

ANNOUNCING DISASTER MOBILE APP: HELP KIDS COPE

IS YOUR FAMILY READY FOR THE NEXT DISASTER?
ACT NOW . PROTECT YOUR FAMILY. DOWNLOAD *HELP KIDS COPE*.



EARTHQUAKES



EXTREME HEAT



FLOODS



HURRICANES



LANDSLIDES



TORNADOES



TSUNAMIS



WILDFIRES



WINDSTORMS



WINTER STORMS

WITH *HELP KIDS COPE*:

- Learn what to do *Before, During, and After* ten disaster types.
- Know what to say “in the moment” to help calm and support your kids of all ages.
- Hear audio clips of other parents’ experiences.
- Understand how kids commonly respond during and after disasters.
- Use the checklists to prepare your entire family before disasters.
- Explain different disasters to your kids using age-appropriate language.
- Find tips on caring for yourself—as you care for your family.
- Connect to activities, children’s books, tip sheets, and more!



Available on the
App Store

ANDROID APP ON
Google play

HELP KIDS COPE by UCLA is **free** from Google Play and iTunes. Now available for Android and Apple devices (iPhone, iPad, & iPod touch). For iPad users: tap on the “iPad Only” drop-down menu and select “iPhone Only” from the menu to view the app.

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NCTSN



Missouri Foundation
for Health

Parent Guidelines for Helping Children Impacted by Wildfires

Wildfires cause emotional distress as well as physical damage. People may fear that their loved ones will be killed or injured. Separation from family members can occur, with hours or days passing before being reunited. Neighborhoods and communities may be called on to evacuate on short notice, forcing people to make important decisions in minutes – whether to evacuate, where to go, when to leave, and what to bring with them (including pets). People may live in shelters for days, not knowing if their homes and businesses have been saved or lost. Routine is disrupted and one's sense of security is undermined. Families and communities should not underestimate the accumulative effects of evacuation, displacement, relocation, and rebuilding.

In the aftermath, as the scope of the damage is known, families may learn of injuries to loved ones. The loss of homes, pets, livestock, and valuables, including sentimental items, will increase feelings of sadness and vulnerability. If a fire is found to have been set intentionally, people grapple with increased anger and blame. Like other traumatic events, wildfires will be particularly difficult for individuals with special needs.

Post-wildfire problems with housing, food, water, electricity, transportation, work, school, childcare, and daily routines can disrupt living for weeks or months. People suffer financial hardships when their homes, businesses, or jobs are lost. Confusion can mount as they seek disaster assistance from local and federal agencies or their insurance companies. As a result, signs of stress may become evident even months after the fires.

Children's reactions to the wildfires and their aftermath are strongly influenced by how their parents, teachers, and other caregivers cope during and after the events. They often turn to these adults for information, comfort, and help. Below are common reactions parents may see in their children. These generally diminish with time, but knowing that these reactions are likely can help you be prepared to help your child.

Common Reactions

- Feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry about safety of self and others (including pets):
 - Children may have increased fears and worries about separation from family members
 - Young children may become more clingy to parents, siblings, or teachers
- Fears of wildfires spreading or new ones starting
- Distress and anxiety with reminders of the wildfires (e.g., burning smell, sounds of sirens or helicopters, burnt landscape and buildings)
- Changes in behavior:
 - Increased activity level
 - Decreased concentration and attention
 - Increased irritability
 - Withdrawal

- Angry outbursts
- Aggression
- Increased physical complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains)
- Prolonged focus on the wildfires (e.g., talking repeatedly about it – young children may “play” the event)
- Changes in sleep and appetite
- Lack of interest in usual activities, including interest in playing with friends
- Changes in school performance
- Regressive behaviors in young children (e.g., baby talk, bedwetting, tantrums)
- Increased chance of high-risk behaviors in adolescents (e.g., drinking, substance abuse, self-injurious behaviors)

How Can I Help My Child?

- *Spend time talking with your child.* This will let your child know that it is OK to ask questions and to express their concerns. Because during and after wildfires includes constantly changing situations, children may have questions on more than one occasion. Issues may need to be discussed more than one time. You should remain flexible and open to answering repeated and new questions and providing clarifications. If you have to evacuate suddenly, tell your child briefly where you are going and that you will answer their questions once you get to safety.
- *You should answer questions briefly and honestly, but also ask your children for their opinions and ideas about what is discussed.* For younger children, try to follow wildfire conversations with a favorite story or a family activity to help them feel more safe and calm.

Things I Can Do for Myself

- *Take care of yourself.* Make sure you take good physical care of yourself, including eating well, sleeping well, getting exercise, and receiving proper medical care.
- *Listen to each other.* Parents and other caregivers should provide support for each other during this time.
- *Put off major decisions.* Avoid making any unnecessary life-altering decisions during this stressful post-wildfire period.
- *Give yourself a break.* Try not to overdo clean-up activities. These activities may include lifting heavy items or working for extended periods of time. Using moderation when doing such work can reduce injury.

Things I Can Do for My Child

- *Be a role model.* Changes in living conditions can be extremely stressful for children. They will take cues of how to handle situations from their parents. Modeling calm behaviors will be important during chaotic times.
- *Encourage your children.* Help children help take care of themselves by encouraging them to get appropriate rest, exercise, and diet. Be sure there is a balance of quiet and physical activities.

- *Reassure children that they are safe or the plans you have for their safety.* This may need to be repeated many times during and after a wildfire. You should spend extra time with your children and stay connected. It doesn't matter whether it's playing games, reading together, or just cuddling. Be sure to tell children they are loved.
- *Maintain routines.* Even in the mist of chaos and change, children feel more safe and secure with structure and routine. As much as possible, stick to everyday routines (including mealtimes, bedtime, etc.).
- *Maintain expectations.* Stick with family rules, such as rules about good behavior and respect for others.
- *Limit media exposure.* It is important for you to protect your child from overexposure to sights and images of the wildfires, including those in newspapers, on the Internet, or on television.
- *Calm worries about friends' safety.* As phone service may be disrupted, communication will be difficult. Reassure your children that their friends' parents are taking care of them just as they are being cared for by you.
- *Talk about community response and recovery.* Reassure children about the work being done in their community to contain the wildfires (such as first responders protecting people, homes, pets, and wildlife), to restore electricity and water, to remove debris, and to help families find housing.
- *Encourage children to help.* Children recover and cope better when they feel they are helping. Find opportunities in which they can contribute in the aftermath of the wildfire. Give small tasks related to clean-up or family activities. After children spend time in clean-up activities, provide activities that are not related to the wildfires. This may include playing a game, reading a book, playing cards, etc.
- *Be patient.* Children may need a little extra patience and attention during these times. They may need added reminders or extra help with chores or homework once school is in session as they may be more distracted.
- *Give support at bedtime.* Children may become anxious when they separate from their parents, in particular at bedtime. First try to spend more time with your child at bed time with such activities as reading a book. It's okay to make a temporary arrangement for young children to sleep with you, but with the understanding that they will go back to normal sleeping arrangements at a set future date.
- *Monitor adult conversations.* Be aware of what is being said during adult conversations about the wildfires and its aftermath. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened unnecessarily about something they do not understand.
- *Seek professional help.* If children have difficulties for more than six weeks after the wildfires, parents should consult a mental health professional for an evaluation.
- *Keep things hopeful.* Even in the most difficult situations, it is important to identify some positive aspect and to stay hopeful for the future. A positive and optimistic outlook helps children see the good things in the world around them. This outlook can be one way to help them get through even the most challenging times.

Further information about children, families, and wildfires can be found at the website of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, www.NCTSNet.org.

Wildfires: Tips for Parents on Media Coverage

While the media (television, radio, print and the internet) can help inform and educate you and your children during wildfires, media coverage unfortunately also has the potential to upset and confuse. As parents, you can protect your children by helping them understand media coverage while limiting their exposure to distressing images.

The impact of media coverage will be different depending upon whether you are:

- A family currently evacuated viewing for the first time your home or neighborhood destroyed
- A family viewing images from home of a wildfire nearby which could spread to your area
- A family who has been affected by fire in the past
- A family not directly threatened who is viewing news about the impact that wildfires are having on others (loss of their home, belongings, pets, school or church buildings)

Children and families who suffer loss in the wildfires are the most vulnerable to negative effects from excessive media viewing.

Understanding Media Exposure

- Media coverage can produce increased fears and anxiety in children.
- The more time children spend watching coverage of the wildfires, the more likely they are to have negative reactions.
- Graphic images and news stories of loss may be particularly upsetting to children.
- Very young children may not understand that the coverage and repetition of images from an earlier or past event is a replay. They may think the event is continuing to happen or is happening again.
- Excessive exposure to the media coverage may interfere with children's recovery after an event.

What Parents Can Do to Help

- Limit Your Children's Exposure to Media Coverage
 - The younger the child, the less exposure s/he should have.
 - You may choose to eliminate all exposure for very young children.
 - Play DVDs or videotapes of their favorite shows or movies instead.
 - Consider family activities away from television, radio, or internet.
- Watch and Discuss with Children
 - Watch what they watch.
 - Discuss the news stories with them, asking about their thoughts and feelings about what they saw, read, or heard.
 - Ask older children and teens about what they have seen on the internet, in order to get a better sense of their thoughts, fears, concerns, and point-of-view.

- Seize Opportunities for Communication
 - Use newsbreaks that interrupt family viewing or newspaper images as opportunities to open conversation. Be available to talk about their feelings, thoughts, and concerns, and reassure them of their safety and of plans to keep them safe, if needed, such as evacuation.
- Clear Up Any Misunderstandings
 - Don't presume you know what your children are thinking; ask if they are worried and discuss those worries with them, reassuring them as needed.
 - Ask questions to find out if your children are understanding the situation accurately; they may think they are at risk when they are not.
- Monitor Adult Conversations
 - Watch what you and other adults say about the wildfires or the media coverage in front of the children; children often listen when adults are unaware and may misconstrue what they hear.
- Let Your Children Know about Successful Community Efforts
 - You may want to share positive media images, such as reports that the fire has been contained in areas or news stories of people or animals brought to safety.
 - Reassure your children the firefighters are working very hard to put out the fire. This will give them a sense that adults are actively taking steps to protect them, their home, their pets, and their neighborhood.
- Educate Yourself
 - Learn about children's common reactions to wildfires or other natural disasters.
 - Know that many children are resilient and cope well, but some may have continuing difficulties. These reactions vary with age and exposure to the event.
 - For more information, see [Parent Guidelines for Helping Children Impacted by Wildfires](#).

When Your Family is Part of the Story

- Know Your Limits
 - Decide if it's a good idea for you or your children to talk to the media. While it's natural to want to tell your story, the media may not be the best place to do so.
 - Think about what you are willing and not willing to discuss. You have the right to set limits with reporters.
 - Ask the reporter for the purpose of the story and its content.
- Protect Your Children
 - Make sure the reporter has had experience working with children in the past.
 - Talk it over with your children before they are interviewed. Assure them that there are no wrong answers.
 - Let them know they can say "no" to any question and they can stop the interview at any time.
 - Be present when your child is interviewed. Stop the interview if s/he becomes upset or distressed in any way.
 - After the interview, discuss the experience with your children. Praise them for doing a great job and listen carefully to any concerns they have.
 - Prepare your children that the final media story may be very short or may be edited in ways that do not reflect their experience.

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Here for Each Other

HELPING FAMILIES AFTER A FIRE

Here for Families and Communities



Family Guide: Fires



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sesamestreet.org/emergencies
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You have each other. You bring your child comfort and make him feel safe. Your love helps him overcome obstacles. After a fire, it is your support that soothes your child and allows him to see that everything is going to be okay.

To help you as you begin your recovery, 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 warm and 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 fire. Fire is very hot and bright, and it makes smoke. Fire burns anything it touches. Small and big fires can be hard to put out.

SAFETY FIRST

Make sure you remember to:

- » **Let your family know that you are safe.**
- » **Stay informed about what is happening. Follow officials' recommendations.**
- » **Keep away from things like fallen power lines, dirty or contaminated water, and broken glass.**



Comfort and Reassurance

Right after a fire, 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 child that she is safe and loved.

Let her know that you will take care of her. 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

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 her 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 him 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 him with positive conversations and activities. Remind him that the disaster is over and that he is safe now.

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 him about it. Correct inaccurate information and let him express his thoughts and emotions.

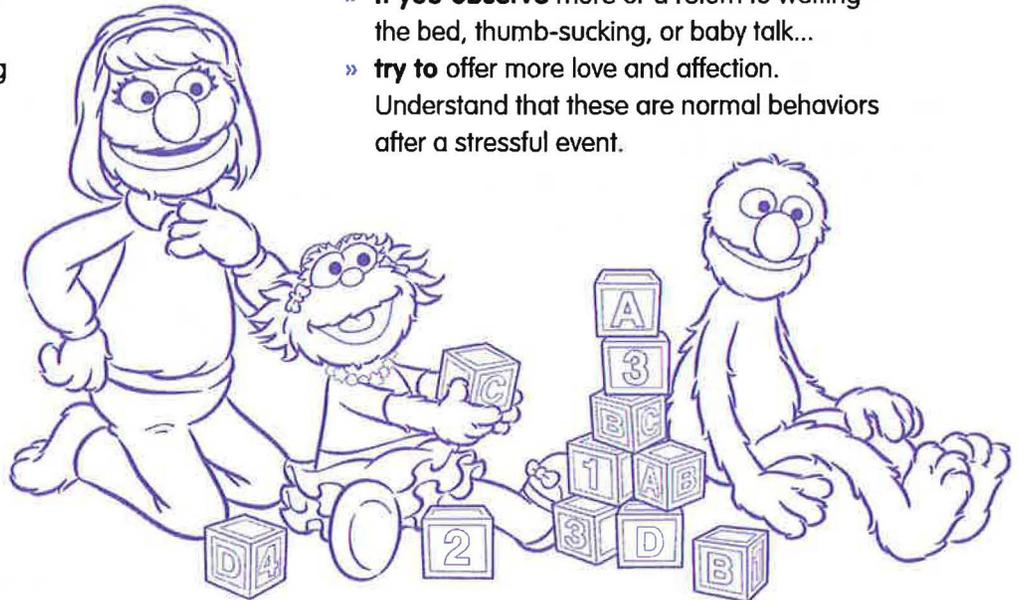


Watch and Listen

It is common for children to show signs of stress 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 him that you will keep him safe. Offer a comfort item like a toy or blanket. If he is fearful of separating, remind him that you always come back and let him know when you will return.
- » **If you observe** fear that the disaster will happen again...
- » **try to** keep your child away from the news or other reminders of the disaster. Remind her that the disaster is over and that she is 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** your child is less open, verbal, or exhibiting unusually introverted behavior...
- » **try to** ask how he is feeling and provide an opportunity for discussion or for him to ask questions. Also, offer other ways for him to express himself, such as drawing.
- » **If you observe** more frequent outbursts and tantrums...
- » **try to** describe her feelings with words, such as angry, sad, scared, or worried. Provide an outlet by allowing her 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.



Questions and Answers

Your child needs to know it's okay to ask questions at his own pace. The following are some common questions after any disaster and comforting ways to respond:

What Happened?

There was an emergency—something we didn't expect would happen. I know it was scary, but I'm here to take care of you and keep you safe.

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 and there is no reason and it's no one's fault. The good thing is that these things don't happen often and we are safe now.

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 like...

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.



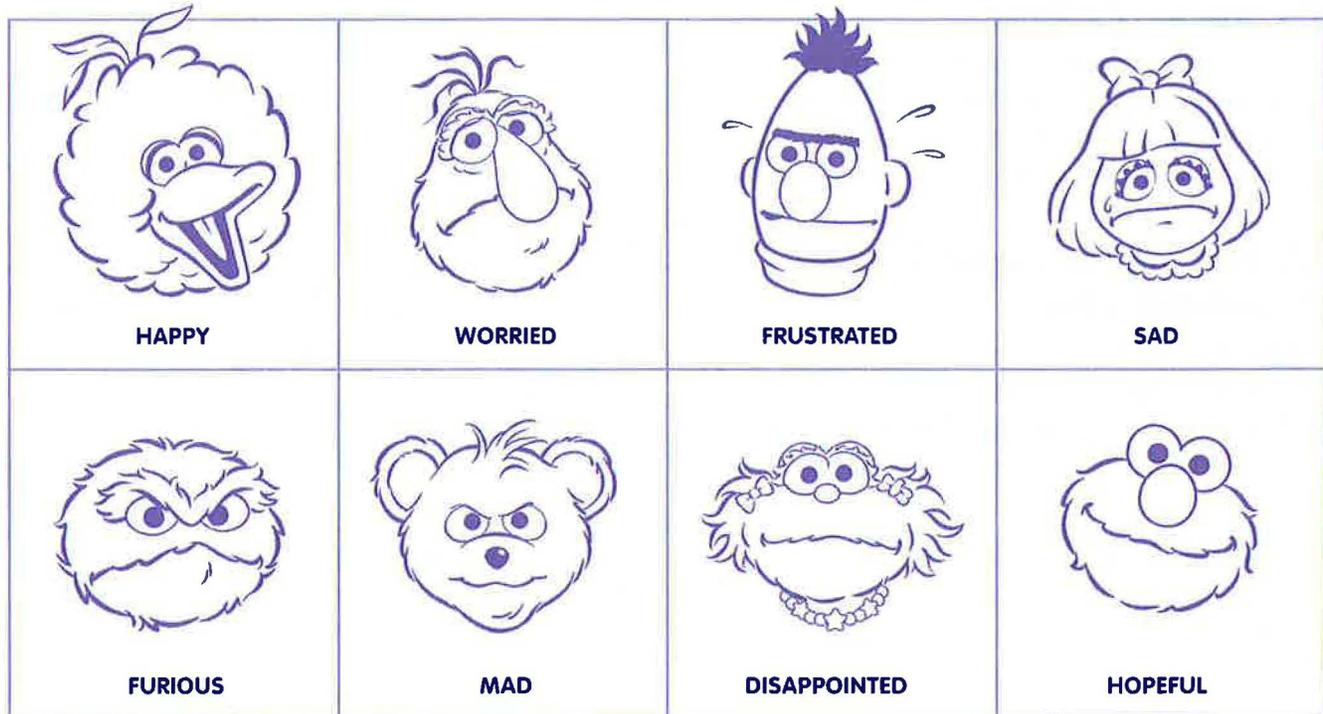
There are questions you may not have an answer to. It's okay to be honest and say, "I don't know." You can follow up by saying, "But what I do know is that I love you and I'm going to keep you safe."

Big Feelings

After an emergency, your child may have some big feelings that come and go in waves. You can help by giving your child words to name her emotions and by asking questions that encourage her to open up. Let her know that these feelings are normal and that it's okay to talk about her feelings. Help her think about what could make her feel better.

How Do You Feel?

Show your child these feelings faces, and ask him to point to one that matches how he's 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. Try to offer materials like paper, crayons, play dough, toys, dolls, blocks, fabric, or cardboard boxes. This gives your child a variety of ways to share his thoughts and feelings with you.



We Have Each Other

Here are some ways to support one another and move forward together 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

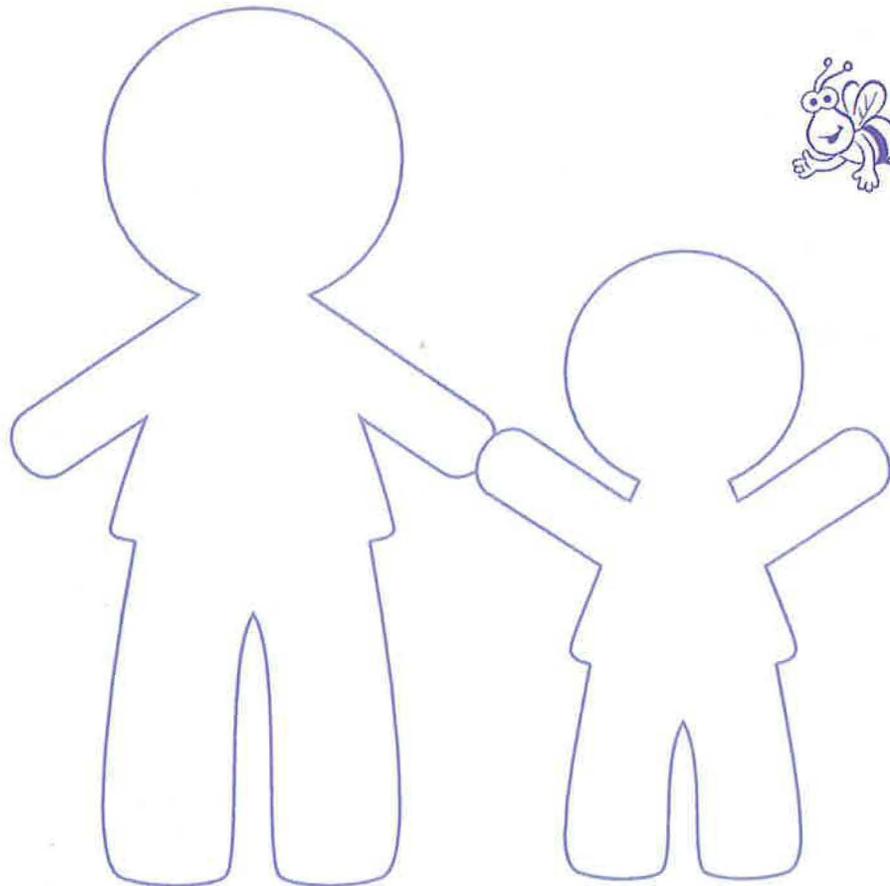
Help your child focus on all the helpers around him. Does he notice the police officers, firefighters, utility workers, doctors, nurses, or volunteers? It can be reassuring to know that there are many people working to make things better.



Empower Your Child

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

After an emergency, remember, 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.

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.



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 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 she needs a Sesame Street friend to help her 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. The person who has the most cards at the end gets a special hug.

