



H is for Helping Hands

Supporting Kids Through Scary Times



H IS
FOR...

HELPING HANDS: Remembering we're not alone

HUGS: Feeling safe and secure

HEARTS: Appreciating the power of kindness and compassion

HEAR: Talking and listening

HERE: Keeping routines and being present

SesameStreetinCommunities.org

What is Community Violence?

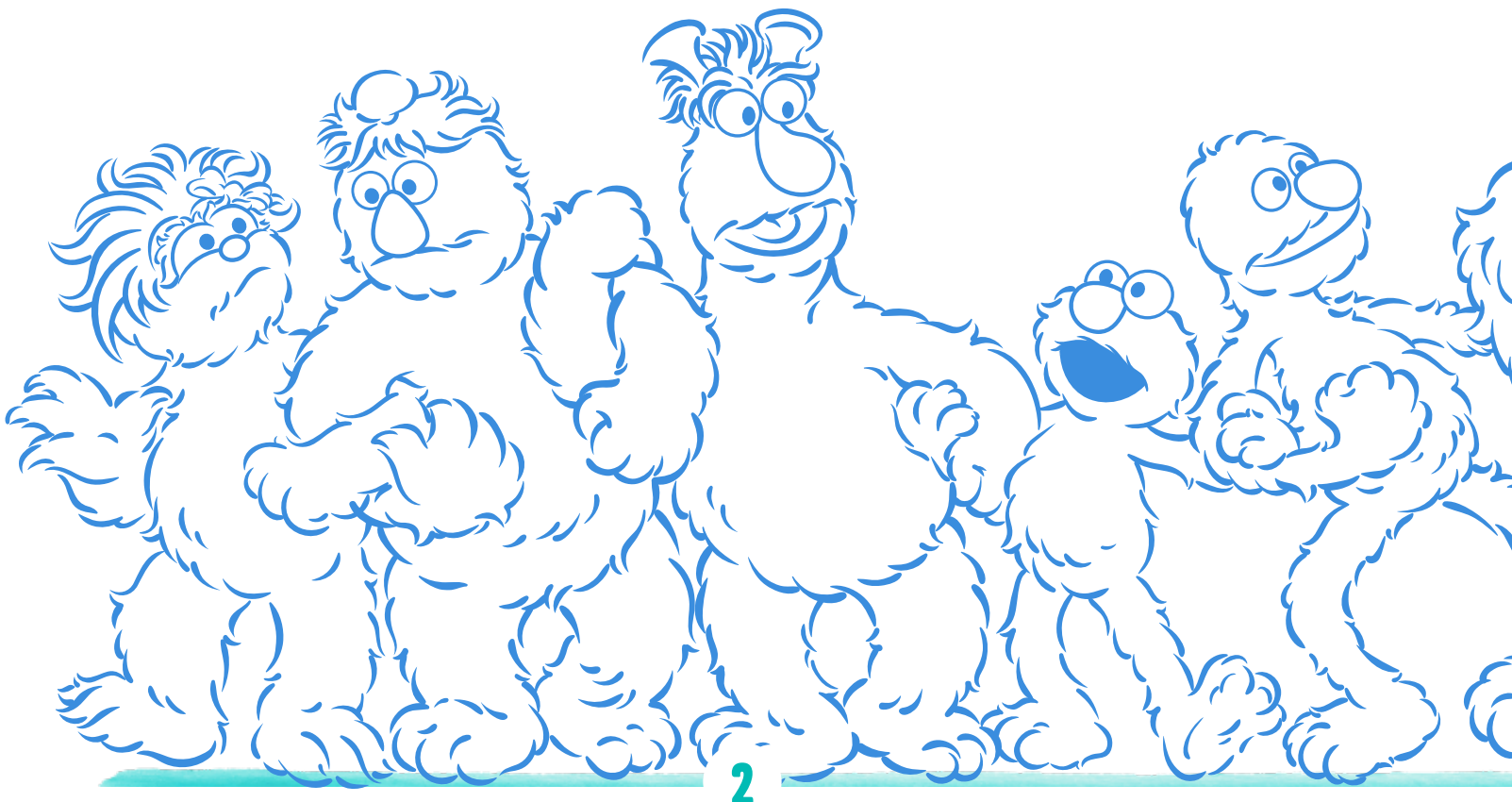
This resource is about helping kids when there's community violence—violence that happens *around* you, but not *to* you. It can happen in your own neighborhood, but because of the role of television and other media in our lives, it can be just as upsetting to watch it happening in other states or far across the world.



Sesame Workshop is the nonprofit organization behind *Sesame Street*, the television show that has been reaching and teaching children since 1969. Sesame Workshop has a mission to help kids everywhere grow smarter, stronger, and kinder. We're active in over 150 countries, serving vulnerable children through media, formal education, and philanthropically-funded programs, each grounded in research and tailored to local needs and cultures. For more information, please visit sesameworkshop.org.

In These Pages

Helping Hands: Remembering we're not alone	4
Hugs: Feeling safe and secure	5
Hearts: Appreciating the power of kindness and compassion	6
Hear: Talking and listening	7
Here: Keeping routines and being present	8



Troubling Times

These days, it seems that our world is full of scary and disturbing news about people harming others. It's hard to know how to explain these events to young children, or how much information to share. It's also hard to know if your way of helping them with their fears and anxieties is "the right way."

Whether your child has been exposed to scary events in your neighborhood or across the world, here's a place to start. These ideas will help you build understanding and provide a sense of safety, security, protection, and hope in your little one.

Think about all you do with your hands every day to care for your child. You pat his back and squeeze his cheeks. You button and snap her clothes. You hold hands crossing the street to keep him safe from danger. You clap your hands to cheer her on or celebrate her successes.

Your hands already do so much. In these pages you'll find that your hands can also help you remember the most important points of helping your child through troubling times. Other caring adults can help, too.

We might use our hands to count on our fingers. In this case, we can use them to count five ideas to remember as we help our children navigate the chaos that, sadly, sometimes occurs in our communities and in our world. In these pages you'll find details on these five ways to help.



H is for Helping Hands

We're not alone. When bad things happen, people come together and lend a hand in many different ways. The idea that everyone has the power to help—and that most people want to—can help your child build a sense of hope and trust in the world.

Helper Hunt

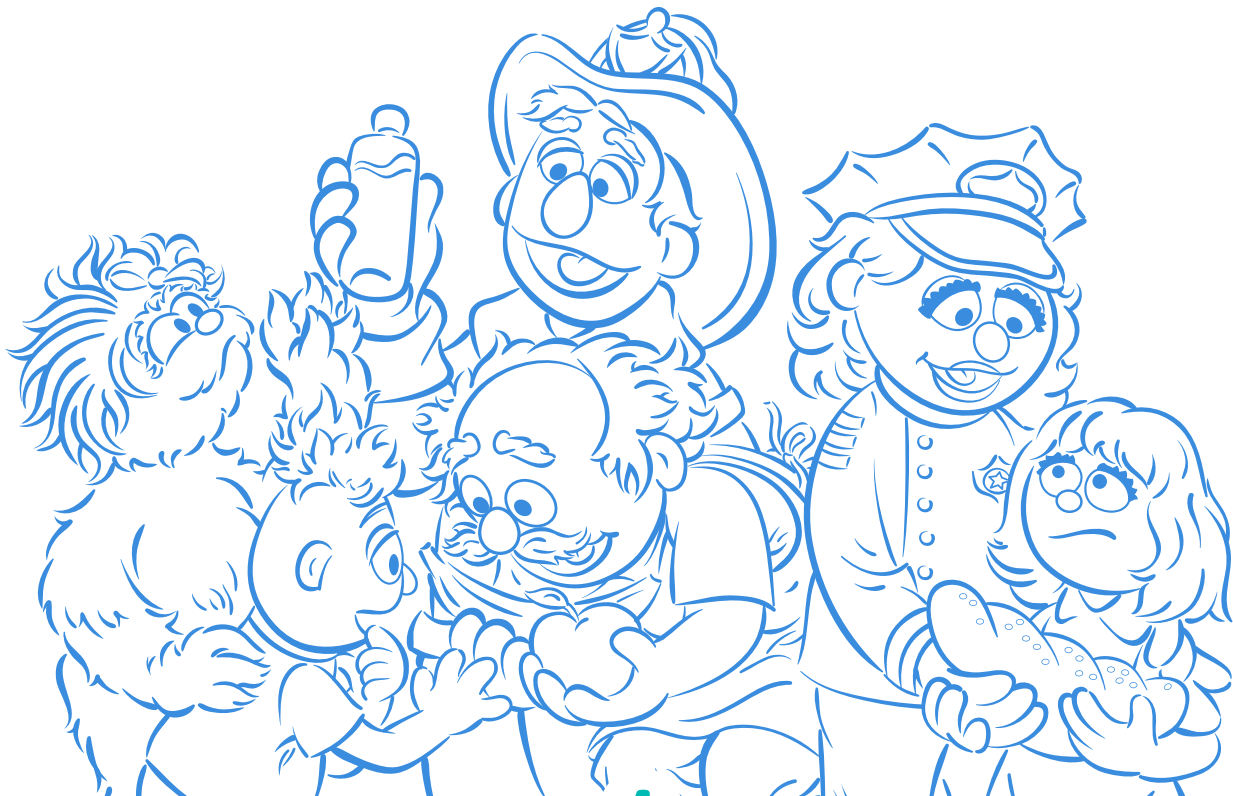
If you are confronted with images of the disturbing event (see page 5 on avoiding media) or the aftermath of a disturbing event is visible in your community, point out where the helpers are. They may be:

- » community helpers like police, firefighters, security guards, and ambulance drivers
- » ordinary citizens volunteering to collect needed supplies
- » local business people giving out water, food, or other services

Look together to find and identify them, and talk together about what they are doing to keep everyone safe and healthy. You might even be able to ask them questions or thank them if they're not very busy. Say, "Look. People are working together to help make things better."

"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping. To this day, especially in times of disaster, I remember my mother's words and am comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world.'"

-Fred Rogers



H is for Hugs (and Hold!)



Hugs (while taking a few deep breaths together!) go a long way in comforting your little one. Besides a nice big cuddle, there are other ways to “spin a cocoon of safety” for your child after a scary event.

Snuggle up and distract!

Get under a blanket together and read a book or watch a favorite show or movie. Or just play or do something fun together—that may be the most effective strategy of all. Another way of holding each other close is simply reminding your child repeatedly that your family is safe and together.



Avoid media.

You can create a safer space by turning off media coverage of the event. For kids living in areas in which crime and violence are real threats, any images or news of violence may trigger extra fear.

Media can make events feel like they are happening nearby even if they're across the world. If children are exposed to images repeatedly on television, they may think the event is happening over and over, in real time. Young children can easily confuse facts with fantasies or fears.

Give Yourself Hugs, Too!

It can be easy to forget about your own needs. Remember: you're most helpful to your child when you take care of yourself. Breathe, relax, stay active, reach out to someone you can trust. Be aware of your own limits, too.

H is for Heart

Kindness and empathy are serious forces.

Let compassion shine. Together, figure out a way to help the people who are hurt or sad. Explain that it's normal to have bad feelings—everyone does—but we can put them into something good and “become part of the solution.” Ask: “What do you think we can do to help?” Then:

- » Encourage your child to draw a picture or card showing his feelings and wishes (he can dictate a message for you to write on it) and together, place or post the drawing at a public memorial or vigil site (or bring flowers or candles);
- » Bring supplies to volunteer/collection sites;
- » Help your child collect pennies to donate;
- » Close your eyes together and send good thoughts to (or sing a song for) the people who are hurt or sad.

If people are sending good wishes to your own community, focus on that goodwill. Point out, “Look, people all around the world are thinking about us and sending us kind thoughts.”



They Have Guns, But We Have Flowers

Here's a conversation that took place between 4-year-old **Brandon Le** and his dad, **Angel Le**, at a Paris vigil in November 2015.

Brandon is talking about “bad guys” who were “not very nice.” He then expresses fear that his family will have to “change houses” because the bad guys will come after them with guns.

Dad: Oh don't worry. We don't need to move out. France is our home.

Brandon: But there's bad guys daddy.

Dad: Yes, but there's bad guys everywhere.

Brandon: They have guns. They can shoot us because they're really, really mean daddy.

Dad: (pointing to flowers at vigil) It's OK. They might have guns, but we have flowers.

Brandon: But flowers don't do anything. They're, they're...

Dad: Of course they do. Look. Everyone is putting flowers.

Brandon: Yes?

Dad: It's to fight against guns.

Brandon: It's to protect?

Dad: Exactly.

Brandon: And the candles too?

Dad: It's to remember the people who are gone yesterday.

*From an interview
by Le Petit Journal
(Paris, 2015)*

H is for Hear

Listening to what kids are saying about an upsetting event, paying attention to exactly what they are asking you and starting from there, letting them know you are here for them to talk and ask questions...all are ways of helping them cope, share their feelings, and express their fears. Let their questions guide the conversation, but be careful to not share frightening details (a good rule of thumb is ask more, tell less!). Some common questions (and possible answers) are:

What happened?

- » *A sad thing happened in _____. A person hurt other people, and some of them died. The police found the person so they could not keep hurting others.*
- » *A lot of people are very sad, but there will be lots of help to make them feel better.*

Why did these people do this bad thing?

- » *That's a good question.*
- » *There is no good reason to harm other people.*
- » *They may have had a very rare sickness in their brain (not the kind you catch like a cold) that made it hard to be kind.*
- » *These people have not learned to be kind to others.*

Will the bad people come hurt us?

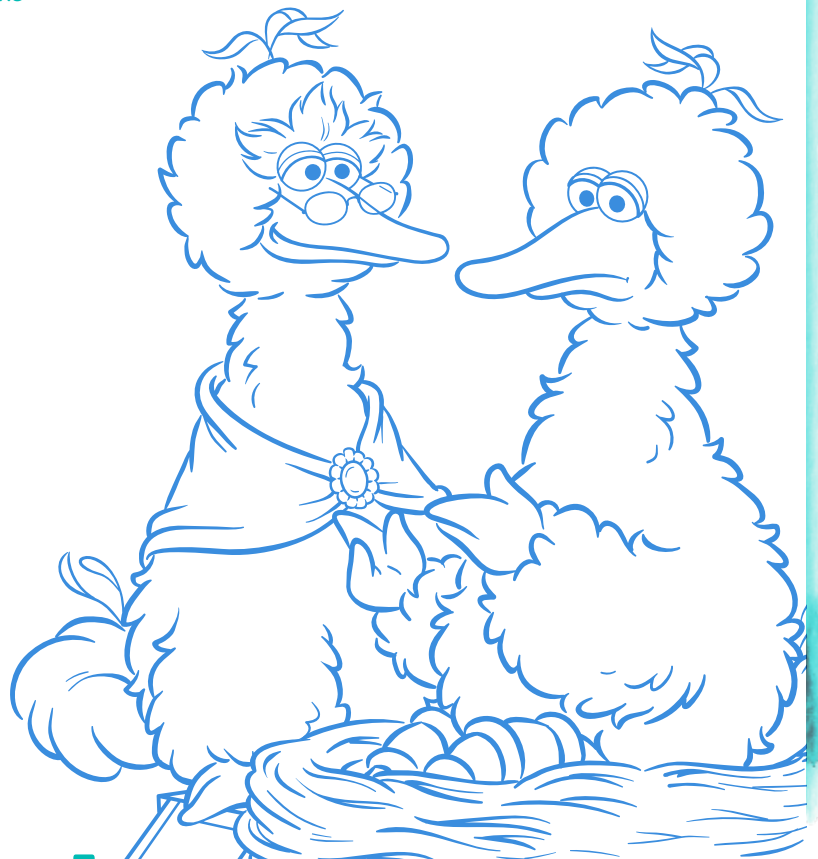
- » *No. I know how to keep you and our family safe. Everyone around us is working hard to make sure we stay safe.*
- » *If the event happened far away, use the distance to reassure kids. Depending on your child's age, you might show the location on a globe or map.*

Will this happen again?

- » *It is very rare for this to happen. It does not happen very much.*
- » *It's over now.*

Remember, it's okay to say...

- » *I'm not sure of the answer to that question. Let me think about it for a minute.*
- » *I wish there was a good answer to that question, but we just don't know.*
- » *I'm sad/angry, too. We all feel sad/angry.*



H is for Here



Most of all, be there and be present.
More than anything else, your little one needs your time.

“I’m Here for You. You Can Count on It!”

Keeping to familiar routines can be very comforting. Choose at least one routine that you can keep every day. Simple things like extra cuddles every morning or the same lullaby every night can give kids a sense of structure and safety.

Listening and Observing

- » Watch for signs of stress (changes in appetite, difficulty sleeping, aggression, withdrawal from social activities, trouble concentrating at school, or not wanting to attend school) and trust your instincts. Seek help from a mental health professional if you are concerned about how your child is reacting or behaving.
- » Start with where children are. Find out what your child has heard, what she knows, what she is concerned about. Ask questions to clarify what he is telling you.
- » Listen carefully to the language your child uses. It will show you what her understanding is, what her concerns are. It’s very common for children to talk about “bad guys.” (You might discuss a bad action or behavior, versus “bad people.” This may help prevent fears that “bad guys” are coming to get them.)
- » You might notice your child acting out the scary event as she plays. Notice what she’s saying and doing, and use it as a chance to start a conversation and answer her questions.

Remember...

Our hearts and minds have their own special kind of power. We use them to build a kinder world in which this kind of thing happens less and less. And we can use our words, not our hands, when we are angry. We can be kind to each other.

