



“mommy’s
home...
why isn’t
mommy
at work
today?”

—Elmo

FAMILIES STAND TOGETHER

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Weathering economic woes with a little
less ... and more of what matters

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH FAMILIES STAND TOGETHER



A SCENE FROM FAMILIES STAND TOGETHER

ELMO: Why isn't Mommy at work today?

MAE: Well, darling, there's something your daddy and I want to talk to you about.

LOUIE: Come on, sit over here, son, sit down.

MAE: You see...yesterday I lost my job. I'm not going to be working, at least for a little while.

Helping kids discover that while they may not get everything they want, they already have everything they need

When parents tighten their belts, kids feel the pinch. These days, that's happening far too frequently. Two out of three middle-class families are at high risk of losing or not sustaining their economic security.¹

As moms and dads struggle to make tough financial decisions, home is becoming a stressful place for young children. Family values—spending time together, playing, and sharing—are harder to maintain.

To help young families through the economic downturn, we produced the Families Stand Together outreach initiative. The bilingual multimedia kit includes a DVD, a storybook, and

a caregiver's handbook with advice about spending time as a family, practical ways to stay afloat, and answering children's questions, such as:

- Q. Why do we have to move?
- A. Because we don't have as much money to pay for our house. Remember, a house is not a home. Home is where our family is.

We also produced a primetime special, which aired on PBS and was screened at community centers, to show families that they weren't alone. Many adults hit by the financial crisis reported feelings of embarrassment and isolation. But in the special, real families come to Sesame Street to share their common experiences.

¹ Demos and the Institute on Assets and Social Policy, "By a Thread," Brandeis University, 2007. Retrieved March 11, 2009 from <http://www.demos.org/pubs/BaT112807.pdf>

After watching the program, parents reported feeling “less ashamed,” more hopeful and more able to cope with financial changes. It’s typical to take layoffs and cutbacks personally, but by seeing families in the same spot parents realize everyone is going through hard times.

Elmo delivers that same message to children in the outreach materials, community screenings and in a special online episode of Sesame Street.

The psychologists and financial advisers who helped us shape this program advised families to have straightforward, honest conversations about changing finances and the ways in which family activities will be impacted, foster hope through short-term and long-term planning, and most important: find ways to spend more time together.

The story begins when Elmo learns his mom has lost her job. While Elmo is initially excited to have more time to play with her, he soon learns that his family will have to cut back. For instance, they’ll have to eat at home instead of at restaurants and rent movies instead of going to the theater. To learn how to adjust to the financial shift, Elmo asks real children how they’re dealing with similar situations.

One boy shares his take on his family’s move: “[The new house is] much smaller, but we have a bunk bed. It’s much funner like that.”

Another child advises, “I have to look out for: Is this a *need* or a *want*?”

“**Families Stand Together makes it clear that there is no magic wand, no fairy-tale ending in sight...comfort comes not from a sudden windfall but from knowing that many have, and are, going through the same sort of thing. In its own “Sesame Street” way, it’s unlike anything on television.**”

—Mary McNamara, television critic, *Los Angeles Times*



Elmo asks the children: “When you can’t always have what you want, what do you do instead?” They show him how they spend more time playing outside, getting books from the library, and having fun with their family. Less buying. More doing.

Elmo returns to his family with a new outlook. While he might not get everything he *wants*, he already has everything he *needs*. It’s a simple message, and for families facing hard times, it’s just the thing.

For more information on outreach projects like these, please e-mail us: outreach@sesameworkshop.org

IMPACT:

87%

of parents gave the Kit a positive overall rating

75%

of parents found the kit “extremely helpful” or “very helpful” in coping with tough economic times.

82%

of parents felt the kit helped their family cope better with the tough economic times.

- In fact, the number of parents who involved their child in dealing with the changes resulting from economic hardship went up from 63% to 81%.
- The number of parents who, despite economic hardship, spent more time nurturing and playing with their child went up from 84% to 91%.
- At the same time, the number of parents who sought community support to help their family cope went up from 39% to 52%.

Source: Sesame Workshop Families Stand Together Impact Study conducted by Fluent Research, 2010.

REACH: 325,000 outreach kits distributed across the U.S.; “countless” free downloads

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