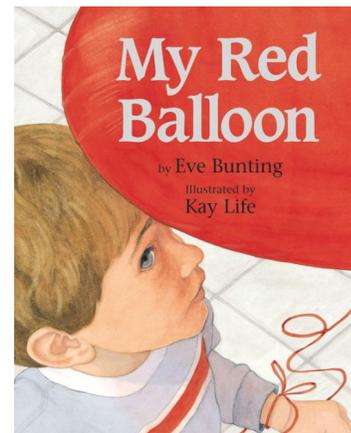


# My Red Balloon

By Eve Bunting

On the day of his father's return from deployment, the little boy and his mom go to welcome him home. The boy brings a red heart-shaped balloon to help his father spot him. While they are watching the ship arrive, the red balloon comes off the boy's wrist. He is sad and nervous his dad will not recognize him without the balloon, but his daddy finds him anyway.



## Discussion and Questions:

- Encourage the child(ren) to find the red balloon on each page. Help very young or nonverbal children point to the balloon if necessary.
- Ask, "What color is the balloon?" and help children label it "red" if needed. Invite children to describe what color balloon they might get for their caregiver if they went away.
- On page 8, point out the many adults, children, and babies pictured. Ask children to guess what the people might be waiting for and if they have ever waited a very long time for something. Encourage children to share how they felt waiting so long.
- This book is written at a comprehension level that may be best for early elementary students. However, some young children may still understand the story. Adults also can paraphrase the written text or talk about the pictures instead.

## Activities:

- **Balloon Measure**
  - Complete this activity before the service member leaves for deployment.
  - Blow up 20 or more balloons to somewhat equal sizes. These balloons will be used to measure how long each member of a family is in balloon lengths.
  - Starting with the service member, have each person lay down on the floor. Children should line up the balloons lengthwise along the person's body. When the correct amount of balloons has been placed, help the child count how many balloons it takes to stretch from head to toe.
  - Write down the number on a poster or piece of paper next to the individual's name.
  - Take turns and repeat these steps until each member has been measured and recorded.
  - Encourage everyone to guess how many balloons each person will measure when the caregiver returns from deployment.
  - Keep the paper with the measurements and guesses. When the deployed caregiver returns home, repeat the activity and see how much everyone has grown.
- **Balloon Stress Ball**
  - Provide each person with a large balloon in a color they choose.
  - Provide enough flour to fill each balloon and demonstrate how to use a funnel to fill the balloon with flour. Caregivers and children may need to work together to fill the balloon.
  - Once the balloon is full, add a little bit of water (1 tsp.) and carefully squeeze the balloon with your fingers to spread the water throughout. More water will result in a squishier and slimier stress ball, while less water will make it firmer and moldable.
  - Help children find the right consistency they enjoy and then tie off the end.
  - Children can draw faces or doodles on their balloon.
  - Explain that the balloon balls can be used when children are upset or feeling overwhelmed.



- Demonstrate to the child how to breathe in, hold for two seconds, and then let it out while also squeezing their ball, holding for two seconds, and releasing.
- More details about this activity can be found at <https://laughingkidslearn.com/squeezy-ball/>
- **Hide and Find**
  - Cut out 20 red balloons from construction paper and divide the balloons among the members of the family or group.
  - On the back of each balloon write a memory or something people love or appreciate about their deployed caregiver. Younger children can draw a picture or have an adult write their thoughts on the balloons.
  - When each balloon is written on, mix them up, and have someone hide them around the room/house.
  - This can be a game of hide-and-seek or the balloons can be left where they are hidden to serve as reminders of the deployed caregiver when they are found across days/weeks.
  - As they are found, balloons can be hung on the fridge, door, poster board, etc.
  - This activity can be repeated as needed by creating more balloons with additional memories or they can be themed such as “Dad’s favorite foods” or “Mom’s favorite activities.”
- **Return & Recognition**
  - As the family prepares for the return of the deployed caregiver, this activity is a creative way for children to get the attention of their caregiver when they return.
  - Talk with the the child about what the boy in the story did to catch his dad’s attention when he returned. Explain that the red balloon set the boy apart, so his dad could easily find him in the crowd.
  - Encourage the child to think of something they would like to make that would help their parent find them in a crowd. Provide suggestions such as silly hats, a poster or banner, flower bouquet, cape, etc.
  - Gather the needed materials for the child to create the item they selected. This may require some advance planning and need to take place over multiple days if items need to be purchased. If possible, include the child when shopping for any needed items and have them choose the colors or materials if applicable.
  - Help the child as needed as they make their project.
  - This activity is a fun way for a child to welcome home a parent even if the deployed caregive greets the child at home instead of at a large welcome home ceremony as described in the book.