

HELPING FAMILIES
AFTER AN
EMERGENCY

Here for Each Other



A Resource for Parents and Caregivers

DEAR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS,

Emergencies can be overwhelming, particularly for young children. Things can change suddenly, and maybe drastically. But even in the most difficult circumstances, you can find strength and resilience within your family and community.

Understandably, your first priority is keeping your family safe. However, after the event, your comfort and support can significantly help your child and your whole family. There are simple ways you can soothe and reassure one another. Through your routines, you can bring a sense of calm into your lives.

To help adults and children cope with disasters, Sesame Street developed **Here for Each Other**, a resource that includes tips, ideas, and activities. In these pages, you'll find ways to talk with your child about what happened while remaining hopeful for better things to come. 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 friends are here to help you and your child through this challenging time.

 For more information and resources, visit:

aap.org

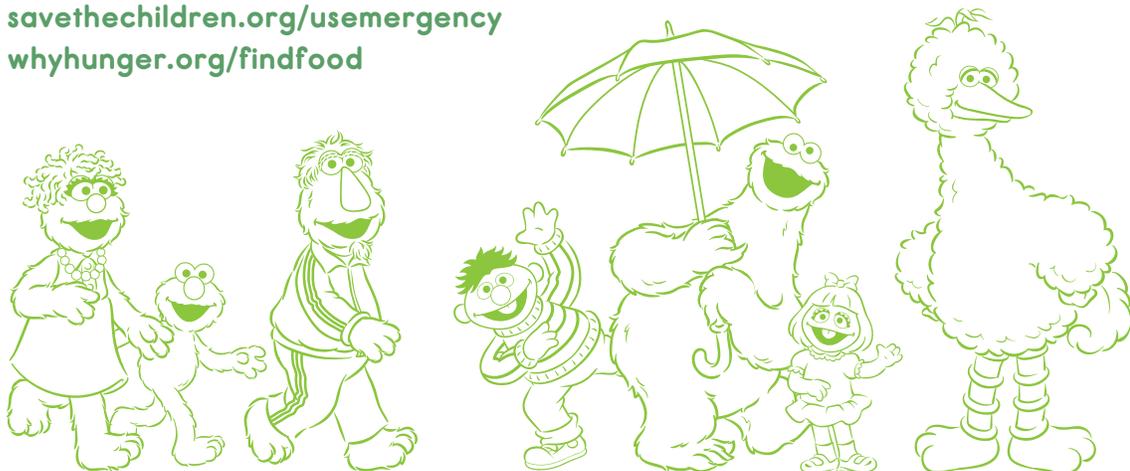
aspc.org

ready.gov

redcross.org

savethechildren.org/useemergency

whyhunger.org/findfood



Communicating and Reassuring

Here are some ideas to help you communicate with your child and reassure him that he is loved. You can help your child by:

- ♥ **GIVING THE FACTS** Use simple words to explain what has happened (see the “What Just Happened?” page at the end of this document). For example, in the case of a hurricane, 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.
- ♥ **OFFERING COMFORT** Children often take their cues from you, when you react, they react. Try to model a sense of calm in front of your child; it is important to ease your own fears as well as his. Answer questions, even those that are repetitious, honestly and with simple words to make it clearer. Reassure children that what happened is not their fault, and that you love them and will take care of them.
- ♥ **LISTENING AND TALKING** Follow your child’s lead. If she prefers not to talk, play with her and spend time doing activities she enjoys. If she expresses sadness, anger, or fear, tell her it’s okay to feel this way, and encourage her to continue sharing her feelings through words or 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 system with relatives, friends, faith leaders, or counselors. Be aware of how you are feeling immediately after the emergency, as well as in the days and months following the event.

Talking Together

What to say when your child says, “I’m scared!”

- ♥ **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, and keep her close at hand. Lots of hugs help, too!
- ♥ **3 TO 5:** “It’s OK to feel scared. Can you tell Mommy why you’re scared? Mommy loves you, and I will be here to keep you safe.”
- ♥ **6 TO 11:** Start by asking your child what she already knows about what has happened and how she’s feeling, so that you know how to address her particular concerns.



Staying Positive and Useful

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 to engage in everyday activities, such as playing with blocks or telling a bedtime story.
- ♥ **SPEND TIME TOGETHER** Simply smiling, laughing, and playing together can help children feel safe. Encourage your child to do things that can help her express her emotions, such as drawing a picture or singing a song.
- ♥ **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 event is happening over and over, in real time.



Talking Together

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



Supporting Each Other

In the aftermath of an emergency, you can support one another and find ways to cope together. 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 behavior. Nightmares, bed-wetting, aggression, inattentiveness, and clinging behavior are common among children who have experienced an emergency. If you notice such signs – either immediately after an emergency or later on – talk to a health-care provider, teacher, school counselor, mental health professional, or other support personnel.
- ♥ **EMPOWER YOUR CHILDREN** If your child has been directly affected by an emergency, you can give him simple chores and responsibilities to help him maintain a sense of control. Praise his efforts; building self-confidence and making him feel proud are both important. If your child has been indirectly affected, encourage him to show compassion and to help others; he will feel strengthened by doing so.
- ♥ **INSPIRE A SENSE OF HOPE** Explain that while many things may have changed, there are always people and places that help keep your family safe and comforted.



Talking Together

“No matter what has happened, we still have each other to build a better future.”

