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Sesame Family Newsletter

September 11, 2008

Comforting a Scared Child

by Jordan D. Brown

Reassuring children when disaster strikes.

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Featuring:

Tantrums and Tremors
Coping with Stressful Events
A Snow Globe with a Tragic Story



Games and More

Rhyme Time

- [Jumping Rhymes](#)
Abby and Zoe teach Rosita to jump and rhyme.
- [In the Nick of Rhyme](#)
Help Grover save the day by finding things that rhyme.
- [Make Time to Rhyme](#)
Rhyme with Elmo and Hoots.
- [Big Bird Rhymes Beep](#)
In this video, Big Bird finds things that rhyme with the word 'beep.'
- [Ending in 'Op'](#)
A song about words that end with 'op.'
- [Weekly Trivia](#)

Sisimpur: Educating a New Generation of Bangladeshi Children

Find out what happened when Sesame Workshop asked Bangladeshi teenagers to document their stories on film.

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New Play with Me Sesame DVD

In this [new DVD](#), Sesame friends engage preschoolers in interactive fun while teaching healthy habits such as exercise, brushing teeth, eating right and getting plenty of rest.

[Find more Play with Me Sesame DVDs](#)

You Can Ask

You Can Ask offers ideas for helping 3- to 8-year-old children build important social and emotional skills and cope with whatever comes their way.

The materials include:

- A *Sesame Street* video for parents and preschoolers
- A guide for parents and caregivers
- Tips for talking with children
- Online resources for adults and activities for children



[Learn More](#)



American Greetings: A Proud Sponsor of Sesame Street

[American Greetings](#) is proud to offer products featuring Elmo, Big Bird, Abby

Cadabby, and the rest of the beloved Sesame Street Muppets. The iconic characters are featured on greeting cards, stationery, gift wrap, and party goods.

TANTRUMS AND TREMORS

One morning last spring, as I was rushing to get out of the house, my daughter Olivia asserted her "3-year-oldness" by refusing to put on her shoes. Eager to avoid a struggle, I offered an incentive: "Olivia, honey, if you put on your shoes... (thinking fast)...um, I'll let you hold my keys until we get to the car."

Sensing my desperation, Olivia wasn't budging. I put my squirming daughter on a chair in her room, the better to slip on her shoes. No luck. To make it perfectly clear who was in charge, Olivia then removed her socks, and crossed her arms. Before she got a chance to remove any more of her clothes, I tried another approach. I put her sneakers on my hands like little puppets. Intrigued by the impromptu puppet show, Olivia stopped pouting immediately. I even took it one step further by speaking in a funny French accent, "Bonjour, Mademoiselle Livvy! Your papa, he needs you to poot on zeez adorable little shoozies. Could you help heem? Pleeez?" Olivia's smile broadened. "Again, again!" she implored. Seeing that the strategy was working, I repeated my silly shoe act. Olivia grew more and more cooperative, and before I knew it, her shoes were on. This playful approach helped me get Olivia and her older brother Finn washed, dressed, fed, and out the door with a few minutes to spare. Phew!

As we pulled out of the driveway, I thought about how I had handled the shoe struggle. "Am I an amazing dad, or what?" I silently gloated. "Is there no situation I can't handle?" Then a news reporter on the radio announced a horrible earthquake in China. Because of this natural disaster, millions of people were now homeless, injured, or dead. Suddenly the challenge of getting shoes on a preschooler seemed ridiculously trivial. Fortunately, Olivia and Finn were deeply engrossed in a game of "I Can Make a Sillier Face than You" in the back seat. They didn't hear this news report.

To avoid any unnecessary worry on their part, I quickly flipped to a music station. As we drove, this tragic news brought to mind a disturbing question: What would I do, as a parent, if faced with some sort of crisis, emergency, or disaster?



[COMFORTING CHILDREN IN A DISASTER](#)

Helping children cope with sudden stress.

[IT'S ALRIGHT TO CRY](#)

This song reminds children that crying is okay when sad things happen.

COPING WITH STRESSFUL EVENTS

Most things that frighten Olivia are easy to handle. If she's scared by a loud clap of thunder, all it takes is a few extra hugs, playing a favorite game, or baking a yummy treat together -- and she's back to her bubbly self. My wife Ellen and I reassure her that while thunder is scary, it won't hurt her. If Olivia is frightened by something in a children's movie or a television show, we simply take her out to the lobby, or turn off the TV. The few times that we've had power outages, our home becomes very dark (we live in a rural area). Once the initial shock is over, we pull out the flashlights and try to turn the situation into an adventure.

With the anniversary of September 11 coming up this week, I can't help but think about what we'd do if our family faced a crisis? What if something really terrible happened, such as a natural disaster or a terrorist attack? Once the immediate panic was over, what could we do to put our kids' minds at ease? Or, what if some disaster happens far away from our home, to people we didn't know? How could we help our children feel empowered rather than worried?

To get answers to these questions, I spoke with parents, teachers, and read the advice of some experts (including the links to the right). Here are some tips that I found helpful:



[UNDERSTANDING HOW PRESCHOOLERS HANDLE STRESS](#)

How 3-to 5- year- olds experience fear and loss.

[HOW 6-to 8- YEAR- OLDS HANDLE STRESS](#)

Helping school-age children handle tough times.

[KIDS TALK ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS](#)

This video features children

- **PAY ATTENTION TO BOTH ACTIONS AND WORDS:** Olivia is quite good about expressing her emotions in words, but like many preschoolers, her actions often provide a better window into her true feelings. When Olivia is stressed out about something, she is often much more "clingy." If she asks repeatedly for "extra hugs" that's a red flag that something's bothering her. And when Olivia is worried, little disappointments can set her off more than normal. Experts also point out kids' fears are often magnified. Young children are not yet able to grasp the idea that a far-away scary event they see on TV won't happen to them tomorrow.
- **AVOID "VIRTUAL DISASTERS" IN MOVIES, TV, AND VIDEO GAMES:** Preschoolers often have a hard time telling the difference between reality and fantasy. Telling a young child, "don't worry, it's only a movie" can be confusing, and probably won't assuage the disturbing images. So, during times of crisis it is especially important to steer clear of any entertainment media that might upset your child. If you are not sure whether a movie or TV show is appropriate for your children, you can consult the online resource [Common Sense Media](#). To determine if a video game might be too scary or violent for your child, you can consult [What They Like](#).
- **REMEMBER RITUALS AND ROUTINES:** In my parenting experience, I find that nothing comforts and reassures my children like rituals and routines. By singing a favorite song, or playing a familiar game, Finn and Olivia are able to feel a sense of control -- even in a situation when unexpected events have happened. Games always help my kids feel grounded, and often bring much-needed humor to what feels like a dire situation. Several years ago, when Finn was very jittery about starting nursery school, he loved the idea that if he survived a morning there, he would get a big "victory twirl" when we picked him up after school.
- **BE HONEST BUT BRIEF:** While Ellen and I would like our kids to develop an interest in national and world events, we are quick to shut off the radio or TV news, especially when presenting upsetting images and sounds. If they happen to hear or see a tragic news story, we do our best to answer any questions as honestly as possible, but try to keep our responses as brief and positive as possible.
- **LENDING A HAND:** Last year, the father of one of the children at Finn's elementary school was killed in a car accident. To help the grieving family, all the students in the school worked on a project to raise money, and wrote letters expressing their concern. While Olivia was too young to understand our conversations about what happened, Finn felt proud of, and comforted by, what he did to help out.

sharing their thoughts on different emotions.

A SNOW GLOBE WITH A TRAGIC STORY

Finn loves to show off his snow globe collection to Olivia. His biggest snow globe comes from the place where he and Olivia were born -- New York City. Although we no longer live in the Big Apple, this snow globe holds a poignant detail that Finn always points out.



"Olivia, see those two tall buildings here?" he said, pointing to the Twin Towers. "Before you were born, some bad guys crashed their planes into them...BOOM! Lots of people were really scared."

Looking at a poster in my son's room, Olivia asked, "Bad guys like Darth Vader?"

"Yeah, kind of," responded. "And lots of people died. But don't worry, we're safe now." Finn gave a brotherly hug. Aware that many children might find this news unsettling, I carefully watched Olivia's reaction. She seemed fine and eager to get back to playing. Finn then shouted, "Hey, Olivia, why don't you be Princess Leia, and I'll be Luke Skywalker and rescue you."

"No, I want to rescue YOU!" my feisty daughter responded, as she grabbed one of Finn's toy light sabers.

"I have a better idea!" announced Finn. "Let's give Daddy "Tickle Torture!" And they headed my way. Soon, their serious conversation about scary events transformed into their usual imaginative playtime.

Jordan D. Brown
Sesame Workshop

WEEKLY TRIVIA

Will Lee, the actor who played Mr. Hooper, died in 1982. Will's passing compelled Sesame Street writers to focus on the subject of death in an honest, moving way. "I'll miss you, Mr. Hooper," said Big Bird at the end of that segment. And millions still do.

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.

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