



## Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos

*Increasing access to early learning in crisis settings*

### Background

The first five years of life are critical for child development. This is when early experiences shape the architecture of the developing brain, laying the foundation for lifelong learning and well-being. For children affected by crisis and conflict, exposure to prolonged stress during these critical early years can inhibit brain development and have lasting effects on learning, health, and behavior. However, [research shows that](#) access to high-quality early childhood development (ECD) can mitigate the effects of prolonged stress, helping children to overcome adversity and build a brighter future. Play is an essential component of ECD, especially for children in crisis contexts, as playful experiences offer a positive outlet for anxiety, reduce stress, and promote resilience.

***Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos*** is a set of engaging, modular, universal early learning videos that are designed to reach young children with playful early

**learning content, with particular attention to the unique experiences of children affected by conflict and crisis.**

High quality, child-facing multimedia programming like the *Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos* offer a comparative advantage for cross-sectoral use. Educational media can be used with limited technical training across a range of settings beyond formal education environments. Sesame Workshop's 50 years of experience has demonstrated that consistent and regular access to high quality educational media can have a [positive impact on learning and development outcomes](#) for children.

**Flexible, play-based, child-facing media content like the *Watch, Play, Learn* videos increase equitable access to early learning opportunities, lowering the barrier to providing high-quality ECD programming across a range of sectors.**



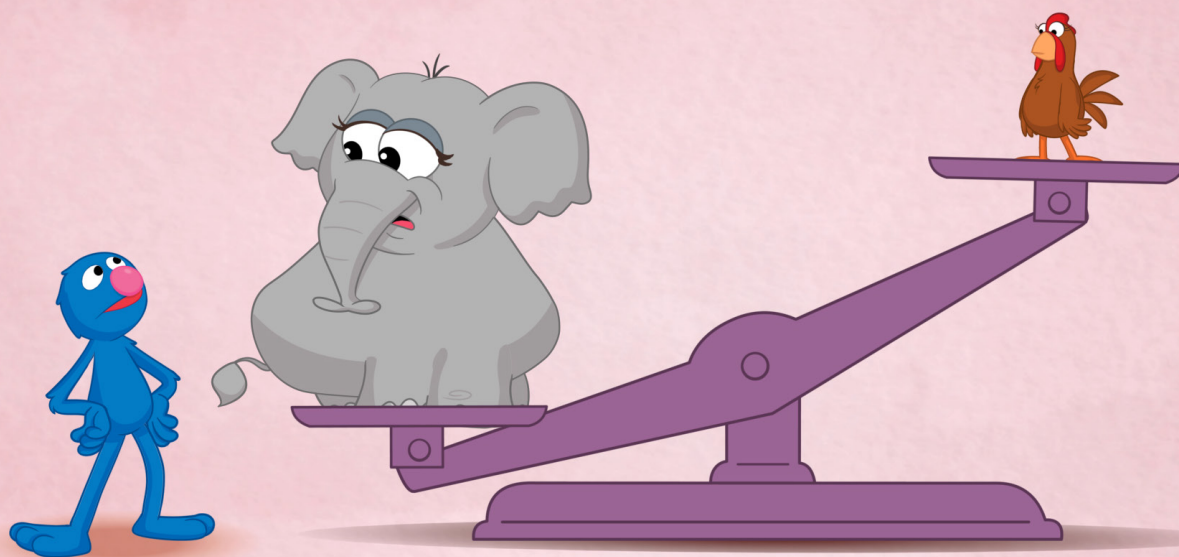
## Content Areas and Approach

With generous funding from the LEGO Foundation, Sesame Workshop has created the *Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos*, a set of thematically-organized videos totaling 140, 5-minute animated segments designed for children three- to eight-years-old. They feature Sesame's engaging and beloved Muppet characters who are artfully designed to promote specific ECD outcomes in the domains of **math, science, social emotional learning, and child protection, health, and safety**.

These domains were selected based on three factors: an analysis of their level of priority for children in humanitarian contexts, an analysis of what domain areas can be well influenced by child-directed media experiences, and a review of what can be easily dubbed and deployed to a variety of settings around the world.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the likelihood of a diverse set of learning levels in humanitarian contexts, **we have designed the videos for children of different age groups and learning levels**. A summary of the topics covered within each domain is included below:



Math	Science	Social Emotional Learning	Child Protection, Health & Safety
Geometry	Shadows	Emotion Definitions	Identity
Measurement	Bridges	Physical Signs	Protection
Relational Concepts	Ramps	and Expressions	Water and Land Safety
Spatial Relations	Pulleys	Self-Regulation	WASH
	Levers		Health Promotion



## Playful Early Learning Across Sectors

A young child's development does not happen only at school or through academics — critical aspects of social, physical, and emotional development are fostered during their daily life — and key learning opportunities are not limited to education sector services. By integrating *Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos* [across essential and protective services](#) that are already reaching crisis-affected communities, we have an opportunity to increase access to playful early childhood development opportunities. **A multi-sector approach allows crisis-affected children and their caregivers to have more frequent, consistent, and uninterrupted access to the early learning opportunities young children need.**

Whether enabled by high- or low-tech delivery, **educational media can be used to enable broad reach**, delivered in a targeted manner to address equity gaps in other early childhood education and development services. High-quality educational media is also **highly engaging**, drawing the attention of both children and caregivers, bringing **joy, play, and inclusive learning experiences** to children who often fall in the gap between sectors and are offered few or no services.

**As a ready-made, child-facing, and globally tested asset, the *Watch, Play, Learn* videos could be one tool used to help restore early childhood development services, bridging the gap between disruption and restoration of formal or non-formal educational services.**

### Learning through play

happens through joyful, actively engaging, meaningful, iterative, and socially interactive experiences and supports overall healthy development, including the acquisition of content (e.g. math, science) and life skills (e.g. social-emotional learning, executive function). These skills are critical to positive, healthy development and to children's success in school and life.



## Designed for Flexible Use in Diverse Crisis and Conflict Settings

*Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos* were designed using Sesame Workshop's core principles:

**CHILD CENTERED:** Kid-friendly content fosters an emotional connection that enables the content to address tough topics and model positive behavior, as well as increasing engagement and learning outcomes through simple, compelling, and concrete messaging. We used a research-based approach to ensure that content is relatable and reflective of a child's world, bringing learning to life through the eyes of a child. A common thread throughout all curricular areas is joyful, play-based experiences that promote a lifelong love of learning.

**CRISIS SENSITIVE:** We created the videos with the guidance of trauma and ECD experts, who advised on how to tackle difficult topics with care and sensitivity, ensuring the videos could address the unique needs of children affected by crisis and conflict. Content and messaging were selected with this in mind, including prioritizing SEL, child protection, and health topics with particular importance for children affected by crisis and conflict.

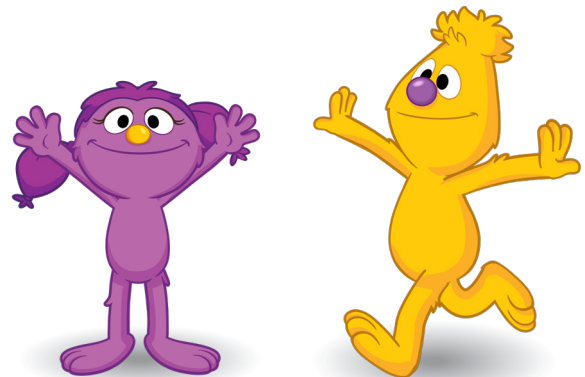
**PLAY-BASED:** Play is essential for promoting children's learning, imagination, and positive connection with their surroundings, supporting them in mitigating the heightened stress caused by violence, natural disasters, displacement and the uncertainty experienced in humanitarian settings. The videos' joyful and engaging stories, scenes, songs, and games promote play-based learning. Sesame's characters are specifically designed to model curiosity and playful problem-solving, encouraging children watching to participate and explore the world around them through calls to action and catchy songs.

**FLEXIBLE:** The videos were designed to easily complement a wide range of ECD content, including partners' existing child-facing materials, Sesame's extensively-tested global library, and new co-created content between Sesame and an implementing partner. Pairing the *Watch, Play, Learn* videos with additional materials offers the opportunity to extend, reinforce, and contextualize key messaging.

**GLOBALLY TESTED:** Sesame Workshop undertook a comprehensive formative research process with displaced populations and host communities in nine locations, including both crisis-affected and more stable settings. All scripts and rough cuts were reviewed by a global advisory council of ECD and technical experts from the regions in which testing was done. Through global testing, we analyzed which characters, themes, messages, and visuals were globally appealing and relevant, allowing us to create a library of content that children around the world can learn from.

**INCLUSIVE:** The videos promote meaningful representation of marginalized groups, ensuring equal gender representation across the Muppet characters, and introduce Ameera — the first ever Muppet who uses a wheelchair and forearm crutches.

**ALIGNED WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS:** The *Watch, Play, Learn* learning outcomes align with the [Nurturing Care Framework](#) and many other commonly referenced international standards in humanitarian settings for young children, with outcomes around good health, safety and security, and opportunities for early learning. Finally, they align with the Early Learning and Development Standards in All Essential Domains of School Readiness (Birth–Age 5) with outcomes around social and emotional development, physical well-being and motor development, approaches toward learning, and cognition and general knowledge.



### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> As a result of the constraints posed by the goal to create content that is universal, we did not include certain domains that would typically be a part of foundational learning for children in this initial package of content. For example, we did not include a literacy domain or content around number systems with the "Math" domain due to the inability to show local alphabets and number systems in a global program. Similarly, we excluded nutrition from the Health domain due to challenges portraying diet diversity in global content and our inability to ensure children engaging with our content will have access to a variety of nutritious foods. We have created the content as a starting point for fluid integration of ECD into existing humanitarian sectors. They do not represent comprehensive preschool program, and we anticipate that they will be most impactful when distributed in tandem with complementary materials from strong implementing partners. We are interested in creating additional, localized content in coordination with on-the-ground partners to supplement this package in the future.