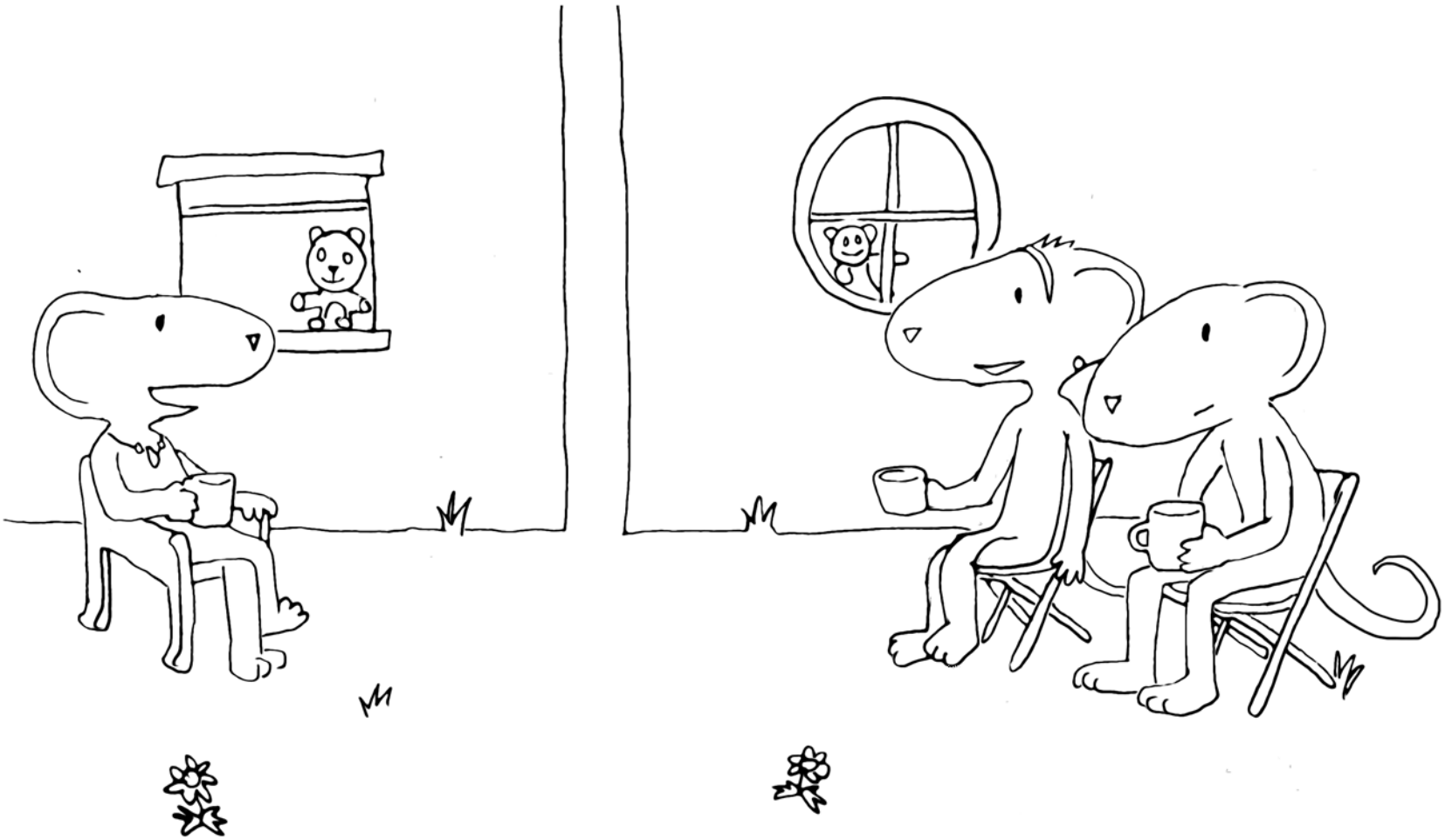
Fighting the Big Virus:
Parent Guide

A companion to the story
Fighting the Big Virus:
Trinka, Sam, and Littletown Work Together



Parents' Guide

The purpose of the story is to help children cope with their fears and worries related to COVID-19. As the story shows, you can help your child by letting your child know they are loved and sharing what is being done to keep the family safe and well.

Ways to Use this Story

1. Review the book yourself so you know the content.
    - Decide if there are any pages you want to leave out.
    - The book describes many different experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Depending on your child's age, you may choose to limit exposure to experiences they are not aware of.
    - However, including all pages may help your child to have empathy for others.
2. Review the companion booklet *Trinka and Sam's Questions*
    - The booklet includes questions your child may have about the virus or changes in your community.
    - Look through the pages and decide the ones to use with your child.
    - You can read this booklet as a stand alone story or include it as part of this story (between page 6 & 7).
3. Read and talk about this book with your child.
    - Follow your child's lead.
    - Some children may want to stop and talk about what's on the page. Let them. This is how they will begin to share their experiences, how they feel, and what they remember.
    - Some children may get worried while reading the book and need to take a break. That's ok. You can say something like "It's good to take a break. We can look at it when you want to."
4. Use it as a coloring book.
    - Coloring is fun and relaxing, it lets children go at their own pace, and it gives them something to do.
    - You can add face masks (see the booklet for instructions).
    - Children can use different colors for different feelings. For example, when Trinka, Sam (or their parents) are angry, they might color the picture red. When they're sad, they might color the picture blue. When they're scared or worried, they might choose a color for fear and color those pages with that color. Doing this will help your child begin to think about different feelings.
    - As children are coloring, they often begin to talk about what they are thinking.
    - Some children may want to scribble on certain pages to show how angry they are or how much they didn't want this to happen. This is a good way to share feelings.
        - They might be mad at the virus and use a page from the booklet *Trinka and Sam's Questions* to show how mad they are at the virus.
        - They might be upset that the playground is closed or that people in the family have been angry and use those pages to share their feelings.
5. Use the story to talk about your family's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.
    - The good things you are doing as a family
    - Good moments you are having as a family
    - Some of the challenges you are having
    - Ways you are supporting your community
    - Ways your community is supporting you
6. Stories are important to young children. They help them understand what is happening.
7. Stories can open doors to difficult but important conversations.
    - When you read the story to your child, they will know it's ok to talk about what is happening and ask questions.
    - As your child asks questions, give answers in simple words.
    - Many families are experiencing a lot of stress related to COVID-19 including economic stress, stress from remaining in close quarters, and from providing round the clock care for children while trying to work. If your child sees you get upset or angry, talk about it once you have had a chance to breathe and feel more calm. It is ok to admit that you were angry, scared, or upset. Help your child to see that you are doing better now, that you are strong, and that you will do all you can to keep your family safe. Also, remember to give yourself breaks during this stressful time.
    - By talking to you, your child may be able to share difficult feelings. When children can talk and don't have to act out

their feelings through their behavior, often their behavior improves.

- To help your child begin to talk, ask them what they are going through or what they remember and whether they ever feel the way that Trinka and Sam feel. Offer that you sometimes worry too and be open to answering questions.
- Sometimes when children are not comfortable or ready to talk about their own feelings, they express themselves by talking about how the characters in the story felt or behaved. If you have noticed similarities between Trinka and Sam's feelings and behaviors and those of your own children, you can direct the conversation to those parts of the story. For example:
    - Sam is mad at his dad because he doesn't understand why he can't go back to school. Young children often get upset with their parents when routines change. They can also misbehave which makes them feel bad about themselves. It is important that his parents understand that Sam misses his friends and teacher and also that the stress of being inside is building up in his body. Just like Sam's parents, it may help to identify ways your child can cope with this disappointment, including labeling feelings, exercising,doing breathing exercises, and being comforted by you.
    - During these challenging times, Trinka is more clingy. It is hard for young children to see so many changes to their home routine and to their community. When young children see adults worry, they worry. Even though Trinka is safe and healthy, she may worry about what could happen in the future, especially after she hears that people in her community are getting sick. Her mother's reassurance, providing a routine that includes special activities, clarifying the rules, and having extra patience helped Trinka feel better.
    - Even Cal, who is a toddler, may be affected by the changes in the family routine or how family members react to different situations. Fear and worry are catching, but fortunately, so are moments of calm and laughter.

8. If your children seem worried, or sad, talking about Sam, Trinka, Cal, or even Juju's feelings may help your children begin to talk about their own feelings.
9. Use the story to begin (or continue) talking to your children about viruses. Remember the booklet, *Trinka and Sam's Questions* can help guide this discussion.

Key Points to Remember

- We will be dealing with changes to our routines and uncertainties for a long time. Try to be patient with yourself and your family.
- Help your family create a new routine during the pandemic. Besides meal time and bedtime, your routine can include learning times as well as play time and time for family activities. Be sure to include calm and quiet time for each member of the family too.
- Young children often cannot tell us their understanding about what is happening. They show their worry through their behavior. Trinka wants to be picked up. Sam takes his brother's toy and slams the door. Some children get stomach aches.
- Children react in different ways. Trinka is worried, and she becomes clingy. Sam is worried, and he acts out.
- Although children may have to be separated from their friends for a time, help them to find connections in different ways. Trinka made a cheesecake for Sam. Sam drew a note on the sidewalk for Trinka.
- Young children can have extra fears over their parents' safety. Sam and Cal needed extra reassurance from their mom that she was protecting herself. Dad needed to clarify additional questions they had about why mom had to leave the home.
- If changes to your schedule occur, make sure you tell your children why and how they can keep in contact with you. Sam and Cal needed to know that their mom might have to stay away from the house, but they could video chat with her.
- In the story, the parents are upset and frustrated by their children's behavior, but they try to understand why their children are behaving this way.
- The parents also got angry with each other, which increased their children's worry. Find ways to give each other space and,

if possible, problem-solve ways to solve conflicts outside of your children's presence.

- Remember, children are always learning, not just their ABC's but about feelings and relationships. When they get upset or when they see us get upset, they are learning about anger. What things make us angry? What do we do when we are angry? How do we repair relationships after moments of anger? Think about what you would like them to learn about anger. Sometimes as parents we help our children to learn things that are different from what we may have learned when we were younger.
- Even when children are scared, angry, or sad, it is not ok for them to behave aggressively – setting limits for your children will help them feel safe.
- Young children ask the same questions over and over. This is not because they forget what you told them but because this is their way of learning about what is happening and how to make sense of it. They need you to answer the same questions over and over as patiently and lovingly as possible.
- Children will miss developmental milestones during these uncertain times (e.g. graduations, incomplete sport seasons, birthday parties canceled). Acknowledge your children's disappointments, problem-solve if there are ways to honor the missed opportunity later or in a different way. For Trinka's birthday, her family wished her happy birthday by video and Sam from his window, but she still had her favorite cake.
- Discuss with your children different ways your community is beginning to reopen. Talk about when schools reopen, when they can play on the playgrounds, or when they can have playdates again. You children may have additional questions about safety during each of these steps. Make sure you help them understand why these activities are now safe to do.
- Help your children know about the helpers in the community and their different roles. Thanking these individuals can inspire children to want to help others in the future. Also thank your children for ways they helped others.

Thinking About Your Child

- Has your child acted differently since the pandemic?
- What makes your child worried?
- How do you know when your child is worried?
- How does your child tend to behave when stressed or worried?
- What can you and your child do together that will help your child feel better?

Ways You Can Help Your Children

- Help your children talk with you about what is happening. Correct any inaccurate information or misunderstandings they may have.
- Help your children identify feelings they may be having, and let them know it's ok to feel that way. The Trinka and Sam poster may help. You can download a free copy from the website: https://piploproductions.com.
- Help your children feel safe. Focus on psychological safety (how your children feel) and actual physical safety (how many people are sick in your community, how do I prevent my family from getting sick). Discuss what your family is doing to keep everyone well (e.g., washing hands, wiping down the groceries, wearing masks, staying home).
- Young children feel safe when you hold them.
- Children feel safe when they have predictable routines (regular meals, schedules, and consistent rules) and know what is going to happen next.
- Limit your children's exposure to COVID-19 media coverage.
- Distract your children with different activities to keep them busy, to help get their energy out, and to help them calm.
- Help them stay connected with extended relatives, friends, teachers, and neighbors.
- If you can, help them do something for someone in need (e.g., send a card, get groceries, bake cookies). Helping others will help them feel better.

Ways You Can Help Yourself

- Adults are dealing with many stressors right now - trying to educate and entertain children, juggling your own jobs, worrying about finances, and keeping everyone safe. You may be scared, and you may feel sad, angry, or guilty about all that is happening.

- Take several slow breaths to calm yourself. Inhale quietly and exhale slowly (twice as long as the inhale).
- Make sure you find ways each day to care for yourself. Practice good rest/sleep, healthy eating, and exercise. What helps you feel calm? Brings you joy? Find one practical activity to do each day.
- Find ways to connect with friends, family, and co-workers. It helps to connect with others in the same situation and learn ways they are addressing problems.
- Allow yourself to feel sadness and grief.
- For large concerns (e.g., unemployment), try to consider small steps to begin to deal with this problem. For example, filing for unemployment, researching community food programs, contacting your boss to determine the feasibility of getting rehired).
- Stay informed but limit COVID-19 media coverage.
- Be patient with yourself as you might not be the best parent right now, the most efficient, or get everything done on your list.

Additional Resources

- NCTSN.org: Information about children, disasters, public health emergencies, and trauma.
- Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) (English/Spanish).
- NCTSN Simple Activities for Families during COVID-19
- Helping Children with Traumatic Separation or Traumatic Grief related to COVID-19
- Coping in Hard Times: Fact Sheet for Parents
- Piploproductions.com: Stories to help families heal including *Once I Was Very Very Scared*, *You Weren't With Me* (for families who have experienced difficult separations, and *Holdin Pott,* to help families talk about feelings.
- Sesame Street: Caring for Each Other and Sesame Street in Communities has tips, activities, and other tools to help the whole family with the uncertainties of health emergencies (English/Spanish).
- Zero to Three: Tips for Families: Coronavirus has information for families with young children.
- Zero to Thrive: COVID-19 resources and information for families and professionals.
- My COVID-19 Time Capsule -an activity book.
- PBS Kids: Has creative fun activities for kids.
- Download a wellness app (e.g., Headspace, Calm, Simple Habit).

Our Team

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