

What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Feeding the Fish--A Special Kind of Daily Routine



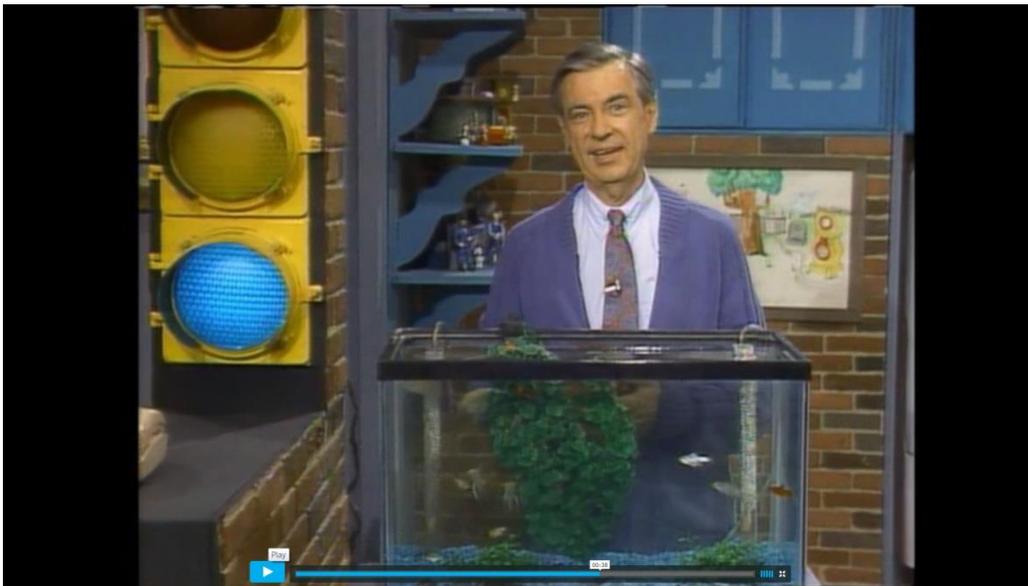
We all know how important daily routines are in child care. But I've come to find out that some routines have a special significance for children.

Knowing the value of routines, Fred filled his *Neighborhood* program with so many of them – from the opening, coming through the door with his song, followed by his sweater and sneakers routine, introducing Make-Believe with the Trolley, signaling his goodbye at the bench for his shoes and at the closet for his jacket, then going out the door. All these routines helped make the program feel comfortable and safe in its predictability.

It was through a letter from a viewer that Fred learned just how much children relied on one particular *Neighborhood* routine – feeding the fish. The letter came from a father whose daughter was blind. He said his daughter was worried that the fish weren't fed because sometimes Fred put the food in the aquarium without

saying he was feeding the fish. From then on, Fred made it a point to say out loud that he was feeding the fish.

Fred made sure to talk about another aspect of feeding the fish in this *Neighborhood* video. In this episode he was about to show his viewers something, but told them that he needed to feed the fish first. What an important message for children -- that we take care of our responsibilities first, like making sure the fish are fed, before doing other fun or interesting things. You'll also hear how Fred addresses another example of children's concerns about feeding the fish -- what happens if he forgets?



Here are some other messages about the value of routines:

Connection with learning

Fred's predictable *Neighborhood* routines helped his viewers know what to expect. Then they were comfortably ready to focus on the one new thing he showed them that day. We all know that focused attention is key to learning. Think about how much you help children be more focused and open to learning when your routines help them feel secure, comfortable, and less anxious about what's next.

Connection with trust

The routine of caring for fish has an added meaning for children. Fred understood how much young children identify with animals, especially pets like dogs, cats, birds or fish. Children feel a natural connection with those pets -- because, like children, they're small and totally dependent on the care of adults. That's why it

was important for Fred to tell them, as he did on the video, that if he ever forgets to feed the fish, he comes back later to feed them “so they’re always taken care of.” When children trust that adults are taking good care of pets, they can trust that adults will take good care of them, too.

Connection with coping

While we acknowledge that routines help children feel safe, we also know that sometimes the routines change – maybe when there’s a substitute teacher, absent friend, field trip, rainy day or a celebration. While some children adjust easily to changes, there are others who need extra comfort and support through those times. By helping them cope with changes, you’re also helping them develop resiliency which will benefit them in all kinds of difficult situations, now and later.

A teacher once told me that she prepares children for a change in routine – starting with the very first day of school. When she explains the daily schedule, she displays it with pictures on cards showing circle time, free play, snack, etc. But then she shows them a blank card (like a “wild card”) that she’ll attach temporarily to the schedule, just in case things do change on a particular day. And she explains that even though they may do things differently one day, she assures them that things will be back to normal the next day.

Something else struck me on the video when Fred sang, “I like to take care of you....Yes, I do. Yes I do.” He seemed to be telling children that besides taking our caregiving responsibilities seriously, it makes us feel good to take care of them. When you let children know that it makes you feel good to do the things that help them feel safe, loved, and cared for – like establishing routines and responding to their concerns – you’re strengthening your relationship with them. As Fred often said, “It’s through relationships that we grow best and learn best.”

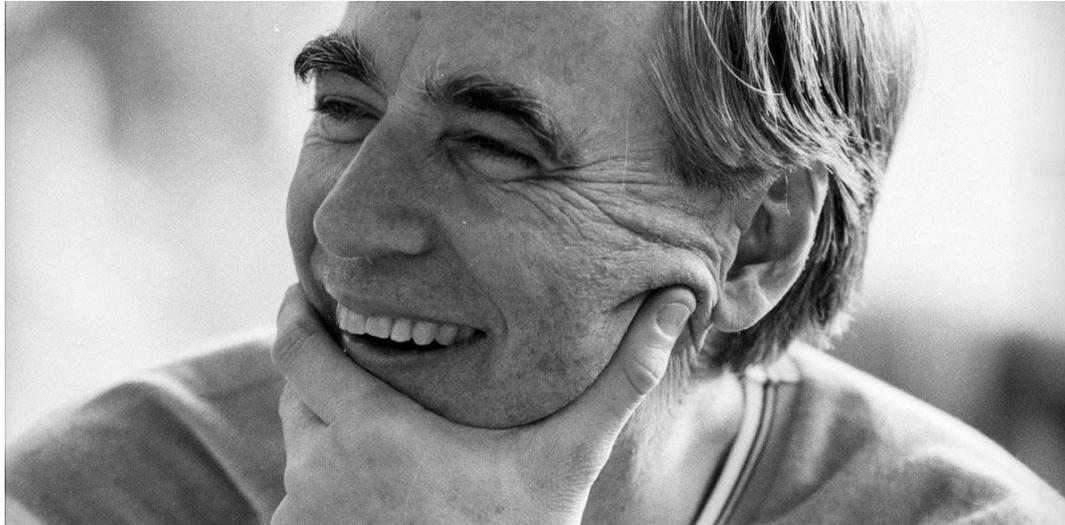
Thank you for being our neighbor,



Hedda Sharapan

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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"Children feel far more comfortable and secure when things happen predictably – with routines, rituals, and traditions. Those traditions, big or small, create anchors of stability, especially in rough seas."

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