

October 2019

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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



"Be-Aware" of Halloween

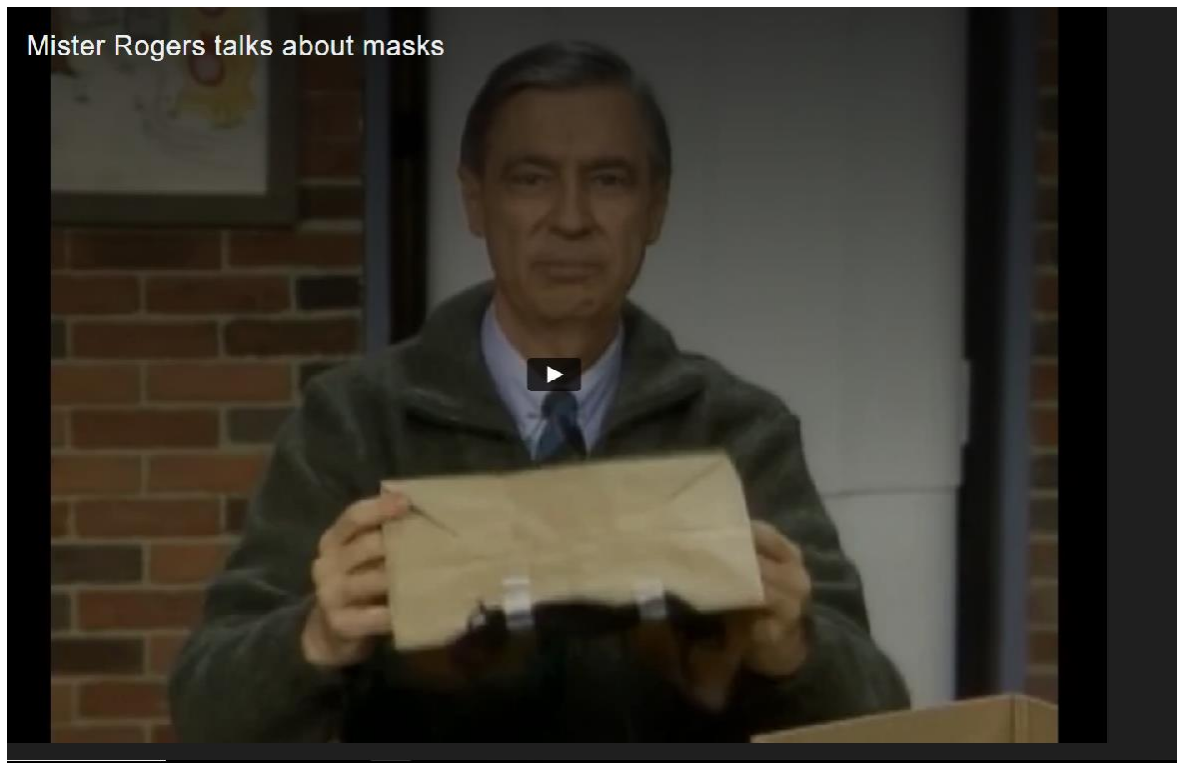


When I was growing up, I loved dressing up in costumes for Halloween. But my Halloween memories don't go back much earlier than when I was about 6 or 7 years old, and I'll bet yours don't either. For young children, Halloween can take on very different meanings. And depending on their temperament and developmental needs, some children in your care might think of Halloween as fun, while others find it frightening -- or anywhere along that spectrum.

Whether you avoid or celebrate Halloween in your work with children, it can help to understand dress-up play from a child's perspective. Fred knew the benefits of dress-up play, and all through the Neighborhood series, he made a

point of encouraging pretending -- often with costumes worn by him or his neighbors. He talked about pretend play as a way for children to work on their feelings and try things out, like trying out what it's like to be a mother, father or baby, a doctor or firefighter.

But Fred also knew that children can be confused about what's real and what's just pretend. He wanted them to know that, although we can put on masks or costumes, that doesn't change who we are inside. Watch this video to see how thoughtfully Fred Rogers talked to children about masks.



Here are some things to be aware of at Halloween or any time of dress-up play:

Pretending about being powerful

Because children often feel powerless, it's no wonder they like to put on symbols of power, like a superhero cape, a firefighter's gear, a mommy's purse or a daddy's jacket. In their everyday lives they might argue about wanting to be in charge, but they don't really want to be in charge. That would be too scary for them. But it does help them to feel powerful some of the time, like when they dress up as mommies or daddies or superheroes. Dressed up like grownups in

their pretend play, they can feel like they're in charge, without the responsibility. That can make it easier for them to deal with their feelings when they have to give in to those who are powerful, like parents and teachers.

Developing empathy

Dress-up play also requires imagining you're someone else. In that kind of play, children might literally be "walking in someone else's shoes," giving them a chance to feel somebody else's feelings and needs...to think of situations from other people's perspectives. While it takes a long while for true empathy to emerge, encouraging this kind of pretending can give us an interesting way to nurture its development.

Mastering fears

Fred often told a story about a boy who insisted on wearing his superhero cape to the doctor's office. It seemed to help him feel braver. So much of children's pretending and play comes out of their inner needs and feelings -- and helps them work on their fears and master them. Fred liked to say that play allows children to work on what's close to their hearts, but from a safe distance.

Sorting out what's real and pretend

Dress-up play gives you an opportunity to assure children that "it's just pretend." Children can easily get carried away with their pretending, and that's frightening for them. You can help them by letting them know that they can stop -- or say "stop" to other children -- when the pretending gets scary for them.

You might also use a mirror to show them what they look like in a costume. Some children might not recognize themselves right away. But with the mirror, you can help them see that they may look different on the outside, but it's still them underneath the costume.

When we're aware of the different meanings that costumes and masks have for children, we can find ways to help with what's scary while also encouraging what's delightful. That awareness can help us figure out how to prepare children for Halloween in developmentally-appropriate ways -- and can remind us to keep encouraging dress-up play all through the year. It's a very special kind of

play that can have lots of “treats.”

Thank you for being our neighbor,



Hedda Sharapan

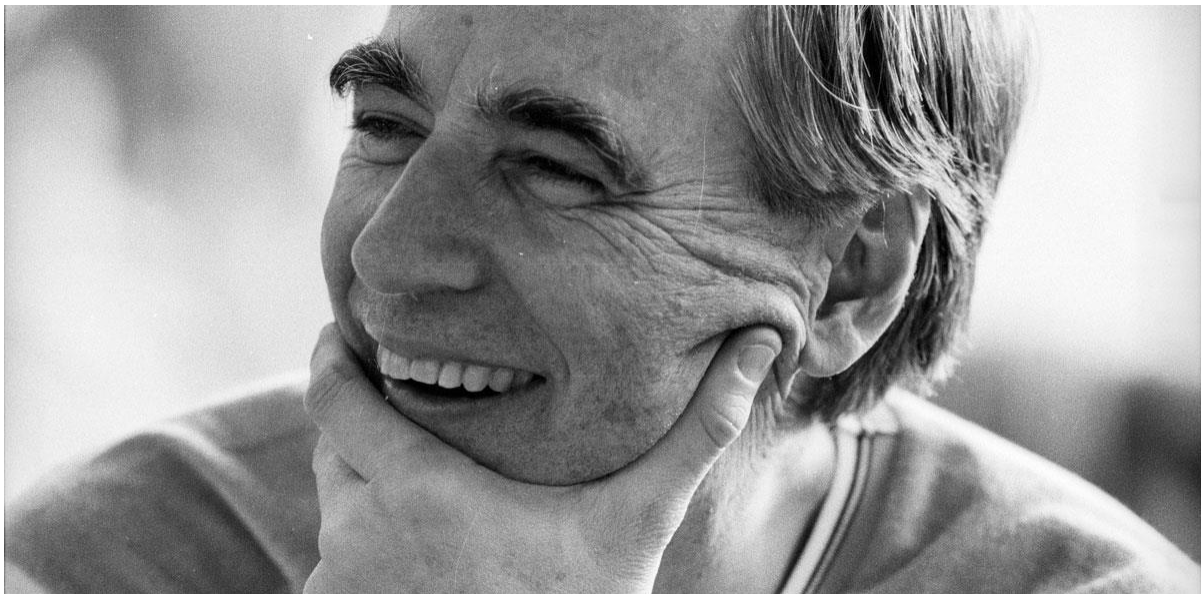
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P.S. For a Halloween treat from our website (www.misterrogers.org), here's Mister Rogers' visit with [Margaret Hamilton](#), where she talks about her Halloween memories and pretending to be the “Wicked Witch of the West” in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"It can be fun to be scared, as many of us will recall from Halloweens past. But if we think back, we'll probably agree that there were two things that made it possible for that scariness to be fun. First, that we knew we were safe because someone we loved was nearby. Second, we knew that whatever was scaring us

was only pretend."

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