

= Snuffy 's Parents Get a Divorce =

" Snuffy 's Parents Get a Divorce " is an episode of the children 's television program Sesame Street . Produced in 1992 , it never aired because tests showed several unintended negative effects . Sesame Street has had a history of presenting difficult topics as part of its affective curriculum goals , including death , marriage , childbirth , and disaster . Extensive research was done before these episodes were written and produced , to ascertain their focus , and after they aired , to analyze the effect they had on viewers , and that was the case for " Snuffy 's Parents Get a Divorce " . The show 's producers had expressed a desire to produce the episode as early as 1989 , and they were convinced that it was a topic they should address after the US Census Bureau reported that 40 % of American children had experienced divorce .

The producers chose to present the Muppet Mr. Snuffleupagus (" Snuffy ") and his family 's experience of divorce . The episode was written by staff writer Norman Stiles , who also wrote the 1983 episode in which Mr. Hooper 's death was explained . Every word of the divorce episode was reviewed by the Children 's Television Workshop 's (CTW) advisory board , content experts , and developmental psychologists . After tests showed that their young viewers were confused by the episode and did not understand important concepts about divorce , the producers decided to not air it , despite the investment they had made . It was the first time the show 's producers made this kind of decision , and was cited as an example of the producer 's practice of " listening to the voices of children and by putting their needs first " , despite the costs .

Sesame Street did not address the topic of divorce until November 2012 , when they produced , for limited audiences , Little Children , Big Challenges : Divorce , as part of their resiliency initiative . Like in " Snuffy 's Parents Get a Divorce " , the production used a Muppet , Abby Cadabby , to represent the child experiencing divorce . Whereas Snuffy was shown going through it in real time , Abby 's parents ' divorce was in the past , which gave her time to adjust .

= = Background = =

Sesame Street , which premiered in 1969 , was the first children 's television program to use a detailed and comprehensive educational curriculum , with specific educational goals , in its content . The show 's goals included both cognitive and affective objectives . Initially , the cognitive skills of its young viewers were stressed over affective skills , which were addressed indirectly because the producers , writers , and researchers believed that focusing on cognitive skills would increase children 's self @-@ esteem and feelings of competency . Eventually , after the show 's first season , its critics forced its staff to address affective goals more overtly , which occurred after " extensive research and planning " .

According to writer Michael Davis , Sesame Street 's curriculum began addressing affective goals more overtly during the 1980s . For example , the producers addressed grief after the 1982 death of Will Lee , who had played Mr. Hooper since the show 's premiere . Author David Borgenicht called the episode " poignant " , and Davis called it " a landmark broadcast " and " a truly memorable episode , one of the show 's best " . For the 1988 and 1989 seasons , the topics of love , marriage , and childbirth were addressed when the show 's staff created a storyline in which the characters Luis and Maria fall in love , marry , and have a child , Gabi . Extensive research was done before these episodes were written and produced , to ascertain their focus , and after they aired , to analyze the effect they had on viewers . The show also addressed real @-@ life disasters . For example , the producers addressed the September 11 terrorist attacks with an episode that aired in early 2002 . They also produced a series of four episodes that aired after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 .

= = Development = =

The Children 's Television Workshop (CTW , later Sesame Workshop) , the organization responsible for the production of Sesame Street , considered and discussed addressing the topic of

divorce for many years before developing an episode . As early as 1989 , writer and director Jon Stone expressed his intention of writing a script about it , stating , " My two projects for this year are drugs and divorce . Divorce is a difficult one . Perhaps we could do it with puppets . I am also writing a script on drugs and peer pressure " . Executive producer Dulcy Singer vetoed the idea in 1990 , before it reached development . While she felt complex social matters should be discussed on the series , she felt the issue was irrelevant to inner city and financially disadvantaged families , which was the show 's target audience . She said that " divorce is a middle @-@ class thing , " and suggested instead that an episode focus on a single @-@ parent family , with the child born out of wedlock with an absent father . Singer stated , even after the episode was filmed , " We were really nervous about the show , and we didn 't think it was a shoo @-@ in . When you 're dealing with something like death , the approach can be universal . But with divorce , it 's so personal . People react differently . " The topic of divorce was discussed again the following year , after the US Census Bureau released statistics suggesting 40 percent of all children in the United States , not just the middle classes , would soon live in divorced households .

Producer / director Lisa Simon stated , regarding the difficulty the producers and writers had with crafting the episode , " We hope to get to it by the end of the season . It always takes us a while to figure out how to do an issue appropriately , from a child 's point of view " . Puppeteer Jerry Nelson , who was one of the original performers of Snuffy , noted , " Now we delve into things like divorce that are likely to affect small children very heavily . We didn 't touch those things before " .

Instead of using the human characters in the show 's cast , the writers and producers decided to use Muppets to present their narrative about the effects of divorce on young children . They chose to use the family of Mr. Snuffleupagus (" Snuffy ") , a large Muppet that had been on the show since 1971 . Long @-@ time cast member Bob McGrath stated , " They knew they couldn 't do it with either of our married couples ? Gordon and Susan or Maria and Luis ? so they tried it with Snuffleupagus , writing a show about his parents getting divorced " . According to Simon , " With puppets , it 's slightly less frightening ... The kids have somebody to identify with . They see the puppet characters have feelings and work through a difficult issue many of them will have to face " .

Staff writer Norman Stiles , who also wrote the episode in which Mr. Hooper 's death was explained , was assigned to compose the script . Every word of the divorce episode was reviewed by CTW 's advisory board , content experts , and developmental psychologists . The episode featured Gordon explaining the concept of divorce , Snuffy being assured that his parents still loved him , and the characters talking and singing " about how Snuffy will have good homes , and so on and so on " .

= = Test results = =

As with the Mr. Hooper episode , " Snuffy 's Parents Get a Divorce " was studied extensively for comprehension and attention . After it was filmed , it was screened before a test audience of 60 children in four daycare centers . The results found several unintended negative effects . As The Christian Science Monitor said , " it bombed " . Despite Gordon 's reassuring the Muppets Elmo , Big Bird , and Telly , children believed that their parents ' arguments would lead to their divorce . They also were unsure that Snuffy and his little sister Alice 's parents loved them despite the divorce , were unclear where the characters ' parents lived (especially their father , who had never appeared on the show before) . Many viewers also thought that Snuffy and Alice would never see their father again . According to Singer , " The kids came away with negative messages ... The kids misunderstood arguments . They said arguments did mean divorce . Some thought Snuffy 's parents were moving away even though we said just the opposite . A number said the parents would no longer be in love with them " .

Based upon their findings , and despite the expense and their intention to air " Snuffy 's Parents Get a Divorce " in April 1992 , the CTW decided not to risk possibly harming their audience and not air the episode . McGrath said , " They wrote a whole show and taped it , and it was just devastating for test groups of kids . So they just threw the whole thing in the garbage and never tried it again . It was just too difficult a concept for a 3 @-@ year @-@ old " . CTW Research director Valeria Lovelace recommended scrapping the episode and going " back to the drawing board " , and the

idea was abandoned , at least for the season . Producer Michael Loman recalled , " We ate the cost and never aired it . We feel there are a range of issues that we can deal with in the family that do not go to the extreme of divorce " . According to Sesame Street researcher Susan Scheiner , it was the first time the CTW had produced an episode , and after making a large investment , found after tests that the episode did not work . Rosemarie T. Truglio and her colleagues at the CTW cited the episode as an example of the CTW 's practice of " listening to the voices of children and by putting their needs first " .

= = Legacy = =

Sesame Street did not address the subject of divorce until November 2012 , when its producers created , as part of their resiliency initiative , Little Children , Big Challenges : Divorce . It was made available to military families and to the general public through family courts , counseling services , and parenting and child care programs . It included a 22 @-@ minute DVD , a caregiver guide , a storybook , a tip sheet for extended families and friends , mobile apps and social networking sites , and an online toolkit . Like in " Snuffy 's Parents Get a Divorce " , the Little Children , Big Challenges production also used a Muppet , Abby Cadabby , to represent the child experiencing divorce . Whereas Snuffy was shown going through it in real time , Abby 's parents ' divorce was in the past , which gave her time to adjust .