



## What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers

### *Open-Ended Questions - "What Do You Think?"*



emotional development.

I came back from this month's NAEYC Professional Development Institute with a renewed appreciation for open-ended questions, after hearing a number of speakers emphasizing them in all kinds of situations -- for story time, for STEM concepts, and for social-

There's a real concern that teaching has become "asking a question so you can get the right answer." But think about how much you stimulate critical thinking skills when you ask questions that require deeper thinking ... that don't have a right or wrong answer ... that can't be answered in a word or two ... that help us start a conversation. Questions like:

- "When you look at the cover, what do you think the book might be about?"
- "What did you notice about that?"
- "What else can you do when you're angry?"

Fred Rogers knew the value of those kinds of questions. He would bring in a bag and ask, "What do you think could be inside?" or "What would you make with these things?" After the Make-Believe story, he'd ask, "What do you think might happen next?" Those questions -- and the time he gave for children to answer -- helped his television program become an interactive viewing experience. Of course he wasn't able to hear the viewers' responses, but he was encouraging them to think and letting them know that their thoughts, feelings and ideas mattered.

Watch how Fred encouraged children's thinking on this video, and see how much time he gives them.



Here are some ideas I've learned from teachers and families about open-ended questions:

#### Visual Reminders

I once visited a university lab school where the teachers posted open-ended questions on large banners around

### *Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers*



"Our questions are much more important than our answers!"

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the room. Those signs were a visual reminder for the child development students who were training there. I was told that parents saw those signs and started using those questions, too. Maybe you'd like to put those visual reminders up. After all, it's a new approach for most of us.

### Patience

Keep in mind that open-ended questions require some thinking, so it can take children time to respond. I was reminded of that during a phone conversation with my granddaughter. She had just told me spring was her favorite season. So I asked if she could tell me why she liked spring so much. I didn't hear any answer, so I started talking about why I liked spring. Fortunately she interrupted me and said, "Wait. I'm still thinking." What an important reminder to us to be patient!

### A Tip for Families

A while ago, I was with a family that did something unusual around their dinner table. One at a time, everyone was asked, "What was the best thing that happened to you today?" and "What was the worst thing?" Then they went around the table again, asking "What did you do to help someone?" and "What are you thinking about for tomorrow?" Those are wonderful conversation starters. And it was good to know it was okay if someone didn't have a response.

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Just think about how much can happen when you ask open-ended questions! You're encouraging higher-level thinking skills and language skills. At the same time, you're learning more about the children -- and because they know their ideas matter to you, you're strengthening your relationship with them...and they'll want to learn from you.

Thank you for being our neighbor,



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