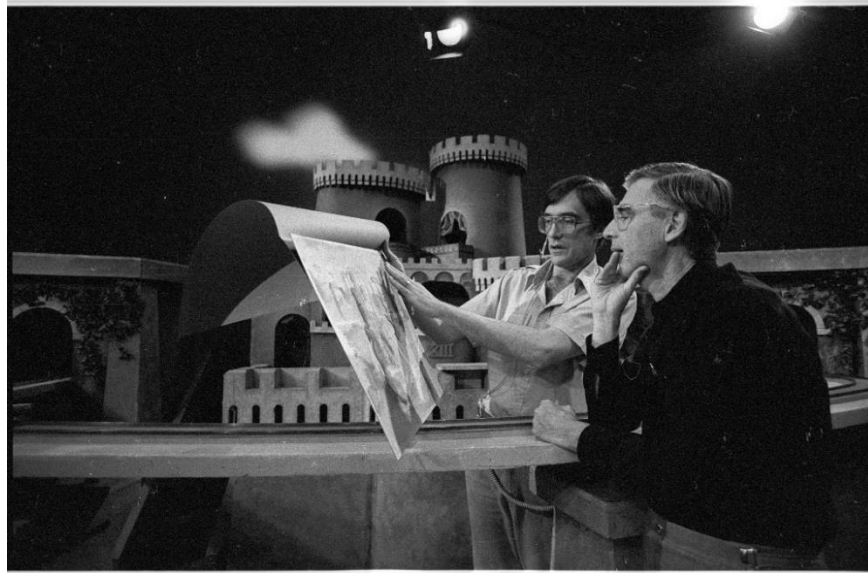




What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Being a "Helper"



I think we'd all agree that being helpful is one of the social skills that we want to support in young children. But we don't always get the response we want when we ask, "Will you help me?" I recently learned there's a better way to phrase that request. A University of California, San Diego researcher reported in a 2014 *Journal of Child*

Development that preschoolers were more willing to set aside what they were engaged with to help adult with chores, if they were asked "Will you be a helper?"

Why does being "**a helper**" make such a difference with young children? It seems that using a noun (helper) rather than a verb (help) gives them a sense of power – a chance to play an important role. Most of the time children are all too

aware of how dependent they are on others for help. And they're envious of grownups and older children who seem to have all the power and are able to do so much more.

Fred often talked about "helping" in his programs. He saw being helpful as part of being "neighborly." In his Neighborhood, one way that people expressed their care for each other was by being helpful. Listen to his words on the video, especially to the way he used the term "helpers," long before the research. In so many ways, Fred was way ahead of his time.



Here are some thoughts about ways we can encourage children to be “helpers”:

Being helpful with others

Social skills are a key predictor of success later on in school, and there are lots of social skills involved in “being a helper.” Young children tend to be egocentric and think only of what they need. But when we ask them to be “helpers,” we encourage them to think about what someone else might need. It may be another child who has too many blocks to clean up, or the teacher who’s searching for the top for a marker or someone who could use a hug.

Being helpful in the classroom

Many teachers use a chart assigning “classroom helpers.” Some children might

feel that some jobs are more important or more fun. But when the assignments are rotated regularly, they're learning every job, big or small, is important. Besides that, they're learning to wait for their turn. That's another social skill -- self-control.

There are other benefits of being "helpers" in the classroom. We're giving children the opportunity to learn what it means to take on responsibility. When they do their job, they're gaining confidence and feel proud of what they can do.

I was looking at lists of classroom helpers, and I was surprised to see some novel jobs I wouldn't have thought of. One was "a bits and pieces helper" -- someone who crawls around under the tables to pick up the bits and pieces of paper on the floor! Some children just love to be down on the floor under the tables! And that can be a big help to a teacher at the end of the day. The other job was as class photographer who uses the class i-pad or smartphone to take one picture of something that happened in the day -- a block building or painting or snack-time! What an interesting use of technology.

Just think how much it means when you let children know that you noticed something helpful that they did. Because of your warm relationship with them, the things you value and comment on become important to them, too. Then the children will want to be "helpers" the next time -- and maybe even look for times to be helpful on their own.

And be sure to let their families know that you noticed their child's helpful behavior. Parents feel good about their child -- and themselves -- when they hear their child is thinking of others. It's a great way to let parents know that social-emotional skills are as important--and worth commenting on and reinforcing-- as cognitive skills. And if you tell them about that phrase -- "Can you be a helper?" -- they might find it makes their home life a bit smoother, too.

Thank you for being our neighbor,

Hedda

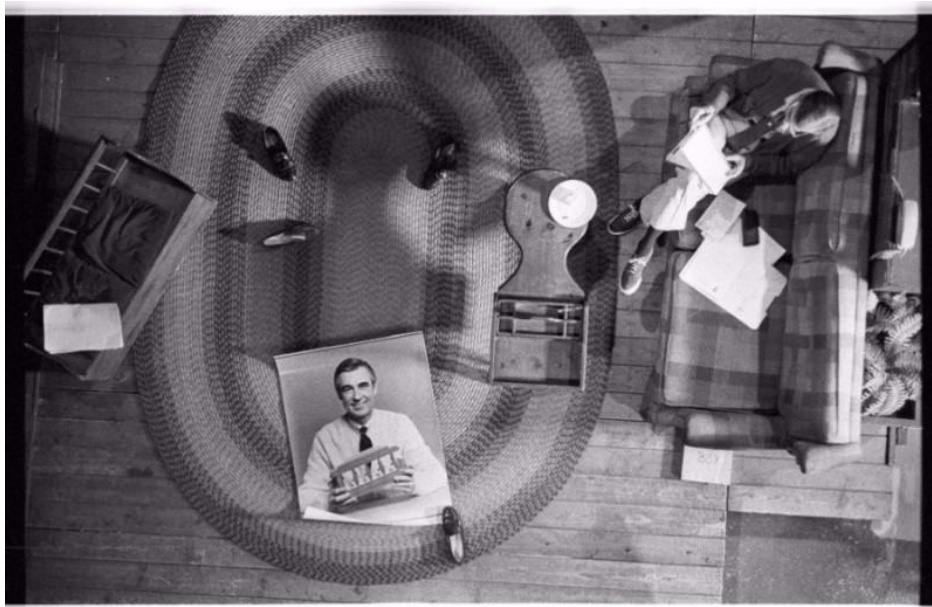
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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"No matter how old we are, we need to know that the people who are important to us really do care about us. But feeling good about who we are doesn't come just from people telling us they like us. It comes from inside of us: knowing when we've done something helpful or when we've worked hard to learn something difficult or when we've "stopped" just when we were about to do something we shouldn't, or when we've been especially kind to someone else."

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