# How Workshop Leaders Can Use This Guide

Asthma is the leading chronic illness among children in the United States, affecting 1.2 million kids under the age of 5. Although asthma doesn’t go away, the good news is that asthma can be managed. As a workshop leader, you may be responsible for training others, including teachers, care providers, and parents, about the care of children with asthma.

To help you share vital information about managing 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 guide you will find:

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

Whether you are helping primary or secondary care providers learn about managing a child’s asthma, the information and ideas in this guide, and in the video and poster, are designed to help grown-ups help kids have fun—and be as active as any of their friends. We encourage you to copy and distribute the material in this guide to individuals or groups you are teaching and training. Find more information and downloadable content online at [www.everydaykidz.com/sesameasthma](http://www.everydaykidz.com/sesameasthma).

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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 groundbreaking 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 [www.sesameworkshop.org](http://www.sesameworkshop.org).
Info to Know

Whether you're a workshop leader, a parent or guardian, or other child-care provider, it's vital to understand asthma, its symptoms, and its triggers.

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 interior walls of the air passages swell;
- 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 the 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:
- unusual sweating or paleness;
- restlessness during sleep;
- fatigue;
- 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 a child is actually allergic to, such as dust mites and pollen. Other triggers are things that just irritate sensitive airways, such as cold air, exercise, and perfumes. Triggers for a child could include:
- pollen (from trees, grasses, weeds);
- cold temperatures;
- molds and fungi;
- secondhand cigarette smoke;
- particles from burning wood, coal, gas, or diesel exhaust;
- cockroach waste;
- dust and dust mites;
- furry or feathered pets;
- strong fumes from materials such as perfumes, pesticides, cleaning products, and paints;
- physical activity, especially running;
- symptoms caused by food allergies;
- respiratory infections.

www.everydaykidz.com/sesameasthma
Managing a Child’s Asthma

The more you know about controlling asthma, the better you can help children stay healthy and avoid asthma attacks. Information can be shared with children to help them become active partners in controlling their own asthma.

Helping Control 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. Parents, baby-sitters, teachers, and other caregivers can help manage a child’s asthma by following these important practices:

- Be alert for any symptoms that may indicate the child is having an asthma attack or breathing difficulty.
- Parents/guardians should work with the child’s doctor to fill out the asthma profile.
- Keep on hand the My Asthma Profile (p. 9). Parents should provide the asthma profile to teachers, day-care providers, and baby-sitters.
- Use the profile to help manage the child’s asthma and to respond to attacks.
- Review the Asthma Action Plan (sit down and rest; stay calm; get help). The action-plan poster in the Sesame Street A Is for Asthma kit is also available for downloading at everydaykidz.com/sesameasthma.
- Show and explain to the child what to do if he or she has an attack.
- Reduce exposure to triggers in the classroom, day-care facility, home, or other environment.

View and Talk

Adults can watch the “For Grown-ups” chapter of the Sesame Street A Is for Asthma video. When it’s time to “Play Program” for children, replay segments; pause and discuss the following to reinforce the ideas in the video:

- **What happens** when Dani has an asthma attack? How can Rosita tell he is having trouble? (Wheezing, saying chest hurts.)

- **How does** Dani’s grandmother help him? (Gives him medicine.) What does the doctor do? (Listens to Dani’s breathing, uses nebulizer, talks about taking medication.)

- **Can you describe** the Asthma Action Plan that Rosita and Dani follow? (Sit down, stay calm, get help)

- **What triggers** Dani’s asthma? (Furry pets, dust.) What else can trigger asthma? (Trees, mold, feathered pets; see p. 3 for a list.)
Giving Necessary Medications
Some children may need to take medications to manage their asthma while they are under the care of someone other than their parents. Working together, parents and caregivers can understand the medicines the child’s doctor has prescribed. Some in the form of pills or liquids are swallowed. Others are inhaled as a mist with either a metered-dose inhaler or a nebulizer. Each child’s asthma is different, so there is more than one kind of treatment. In general, there are two categories of asthma medications that a child might take:

1) **Rescue medications**, such as certain inhalers, provide immediate relief of symptoms when a 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 a child uses rescue medications more than a couple of 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 can help to control a child’s asthma, even when she has no symptoms. Because they actually help prevent symptoms, they are sometimes called preventive medications. These medicines are used regularly, every day.

When a Child Has Breathing Difficulties
Know the steps to take if a child has trouble breathing:

- **Use the Asthma Action Plan.** Have the child sit and rest. Make sure he or she avoids lying down.
- **Help the child stay calm.** By also staying as calm as possible yourself, you will help him or her be less anxious.
- **Make sure the child takes his or her medicine.** Follow the guidelines of the child’s doctor as listed in the My Asthma Profile (p. 9), which the parent or guardian has completed.
- **Get help.** If medications don’t appear to be working, call 911 for an ambulance; the child’s parent or guardian should also be notified. The emergency team can provide immediate breathing relief as they transport the child to the hospital. Refer to the child’s asthma profile to let medical personnel know what medicines the child uses.

Asthma Management Checklist

- Remember, the My Asthma Profile (p. 9), which has been completed with the child’s doctor, should be shared by parents with their child’s care providers.
- Parents and care providers who communicate on a regular basis can ensure that children take prescribed medications regularly.
- If possible, remove asthma triggers from the child’s home and school environments.
An Ounce of Prevention

Knowing what to do when a child has an asthma attack is important. But knowing what to do to help prevent attacks is equally important. There are several actions that can decrease the chance that a child will have an asthma attack. Teachers, day-care providers, baby-sitters, relatives, or friends who help care for a child with asthma, together with the child’s immediate family, are vital partners in helping to keep the child healthy and active.

Remove Triggers

• Wipe surfaces daily with a damp rag to reduce dust.

• Avoid using carpets in the child’s environment, because they can hold dust. Choose washable area rugs or bare floors instead.

• Eliminate sources of strong odors, such as cigarettes, strong cleaners, perfumes, and other strong-scented products.

• Avoid keeping furry and feathered pets in the child’s environment. Consider other types of pets, such as fish.

• Provide rest times before and during outdoor activities. The child might benefit from medication just before, or during a break from, physical activity. Parents or guardians should discuss this with the child’s caregivers.

• Eliminate pests. It’s especially important to get rid of cockroaches because of their harmful waste products.

• Minimize mold and mildew. Spores in the air can trigger attacks.

• Keep the child out of areas where someone is smoking.

• Recognize the need to be alert to the child’s reactions, especially during or after physical activity.

• Talk with the parent or guardian to identify snack foods that could cause an allergic reaction leading to an asthma attack.

Keep Child’s Asthma Profile Easily Accessible

Day-care providers and teachers can copy and distribute to parents the letter and My Asthma Profile form on pages 7–9.

When completed by the parent with help from the child’s doctor, the Asthma Profile will provide information vital to the child’s health, such as:

• the child’s asthma triggers;

• the medicines he regularly takes;

• what to do if he has difficulty breathing;

• how to reach a parent or guardian in case of an emergency.

Anyone—parent, baby-sitter, teacher—who shares in the child’s care should have a copy to keep on hand 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.
Dear Families,

On __________________________ [fill in the date], I will be showing your child an entertaining video called Sesame Street A Is for Asthma. The video features a Sesame Street Muppet named Dani, an active and fun-loving child who has asthma. Dani and his friends explain what asthma is and how Dani keeps it under control by taking medicine and visiting the doctor. The characters sing, dance, and talk about asthma in a way that young children can understand and enjoy.

You may wonder why I plan to show your child’s group a video about this topic. The fact is that with 1.2 million children under the age of 5 having asthma, there’s a good chance that one of your children or one of their friends is among them. The video is designed to help reduce children’s fears and show them how they might be able to help someone with asthma.

Important Messages That Your Child Will Learn

Dani and his friends will show your child that:

• All people breathe, even when they’re not thinking about it.
• People with asthma sometimes have trouble breathing.
• Though children with asthma sometimes have trouble with physical activities, they can run and play just like other kids if they take their medicine and see their doctor regularly.
• Children who don’t have asthma can help their friends who do.

Your child will also learn to follow this three-part Asthma Action Plan when he or she, or a friend, has trouble breathing:

1) Sit down and rest.
2) Stay calm.
3) Get help.

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. Each child has his or her own set of asthma triggers. In the video that your child will see, Dani’s triggers are furry animals and dust. Other children may be sensitive to molds or fungi, grass or tree pollen, respiratory infections, cold temperatures, cockroach waste, strong fumes from perfumes or cleaning products, cigarette smoke. One way children’s asthma can be managed more successfully is if exposure to their particular triggers can be reduced.  

1 American Lung Association; Lung Disease Data: 2006; p. 13.
(Dear Families continued)

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.”

Doctors sometimes recommend watching for “loud” symptoms such as coughing, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, or wheezing (a whispering sound when breathing). “Quiet” symptoms are also important indicators. They include unusual sweating or paleness, restlessness during sleep, and being tired.

Please Work With Me
Asthma is an illness that doesn’t go away, even when symptoms are absent. That means it requires continuous care, including the use of controller medicines—those given on a regular basis to control a child’s asthma even when there are no symptoms. Although it’s a serious condition, asthma is treatable, and episodes can be prevented or reduced in number and severity.

If your child has asthma:
• Please fill out the My Asthma Profile form with your child’s doctor and return it to me. That way, we can work together to manage the child’s condition.
• Consider sharing the information you’ve learned about asthma with friends and relatives who take part in your child’s care.

Whether or not your child has asthma, in the coming days, ask him or her about Dani and the video to see what he or she has learned. And if you want to know more about asthma, please contact me for additional information, or visit www.everydaykidz.com/sesameasthma.

Sincerely,

Your Child’s Teacher or Day-Care Provider
My name is: ________________________________

(child’s first and last names)

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Medicine</th>
<th>When I Take It</th>
<th>Who Can Give It to Me</th>
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</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Medicine</th>
<th>When I Take It</th>
<th>Who Can Give It to Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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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): (     ) ____________________________
Group Activities

Adults can bring alive the information and fun of *Sesame Street A Is for Asthma* through games, songs, and role-playing. On the next few pages, you will find several activities with key messages that children can take away from each.

Watching and Learning

Children will learn more from the video as you help them understand it. Pause every so often to discuss what’s happening on the screen, or after the video is finished, to talk about what they’ve learned. It’s always good to repeat and review the key message points.

Adding a Personal Touch

You can strengthen key messages in each activity by personalizing them—centering one around the children who have asthma. Do this only, of course, if they are comfortable with it.

View and Sing!

After watching the *Sesame Street A Is for Asthma* video with children, sing this song to reinforce the importance of avoiding irritants in helping reduce asthma attacks.

**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 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.

Play the Video Again

Before doing the activities on this and the next page, adults can replay segments that connect to each one. This will help children recall key points.
What Does Breathing Sound Like?

Key Messages:
• All of us breathe, but children with asthma sometimes have trouble breathing.
• When a child with asthma has trouble breathing, his or her family, caregiver, or friends can help by following the Asthma Action Plan, as explained in the video and poster that are part of this kit.

What to Do: During a check-up, health-care providers can let children listen through the stethoscope to learn what their breathing sounds like.

Teachers and day-care providers may wish to invite a pediatrician, public-health nurse, or other health-care professional to visit their group. He or she can speak to the group in a simple way about asthma and how it affects breathing. Ask your guest to bring a stethoscope and, if possible, to watch the video. Ask the guest to emphasize ways that kids with asthma can stay healthy and to talk about the three steps in the Asthma Action Plan (sit down and rest; stay calm; get help). Point out to children that in the video, Rosita helps Dani when he’s having trouble breathing.

Practicing the Action Plan

Key Message:
• When a child with asthma is not feeling well, other children should help by following the Asthma Action Plan.

What to Do: Replay the video segment in which Rosita follows the action plan. Ask one child to role-play having asthma while another follows the three steps. Let children take turns being the helper and the one being helped. To avoid confusion, make sure no adults play the helper, since the plan teaches children to go to them to get help (step 3). If the “actors” forget what happened in the video, ask others in the group to help them remember.

As the steps of the Action Plan are reenacted, write them down in bold lettering on poster board, or point to each step on the poster included with the Sesame Street A Is for Asthma kit. Hang up your poster where the children can see it every day.

You can also have the children act out other scenes from the video, such as Dani’s rap or the visit to the doctor’s office. They can even turn this into an occasion for dress-up play.

Trees, Flowers, and Furry Pets

Key Messages:
• Children with asthma need to avoid things that trigger their symptoms.
• Different children have different triggers.

What to Do: Replay the video segment that deals with triggers. Have a group discussion about the things that set off Dani’s asthma (furry animals, dust). Do any kids in your care have asthma? Encourage them to talk about their triggers.

Next, invite the class to find pictures in old magazines of furry animals, like those that triggered Dani’s asthma, or to draw their own pictures. If you’ve talked about a child in your care, you may want to have the children look for pictures of that child’s triggers (which might include flowers, trees, and other items listed on page 3). Then guide the group to make a collage of the triggers. Point out that children with asthma, not everyone in the group, must avoid these things. Display the collage as a reminder.
Breathe Easier
Managing asthma can be easier for everyone with the Sesame Street A Is for Asthma kit. Keep in mind:

• Asthma is a chronic illness that affects millions of children.

• When managed properly, asthma attacks can become less frequent and less severe.

• Communication among the child, parent, doctor, teachers, and other caregivers is key in helping manage that child’s asthma.

Resources
For more information, contact these organizations or visit their Web sites:

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 Wells Street, Suite 1100
Milwaukee, WI  53202
www.aaaai.org

The American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Point Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL  60007
www.aap.org

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

The Consortium on Children’s Asthma Camps
490 Concordia Avenue
St. Paul, MN  55103
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.