

What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Don't Forget the Fun

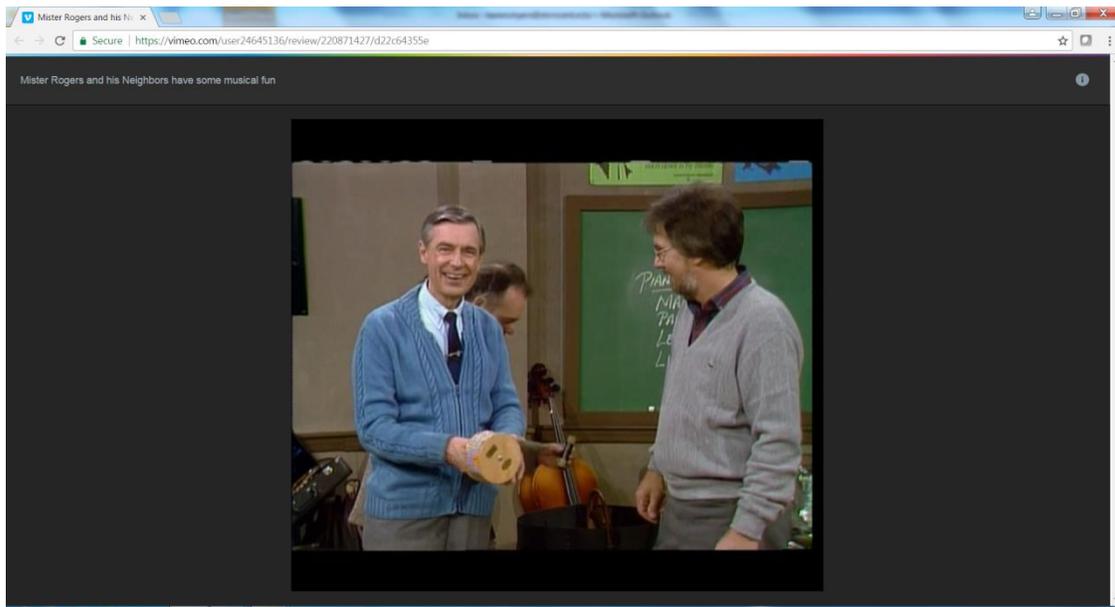


I was walking down the hall in a child care center when I heard one of the best sounds in the world -- the sound of children laughing. The teacher told me that now and then she likes to add something silly when they're singing. That morning she changed the "Old MacDonald" E-I-E-I-O to "Oinky, boinky, doinky" -- and the three-year-olds thought that was hilarious.

Laughter is not only a great sound, it's actually a healthy sound! Researchers tell us that laughter raises endorphins, which increases immunity, lowers stress -- and as we all know, "it's such a good feeling." With that kind of positive brain chemistry, children's brain cells are more likely to make connections. So laughter actually creates a healthy climate for learning.

Fred Rogers had a wonderfully whimsical sense of humor, and he understood how helpful it was to share that with children. I remember years ago when Helen Ross, a noted children and family mental health specialist, advised him “Don’t forget the fun!”

Watch how much fun Fred is having making music with his musician friends -- master guitarist and Neighbor Joe Negri and percussionist Bobby Rawsthorne who was part of the Johnny Costa trio contributing to the magnificent music for the whole *Neighborhood* series.



It helps us all to be reminded of why we need to find fun and laughter in our work with children, especially on tough days:

You’re a role model

When the children see that you’re having fun, they’re more relaxed, too. As a role model, you set the tone in your room. I once saw a teacher leading the children in exercises around 10 a.m. She ended by having the children learn a yoga position of lying still and breathing quietly. As a private aside to the other teacher, she said with a chuckle in her voice, "We're going to keep doing this until lunchtime!" And they both laughed. Even if the joke wasn't for the children, I'll bet they enjoyed hearing the teachers sharing a warm laugh together.

Be able to laugh at yourself

When things go wrong, remember that no one is perfect. Young children are especially forgiving, even when activities don't happen as you planned. When the children see that you can laugh at your mistakes, they'll be more likely to deal with their own mistakes as well.

Enjoy the fun things children say.

This spring, I heard a child ask, "How did the leaves get back up on the trees?" Recently a teacher told me another fun story about teaching *The Pledge of Allegiance*, with the words "and to the Republic for which it stands," when a child asked her, "Who are the four witches?" (Doesn't it feel good to laugh?) Not only does it feel good to laugh at the delightful things children say, we can also learn a lot from them. Their questions and comments help us see the world and hear our words from their perspective. You might even want to share those stories in staff meetings -- to enjoy a good laugh together.

They say laughter is contagious. I suppose that's because laughter is a social experience and helps us bond together, whether we're children or adults. There's something about fun and laughing together that warms a place and makes us feel "at home."

Thank you for being our neighbor,



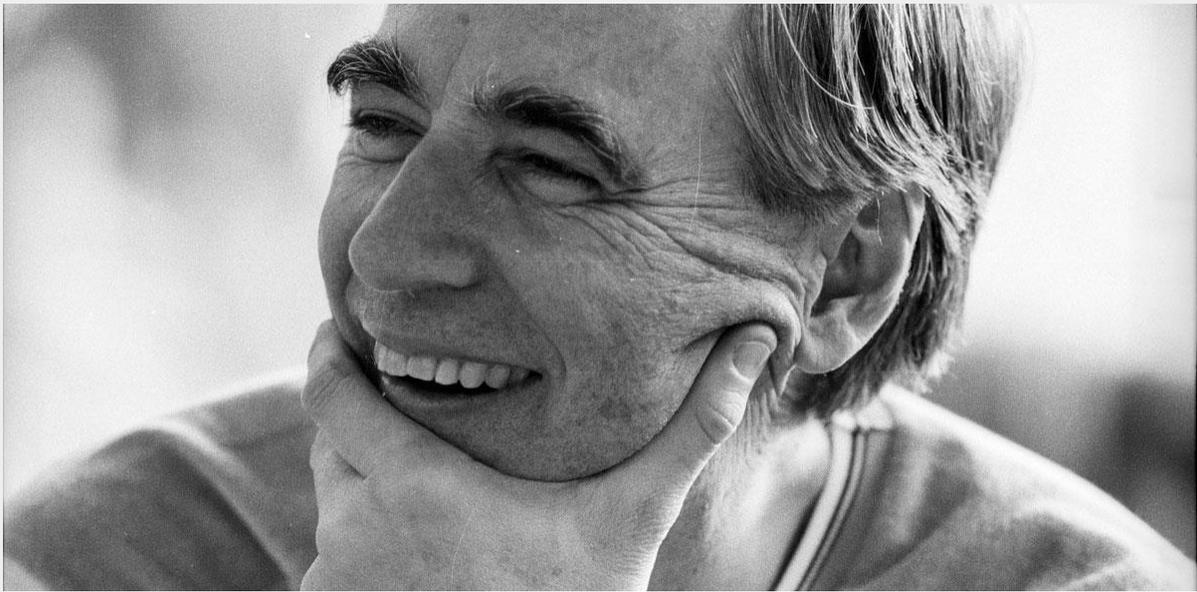
Hedda Sharapan

M.S. Child Development

PNC Grow Up Great Senior Fellow

hedda.sharapan@stvincent.edu

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"Maybe you'll find that by watching a child at play, you'll tap into some of the playfulness inside you -- remembering your childhood and discovering new things about yourself."

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Saint Vincent College
300 Fraser Purchase Road
Latrobe, Pennsylvania 15650-2690

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