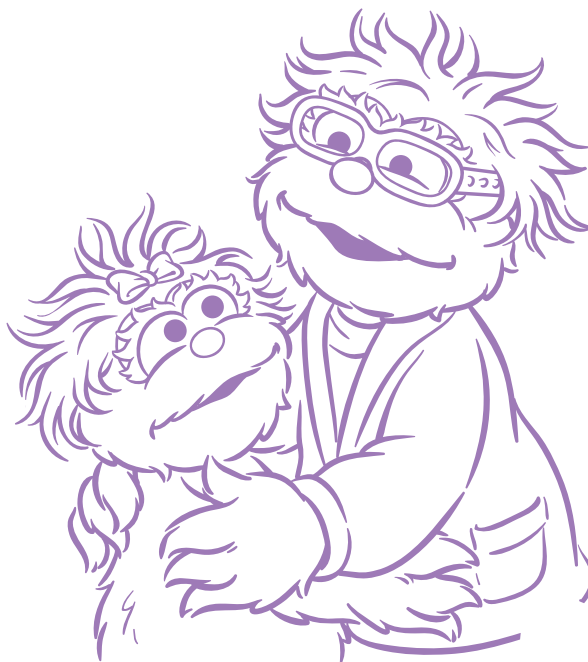
There is comfort in the familiar, especially after a disaster. Choose at least one routine that you can keep even if your situation or location changed. Simple activities that your child can look forward to each day can give them a sense of control, such as extra cuddles every morning or the same lullaby every night.

Create a Safety Net

Simply seeing or overhearing something that reminds your child of the disaster can trigger feelings of fear or sadness. Try to surround them with positive conversations and activities. Remind them that special helpers, like firefighters, are working hard to put out the fires as quickly as possible—and to keep us all safe.

Monitor the Media

Avoid your child seeing repeated images of the disaster and its damage as young children may think the event is happening over and over, in real time. If you think your child might have seen or heard something, ask them about it. Correct inaccurate information and let them express their thoughts and emotions.



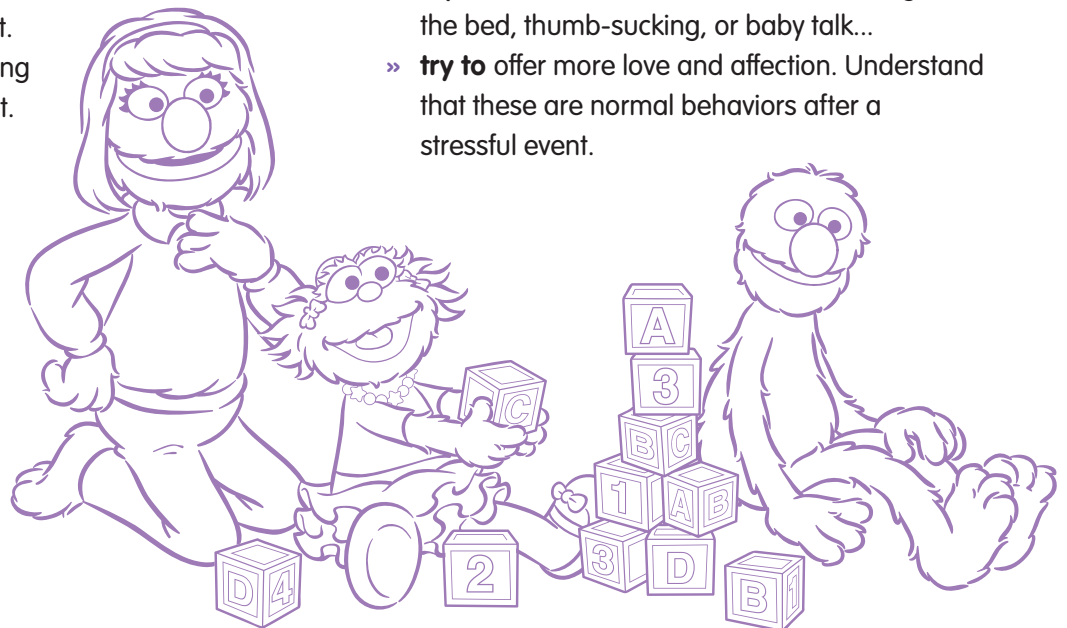
For more information and tips to help your family recover from an emergency, visit [Sesame.org/Emergencies](https://www.sesame.org/emergencies)

Watch and Listen

It is common for children to show signs of stress during or immediately after a disaster. If changes in behavior persist or appear much later or affect your child's everyday life, it might be time to seek professional help. Below are some common reactions and helpful ways to respond.

♥ Looking for Signs of Stress

- » **If you observe** unusual clinging or fear of being alone...
- » **try to** use gentle words and reassure them that you will keep them safe. Offer a comfort item like a toy or blanket. If they are fearful of separating, remind them that you always come back and let them know when you will return.
- » **If you observe** fear that the disaster will happen again...
- » **try to** keep your children away from the news or other reminders of the disaster. Remind them that they are safe with you.
- » **If you observe** trouble sleeping...
- » **try to** keep a consistent routine to provide comfort. Read a favorite story or sing a favorite song each night. Simple breathing or a massage may also help.
- » **If you observe** children are less open, verbal, or exhibiting unusually introverted behavior...
- » **try to** ask how they are feeling and provide an opportunity for discussion or for them to ask questions. Also, offer other ways for them to express themselves, such as drawing.
- » **If you observe** more frequent outbursts and tantrums...
- » **try to** describe their feelings with words, such as angry, sad, scared, or worried. Provide an outlet by allowing them to play or by going for a walk together. Keeping routines can also help prevent tantrums.
- » **If you observe** more or a return to wetting the bed, thumb-sucking, or baby talk...
- » **try to** offer more love and affection. Understand that these are normal behaviors after a stressful event.



For more information and tips to help your family recover from an emergency, visit [Sesame.org/Emergencies](https://www.sesame.org/emergencies)

Questions and Answers

Your children need to know it's okay to ask questions at their own pace. The following are some common questions they might have and comforting ways to respond:

What Happened?

There is/was a wildfire. I know it can feel scary, and I'm here to take care of you and keep us safe. A wildfire is a fire that starts outside—in any place that has trees, grass, bushes, or plants—and can spread to places people live, like homes or buildings. Wildfires also make smoke that isn't safe for people to breathe. We can't always know where and when a wildfire might start or spread. That's why we and our special helpers have a plan. If it comes near where we live, we might have to leave for a little while to stay safe. We also may have to stay inside more or wear a mask to protect from smoke.

Will We Be Okay?

Yes, we will be okay. I'm doing things to make sure we are safe and make things better for our family. Look around: there are many helpers working hard to make sure we will be okay.

Why Did This Happen? Did We Do Something Bad?

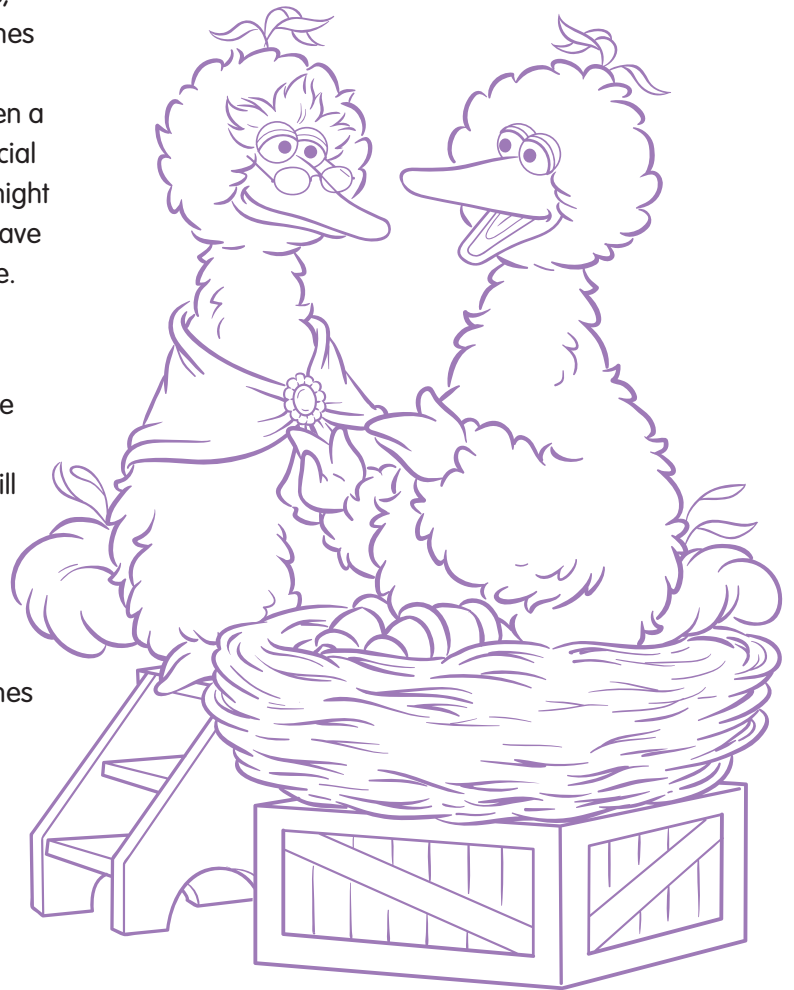
We didn't do anything bad to make this happen. Sometimes things happen that are out of our control, but we will get through it together.

Who Will Take Care of Me?

I will take care of you. I'm going to do everything I can to make sure you have what you need. There are also other people who can help.

When Can We Go Home?

I don't know when we can go home. I wish we could go home, too. But what I do know is that we are still a family and that home is wherever we are together.



There are questions you may not have an answer to. It's okay to be honest and say, "I don't know." You can follow up by saying, "But I know that I love you and I'm going to keep you safe."

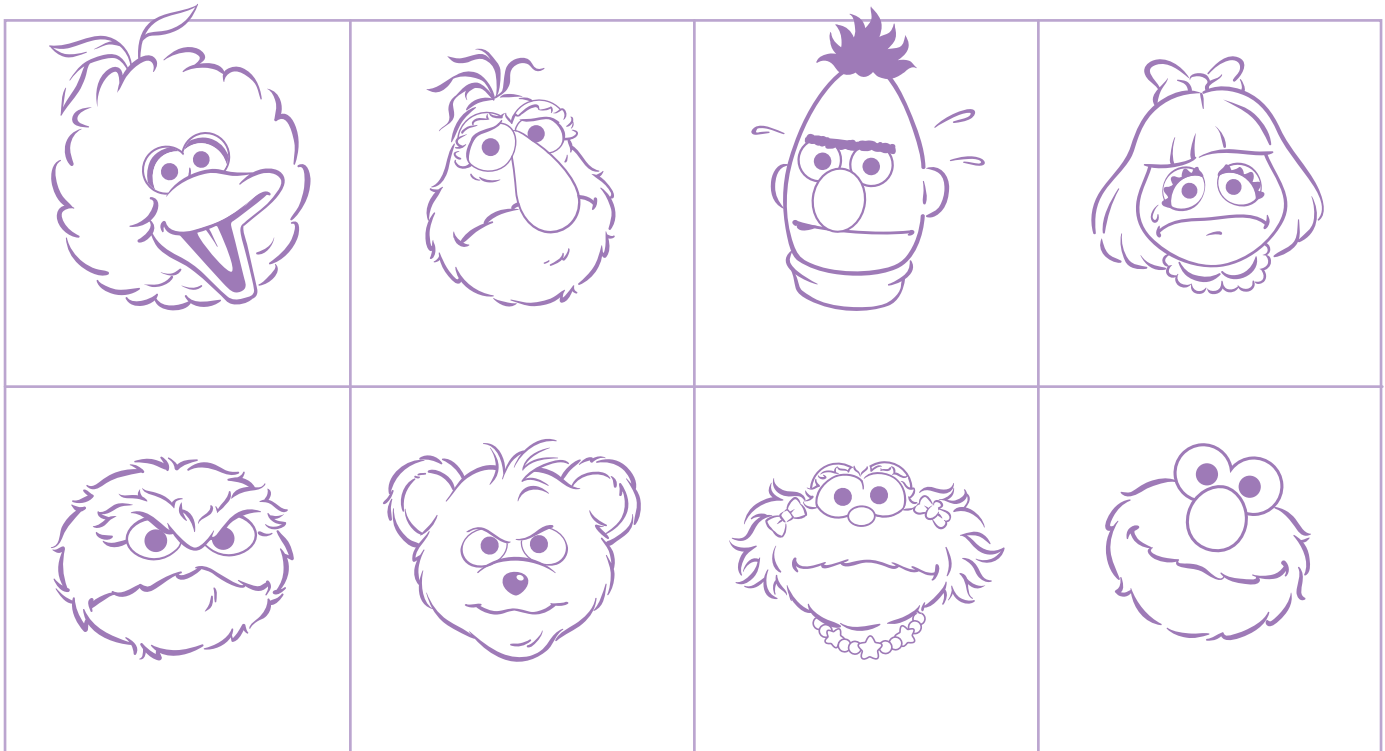
For more information and tips to help your family recover from an emergency, visit [Sesame.org/Emergencies](https://www.sesame.org/emergencies)

Big Feelings

During and after a wildfire, children may have some big feelings that come and go in waves. You can help by giving children words to name their emotions and by asking questions that encourage them to open up. Let them know that these feelings are normal and that it's okay to talk about their feelings. Help them think about what could make them feel better.

How Do You Feel?

Show your children these feelings faces, and ask them to point to one that matches how they're feeling. You might say, "I see you're pointing to the frustrated face. Why do you feel frustrated?"



Some children may talk about their feelings; others may express themselves through art or play. This gives your child a variety of ways to share their thoughts and feelings with you.

For more information and tips to help your family recover from an emergency, visit [Sesame.org/Emergencies](https://www.sesame.org/emergencies)

We Have Each Other

Here are some ways to support one another and move forward together during and after an emergency:



Spend Time Together

Simply laughing, moving, and playing together can help children feel safe. Try drawing a picture or singing a song.



Look for the Helpers

Help your children focus on all the helpers around them. Do they notice the police officers, firefighters, utility workers, doctors, nurses, or volunteers? It can be reassuring to know that there are many people working to make things better.

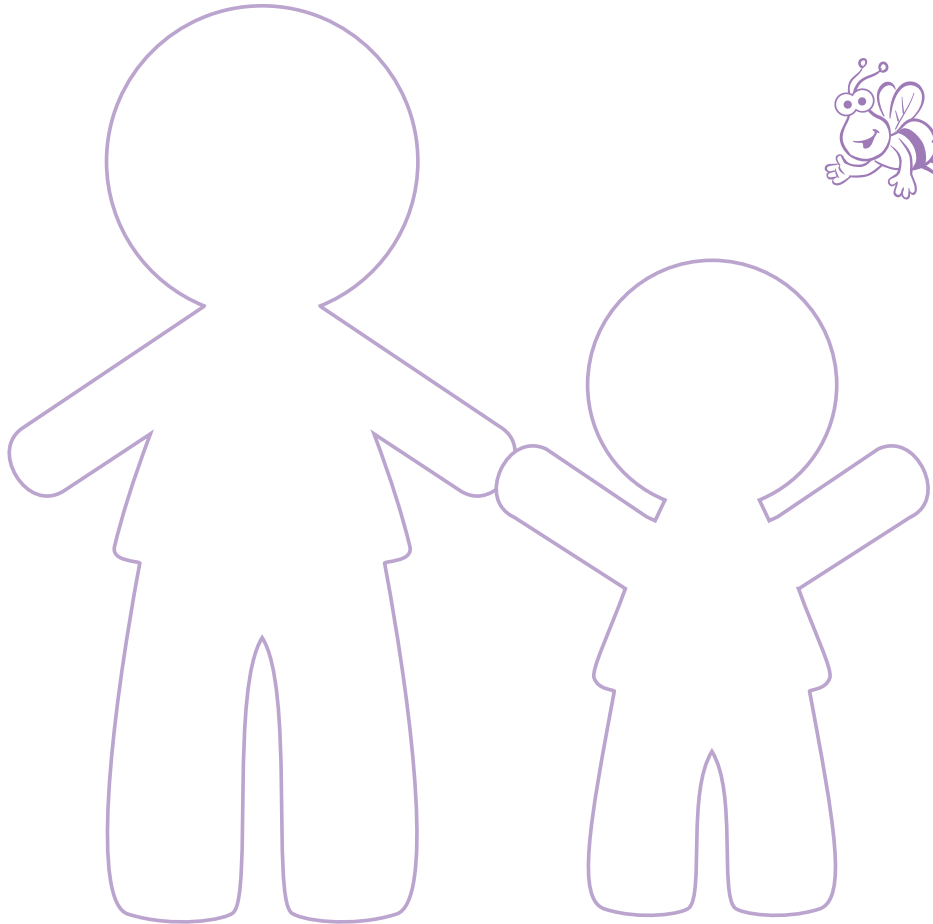


Empower Your Child

Give them simple responsibilities or choices to help them maintain a sense of control. If your child has been affected indirectly, encourage them to help others. Perhaps they can save coins to donate or write cards to those in need.

You are not alone. Look for the helpers all around you. They are there to keep you safe and sound. Think of someone who has helped you—a friend, neighbor, firefighter, police officer, nurse, emergency responder, or teacher.

DRAW A PICTURE of this person and yourself in the space to the right.



For more information and tips to help your family recover from an emergency, visit [Sesame.org/Emergencies](https://www.sesame.org/emergencies)

Take Care of Yourself

During times of stress, it can be easy to forget about your own physical and emotional needs. Remember: you are more helpful to your child when you take care of yourself. Try to do something that helps you feel a little better each day. Here are some ideas:

♥ Breathe

Close your eyes and take a deep breath through your nose. Pretend you are filling up a balloon in your belly. Exhale slowly and repeat.

♥ Relax

To relieve muscle tension, roll your neck and shoulders or make big arm circles.

♥ Stay Active

Go for a walk or turn on some music and dance. Even five minutes of stretching can help your body feel more relaxed and cared for.

♥ Connect

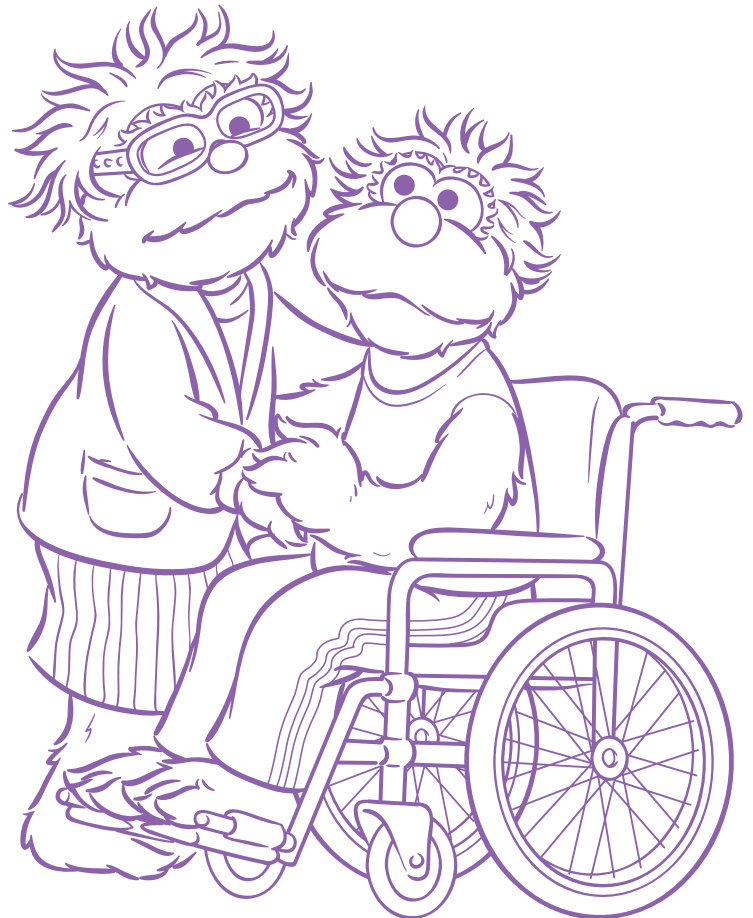
Reach out to someone you trust and can talk to—a relative, friend, faith leader, or counselor. You are not alone.

♥ Imagine

Close your eyes, take deep breaths, and picture a situation or place that feels peaceful.

♥ Sing or Listen

Sing a favorite tune or listen to a song that lifts your mood.



For more information and tips to help your family recover from an emergency, visit [Sesame.org/Emergencies](https://www.sesame.org/emergencies)

 **Story: Hugs All Around**

Elmo's day started with the sun shining through his window and a warm good-morning hug 🧡 from Mommy. Getting hugged by his family and friends is Elmo's favorite way to begin the day, but he loves giving hugs, too! So Elmo went all around Sesame Street to share some fuzzy hugs with his favorite friends and neighbors.

First, he spotted his friend Alan working at Hooper's Store. Elmo spread his arms wide open and said, "Here's a big thank-you hug 🧡 for always being there to listen to Elmo when he needs a friend!"

Then, Elmo saw Zoe, who was feeling a little scared because a very loud fire truck had just passed by. "That's too loud!" she said. Elmo reassured her that the loud siren means that firefighters are going to help somebody. Elmo then gave her a tight we-are-safe hug 🧡 and she didn't feel so frightened anymore.

Finally, when Elmo got back home, it was time for bed. Elmo and Daddy snuggled under the blanket and read their favorite book together. They gave each other a very long I-love-you hug. 🧡 Elmo couldn't think of a more perfect way to end his hug-filled day!



Our Favorite Things

All our Sesame Street friends have a favorite toy or animal friend that helps them feel better when they are scared or sad. Have your children choose one of these cards to hold when they need a Sesame Street friend to help them feel better.

Memory Game Instructions

1. Play with a friend. Cut apart these cards and lay them facedown in a big square shape.
2. Take turns flipping over cards, two at a time. If the cards match, keep them and take another turn. If the cards do not match, turn them back over in their places and try to remember the cards you've seen so you can find matches in the next turn. Let your friend take a turn.
3. Play until all the cards have been matched.



For more information and tips to help your family recover from an emergency, visit [Sesame.org/Emergencies](https://www.sesame.org/emergencies)