

Here for Each Other

HELPING FAMILIES THROUGH EMERGENCIES

Wildfires



Family Guide

INSIDE YOU'LL FIND:

- ♥ Parent Tips and Safety Strategies
- ✎ Child-Friendly Interactive Pages

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A creation of

SESAME WORKSHOP™

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.

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You have each other. Wildfires can be scary. They can move quickly, make a lot of smoke, and sometimes mean families need to leave their homes in a hurry. Even if you're staying somewhere new, your calm presence, hugs, and love help your child feel safe.

Children feel more secure when they understand what happened and what's coming next. This guide offers simple ways to comfort and support your child after a wildfire—through play, talking, and spending time together. And remember, you are not alone. We are here for each other!



SAFETY FIRST

- » When wildfires are near your home, your family might need to leave quickly. Keep a small "go bag" with important things like water, snacks, a flashlight, favorite toys, and extra clothes.
- » If possible, plan for multiple evacuation routes, and check-in on where your family might go (i.e. a family member or friend's house farther away, an evacuation shelter).
- » Be aware of smoke in the days and weeks after a wildfire. Check the air quality daily and try to stay indoors on high-risk days. If you need to go outside consider moving at a slower pace and wearing a smoke-safe mask, like an N95 respirator.
- » Follow officials' recommendations and don't return to buildings or homes until emergency workers tell you it's safe.

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Questions and Answers

After a wildfire, 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 wildfire. A wildfire is a fire that starts outside and can spread to other places. We can't always know where and when a wildfire might start or spread, or how long it will take to put out. If it comes near where we live, we might have to leave for a little while to stay safe, and school and work might close. Luckily our special helpers have a plan to put the wildfire out.

Why does it still smell smoky?

Why is the sky a different color?

Even when the fire is out, smoke can stay in the air for a while. That's why we keep windows closed and stay inside more until it's safe. It won't last forever and while we wait, we can find fun things to do inside together.

Will We Be Okay?

Yes, we will be okay. It may take a little while to get back to our regular routine, but there are helpers all around (like firefighters!) fixing things and making sure our community gets better.

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. And there are lots of other people who can help too, like neighbors, doctors, teachers, and emergency helpers.

When Can We Go Home?

We have to wait until the helpers tell us it's safe. But even when we aren't in our house, we are still a family and 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 presence goes a long way in helping your child feel safe. Here are some simple ways to help your child feel secure and supported.

Provide Comfort

Assure your children that they are safe and loved and that you will take care of them no matter what. Hold hands and snuggle often! Holding a comfort item, like a blanket or toy, may also help, especially if you need to temporarily stay somewhere else. Lean into your relationships with the trusted friends and neighbors around you: "See how our community is getting through this together!"

Model Healthy Ways of Coping

After a wildfire, 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 while surrounding them with positive conversations and activities. Talking about your own feelings may encourage children to open up.

Try to Keep One Routine

Finding a few consistent activities that your child can look forward to each day can give them a sense of control when things around them are changing. Even simple routines like bedtime stories or a set snack time can help. You might let your child know that things will be different for a little while, but you will also have special time together.

Answer Questions

Children may ask you a lot of questions after a wildfire and providing them with clear and honest answers will go a long way towards helping them feel safe. Follow your child's lead; usually their questions will let you know how much they are ready to hear.

Monitor the Media

Avoid your child seeing repeated images of the wildfire and its damage. If you think your child might have seen or heard something ask them about it. Correct inaccurate information while validating their thoughts and emotions about what they have experienced.



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Watch and Listen

It's normal for children to feel worried or act differently after a wildfire. 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 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 around reminders of the wildfire like sirens or smoke...

- » **try to** let children know that you understand why reminders of the wildfire 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 "body scan" in which children take a deep breath and check in on how each part of their body feels from head to toe can be a good way to relax together.



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

- » **try to** ask how they're feeling and help them talk about it. (*"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 them other ways to express themselves, such as drawing or playing with dolls or stuffed animals.

If you observe more frequent outbursts and meltdowns...

- » **try to** help them 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 extra comfort, love, and affection. These are common behaviors after a stressful event and will likely fade with time and support.

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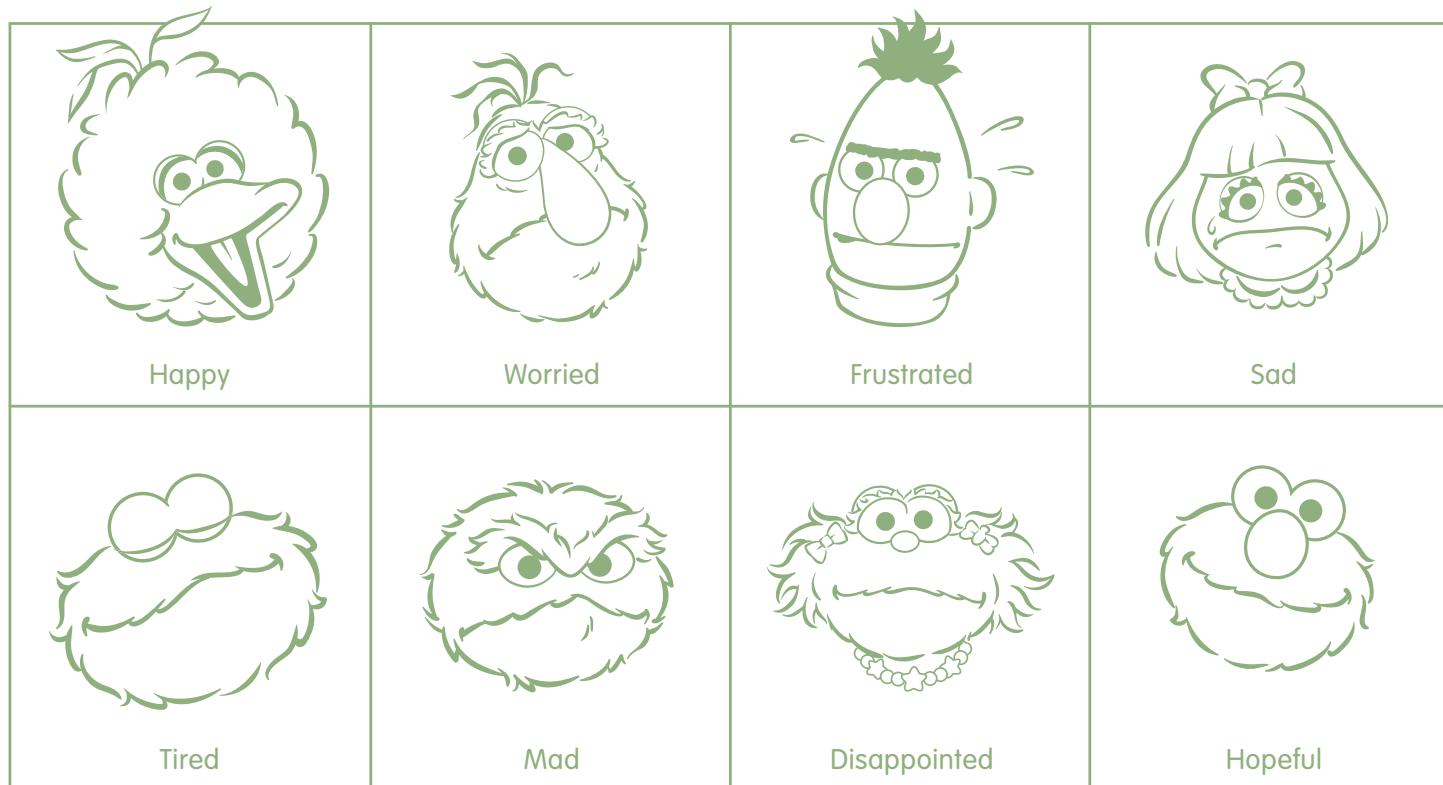
Big Feelings

After a wildfire your child may have 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 observing children's behavior ("I notice you are a little quiet today") or asking children where they are feeling something in their body ("Where do you feel your nervous feeling in your body? Does it feel like butterflies in your tummy or your heart beating fast?"). Let them know that we all have big feelings and that it's okay to talk about them.

How Do You Feel?

Show your child 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?" (For instance, you might encourage them to work through their worried feelings by moving or drawing.)

Some children may talk about their feelings; others may express themselves through art, movement, or pretend play.



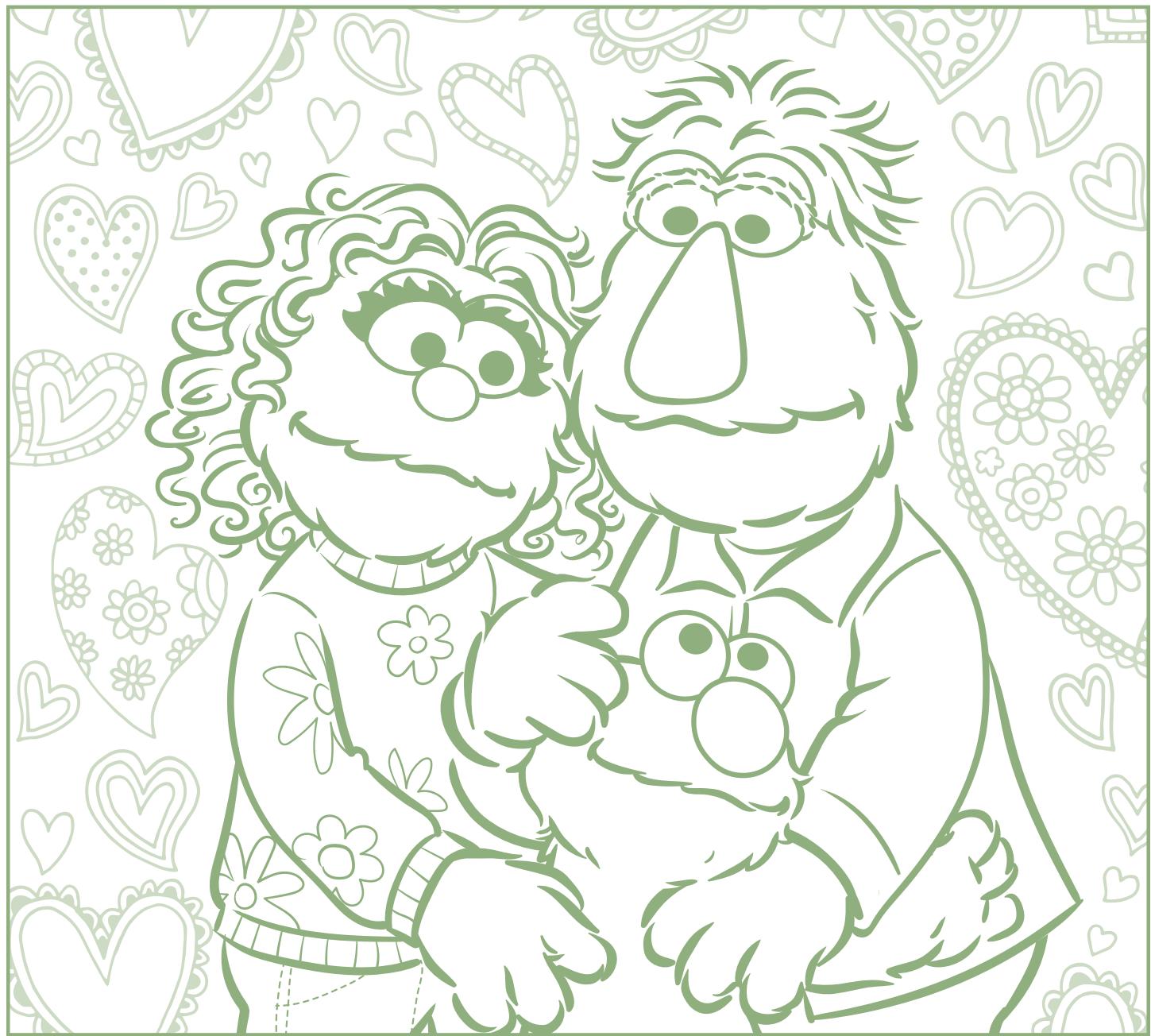
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We Have Each Other

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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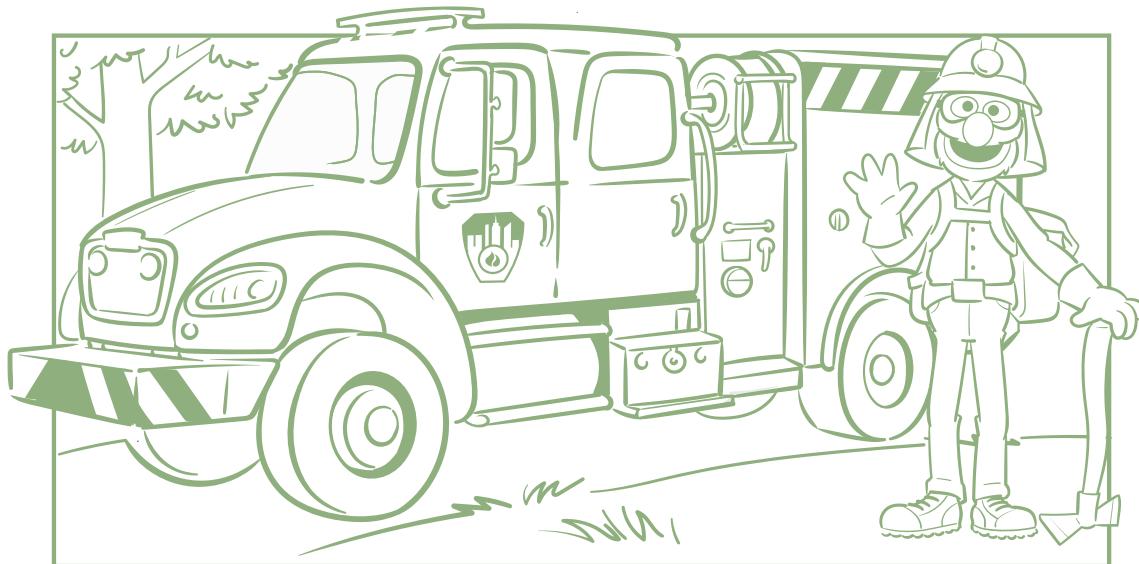
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Look for Helpers!

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

- » Firefighters and Wildland Firefighters
- » Emergency Responders
- » Utility crews
- » Volunteers handing out supplies
- » Neighbors helping neighbors
- » Doctors and nurses at clinics or mobile units

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



Firefighters and Wildland Firefighters:

Firefighters help everyone stay safe from all kinds of fires. There is also a kind of firefighter who has special training just for wildfires. They're called wildland firefighters.



Volunteers: After a wildfire communities and volunteers come together to help each other by giving out food, clothes, and helping people replace things they may have lost.

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Take Care of Yourself

When coping with a wildfire, 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.

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... and pretend you are flying like a butterfly!

Relax

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

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.

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.

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.

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: Elmo's Inside Adventure

One morning, Elmo woke up and the sky looked very different. It was gray and smoky. 

"Elmo," said his daddy Louie, "There's a wildfire nearby. We need to stay safe inside today."

Elmo didn't want to stay inside. Elmo wanted to go to school. Elmo wanted to slide down the slide with his friends Abby and Rosita. It was hard for things to be different. Elmo felt disappointed and a little sad.

"When can Elmo go outside to play? When can Elmo go back to school?" Elmo asked.

"We don't know yet Elmo," said his daddy. "I know it can be hard when our routines change, but we need to give things a little time so firefighters can put out the fire, and the smoke can clear. Can we come up with some indoor activities together?"

Elmo had an idea.

"I guess Elmo could draw a picture, read story or..." Elmo thought hard. "Elmo could have a dance party!"

"Those are all great ideas, Elmo," said his daddy.

That day they read Elmo's favorite book, they danced to Elmo's favorite songs, and Elmo drew one of his favorite pictures ever of a bright red fire truck and the special helper firefighters working hard to keep them safe.

Elmo's daddy checked his phone. "Look Elmo!" he said. "The sky is clearing up, maybe tomorrow you will be able to go play outside."

"Elmo is so glad, daddy!" Elmo said. "But if we can't, Elmo can have another inside adventure." 



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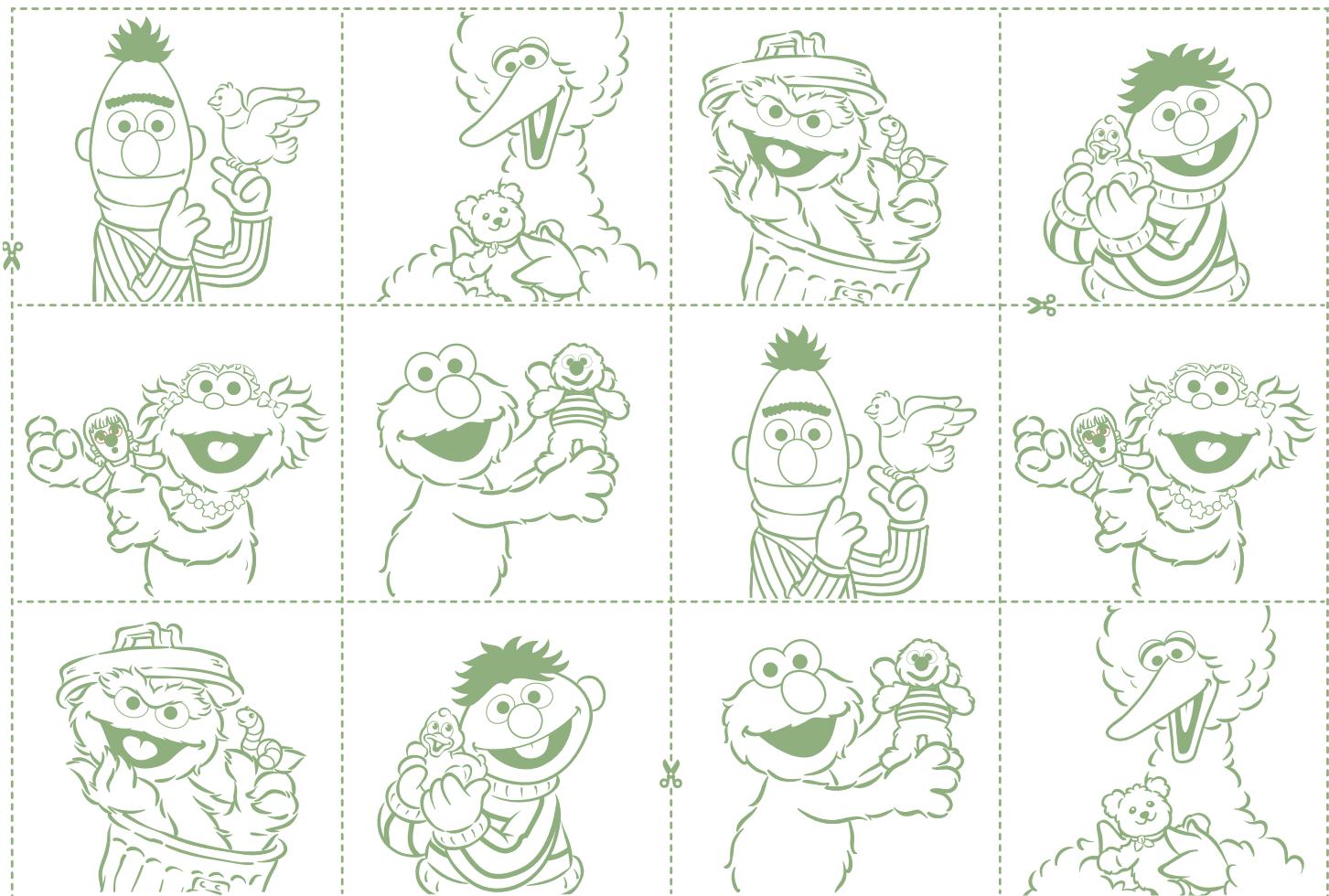
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Our Favorite Things

Sesame Street friends have a favorite toy or animal friend that helps them feel better when they have big feelings. 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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