



## What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers

### *The Power of Puppet Play – It's Not Just Make-Believe*



When most people think of Fred Rogers' puppets, they think about his Neighborhood of Make-Believe stories. But there's another way he used puppets--a way that can help us learn about children's thoughts, feelings and

concerns.

Fred was always enamored with puppets, so when he was a graduate student in Child Development, they were a natural tool for him to use with small groups of children. He saw how readily children identify with puppets, so they're more open to learning social-emotional skills from them. That's why many teachers use puppet stories, much like Fred did with the Neighborhood of Make-Believe.

Fred also saw how children seem to trust puppets, maybe because they're childlike and non-threatening. At a safe distance, an arm's length away from the puppeteer, children tend to confide in a puppet, saying things they might not tell an adult.

Here's a great video from some of Fred's early work with children and puppets. Watch the faces of the children as they talk with King Friday XIII on Fred's hand. They're so focused on the puppet, it's as if Fred (the puppeteer) is invisible. Listen to what they tell the puppet and the thoughtful way Fred uses the puppet to respond. You can see for yourself the power of puppets.

### *Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers*



"Pretending through puppets is often a safe way for children to talk about things that really concern them."

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You don't have to be a puppeteer to help children get the most out of puppet play. You just have to be willing to put a puppet on your hand and give it a try. Here are some ideas that can help:

### **Introducing puppet play**

To guide children towards using puppets in meaningful ways, it helps to model how to talk with a puppet. Here are three steps in that can help:

- 1) Talk **to** the puppet. The children are more likely to talk to the puppet if they see YOU talking to the puppet. You could start by telling the puppet about something that happened that day.
- 2) Talk **for** the puppet. Ask the puppet a question, then talk **for** the puppet answering you. Create a conversation between yourself and the puppet.
- 3) Have the children talk **with** the puppet. When you feel the children are ready, turn the puppet to talk with them. It's a good idea to model these steps for several days before offering children puppets to use themselves.

### **Using puppets for social stories**

I know teachers who use a puppet when they want to talk with children about behavior situations, about empathy, or making better choices. For example, you could have a puppet on your hand tell you, "I'm mad today." You could ask why and have the puppet answer something like, "Because somebody knocked down my blocks," or "I wanted to be first in line." You could then ask the children to talk with the puppet and offer some suggestions or encouragement. It may be especially helpful for children who have trouble with those kinds of social or emotional situations if you remind them later on what they told the puppet.

### **Making puppets**

The things children value the most are the things they make themselves, and puppets can be easy to make out of things like paper bags, paper plates on sticks, or socks. When children make their own puppets, they're more likely to use them creatively in their pretend play.

You could also have children make puppets that express emotions. Have them look in a mirror, show an emotion (angry, sad, scared), and then represent it on the puppet's face. What do the eyes look like? The mouth? What would the puppet say when it's angry, sad, or scared?

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Puppets can be a powerful learning tool for you, too. Because they can open the door for some important conversations, they can help you gain insight into what children are thinking about and how you might support them. You might also find that learning how to use puppets can give you a fun and meaningful way to support children's social-emotional development.

Thanks for being our neighbor,



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