



What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Helping Children with Tragic Events in the News



Whenever there's tragedy in the news, like the recent shootings in Pittsburgh and California, I worry about how young children interpret (and misinterpret) what they hear -- not only from the news but also from the conversations of the adults around them. And I'm concerned that we get tangled in our own emotional reactions, and that makes the news even harder to talk about with a child.

Over the years, many people have been grateful for Fred Rogers' reassuring help with difficult issues. He certainly was a pioneer in addressing children's concerns about tragic news events, beginning with his response to Robert Kennedy's assassination to his calming and thoughtful insight during the War in the Persian Gulf, September 11, and Hurricane Katrina.

Here's a [link](#) that you can pass on to parents and to others who work with children. You may want to keep this site in mind whenever you're looking for ways to help children through difficult situations.

I also wanted to share with you a video resource that can be directly helpful for you in your work. This video clip is from a workshop produced a number of years ago for people who work with children in communities where there's violence. Have you ever been in circle time and had one of those terribly uncomfortable moments when a child told you about some family tragedy or even a shooting that's affected him or her? In the video, you'll hear from caregivers who have had that experience and have worked on how to deal with it sensitively.



Be prepared.

Think about addressing this in a staff meeting in the near future. It can help to set

aside some time to talk about how to handle moments like that, so you are less likely to be caught off guard.

Look around to see how the other children are responding.

Is it just that one child who needs help dealing with it? You can better judge that by watching for signs of anxiety from the others. Being a careful observer always helps.

If you sense there are others who are upset, too, it can help to acknowledge their feelings. You could say something like, “Some things are sad and scary,” and then have a discussion about what they have found to be helpful when they need comfort and reassurance.

Acknowledge what the child has said.

I know how tempting it is to try to avoid difficult subjects and move on, but it’s important that children know you care about what they say and feel. Here are some things a caregiver said on the video: “I’m so glad you told me that. I want to hear more about it, so we’re going to talk more about it later.” You have your own ways of letting the children know you are there for them.

If you feel the child can’t wait until later to talk with you, ask someone to be with the other children so you can listen one-on-one. That lets all the children know that their concerns, feelings, and needs really matter to you, and that will go a long way toward strengthening your relationship with all the children.

You don’t need answers.

On the episodes Fred Rogers made about dealing with death, he told his viewers that there are some things that even he, now as an adult, doesn’t understand. He also often reminded us that “whatever is mentionable can be more manageable.” What’s important in that conversation is to give permission for children to talk about their story and to let them know their feelings are natural and normal. And when we say to someone, young or old, “Tell me more,” we’re letting them know that we really care.

Here at the Fred Rogers Center, our thoughts and prayers are with the families who have been affected by the tragic shootings in Pittsburgh and in California. And we all hope for peaceful days ahead.

Thank you for being our neighbor,



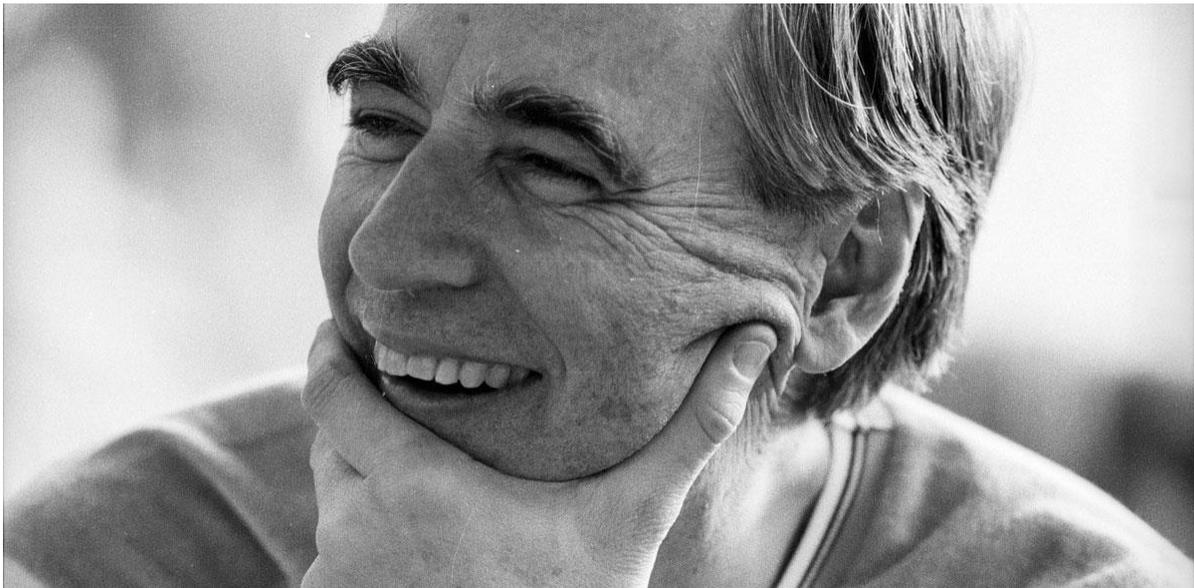
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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"When I was a boy and would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of disaster, I remember my mother's words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers -- so many caring people in this world."

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