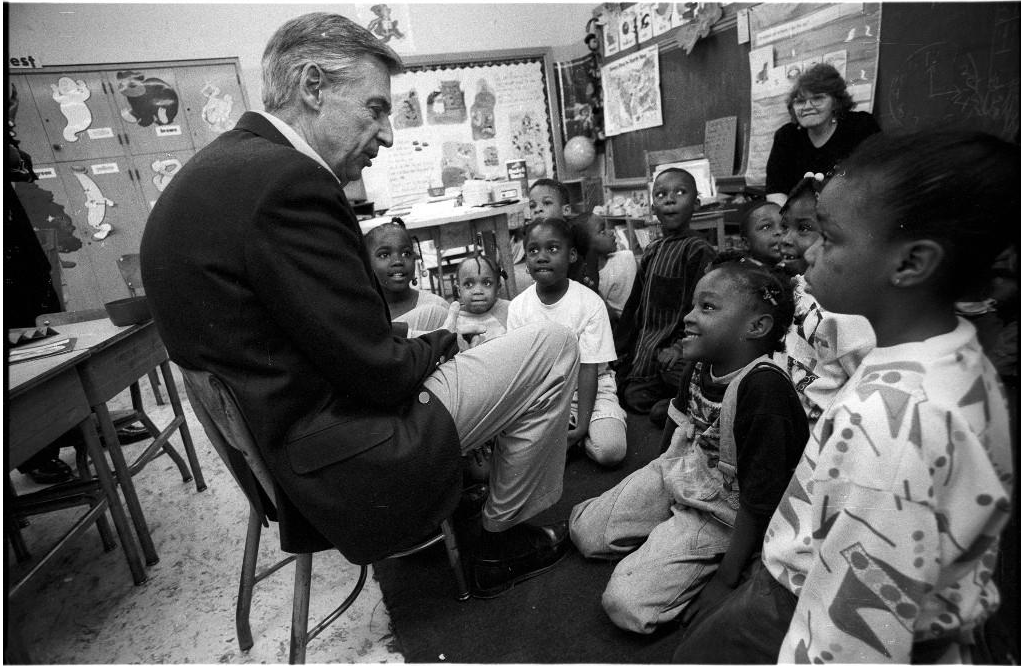


What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Blankeys and Stuffys



Oh, the comforting smell and feel of a beloved *blanky* or *stuffy*! No wonder children call them “loveys.” And no wonder teachers are seeing a lot of them, especially now at the beginning of the year.

To us, those objects might look worn and bedraggled, but just think how powerful they are for children. They can calm a crying child, provide comfort when a parent leaves, and settle a child at bedtime. It’s as if the loving touch and scent of a parent are sewn into the very fabric of a *blanky* or *stuffy*, so holding it is like getting a hug from mom or dad even when they aren’t there. When you think about it from a child’s perspective, “loveys” seem to be a physical representation of the comfort and safety of the loved parents.

There's another way to look at these objects. From our child development perspective, we call them "transition objects." They're used by children as a transition to help them make the gradual shift from being completely dependent to being comfortably independent. They're like an emotional bridge, giving children a safe transitional space where they can work on their feelings and build trusting relationships, until they feel strong enough to manage without them.

Fred understood how important those special objects can be for children. On this *Neighborhood* episode, he talked about his sister's *byankey*, and through his song he validated these beloved objects as a source of comfort and strength – in the long, long trip of growing.



I talked with some teachers and directors to find out how they deal with "loveys" at their center or child care home. Here are some things I learned from them:

Anywhere, anytime

Some directors told me that, although they discourage children from bringing their toys from home, they do allow and even encourage "loveys" where there's real attachment. In their centers children can keep them whenever and wherever they need.

In the cubby till naptime

Some centers have a rule that “the lovey stays in the cubby,” to be used only at naptime. One teacher said that if a child is having a hard time letting go of a stuffed animal, she encourages the child to make a kind of bed for it in the cubby, or maybe tucking it into the sleeve of a coat or jacket, as if it’s snuggled in. I thought that was an interesting way to empower a child to feel more secure without it, by being more in charge of letting go of it.

A middle ground

Some teachers say “the lovey stays in the cubby,” but it’s okay for a child to get it when it’s needed. Sometimes at a stressful moment, a child will get it for just a few minutes, use it to refuel, then put it back and rejoin the group. Or when a child gets hurt, the teachers find it can help to offer the “lovey” because it usually has a calming effect while they’re putting on a bandage or calling the parent.

Generally, teachers don’t want the “loveys” to go outside. However, one director told me if children seem to really need them, they are encouraged to set them on a special shelf outside. Just knowing their “lovey” is in sight helps those children engage in play. Another teacher told me she persuades children to set it down on a chair inside, saying, “It’s important to use two hands when you’re playing outside. It’ll be safe here inside.”

When a child isn’t participating

Of course it’s a concern if a child uses the “lovey” to withdraw from activities. That’s an important signal for you – not to take away the child’s only source of comfort, but instead to give that child more nurturing experiences with you. When you can take the time and effort to build a trusting relationship, that child won’t have to rely as much on the “lovey.”

There’s another way to think of these “loveys” or “transition objects.” They’re a healthy way for children to comfort themselves. When you think about it, it’s a sign of real strength when children don’t just fall apart when they are upset, but can use something as a tool until they become secure enough to feel independent and confident in the journey from home to the outside world.

Thank you for being our neighbor,



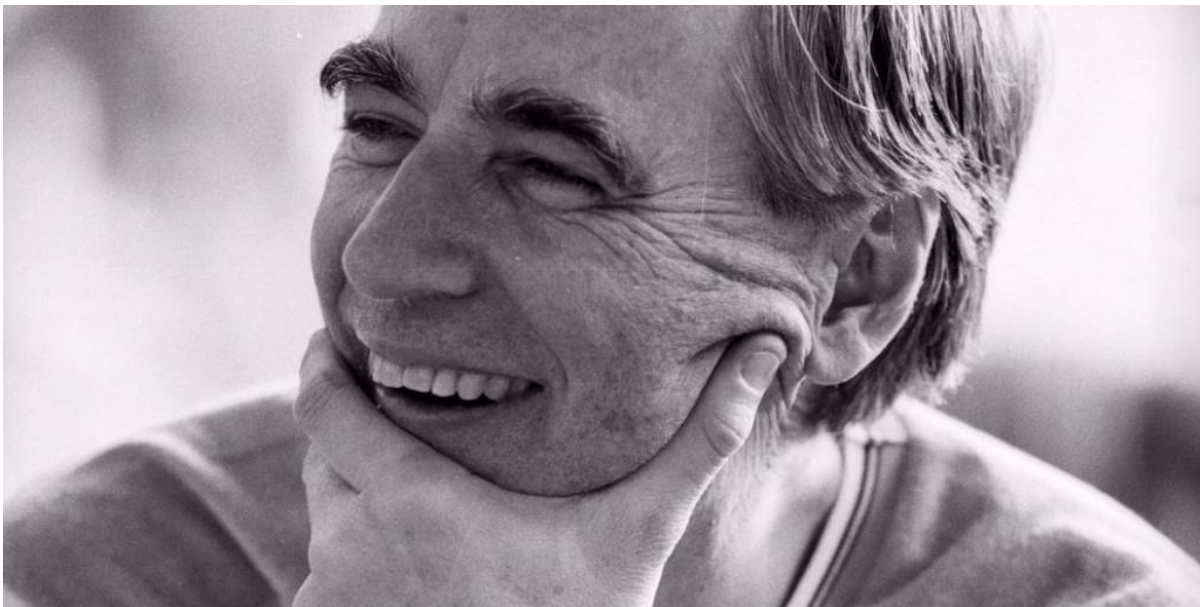
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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



It's tempting to cling to the familiar. Just like in music, if we keep living...playing in the key of C, we wouldn't have to take any risks of not making it to the key of E-flat. But we'd never know what it sounded like unless we tried. And once we've had the practice and the pleasure of making a transition from one key to the next, the subsequent times might not be quite so difficult.

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