

# Plenty of room to swing a cat—but where's the cat?

Last night as the boys and I were driving home, we passed a burning pickup truck. The front was completely engulfed in flames.

"Mama," Leo said, "if that happens to our car, I won't worry about stepping on things on the floor. I will just get out of the car."

Our 5-year-old has learned about fire safety at preschool and toured a Baltimore City fire station on Sunday. So he knows what to do when there's a fire.

"Yes, that probably won't happen," I said. "But if it does, we won't take anything with us. We'll just get out."

"But we'll take our sleeping friends with us," Leo said. "We'd have to have our sleeping friends."

I started to explain that in a fire you don't even stop to get your stuffed animals. And that's when it hit me. I realized we had left Leo's favorite pal, the Cat in the Hat, not in a burning car, but at preschool.



I took a deep breath and broke the news.

"Turn around," Leo said simply. "Go back."

I have done that before when the Cat was left at Grandma and Grandpa's, but I don't have a key to the school, and it was closed.

"I want my Cat in the Hat," Leo whimpered.

I tried empathy—"You really miss your Cat"—and logic—"We'll see the Cat tomorrow"—and tried to make it sound like fun—"The Cat's camping out at school tonight!"

Nothing worked.

✖ So I told him a story from my childhood. I described driving all the way to Massachusetts with my family. On the way home we realized we had forgotten my doll, Beansie, at our friends' house in Massachusetts.


I had to wait for days while our friends boxed Beansie up and shipped her home. Opening that box and seeing her again was one of the best moments ever, I told Leo and Daniel.

And it would be just as wonderful as that in the morning when we pulled the Cat out of Leo's cubby.

Leo didn't want his Cat in the Hat in the morning. He wanted him now.

When we got home, all I could offer was the replacement Cat I bought months ago

when I realized his stuffed friend was deteriorating.

Leo had met the clean replacement, and he's unimpressed. It sits on a shelf,  unloved and forgotten. Our son likes his limp, bedraggled Cat.

But last night he had no choice. He took the alternate to bed.

Then he astonished me by falling asleep without any trouble and sleeping all night long.

At 6:30 this morning when I went in to get the boys out of bed, Leo said, "Mama, this replacement Cat in the Hat is not working."

"Really?" I said, looking at the beautiful, plush Cat lying next to our older son.

"No," he said. "His tie is not long enough."

Maybe not. But John and I got a full night's sleep, one I wasn't expecting when I realized we had forgotten Leo's beloved stuffed friend at school. So that replacement Cat sure worked for me.

In the back of my mind, I can hear a little voice saying that maybe, just maybe, our little boy doesn't need his Cat in the Hat the way he used to.

Maybe he is growing up and away from needing a sleeping friend.

Maybe.

But you can bet I don't plan to forget the Cat again anytime soon.