



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS of Young Children With Asthma





Helping Your Child Breathe Easy

There's almost nothing as frightening to a child – and parents – as his not being able to breathe. But for millions of young children with asthma, this is an all-too-frequent part of life. Asthma is the leading chronic illness among children in the United States, affecting 1.2 million kids under the age of 5.¹ Although asthma doesn't go away, the good news is that asthma can be managed.

To help you and your child learn how to manage his or her asthma, Sesame Workshop has developed **Sesame Street A Is for Asthma**. This multimedia kit features Elmo, Rosita, and Luis along with their new friend Dani, a character with asthma who was created especially for this important project.

In this parent guide you will find:

- information that explains what asthma is, how it is triggered, and how it can be managed;
- activities that you can use with your child, to teach and reinforce important messaging;
- ideas to extend the stories in the **Sesame Street A Is for Asthma** video.

This special magazine was designed to help you and your child understand his asthma better and learn how to control it. By knowing about your child's asthma, you can help him to have fun and to be as active as any of his friends.

Find more information and downloadables online at www.everydaykidz.com/sesameasthma.

¹ American Lung Association; Lung Disease Data: 2006; p. 13.



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, Sagwa and Pinky products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at sesameworkshop.org.



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Info to Know

1) What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic (long-term) inflammatory lung disease. Children with asthma have air passages in their lungs that are easily irritated by certain substances called triggers.

2) What Happens During an Asthma Attack?

Three things occur in a child's lungs:

- The muscles around the air passages tighten.
- The lining of the walls of the air passages swells.
- The air passages produce excess mucus.

As a result, the flow of air in the lungs is greatly reduced and there is difficulty breathing, especially breathing out.

3) What Are the Symptoms of an Asthma Attack?

Young children may have difficulty describing their symptoms. Children sometimes will say things such as "My chest hurts" or "I can't breathe so well." A child's mood or behavior may also change suddenly. Children may become nervous, irritable, unusually quiet, or even shaky. It's important to pay attention to the child's way of describing what is happening to him.

Doctors sometimes recommend watching for "loud" or "quiet" symptoms that may indicate your child has difficulty breathing.

Loud symptoms will be most obvious to you:

- coughing;
- shortness of breath;
- tightness in the chest;
- wheezing (a whistling sound when breathing).

Quiet symptoms are also important indicators, but noticing these changes may require closer attention:

- restlessness during sleep;
- fatigue;
- unusual sweating or paleness;
- anxiety.



4) What Triggers Can Cause an Asthma Attack?

Although many substances can be triggers, not every child is sensitive to the same ones. Some triggers are things that your child is actually allergic to, such as dust mites, pets, or pollen. Other triggers are things that just irritate sensitive airways, such as cold air, exercise, or perfumes. Triggers for your child could include:

- viral respiratory infections;
- dust and dust mites;
- furry or feathered pets;
- pollen (from trees, grasses, weeds);
- molds;
- cockroaches;
- physical activity, especially running;
- cold air;
- secondhand cigarette smoke;
- strong fumes from materials such as perfumes, pesticides, cleaning products, or paints;
- smoke or odors from burning wood, coal, gas, or diesel exhaust;
- food allergies.



Managing Asthma

The more you know about controlling your child's asthma, the better you will become at helping her stay healthy and avoid asthma attacks. You will also be able to share information with your child that will help her become an active partner in controlling her own asthma.



Working With Your Doctor

Your family doctor is your most important partner in successfully managing your child's asthma. Remember to do the following:

- Take your child for regular checkups.
- Prepare any questions you may have before visiting the doctor. Make sure you understand the answers to your questions, and write down any instructions from the doctor about your child's medications or care. Follow those instructions carefully and completely.
- Work with your doctor to develop an Asthma Profile (see page 7) to manage your child's asthma and to respond to asthma attacks.
- Give your doctor feedback on your child's treatment plan. Let him or her know what is working and what is not working to provide your child with the best treatment possible.

Controlling Asthma

There is currently no cure for asthma. But asthma can be controlled, and attacks can be prevented or lessened. When asthma is managed properly, children who have it can enjoy being as active as their friends. You can help manage your child's asthma by following a few important practices, such as:

- working with your child's doctor, and keeping up with regular doctor visits;
- communicating about your child's asthma with teachers, family members, and other people who help care for your child;
- teaching your child what to do if he has an asthma attack;
- reducing exposure to triggers.



Giving Necessary Medications

Work with your child's doctor to understand the medicines needed to control his or her asthma. Some asthma medicines in the form of pills or liquids are swallowed. Others are inhaled as a mist with either a metered-dose inhaler (puffer) or a nebulizer. Every child's asthma is different, so there is more than one kind of treatment. In general, there are two different categories of medications that your child might take:

1) **Rescue medications**, such as certain inhalers, provide immediate relief of symptoms when your child has an asthma attack or any type of breathing difficulty. In children whose asthma is properly managed, these medications should not be needed every day. In fact, if your child uses rescue medications more than two times per week, his asthma is probably not being controlled as well as it could be, and he probably should be on a controller medication.

2) **Controller medications** do exactly what their name suggests: They control your child's asthma, even when she has no symptoms. In fact, they actually prevent symptoms, and are sometimes called preventive medications. These medicines should be used regularly, every day.

Steps to Take When Your Child Has Trouble Breathing

- Have your child sit and rest. Make sure he or she avoids lying down.
- Help your child stay calm. By staying as calm as possible yourself, you will help him or her be less anxious.
- Make sure your child takes his or her medicine. Follow your doctor's medication guidelines as listed in the Sesame Street Asthma Profile that you've completed (see page 7).
- Get help. If medications don't appear to be working, call 911 for an ambulance. The emergency team can provide immediate breathing relief as they transport your child to the hospital. Use the Sesame Street Asthma Profile to tell medical personnel what medicines your child uses.



An Ounce of Prevention

Helping to *prevent* an asthma attack can help ensure your child will stay healthy and active.

Remove Triggers

- **Wipe surfaces daily** with a damp rag to reduce dust. Stuffed toys and security blankets trap dust and dust mites; no more than two should be kept on the bed. They should be washed weekly.
- **Avoid using carpets**; they can trap dust and pet hair. Choose washable area rugs or bare floors instead.
- **Eliminate sources of strong odors**, such as cigarettes, strong cleaners, perfumes, and other heavily scented products.
- **Avoid keeping furry and feathered pets.** Consider other types of pets, such as fish. If you have a furred or feathered pet, keep it out of the child's bedroom and make sure pet litter boxes are kept far from the child's bedroom, too.
- **Provide rest times** before and during outdoor activities. Your child might benefit from medication just before, or during a break from, physical activity. Also discuss this with your child's teacher, baby-sitter, and other caregivers.
- **Recognize the need to be alert** to the child's reactions, especially during or after physical activity.
- **Eliminate pests.** It's especially important to get rid of cockroaches because they are a significant cause of allergic asthma.
- **Minimize mold and mildew.** Spores in the air can trigger attacks. Use a dehumidifier in the basement and run the air conditioner during warm-weather months.
- **Keep the child out of areas** where someone is smoking.

Partner With Child's Caregivers

People who spend time with or take care of your child—teachers, baby-sitters, relatives, and close friends—are vital partners in helping to keep



your child healthy and active. Give them details about your child's condition and needs, and make sure each of them has a copy of your child's **My Asthma Profile**. Also let teachers know about the **Action Plan** poster available for use in their room at www.everydaykidz.com/sesameasthma.

Caregivers should:

- be aware of triggers that may bring on an asthma attack and make sure these irritants are not present in your child's environment;
- recognize that they need to be alert to your child's reactions, especially during or after physical activity;
- identify snack foods that could cause an allergic reaction leading to an asthma attack.

Give Child's Asthma Profile to Everyone in His or Her Life

Your child's Asthma Profile provides vital information about your child's asthma, such as:

- your child's triggers;
- the medicines he or she regularly takes;
- what to do if your child has difficulty breathing.

On the next page you will find a form that you and your doctor can use to create an Asthma Profile for your child.

Anyone—parent, baby-sitter, teacher—who shares in the child's care should have a copy to keep with them and to file.

Parents or guardians should share an updated Asthma Profile when there is a change in the child's treatment or a change in his reaction to triggers in his environment.

My Asthma Profile

You and your child's doctor can work together to fill in this important information.

- Keep a completed copy with you at all times. Hang a copy at home in a place where it is clearly visible.
- Make sure all of your child's caregivers, and all other people in his life, keep a copy on hand.
- Update the Asthma Profile when there is a change in your child's treatment or a change in her reaction to triggers in the environment.



My name is: _____
(Write your child's name here)

I live at: _____
(address, apartment #, city, state, ZIP)

I may be having an asthma attack when (Describe behaviors, such as "I am coughing and can't catch my breath," "I complain that my chest hurts," "I am wheezing," and so on):

My asthma can get worse when I am near (List triggers for your child's asthma attacks, such as dust, certain food allergies, cold air, and so on):

All About My Medications

Control Medications I take these medicines regularly, even when I don't feel sick or don't have trouble breathing:

Name of Medicine	When I Take It	Who Can Give It to Me

Rescue Medications I take these medicines when I am having an asthma attack or it is hard for me to breathe:

Name of Medicine	When I Take It	Who Can Give It to Me

When my Rescue Medications are not helping me breathe more easily:

- Call 911 for an ambulance to take me to the hospital right away
- Call my parents/guardians (name/s): _____
(phone): () _____ if they are not with me
- Call my doctor (name): _____ (phone): () _____



Family Activities

Use these activities to reinforce the messages from the **Sesame Street A Is for Asthma** video, and to have fun with your child.

We Help One
Another! 

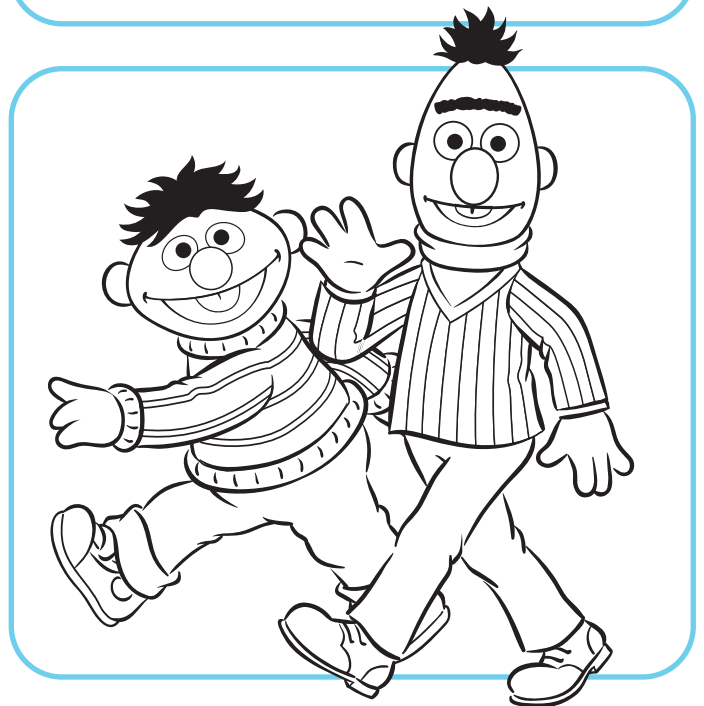




A Is for Active!

Color the pictures of Dani, Zoe, and all the Sesame pals. What is each one doing? Which of these activities would you enjoy?

By taking your medicine and avoiding your asthma triggers, you can play and have fun like your friends. Draw a picture of yourself doing one of your favorite activities.



It's a Rap!

Sing this song with Dani!

Then use your finger or a crayon to help him find his way from start to stop. What will he see along the way? Point to the clean room. Find the doctor. Which picture shows his inhaler? Who is he playing with in the park?



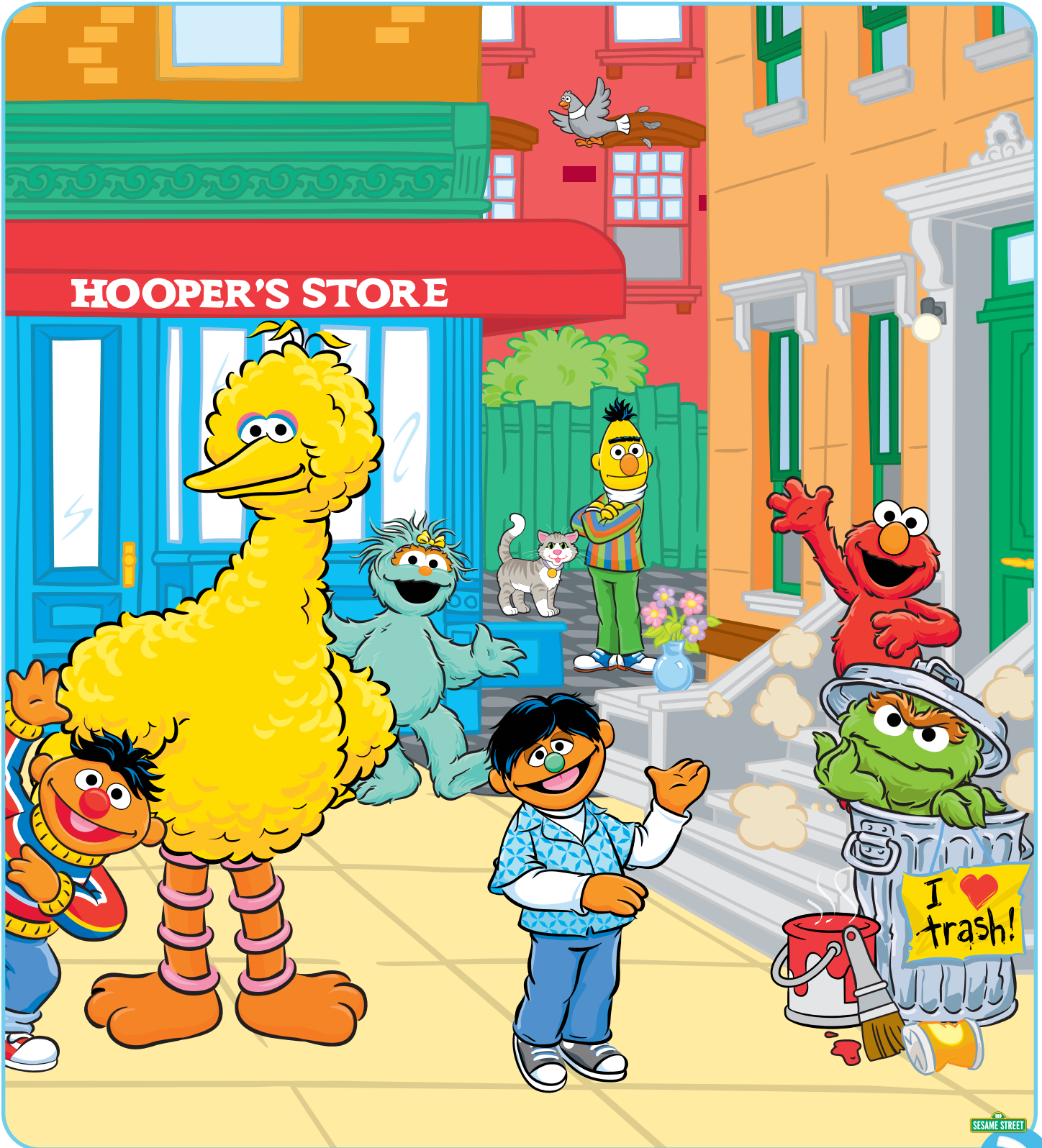
Dani's Rap
Many things around me might
give me trouble breathing right.
Could be the puppy, could be the kitten,
could be the dust on its furry mitten.
So when I want to run and play,
we just clean the dust away.
So when I want to run and play,
we just clean the dust away.
So if I take my medicine every day
and I see my doctor as often as they say,
I know that everything will be OK,
and I will be able to run and play!

By Alberto Bernal and Carlo Nicolau. © 1998 Sesame Street Music, Inc.



Find the Hidden Triggers

Several asthma triggers are hidden in the picture below. See how many you and your child can find. Are any of these triggers for your child?



Breathe Easier

Managing your child's asthma can be easier when you use the **Sesame Street A Is for Asthma** video and parent guide. Watch the video more than once with your child; preschoolers learn best with repetition.

- You can pause the video every so often to discuss what's happening in the story. Talk about how some of your child's experiences may be similar to Dani's, and how others are different.
- Point out that in the video Rosita helps Dani when he's having trouble breathing. She uses the **Asthma Action Plan**.
- After the video is finished, talk with your child about what he has learned. It's always good to review important points such as why going to the doctor is important; what to do during an asthma attack; why taking his medicine helps your child; and how Dani, just like your child, can play and be active as long as he takes his medicine.



Keep in Mind . . .

- Asthma is a chronic illness that affects millions of children.
- When managed properly, a child's asthma attacks can become less frequent and less severe.
- As a parent or guardian, you are the key to helping your child manage his or her asthma. Communicate with your child's doctors, teachers, relatives, friends, and any caregivers.
- Keep your child's completed **My Asthma Profile** in a place where it is clearly accessible. And use the resources listed on this page. You'll find that these ideas will aid you in helping your child manage his or her asthma in a more relaxed way.

For More Information

Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics
2751 Prosperity Avenue, Suite 150, Fairfax, VA 22031
www.aanma.org

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
555 East 12 Street, Suite 1100, Milwaukee, WI, 53202
www.aaaai.org

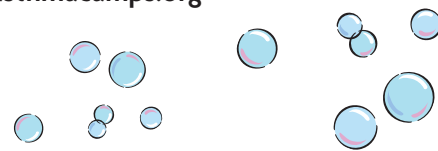
The American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Pt. Blvd., Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098
www.aap.org

American College of Allergy Asthma & Immunology (ACAAI)
85 W. Algonquin Rd., Ste. 550, Arlington Hts., IL 60005
www.acaaai.org

The American Lung Association
61 Broadway, New York, NY 10006
www.lungusa.org

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA)
1233 20th Street, NW, Ste 402, Washington, DC 20036
www.aafa.org/

The Consortium of Children's Asthma Camps
490 Concordia Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55103-2441
www.asthmacamps.org



For information on ordering the **Sesame Street A Is for Asthma** DVD visit www.sesameworkshop.org/educationalresources.

A guide for using these materials in a workshop setting plus additional information for parents and caregivers is available for downloading at www.everydaykidz.com/sesameasthma.

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