

What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Slowing Down



Whenever I show video clips from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* at a professional development workshop, I often ask, "What messages did you hear in it?" Usually teachers talk about "what" Fred said or did. But recently a teacher talked about "how" Fred said and did things.

What struck her was his slow pace, how comforting and comfortable it was - and how much it helped her be open to watching and listening. And she added that it was a great reminder to work on slowing down.

While “Mister Rogers” pace was Fred’s natural pace, I can tell you from working with him over the years that he really worked at that. He understood that a slow, thoughtful pace can help make communication more meaningful, whether you’re talking with children or adults. You can look at almost any Neighborhood episode and find examples of Fred taking the time to slowly and deliberately explain things...showing something over and over again...letting children look carefully and giving them quiet time to think about what they’re experiencing.

Here’s an example of that from one Neighborhood episode. As you watch, think about Fred’s pacing and what makes it so helpful.



Of course it was much easier for Fred to set that kind of a slow, methodical pace because he was talking to a camera in a television studio. In our fast-paced world and with all that’s going on in a roomful of young children, that’s obviously more challenging. Here are some ideas to keep in mind that I’ve learned from Fred and others:

Take a Deep Breath

Have you been in a workshop when the leader starts by asking you to take a deep breath and slowly let it out? I have, and I’m always amazed at how just that simple “activity” settles me down and relaxes my muscles and my mind

– and opens me up for learning. Try it now. And try it with the children, especially when you want to help them calm down so they’ll be ready to watch and listen to what you have to say.

Give Children Quiet Time to Think

When you give children quiet time to think, you’re helping them develop one of the important tools for learning -- reflection. Silence lets them digest, internalize and make connections at their own pace. I know teachers who ask a question and then tell children NOT to reply right away, but to take some time to think. It can take a lot of self-discipline on our part to not jump in too soon to provide answers or even to scaffold too soon. One of my granddaughters reminded me of that, when she said, “Wait, Grandma. I’m still thinking.”

Do It Again and Again

Part of what makes Fred’s pacing so comfortable is that he didn’t jump from one thing to the next. Just like you can see in the video, he often demonstrated the same thing over and over again, sometimes with a slight variation so you could understand more about it. We can’t assume that children, especially young children, get the full experience from a one-time showing. Just as they like favorite books read over and over again, they gain a sense of mastery – and discover new things in repeated experiences.

Slowing down isn’t only for the children’s benefit. It’s a tool for your own professional growth, too, because it can help you see more and hear more of what’s going on around you. It’s like taking time to smell the roses. The slower, quieter pace can help you notice things about the children that you didn’t see before -- and appreciate more of what they say and do. And that’s a real boost to the important work you do of relationship building.

Thank you for being our neighbor,



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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"There's an old Italian proverb: Chi anda piano, anda sano, anda lontano. That means: The person who goes quietly goes with health and goes far. Hurrying up and using a lot of shortcuts doesn't get us very far at all."

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