

Here for Each Other

HELPING FAMILIES
AFTER AN
EMERGENCY



A Resource for Parents and Carers

DEAR PARENTS AND CARERS,

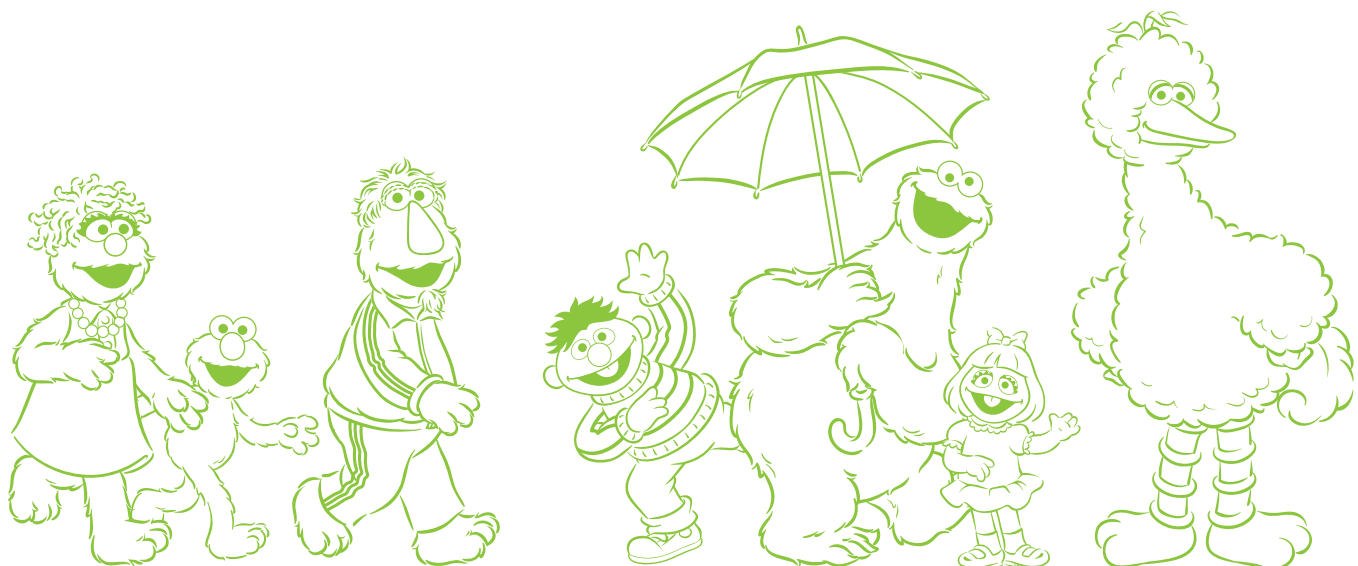
This booklet has been developed to give you information about a child's needs and offers ways to help children after an emergency. It is intended to provide suggested ways to nurture children's emotional healing.

An emergency is any sudden event that threatens to cause danger to people, property and/or the environment. Emergencies can be overwhelming, particularly for young children. Things can change quickly. Sometimes something scary can happen. It can be difficult for children to understand and accept that some things that happen cannot be prevented. But with reassurance, support and understanding you can help children work through their feelings and emotions.

You are a very important support for your child, but firstly, you need to be aware of how you are coping and attend to your own needs. You may want some support to manage your own natural feelings and emotions such as helplessness, sadness, fear, and anger. You won't be able to provide support to children until you have some strategies to manage your own feelings and emotions. Children will respond in an environment where they know you care for them and know you will act in response to their signals and signs.

To help adults and children cope with emergencies, Sesame Street developed **Here for Each Other**, a resource that includes tips, ideas and activities. In this book, you'll find ways to talk with your child about what happened while remaining hopeful about the future. With this information, you can create a comfortable and caring environment, no matter where you are, even when you're not surrounded by your own familiar things.

Your furry Sesame Street friends are here to help you and your child through this challenging time.



“What Has Happened?”

An emergency is often something that happens without warning such as a fire, earthquake, flood or cyclone. Simple, concrete words can go a long way in explaining complex situations. Here are some ways you might explain to children what has happened in their world.

EMERGENCY »» “An emergency is when something happens that we do not expect and we have to act quickly to keep ourselves safe.”

EARTHQUAKE »» “When there’s an earthquake the ground shakes. It shakes because rocks deep under the ground are moving. There is sometimes some shaking after the earthquake is over.”

FIRE »» “Fires are very hot and make a lot of smoke. Fire burns anything it touches. Small and big fires can be hard to put out.”

FLOOD »» “Floods happen when there is too much rain and the water covers the land.”

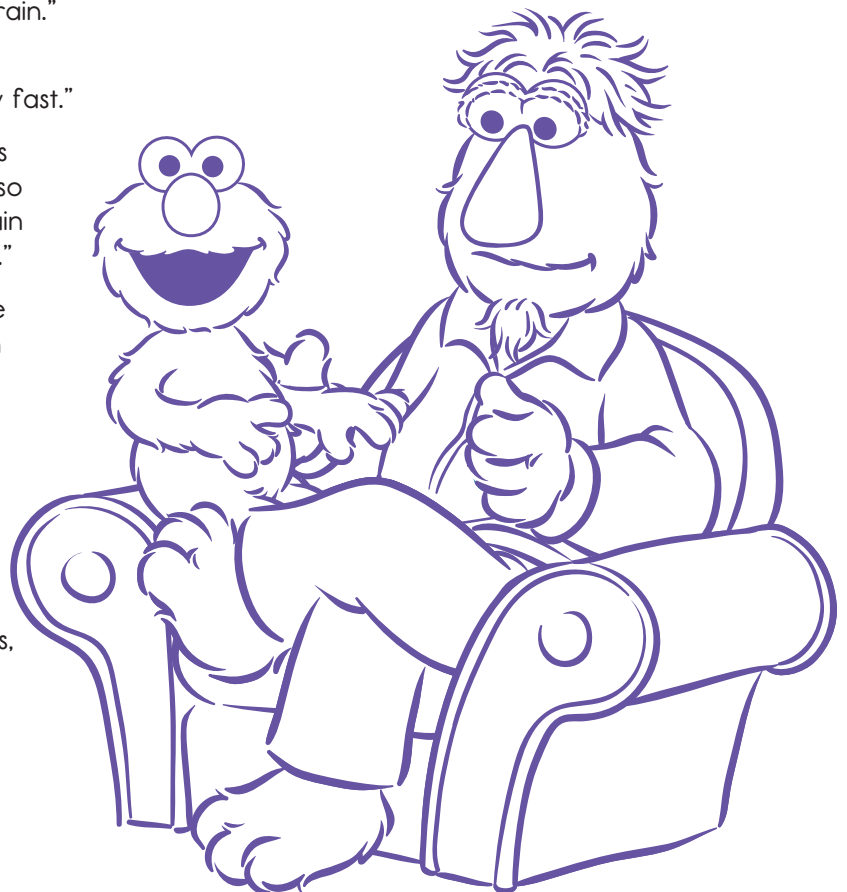
HURRICANE AND CYCLONE »» “A cyclone or a hurricane is a very strong storm with a lot of wind and rain.”

TORNADO »» “A tornado is a very strong, swirling wind that moves very fast.”

SNOWSTORM »» “A big snowstorm is called a blizzard. Snowstorms can also be a mixture of rain and snow, or rain that freezes into ice on the ground...”

TSUNAMI »» “Earthquakes under the sea can cause a tsunami. The ocean floor moves and can create huge, powerful waves.”

HELPERS »» “There are many people who help us during and after an emergency. As well as parents/carers, family and friends, some of the people who help are teachers, doctors, nurses, counsellors, police officers, fire fighters and ambulance workers.”



Normal Reactions

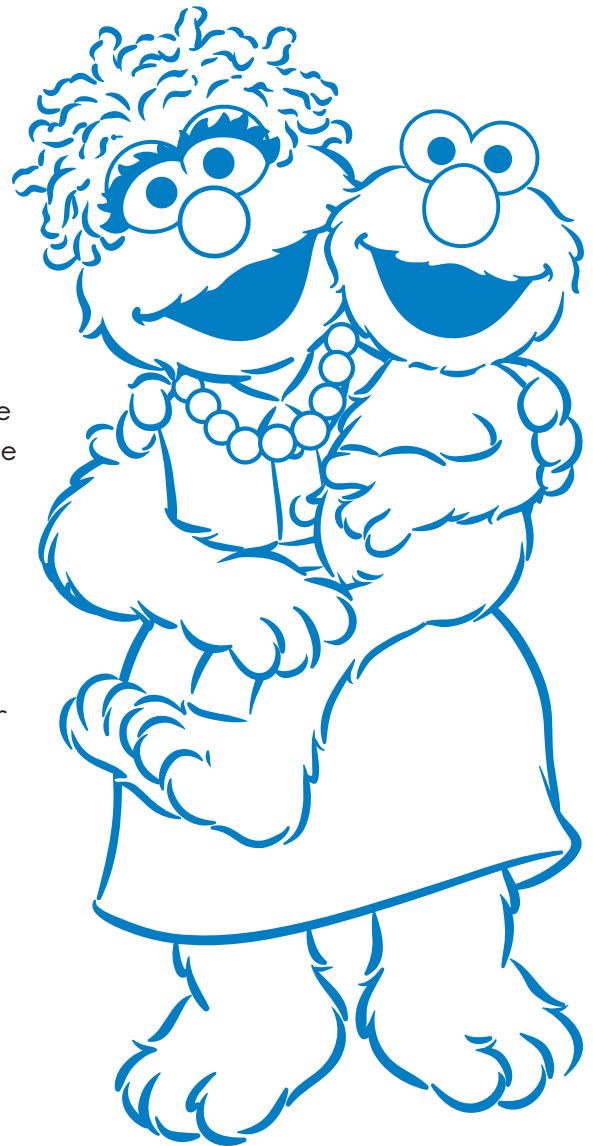
There are a number of normal reactions young children may have to an emergency. There is no 'typical' reaction. Children react differently to an emergency depending on things like proximity, age, developmental stage, temperament and previous experiences.

Here are some of the common reactions young children may have:

- ♥ FEAR OF SEPARATION FROM THEIR FAMILY/CARER
- ♥ CLINGINESS TO THEIR PARENT, CARER, SIBLINGS
- ♥ WITHDRAWAL
- ♥ INATTENTIVENESS
- ♥ AGGRESSION
- ♥ CONTINUAL CRYING
- ♥ ANGRY OUTBURSTS
- ♥ NIGHTMARES
- ♥ NOT WANTING TO PLAY
- ♥ CHANGE IN EATING HABITS
- ♥ TUMMY ACHES, FEELING SICK, HEADACHES

These reactions are considered a normal response to an emergency situation. Some children may have mild reactions and other children's reactions may be much more intense.

Younger children cannot always tell you what is wrong or what is upsetting for them. You may find their behaviour gives you some clues as to what is troubling them. You can find out more about how to help your children through these situations in our "Supporting Each Other" section.



How you can Help

Here are some ideas to help you communicate with your children and reassure them that they are loved. You can help your child by:

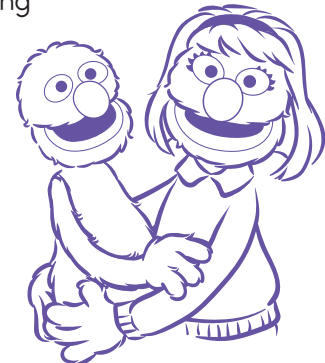
- ♥ **EXPLAINING WHAT HAS HAPPENED** Use simple words to explain what has happened. For example, in the case of a cyclone, explain that it is a big storm with a lot of wind and rain. Explain that it can be scary, but that adults do their best to keep children safe.
- ♥ **COMFORTING AND CARING** Children look to adults for comfort if they are upset, scared or sad and they will also be guided by your reactions. Try to model calm behaviour in front of your child. Answer their questions truthfully in an age appropriate way. Reassure your child that you love them and that you will care for them. Give your child a hug.
- ♥ **LISTENING AND TALKING** Listen to what your child is telling you and the questions they have. If your child prefers not to talk, play with him/her and spend time doing activities he/she enjoys. If your child expresses sadness, anger, or fear, tell him/her it's okay to feel this way. Ensure safe ways of expressing anger. Continue sharing feelings through words and pictures.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF:

In any emergency, taking care of yourself, both physically and emotionally, will allow you to be more helpful to your child. After the immediate danger is over, build a support network with relatives, friends, faith leaders, or counsellors. Be aware of how you are feeling immediately after the emergency, as well as in the days and months following the event.

Talking Together

It is important to listen to what your child is saying and acknowledge their experience.



♥ 2 YEARS OLD OR YOUNGER:

Let your child know it's okay to feel scared. Even more than words, young children need tangible reassurance. Try providing your child with a comfort item to hold on to. Lots of hugs help too!

- ♥ **3 TO 5:** Let your child know it's okay to feel scared. Always use the child's words to talk about their experiences. Tell your child you love him/her and that you will keep them as safe as possible. Try a fun, relaxing activity to help them feel calm, such as blowing bubbles.

- ♥ **6 TO 11:** : Let your child know you are there for them and allow the child to take the lead in guiding the conversation. Give the child time to ask questions and discuss their feelings. Address any concerns the child talks about, checking you have understood what he/she is saying. Acknowledge with your child the 'awfulness' of their experience. Encourage your child to come up with ways of coping.

SOME CHILDREN MAY NOT WANT TO TALK

Playing, writing or drawing may give you a clue as to how children are feeling but none of these activities should be compulsory. You may get a sense of how your child is coping by observing them as they engage in their own chosen activities.

Staying Positive and Supportive

There are simple ways to stay positive after an emergency. Here are some ideas to keep in mind:

- ♥ **TRY TO KEEP A NORMAL ROUTINE** Children like consistency. As much as possible, try to stick to a daily routine. To help your child feel calm and safe, encourage him/her to engage in everyday activities, such as playing, mealtimes and telling a bedtime story.
- ♥ **STAY CALM** Children quickly pick up on adult anxiety; they take their cues from the reactions of their parents/carers to an emergency. Tell your child you love them and reassure him/her you will keep them as safe as possible. Be aware of having adult conversations about an emergency in front of children; they may misinterpret what is being said or become frightened.
- ♥ **SPEND TIME TOGETHER** Simply smiling, laughing, and playing together can help children feel safe. Encourage your child to do things that can help her/him express feelings and emotions, such as drawing a picture or singing a song together.
- ♥ **MONITOR MEDIA USE** Avoid having your child watch or see repeated images of troubling events such as a natural disaster and its damage. Young children might think that the events are happening over and over, in real time.
- ♥ **IDENTIFY PEOPLE WHO ARE HELPING OUR COMMUNITY** Talk to children about the helpers that are working on such things as getting the power back on, giving out bottles of water, clearing away the damaged buildings and helping people find food and somewhere to stay.
- ♥ **MAINTAIN HEALTH AND WELLBEING** Encourage children to eat healthy foods and engage in daily physical activities. Plan for quiet activities near bedtime such as story time.
- ♥ **ENCOURAGE SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS** Engaging in play, talking and laughing with other children can be healing for your child.

 **Talking Together**
“Let’s make up a story about how we are feeling.”



Supporting Each Other

After an emergency you can find comfort in one another and can work together to find ways to help you cope. Here are some ideas to keep in mind:

- ♥ **PAY ATTENTION TO SIGNS OF STRESS** Children often let us know something is bothering them through their behaviour. Nightmares, bed-wetting and clinging behaviour are common and normal following an emergency situation (see our Normal Reactions section). If any of these reactions persist over time and interfere with your child's health and well-being, it can be helpful to ask for assistance from your doctor or an allied health professional such as a clinical psychologist.
- ♥ **EMPOWER YOUR CHILDREN** If your child has been directly affected by an emergency situation, you can give him/her simple jobs and responsibilities to help your child maintain a sense of control. Praise your child's efforts; this builds self-confidence and makes children feel important. If your child has been indirectly affected, encourage him/her to show compassion and to help others; he/she will feel strengthened by doing so.
- ♥ **GIVE CHILDREN A SENSE OF HOPE** Explain that while many things may have changed, there are always people and places that help keep your family safe. Discuss things that are different with your child and how you will look after them and be there for them.

Talking Together

"No matter what has happened, we still have each other to build a future together."



Friends Care! by Big Bird

Hi, everyone. We had a big emergency on Sesame Street. I had to leave my nest quickly, and Maria, Luis, and Gabi invited me to stay with them during the emergency. I was scared, but they helped me feel better.

When it was over, we went to find my nest, and do you know what? It wasn't there anymore! I felt very sad. But my friends were there for me and helped me build a new nest. They also made a bow for Radar and gave me a big jar of birdseed.

When I settled into my new nest, we all played some games together.

 **YOU CAN PLAY, TOO. COLOUR THE PICTURE OF BIG BIRD AND RADAR.**

Were you ever in an emergency?
How did you feel? What helped you feel better?



PARENTS AND CARERS: These activities are designed especially for children. You might use them to help encourage your child to talk about what happened, keep a bedtime routine, play together, and help others. No matter what the situation, your child can have fun with his/her favorite Sesame Street friends.

Helping Hands

Ernie, Ernestine, and Bert are making hand pictures. You can do so many things with your hands, such as draw, write, clap, eat — and help!

 **TRACE YOUR HAND ONTO THIS PAGE.**

Use your imagination to decorate it any way you like.



 **THINK ABOUT A WAY YOU HAVE HELPED SOMEONE OR HOW SOMEONE HAS HELPED YOU. ASK A GROWN-UP TO HELP YOU WRITE OR DRAW ABOUT IT HERE.**

Tucked in Tight

Elmo woke up with the hiccups. It was no fun! He was frustrated. "What a day!" he said. Elmo's Daddy surprised Elmo with a silly monster face: "**Boo!**" No more hiccups!

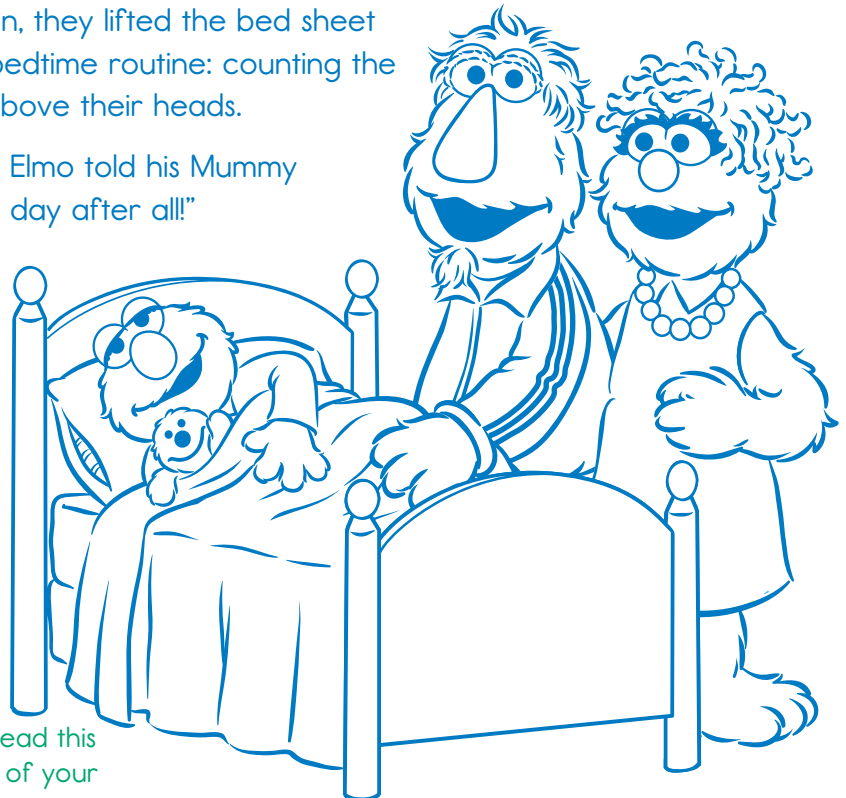
Later, on the way to the store with his Mummy, Elmo slipped and — **swoosh!** — he fell. Elmo was upset. "What a day!" he said. "Elmo's finger has a boo-boo." Elmo's Mummy kissed his finger to help him feel better.

At night, Elmo put on his favourite pyjamas. But a button popped off. Ping! The pyjamas were too small. Elmo was disappointed. "What a day!" he said. As Elmo's Mummy gave him pyjamas that fit, she said, "Do you want to talk about what happened today?" Elmo nodded his furry head.

Elmo's Mummy sat on his bed so they could have a cuddle and talk. Elmo had been frustrated, upset, and disappointed. What a day! "Elmo," Elmo's dad began. "Would you like to sing to feel better about your long day?"

"Yeah!" said Elmo. His Mummy and Daddy smiled while Elmo sang his favourite lullaby. Then, they lifted the bed sheet and began Elmo's favourite bedtime routine: counting the sheep printed on the sheet above their heads.

What a day Elmo had! But, as Elmo told his Mummy and Daddy, "This was a good day after all!"



PARENTS AND CARERS: Read this story aloud to your child as part of your bedtime routine.

Memory Game

All of these Sesame Street friends have a favourite toy or animal friend that helps them feel better when they are scared or sad. Choose one of these cards and hold it when you need your Sesame friend to help **you** feel better.

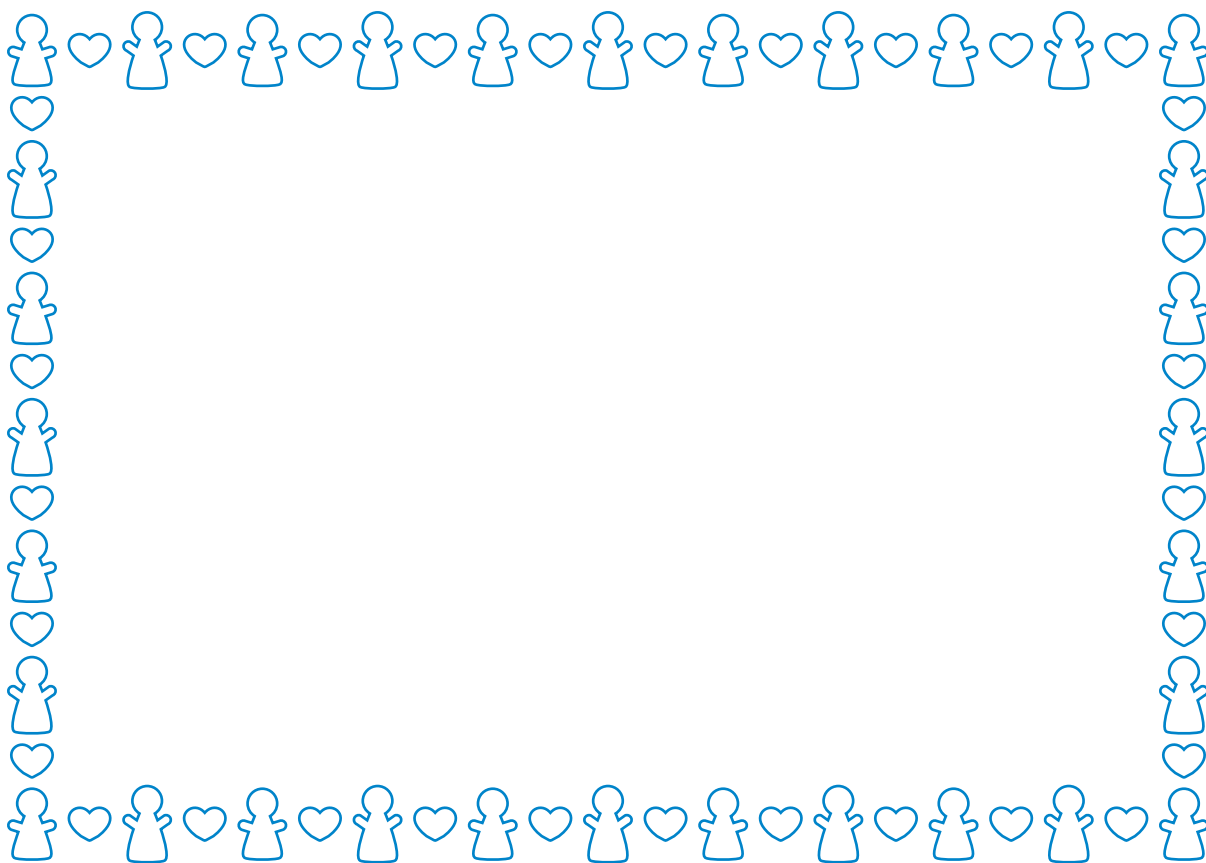
INSTRUCTIONS

1. Play with a friend. Cut apart these cards and put them facedown.
2. Take turns flipping cards over two at a time. If the cards match, take the cards and take another turn. If they do not match, turn them back over in their places and let the other player take a turn.
3. The person with the most cards at the end wins.



About Me

 **STICK IN A PHOTO OR DO A DRAWING OF YOU.**
 Use your imagination to decorate it any way you like.



 **WRITE ABOUT YOURSELF HERE.**

MY NAME: _____

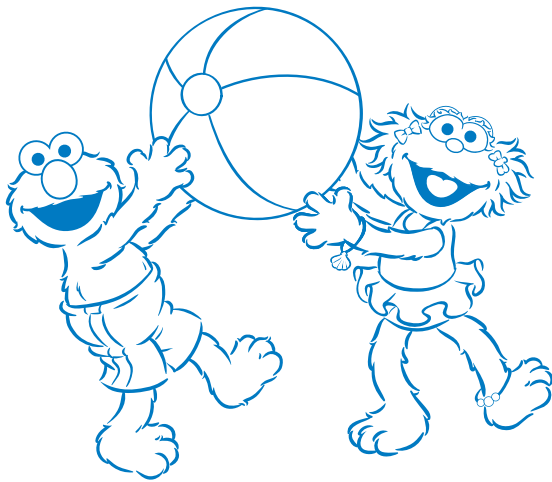
MY AGE: _____

MY FAVOURITE ANIMAL: _____

MY FAVOURITE FOOD: _____

People Who Care About You

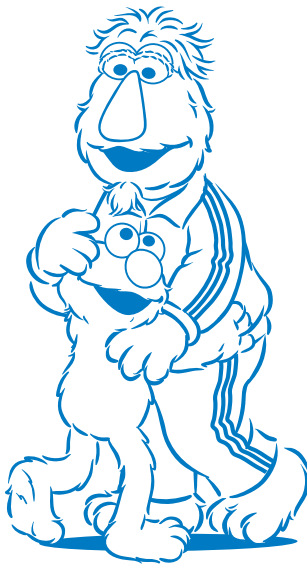
All of these Sesame Street friends have a special friend who cares about them. What can you do with the very special people who care about you? These are some of the activities you can do to make you feel better.



PLAY WITH



TALK TO



HAVE A HUG FROM



RUN WITH

 THINK ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE ACTIVITIES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER. ASK A GROWN-UP TO HELP YOU WRITE OR DRAW ABOUT IT.

Notes Page

Resources You Can Use

 For more information and resources, visit:

- ♥ www.education.vic.gov.au/about/emergencies/default.htm
- ♥ www.education.vic.gov.au/earlychildhood/
- ♥ www.earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/resource_hubs/disasters_children/disaster_resources/
- ♥ www.ema.gov.au/
- ♥ www.dhs.vic.gov.au/emergency/
- ♥ www.psychology.org.au/community/topics/trauma/
- ♥ www.skylight.org.nz/



Parentline Australia – 13 22 89

Kids Helpline Australia– 1800 55 1800

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement – 1300 664 786

Created by Sesame Street, this resource guide has been revised for Australia in collaboration with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria, Australia. Adaptations made by Dr. Vicki Trethowan.



Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development

