



# Sesame Family Newsletter

July 20, 2005

The nonprofit organization behind Sesame Street and so much more



## For Parents

### Rituals and Rebellions

by *Jordan Brown*

The comforts and constraints of family traditions.

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- [No, Daddy! YOU'RE Exhausted!](#)
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### GAMES AND MORE: Out-of-this-World Fun!

"Spacing out" with Sesame pals.

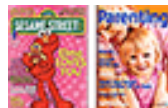
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## Rituals and Rebellions

## WHEN THE SON RISES

**"Mommy's my night-night guy, and Daddy's my morning guy,"** our 4-year-old son Finn recently told a family friend. In other words, my wife Ellen is the last person he sees before he nods off, and I'm the first one he sees when he wakes up. Both ends of the day come with wonderful rituals that we each hold dearly.

Every night, after Ellen reads Finn a story, and tucks him in, she asks him the same two questions, "What was your favorite part of the day?" and "What will you dream about tonight?"

Finn's answer to the first question might be, "Playing water games at camp!" The response to the second could be, "I'm gonna dream about flying over a volcano!" After one last hug and kiss, Ellen then sits on a chair in Finn's room until he drifts off to sleep.

Finn also enjoys several traditions with "the morning guy." I'm naturally an early riser, as is our dog Satchmo (coincidence? I don't think so.) Anyway, I'm usually up before Finn awakens. When he runs to me in the den, I give him a big bear hug. He then takes my hand, and leads us back to his bed. He says, "Tuck me in just the way I was." After I do this, Finn requests that I bring him "apple juice not-too-cold in the Dora cup." While I'm off getting his drink, he pretends to go back to sleep, complete with loud, dramatic snoring. I "wake" him to give him the juice, he says "thanks," and his day officially begins. Many of the rituals and routines that Finn loves allow him to feel in charge of a situation, and know that things will unfold in a predictable way.



### THROUGH THE YEARS: RITUALS

[Traditions help kids adjust to life.](#)

### STUCK IN A GROOVE

[Stumped by your child's devotion to a particular toy, dress, or routine? Here's guidance with a grin.](#)

### MORNING MANAGEMENT

[Tips for making morning routines run more smoothly.](#)

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## NO, DADDY! YOU'RE EXHAUSTED!

**Finn's fondness for rituals and routines can be charming when he's in a good mood.** But as any parent of a preschooler knows, this isn't always the case.

About a year ago, Finn gave up a favorite ritual--the afternoon nap. On the plus side, without a midday nap, Finn never puts up a fight at bedtime. The clock strikes 8:00, and zzzzzzzzzzz, he's out like a light. His falling asleep so quickly gives Ellen and me a little downtime. (That is if you consider getting our 8-month-old daughter Olivia to sleep "downtime.") The only problem with the nap-free version of Finn is that when he's had an especially active day, he is much more prone to tantrums and meltdowns near bedtime.



### ANGER

[Our experts explore how children cope with angry feelings.](#)

When our boy is tired he can transform from a strong-willed sweetie into a melodramatic "drama queen." For example, if I happen to knock over a Lego tower he built earlier in the day, he'll scream, "That's horrible. You're a BAD daddy!" If his sandwich isn't cut just the right way, and he's feeling fragile, he'll freak out.

In such situations, our first line of defense is usually distraction. If we can quickly refocus Finn's attention, then there's a chance of reversing his mood. While brushing his teeth one recent evening, he was on the verge of a tantrum after I told him that he couldn't swallow the bubble gum flavored toothpaste. By "accidentally" dabbing some shaving cream on my nose and ear lobes, I was able to shift Finn's attention away from the toothpaste issue. However, there are Occasions when I draw a blank coming up with a good distraction and wish that some creative entrepreneur would dream up an invention for parents called "the Distract-o-rama Belt" (slogan: Tools for Every Tantrum). When the Panic button on this belt is pressed, it instantly releases the perfect diversion for your child. Maybe it's a laser light show with music, or a stream of balloons, or an image of a favorite cartoon character. If a child were fond of airplanes, perhaps this belt could instantly project a 3-D holographic image of a DC-10 zooming across the ceiling.

Unfortunately, since Ellen and I don't have such an invention, our attempts at distraction sometimes bomb, and Finn becomes defiant. Reasoning with our overtired kid is usually a lousy idea, and most often leads to Finn yelling charming things like "No, Daddy, YOU'RE Exhausted!"

Fortunately, during the last year or so, Finn's tantrums have definitely become less frequent and less intense. While there's always room for improvement, he is much better at calming himself down.

## THE DANGEROUS EMOTION

Ways to express anger without harming your child.

## AGGRESSION: TWO TO FIVE

How young children learn to control their hostility.

## SELF-CONTROL: TWO TO FIVE

Preschoolers are better at reining themselves in.

## AFTER-SCHOOL MELTDOWN

When good kids let off steam.

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## DISCIPLINING A STRONG-WILLED CHILD

**Sparked by Finn's passion for chocolate, I started reading to him CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY by Roald Dahl.** With a lot of support (and by skipping slow-moving sections), Finn is able to follow the basic plot of the story. In addition to enjoying the zany action, we discuss the consequences of some of the lead characters misbehaving. Finn seems particularly intrigued with the character Veruca Salt, a girl who makes numerous demands on her parents, and screams, "I want it NOW!" Hmmmmm...



## DISCIPLINE ABCs

With these basic strategies

When Finn gets fussy and bossy, it sometimes feels as though we live with our own Veruca Salt. As Murphy's Law would have it, this side of Finn often emerges when I'm in the middle of an important phone call for work. Before the call, I'll explain to Finn that he needs to play quietly in the other room while I'm on the phone for a few minutes. I'm amazed when he patiently does so--for about two minutes. Then Finn will burst into the room, yell "My turn!" and grab the phone. He'll tell whoever is on the other end of the line details of whatever toy he is playing with. Not surprisingly, this kind of power struggle can lead to a tantrum.

As a parent, I have trouble determining when to stand firm about something I've said "no" to, and when it is not worth the battle. Obviously if Finn is doing something that could endanger himself, or someone else, there's no room for negotiation. But there are many cases when I find that I've said "no" because I'm setting limits as a parent. We don't want Finn to feel that he gets everything he asks for. On the other hand when I bend from time to time, it empowers Finn by letting him know that his wishes matter--and it often avoids a tantrum that would make the whole situation worse.

Rituals can be mixed blessings. On the plus side, they provide predictability and comfort to a child's world. No matter what else happens in his day, Finn can always count on Ellen and me to be there with many fun traditions. But Finn is also starting to learn that the realities of life sometimes intrude on rituals. When a ritual doesn't work as usual, like when Ellen is away on a business trip, and so can't do their bedtime routines, it becomes a source of anxiety rather than comfort. By learning how to anticipate and handle temper tantrums, we've made all our lives happier.

Well, it's almost midnight, and this "morning guy" has to be bright-eyed when his little boy awakens in just about six hours. I hope that you and your family enjoy many wonderful rituals and traditions together.

Jordan Brown

Sesame Workshop

[you can raise a child who is spirited, not spoiled.](#)

### TIME-OUT TACTICS

[Should time-outs be your first choice when disciplining a preschooler?](#)

### FIVE DISCIPLINE DILEMMAS

[How to scold children without getting into a battle of wills.](#)

### TAMING THE "TYPE-A" KID

[If your child is a perfectionist, he might have a type-A personality.](#)

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## Weekly Trivia

**Did you know.** ...that some Muppets are designed with colors that complement each other? It's true! Best friends Elmo and Zoe were designed to have matching red/orange color schemes.

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## FROM THE WORKSHOP

From the United States to Bangladesh, Sesame Workshop is using the power of media to allow children to learn about the world around them and acquire the skills they will need to succeed in it. Whether it's letters and numbers or a concept like sharing, with kind words and the humor of puppets, the laughter and the learning are the same all over the world.



[Learn how you can help Sesame Workshop today.](#)

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### COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

[Tell us what's on your mind.](#) Kindly note that we are unable to respond to every email received.

### ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary Sesame Street. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like Dragon Tales and Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat, Pinky Dinky Doo and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of Sesame Street, Dragon Tales and Sagwa products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at [www.sesameworkshop.org](http://www.sesameworkshop.org)

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