

October 2018

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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



The Other Transition Time



In early childhood we work hard to help families deal with the transition at the beginning of the day, but there's another transition time that needs our help, too.

A few weeks ago I was at a child care center at the end of the day, and my heart went out to the parents -- and their children. Many parents came in looking like they had a tough day at work, but the minute they spotted their children, their eyes lit up. Most of them called out a warm hello, followed by an urgent plea, "Come on, let's get your coat on and go home." Then I saw parents looking disappointed, impatient and even angry when their children ignored them, started to cry or went into a tantrum.

What a tough thing for parents to deal with at the end of the day. At times like that I want to tell them something I once heard from Dr. Margaret McFarland, Fred's chief consultant and my mentor at the University of Pittsburgh: "Your child is glad to see you at the end of the day -- even though it may not look like it."

How can we help parents and children with the end of the day transition? Think about how many transitions and rituals Fred built into his program, from the very beginning when he put on a sweater (giving children time to settle in), helped children know what's next. His transition at the end of his "television visit" was just as carefully planned. Here's an example of how he intentionally prepared children for his leaving.



Here are some ways teachers are helping parents with the transition to home at the end of the day:

A few kind words

A kind empathetic word from you can go a long way to boost a parent. Parents are exhausted, and they still have a full evening ahead. A kind word about something their child has said or learned or managed that day can go a long way towards giving parents a good feeling about their child -- and their parenting. In some

situations -- and with some parents -- it's better not to talk about a problem that arose in the day. Keep in mind *anything you can do to strengthen a parent will help strengthen a child.*

A transition object

Just as some children bring a transition object from home into child care, I've seen teachers offer a transition object from child care, like a book or small toy, to ease the parting. Of course that book might not be back on your shelf a while, but I've seen a parent's grateful look when the teacher offers a book that helps a child more willing to leave. With that book, you might also be adding extra encouragement for parents to read with their children in the evening.

A bit of transition time

We all know parents are in a hurry to get home. But they may find that just a few minutes of transition time can save them from much longer struggling time. When you think about it, parents arrive while their children are engaged in an activity. Imagine being pulled away in the midst of something you're doing. Some teachers make a point of helping parents feel they're welcome to stay a bit while their child is finishing a puzzle or a drawing. That bit of time can help children be more willing to leave. A specific limit can help, too, like when a parent says, "We'll leave after you finish that puzzle."

A way to play about transitions

Some teachers encourage children to pretend they are parents going to work and then coming back to their babies (dolls or stuffed animals) in the doll corner. That kind of pretending can give children a chance to work on the feelings they may have about separation, so the end of the day transitions may not be quite as hard for them.

Of course, on some days the end-of-the-day transition is easier than on others. However it goes, it's another reminder that you're not just there for the children. You're there for the parents, too.

Thank you for being our neighbor,



Hedda Sharapan

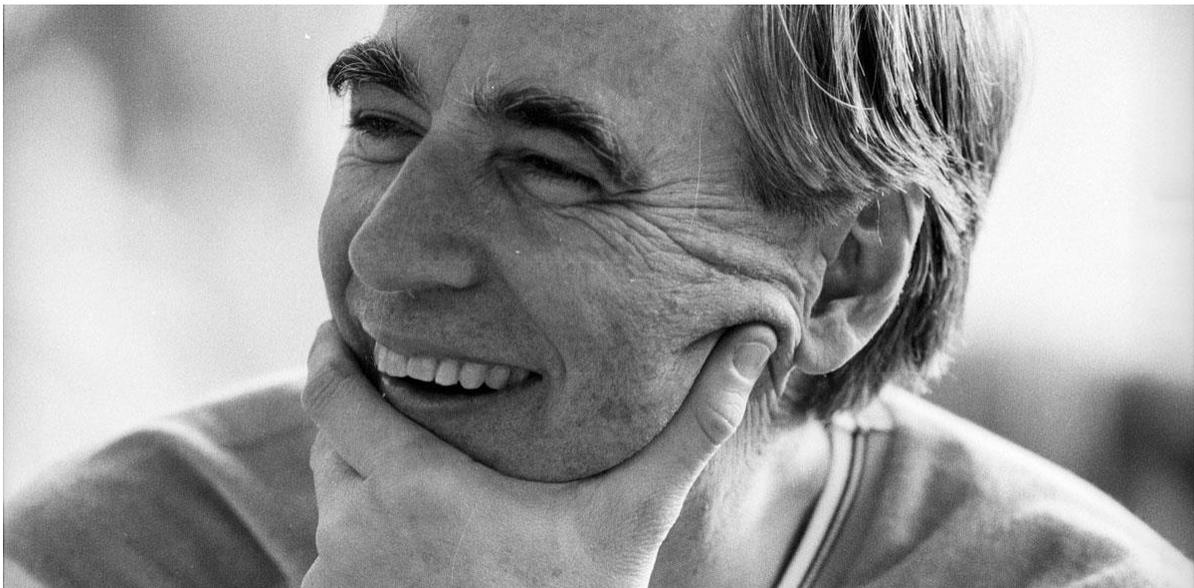
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P.S. I thought you would like to know about the brand-new Mister Rogers' Neighborhood [website](#) just launched by Fred Rogers Productions. It features video clips and music from the classic series; a behind-the-scenes look at many of the beloved show's characters, puppets, and sets; and more. It's a place you'll want to visit again and again to make each day a little brighter, kinder, and gentler.

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"One of the things that caregivers can do is to assure children that their parents miss them when they are away from them and love them even when they can't be with them...and by talking with them about what the feelings are that children have when parents leave -- and come back again."

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