



What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers

Helping Kids "Get" Science



There's an intriguing sign at our Pittsburgh airport: "Kids who get science get jobs."

When you think about it, "getting" science starts way back in the early years. Children are natural scientists. They're curious. They're fascinated by things

in the world around them. And you have many ways to support their interest in the sciences -- through the activities you offer, the materials you supply, and most importantly through your conversations and your questions. Sometimes it just takes a word or two.

Fred had a deep interest in the arts, but he also felt it was important to give his young viewers a rich appreciation for the sciences and the connections between them. Remember the factory videos? They were full of STEM concepts (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). All through the Neighborhood series he introduced children to people in a wide variety of STEM fields, including construction workers, a plumber and a paleontologist.

Fred also modeled for us ways to help children enjoy learning about science. As you watch this video, you might think it looks simple, but there's a lot we can learn from it.

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"Marveling, wondering, asking questions - for young children, those are the things they'll need, for learning about science or about anything."

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You can also view the video with my [commentary](#) about what we can learn from Fred.

Here are some other ways we can help children "get" science:

Introduce children to scientific terms.

Children like "big words." I'll bet you know children who can tell you the names of dinosaurs or construction vehicles. But even if some children don't remember the technical terms, it's good to expose them to these words.

Talk about jobs in the sciences.

To children it probably seems that lights come on magically when you touch a switch, but you could mention that it takes "electricians" who know how to put the wires and switches in buildings. When children create buildings or bridges with blocks, you can tell them that's like the work of "architects" or "engineers." If they're looking through a microscope or magnifying glass, you can say that's one thing scientists do -- they look closely at things. You might even show the children non-fiction books or online pictures of people doing the kind of work they're playing about.

Invite families to tell about their work.

Now is a great time, as you're meeting the families at the beginning of the year, to find out if any of them do STEM-related work that they could explain to the children. To make that discussion more engaging, you could suggest that they demonstrate how they use some of their tools, like blueprints if they're contractors, pipes if they're plumbers, and rulers or screwdrivers if they're carpenters. Maybe you can borrow some of those tools for the classroom to encourage children to play about those jobs.

I once heard an early childhood teacher say she's in "investments!" What a great way to talk about the work that you do - as an investment in the children's future. When you talk about the sciences, you may be opening the door for their future careers. But whether or not the children in your care will grow up to be adults who "get jobs" in the sciences, you will have given them something

important for their everyday lives and for our society -- an appreciation for STEM, for the people who do those kinds of jobs and for the world around us.

Thank you for being our neighbor,



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