Just Give It A Try

I’ve heard elementary school teachers say that one of the most important qualities that children need to succeed in school is the willingness to take risks. They’re talking about “safe risks,” like the willingness to offer ideas in class discussions, ask questions, try new things, or tackle problems that seem challenging. No wonder that’s important!

You probably know some children who are willing to “give it a try.” But others are
hesitant or anxious about taking even a small risk. Their attitude towards trying might have come from their temperament, their past experiences, or their family’s approach to risks. Whatever is in their background, your encouragement can play a major role in helping them develop a more positive attitude towards “trying” -- a tool that will help them in school and in life.

Fred knew how important it was to help young children feel more comfortable trying new things. Sometimes in the Neighborhood series, he intentionally put himself into new situations where he knew he wouldn’t succeed, so he could model those experiences for them. Watch Fred’s reactions as he takes a “safe risk” -- agreeing to a lesson from a famous juggling team.

Here are some ways to help children be more willing to “just give it a try”:
**Offer encouragement**

You have so many ways to encourage children to “just give it a try”-- with an inviting tone in your voice, a warm smile, and a welcoming gesture. Think about how helpful it can be when you let children know you’re glad they tried, even if they didn’t succeed. Research tells us that instead of praising the success or final product, it’s much more important to praise the effort, the persistence and the willingness to learn from mistakes.

**Think about what each child needs**

Some children are especially cautious by nature. It can help them feel more confident if you let them watch the others for a while. You could also encourage them to start with just a little “step” at first.

There are also children who get embarrassed easily in front of the others and would be more willing to try if you encourage them in a more private way. They might also respond better with quiet appreciation afterwards, like a high-five or pat on the back or even a nod. It helps to keep in mind that the kind of encouragement that works for one child may not work for another.

**Be a role model**

If you’re introducing to the children materials, games, songs or activities that are new for you, too, let them know you’re trying it for the first time, along with them. You could talk about how you feel...maybe a little scared or worried it might not work...but that you’re going to give it a try anyway. It can help children to see that those feelings are part of being human. And if you can be light-hearted about your early attempts, the children may be more willing to try, too.

It’s not easy for any of us, adults or children, to counter the feeling of “I can’t do that -- so I don’t want to even try.” But think about how people all through your life
encouraged you to “just give it a try”...and think about how important “risk taking” is for school readiness. I hope you’ll feel good about the many ways you’re helping children to be more confident learners, now and all through their lives.

Thank you for being our neighbor,

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**Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers**

"Above all, I think that the willingness and the courage to keep on trying develops best if there is someone we love close by who can lend us some of the strength we
do not yet have within ourselves. We all need quiet, caring cheerleaders like that -- grownups as well as children."