Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

Now that we’re getting close to the end of the “school year,” I hope you can take some time to appreciate how much forward progress the children have made in your care.

You invest a lot of your time and energy to guide and support the children, and it can give you a good feeling to think about how much they’ve grown. So it’s understandably disheartening at any time, but especially this late in the year, when you see a child regress and lose some of those major accomplishments, like self-control, cooperative behavior, focused attention and even potty training.

It might help to remember that it’s natural to take a step backwards “in the long, long trip of growing.” Fred even wrote a song about that. In fact, he used to refer to that song as permissible regression, but of course, we didn’t call it
that publicly. The title of that song is “Please Don’t Think It’s Funny...when you want an extra kiss...”.

Here are some of the words:

_In the long, long trip of growing_
_There are stops along the way_
_For thoughts of all the soft things_
_And a look at yesterday._

_For a chance to fill our feelings_
_With comfort and with ease,_
_And then tell the new tomorrow,_
_"You can come now when you please."_

We forget how much emotional energy children expend in order to stop from hitting or to give up a toy to share with another child or even to pay attention to potty signals. Sometimes they just need to take a step back. They aren’t strong enough at that moment. They need to refuel so they can find enough strength to move forward.

As you listen to the words of Fred’s song on this _Neighborhood_ video clip, think about how important your loving care is in refueling children on that “long, long trip of growing.”
What are some possible reasons for regression?
We can’t always know the reasons for children’s behavior, but sometimes they regress when they’re upset, when they’re tired or sick, or when they don’t feel safe. Regression can also happen just before a big growth spurt, almost as a way of gathering their strength so that they’ll be ready to move on.

Children also might regress because of stresses at home, like a new baby, a move, when a parent is traveling, or even when they’ve overheard a loud argument. That’s why it helps that you’ve built a good relationship with the families, so they’ll be open enough to tell you when they’ve had a tough time at home and trust that you won’t be judgmental. Then you can be prepared to give their child some extra help that day.

What are some ways we can help children when they regress?
In his song Fred told us some of the things that children need during those temporary regressions, like an extra kiss or quiet time with a teddy bear. It can also comfort a child to have some time on your lap or a longer backrub from you at naptime.

You might also want to stay close to a child who seems to be having a difficult day, to offer some extra support with self-control or with sharing or working out a problem with a friend.

No matter how old or young we are, we all have times when that we need extra comfort and want to retreat to earlier, easier moments. I remember being grateful for that permission years ago at the end of a long day at the NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) conference. I was physically and emotionally exhausted, but I didn’t want to miss the evening session of one of my favorite early childhood presenters, Bev Bos. And she gave us a song that was just what I needed: *Tonight I want you to rock me to sleep... ’cause I’m tired of trying to figure things out. And I’m tired of being so strong.* Even as adults, it helps to know that it’s okay to take a step back and refuel until we’re ready to take a step forward.

Thank you for being our neighbor,
P.S. A few months ago I told you about our legacy website (www.misterrogers.org). We just learned that our site has won the Webbys People's Voice award for Websites in the Television category. Click on the link where you'll find treasured videos and more insight into Fred's messages.

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers

"If we expect children to always grow smoothly and steadily and happily, then we're going to worry a lot more than if we are comfortable with the fact that human growth is full of slides backward as well as leaps forward and is sure to include times of withdrawal, opposition, and anger, just as it encompasses tears as well as laughter."