

# Here for Each Other

HELPING FAMILIES THROUGH EMERGENCIES

# House Fires



## Family Guide

INSIDE YOU'LL FIND:

- ♥ Tips and Strategies on Recovery and Building Resilience
- ✎ Activity Pages for Children

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A creation of



**Sesame Workshop** is the global nonprofit behind *Sesame Street* and so much more. For over 50 years, we have worked at the intersection of education, media, and research, creating joyful experiences that enrich minds and expand hearts, all in service of empowering each generation to build a better world. Our beloved characters, iconic shows, and outreach in communities bring playful early learning to families in more than 190 countries and advance our mission to help children everywhere grow smarter, stronger, and kinder.

Learn more at [sesame.org](https://sesame.org) and follow Sesame Workshop on [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#), [Facebook](#), and [X](#).

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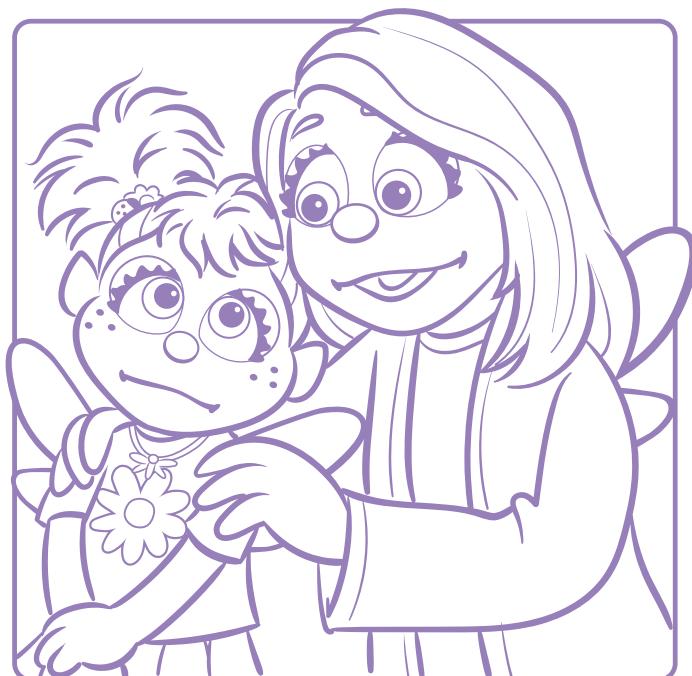
## You have each other.

A house fire can be a devastating event for the whole family. Even after everyone is safe, recovery (both emotionally and physically) can be a long process, especially for little ones. The good news is, your love and support can help your child overcome obstacles.

This guide offers simple ways to comfort and support your child after a fire—through playing, talking, and spending time together. And remember, you are not alone. We're here for each other!

### SAFETY FIRST

- » Avoid touching anything with soot or ash.
- » Do not go back inside until firefighters or inspectors say it's safe.
- » Use bottled or clean water if your water smells or looks different.
- » Throw out any food, medicine, or toys touched by smoke, fire, or water.
- » Keep in touch with family, friends, and neighbors to let them know you're safe.



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## Questions and Answers

Your child may have questions. Let them ask at their own pace and try to answer them honestly and calmly.

### What Happened?

There was a fire in our home (or neighborhood). It happened quickly, and it was scary, but now it's over. We're safe, and I'm here with you.

### Will We Be Okay?

Yes, we will be okay. Helpers like firefighters, safety inspectors, and neighbors are taking care of people in our community.

### Why Did This Happen?

### Did We Do Something Bad?

Fires start in many different ways. It's not your fault. Accidents happen sometimes, but the important thing is that we are safe now.

### Who Will Take Care of Me?

I will take care of you. I'll do everything I can to make sure you have what you need. And there are lots of other people who can help too.

### When Can We Go Home?

We have to wait until the helpers tell us it's safe to go home. We might not know for sure yet, but what I do know is that we are still a family and that home is wherever we are together.

If your family lost your home, you might say, "We can't go back to our house. It makes us all feel sad. No matter where we are, we are still a family. 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. But what I do know is that I love you and I'm going to keep you safe."

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## Comfort and Reassurance

Your caring and supportive presence goes a long way in helping your child feel safe and secure, even when dealing with the challenges and uncertainty.

### Provide Comfort

Assure your child that they are safe and loved. Let them know you are there to take care of them no matter what. Hold hands and snuggle often. After smelling smoke from a fire, it can be particularly comforting for children to snuggle items that smell good, like a freshly laundered shirt, or a lovey sprayed with a bit of perfume or essential oil.

### Model Healthy Ways of Coping

After a fire, children look to the adults around them to see how they should feel and react. As much as possible, try to stay calm, and encourage children to talk about their feelings. Make space for your own need to cope and process by talking to a trusted friend or family member.

### Try to Keep One Routine

There is comfort in the familiar. Finding a few activities that your child can look forward to each day can give them a sense of control even if there are changes to your daily life. Simple routines like bedtime stories or snack time can help your child feel safe.

### Create a Safety Net

Simply seeing or overhearing something that reminds your child of the fire can trigger feelings of fear or sadness. After a fire, children may be particularly sensitive to the sound of sirens or alarms, or the smell of smoke. As much as possible, try to surround them with positive conversations and activities to help build back their sense of safety.



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## Watch and Listen

It's normal for children to feel worried or act differently after a fire. If these changes last a long time or make daily life hard, your child may need some extra help.

### Looking for Signs of Stress

**If you observe** unusual clinging or fear of being alone...

- » **try to** use gentle words and reassure them you'll keep them safe. Offer a comfort item like a lovey 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 fire will happen again...

- » **try to** keep your child away from reminders of the fire. Remind them that it's over and that they are safe with you.

**If you observe** fear around reminders of the fire like sirens, alarms, or the smell of smoke...

- » **try to** let children know that you understand why reminders of the fire might feel scary, and gently reassure them that they are safe with you.

**If you observe** trouble sleeping...

- » **try to** keep a consistent bedtime routine to provide comfort. Read a favorite story or sing a favorite song each night. Doing a head-to-toe "body scan," in which children take a deep breath and notice how each part of their body feels from head to toe can be a good way to help children feel calmer.

**If you observe** your child is less open, verbal, or otherwise withdrawn...

- » **try to** ask how they're feeling and provide an opportunity for discussion or for them to ask questions. (I see you're crying, it seems like you're feeling sad. I feel sad sometimes too. Do you want to tell me more about how you are feeling?) Offer other ways for them to express themselves such as drawing or engaging in pretend play.

**If you observe** more frequent outbursts and meltdowns...

- » **try to** describe their feelings with words, such as angry, sad, scared, or worried. Provide an outlet like jumping, walking, or play that engages children's senses, like feeling different textures or "drawing out" their feelings.

**If you observe** more or a return to wetting the bed, thumb-sucking, or baby talk...

- » **try to** offer more love and affection. These are common behaviors after a stressful event and will likely fade with time and support.

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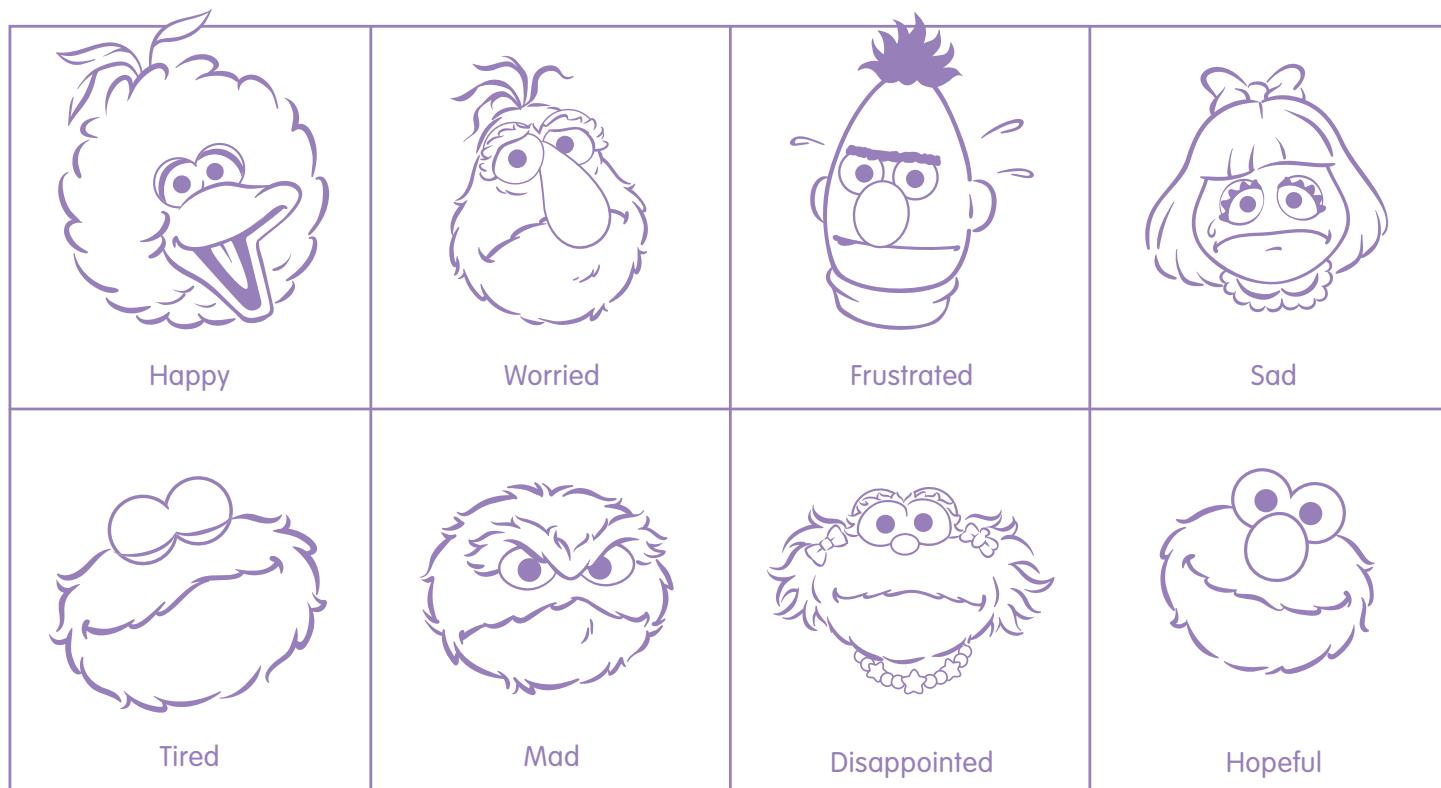
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## Big Feelings

After a fire, children may have some big feelings that come and go in waves. You can help by giving your child words to name their feelings and by asking questions that encourage them to open up. A good place to start is by noticing children's behavior ("I see you are a little quieter today") or asking children where they are feeling something in their body ("where do you feel your nervous feeling in your body?"). Let them know that we all have big feelings and that it's okay to talk about them.

### 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 worried face. I understand why you might feel worried. Can you tell me more about it?" (Encourage them to work through their worried feelings by moving or drawing. This gives children different ways to share their thoughts and feelings with you, even if it's without words.)



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## We Have Each Other

Even in stressful times, there are opportunities to connect as a family. In quiet moments, you might spend some time coloring this page with children. Remind them, "No matter what, we always have each other."



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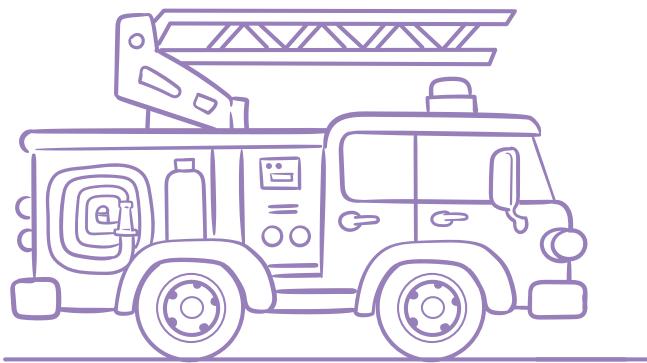
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## Look for Helpers!

After a fire, it can be reassuring to know that there are many people working to make things better. Let children know that there are helpers all around. You might see:

- » Firefighters
- » Utility crews
- » Shelter workers
- » Fire inspectors
- » Line workers
- » Doctors and nurses
- » Emergency responders
- » Plumbers and electricians
- » Neighbors helping neighbors

Read about the special helpers pictured below as children color them in. Have they see any of them in real life?



**Firefighter:** A firefighter's job is to put out fires and keep us all safe. They have special trucks with sirens so people know help is on the way, ladders so they can reach tall buildings, and hoses that put out fires.



**Fire Inspector:** A fire inspector's job is to check that buildings and houses are safe from catching fire. They check things like wires, alarms, doors and windows.

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## Take Care of Yourself

After a fire, you may be dealing with insurance, cleaning, or replacing things. It's normal to feel stressed, tired, or overwhelmed. When you care for yourself, you can better comfort and protect children—and little ones learn lifetime lessons by watching their parents take care of themselves and build their own resilience. Try to do something that helps you feel a little better each day.

### Heart **Breathe**

Close your eyes and put your hands on your belly. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose and slowly out through your mouth. You might also slowly raise and lower your arms as you breathe.

### Heart **Relax**

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

### Heart **Stay Active**

Even five minutes of stretching can help your body feel more relaxed and cared for. Remember to take care of your body in simple ways like eating and drinking water.

### Heart **Connect**

Reach out to someone you trust and can talk to—a relative, friend, faith leader, or counselor. Even a few minutes of rest, laughter, or connection helps rebuild strength. You are not alone.

### Heart **Imagine**

Close your eyes, take slow, deep breaths and picture a situation or place that feels peaceful. Sing or listen to a favorite song. "Dig deep" for the best, strongest parts of yourself. This will help keep you steadier and remind you that you can keep it together for your little ones.

### Heart **Show**

Let your children see you take care of yourself—it helps them learn how to care for themselves too!



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## Story: Safe and Cozy

Elmo was playing in the living room when he smelled something strange.

Elmo's daddy said, "There's a small fire in the kitchen. We need to go outside right away."

**Elmo held his parents' hands tightly as they left.** Outside, Elmo saw flashing lights and firefighters hurrying in. The fire didn't last long, but the house was filled with smoke, and some things were wet from the water used to put out the flames. That night, Elmo and his family stayed at his auntie's house. "Elmo misses his cozy room, and cozy blanket, and cozy house." Elmo told his mommy.

"I know, Elmo," said his mommy. "I do too. We have to wait for the smelly smoke to clear out of our apartment. The helpers will let us know when we can go back. **For now, let's think of some ways we can make tonight cozy.**"

Elmo's auntie brought in a warm cup of hot cocoa as a special treat for Elmo.

"Yummy!" Elmo said.

Elmo's mommy brought out a soft pair of pajamas from the laundry for Elmo. They were still warm from the dryer and didn't smell like smoke. Elmo put them to his cheek and felt the soft fabric.

"Soft and fuzzy!" Elmo said.

Elmo's daddy brought in a blanket and a book of stories.

"Cozy!" Elmo said. Mommy, Daddy, and Elmo all snuggled under the blanket together and read stories until it was time for bed.

"Elmo was sad to leave his home but Elmo is glad we're together," said Elmo.

"Safe and cozy!" said Mommy.



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## Our Favorite Things

All the *Sesame Street* friends have a favorite toy or animal friend that helps them feel better when they are scared or sad. Have your child 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 face down 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.



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