

## What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



### Math You Can Count On



I wonder how you felt about math when you were in grade school? I know there are early childhood professionals who cringe at the very thought of math. I'll bet that even now you can remember, like I can, how it felt when we were faced with long division problems with a remainder...or subtraction problems like  $325-89$  when we had to "borrow."

But it may help us put those feelings aside if we can think about math in a new way -- a way that's developmentally appropriate for young children. Our role in early childhood is to lay the foundation, and that's much more about our attitude than about arithmetic. I'm referring to fundamental things like helping children be interested in numbers, to know what "counting" means, and to know how and why we count.

Of course math is much more than counting, but that's a good place to start for now. Watch how Fred approaches counting in a warm and developmentally-appropriate way. At the same time, he's also showing us that we, too, can make math fun and meaningful.



In the video Fred was helping children see that numbers are more than “words” we say in a certain order. Sure, we can applaud when a toddler says the numbers from 1 to 10, but it's even more exciting when a child can use the numbers to count in a meaningful way. Here are some fun and engaging math activities that can help set the foundation for a real and practical understanding of counting.

### **Music, Movement, and Math**

One NAEYC session that I made sure to attend each year is Mimi Chenfield Brodsky's. Here's one of my favorite activities of hers. To the music of “One” from the Broadway show “Chorus Line,” she asks us to start by moving “one” body part -- any one body part. Then as the music progresses, she calls out “two” (for us to move two body parts, then three, etc.) What a great way to combine

creative thinking, fun, music, movement and numbers. Thank you, Mimi!

### **How many?**

I once saw math used at snack time for three year olds. Attached to a basket of small round crackers was a piece of paper with the numeral 4 and four circles. The children knew that meant they could take 4 crackers (at least on the first go-around). I heard the children counting the crackers out loud, one at a time, as they took them. What a practical way to help them understand and use the number 4!

### **A Take-Away Game**

A teacher recently told me about a “take-away” game she devised for her group of older four year olds. She gave each child 7 poker chips. Then she made a pile of Uno cards from 1-5. As the children picked a card from the pile, they had to “take away” from their own pile of poker chips the number on the card and then say how many they had left. They kept the game going until the last one had none left -- zero! That’s subtraction -- with four year olds! And the children came to understand what “take away” means because she made it concrete.

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These are just some of the many ways we can show children that numbers “count” for something. By bringing numbers to life for children, and by that I mean bringing numbers to real life experiences, we’ll be helping them lay the foundation for “math thinking” -- one step at a time!

Thank you for being our neighbor,



Hedda Sharapan

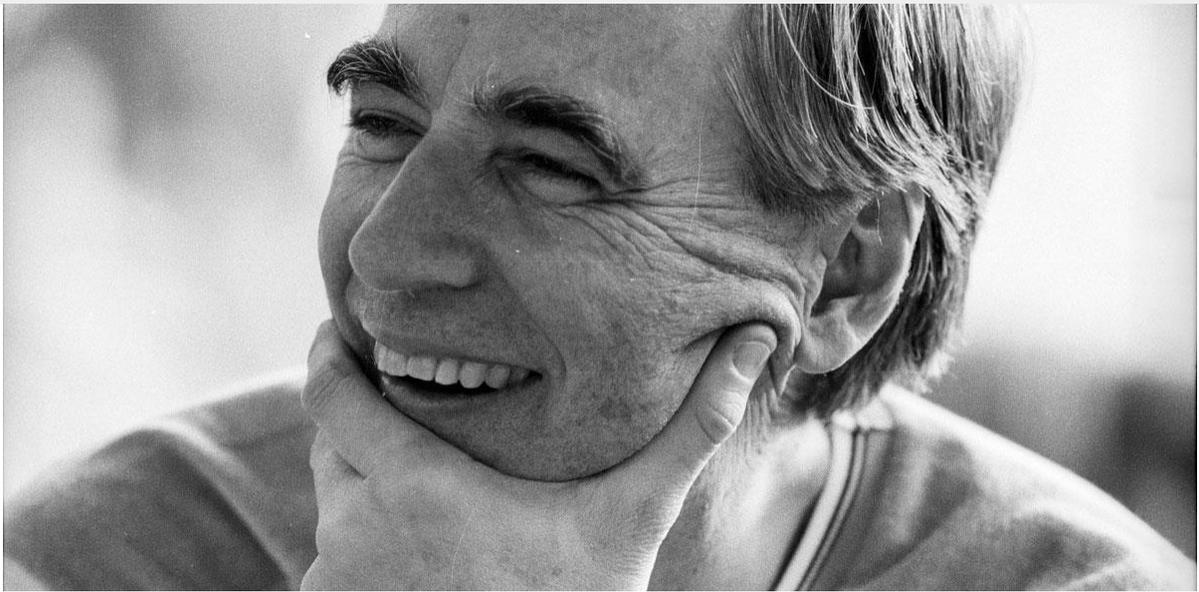
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**Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers**



"As you help children appreciate their real-life experiences playing with things like numbers, shapes, and measurements, you will be helping them learn that math can have relevance in all people's lives. When children care about what they're learning, and when they know their teachers care about them, they are more likely to be ready to learn and grow."

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