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Subject: Letting Go

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Sesame Family Newsletter

November 27, 2009

Letting Go

by Elana A. Halberstadt

Helping one preschooler
cope with a big move

Featuring:

- Moving Day
- The Old and the New
- Starting Over
- Settling In
- Missing Feelings Come and Go



This Week on the Street...

ABCs and 123s

- [Alphabet Soup](#)
Make words in Cookie's soup!
- [Magical Numbers](#)
Count along with Mumford the Magician.
- [Big Bird's Letters](#)
Click the keyboard to see letters and pictures appear.

And the Winner Is...

Which Sesame Street video
did you vote the "best ever"?

[Find out now!](#)

B is for Blog

Find out from a Sesame
couple what it's like to be in
the Macy's Thanksgiving Day
Parade.

[Read the Blog](#)

Sesame Street Parents: Nature

Videos, games, and activities to make every day
a nature adventure!

[Watch, Play, & Explore](#)

Nature



Moving Day

The day our family moved this past spring was organized chaos. Our son Max was 2-and-a-half years old. Understandably, Max was not thrilled to see movers emptying his home. The commotion and noise bothered him, too.

Thankfully, Max's Uncle Mark and Aunt Kathy came to our rescue. They swooped up Max, our cat Ringo, and Max's box of very important things (e.g., his favorite trains and toys) and delivered them to our new home. This enabled Max to escape the moving frenzy, spend time with an aunt and uncle he adores, AND have the comfort of his things when he arrived. We assured Max that we would see him at our new home by dinnertime. Max took along his Border Collie Dog and Striped Cat stuffed animals to hold in the car. "See you later, Mommy and Daddy!" he called out the window as they pulled away.

When my husband Andy and I arrived later that day, we were relieved to see Max having fun with his aunt and uncle and seemingly enjoying his new home. He even gave us a room-by-room tour. "This is the kitchen... bathroom... and this is MY room!"

That night we did our usual bedtime routine. It was quieter than the city, and there were new sounds Max had never heard.

"WHOO! WHOO!"

Suddenly Max sat up, "What's that?"

"An owl." I replied.

Max peeked out the window.

I said, "There's the moon. We're under the same sky as we were last night in our old home."

Max was happy to see the moon and promptly fell asleep clutching his stuffed animals.

The Old and the New

The next morning Max couldn't wait to get outside and run through the grass in his bare feet -- a new experience for a city kid. We said "hello" to the birds and chipmunks. When a pack of deer strolled by, Max was amazed.

As we unpacked inside Max said, "Wow, that's A LOT of boxes!" Then he played fort in the growing pile.

We set up Max's room. He loved his new bed and looking out the windows. Every time we unpacked a box, he'd say, "That's from my apartment!" We gave Max a job arranging his toys on a low shelf. He was proud and exclaimed, "I'm a worker!"

Everything went smoothly until the third day, when Andy went back to work. The novelty of the situation was wearing off and reality was setting in. Max was visibly sad. He didn't want to eat or do much of anything.

I asked, "Max, are you sad?"

He nodded yes.

"Me, too. It can feel sad when we leave people and places we love."

My heart broke when Max said (over and over), "Mommy, go back home! Pack up my things...trains...books...and go back HOME. Want to go back home!"



[Sounds Around Town](#)

Play this game with your child and then find more sounds at home.



[Playlist: It's All Right To Cry](#)

Watch and talk with your child about feelings that make them cry.

[Talk It Out](#)

Tips to help understand and respond to your child's feelings.

When I explained that this was our home now, he cried. I comforted him. We snuggled and read. I held and hugged him and gave him extra TLC. Max had said goodbye to so many things he'd loved: home, neighborhood, school, playgroup, friends, and babysitters.

I tried to coax Max outside for fresh air, but he refused. Max's whole world was upside down and the post-move mess of boxes cluttering our house mirrored how we all felt inside.

Starting Over

In the weeks that followed, Max's mood did not improve. In fact, it kept going south. He was sad and angry, throwing frequent tantrums. His behavior was odd, too. He started tripping and falling down a lot, like his balance was off. Before the move, he'd begun using the potty, but now he had no interest, and stopped using it entirely.

Max was clingy and anxious at the slightest separation from me, even if I left the room for a minute. He started having late afternoon naps. It was as if Max didn't want to be awake, but then couldn't fall asleep at night.

I reinstated routines from before the move, and I knew that Max needed to be around kids his age, ASAP. With a little encouragement, I finally got him to spend more time outdoors. He helped me feed the birds and we planted flowers. We went for a walk in the neighborhood and met a little girl his age playing in her front yard. They had an instant playdate. The old Max was beginning to reappear.

I filled mornings with activities: I took Max to the playground, to the supermarket, the bookstore, and to meet his new pediatrician. Every day was a new adventure.

Settling In

I planned for Max to go to preschool in the fall, but it was the beginning of summer and fall felt a long way off. Luckily, the school also runs a summer camp program. I was anxious to get Max into a daily routine that included learning and friends, so I signed up right away.

At first, getting him to camp and separating at drop-off was difficult. Max resisted every step of the way. But after some crying and goodbyes, he recovered, and was usually OK the minute I left. I noticed positive changes right away. Max's eating habits and sleep improved. By the end of the summer, Max was HAPPY to go to camp in the morning, was fine saying goodbye to me, and even wanted to stay when it was time to go home! What a relief!

My hope was that his camp experience would ease his transition to school. It did. Max started in a 3s preschool class in September and loves it.

Missing Feelings Come and Go

For a while, we avoided talking about or even referencing our old home and life because it upset Max. But, about five months after the move, Max suddenly started talking about the past without it causing distress... he was just matter of fact about it. He had a phone chat with his old babysitter, who he still loves and misses.

When I noticed Max was able to talk about our old neighborhood without getting upset, we discussed the possibility of visiting. Max said, "I want to play with friends and ride the elevator." Soon after that,



[Understanding How Preschoolers Handle Stress](#)

Help your child cope with change and loss.

[You Can Ask](#)

Helping children cope with difficult times.

[Playlist: New Friends](#)

Watch these videos and encourage a conversation about friendship.



[Letting Go Is a Life Skill](#)

Info and tips to help cope with separations.

[New in the Neighborhood](#)

Watch and ask your child if they know someone new in town.

we accepted an invitation to go to a party in our old neighborhood. Max was excited to go back. When we got there, he recognized everything, and had fun pushing the building elevator buttons and playing with his old buddies, like no time had passed. He also understood that we lived somewhere else and said goodbye easily when it was time to go home.

Now when the topic comes up, Max says, "Maybe some day we can go back." He still misses it, but he's happy and doing well. Max turned 3 last week and has come a long way since our move six months ago. Just the other day he walked through our door and said, "I love our house!"

Elana A. Halberstadt
Sesame Workshop

Sesame Street Campaign for Understanding

More than the letter "O" and the number "9," Sesame Street is a place where children learn about friendship, respect, and getting along with each other.



In Northern Ireland the Muppets of *Sesame Tree* bring children together through the common bonds of learning, laughter, and fun. In Kosovo, children of Serbian, Albanian, and Roma descent -- ethnic groups long at odds with each other -- discover they enjoy the same games, songs, and stories. And in South Africa, a vibrant young girl Muppet who is HIV-positive teaches children compassionate lessons about living with HIV/AIDS. We call it Muppet Diplomacy -- and it works!

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