



What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Strengthening Social Skills



“Kindergarten Social Skills Hold Key to Success.” That was the headline for a *USA Today* article a while ago about a 20-year study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* which followed more than 750 children. The researchers found that kindergarteners with the highest scores on “social competence” were more likely to graduate high school on time, earn a college degree and hold full-time jobs.

Think about all the time and energy you spend helping infants, toddlers, or preschoolers develop social skills. You’re building the foundation for their future success in school and in life!

What is “social competence”? It’s not just about getting along with others. It’s also about being able to deal with the tough times in relationships, which could include conflicts, frustration, jealousy and disappointment. Working on

relationships involves skills like problem-solving, self-control, self-regulation, communication, and seeing things from another perspective. Isn't it interesting that those are the same "tools" that help children learn the academics.

Fred knew how important social skills are for learning. He often talked and sang about the good feelings as well as the difficult feelings that can be a part of friendships. In the Neighborhood of Make-Believe stories, he showed us that it can be hard to deal with feelings like jealousy, being forgotten by a friend or annoyed by something a friend did or said. After each Make-Believe story Fred gave a clear explanation of how the characters worked on resolving their conflict, especially by talking about their feelings. As Fred often said, "Whatever is mentionable can be more manageable."

Listen to the way Fred talked about the ups and downs of friendship -- at the beginning of the video and after he cleaned up at the sand table.



Here are some ways we can build on Fred's messages and help children strengthen social skills:

- Let children know there can be difficult times even when people care about each other. Children tend to see things as absolutes -- either you are my friend or you aren't. As Fred said in the video, "Some people think that friends are always happy and always having fun. Well, that's not true. Friends often have hard times and sad times."
- Help children *talk and listen* as they tell each other how they feel about what happened. Some teachers have children sit across from each other and take turns talking and listening, with rules like "Don't interrupt" or "Now repeat what the other child said" -- to help a child hear to the other's perspective.
- Think about your role as a "mediator," not a referee (not judging or blaming). Encourage children to brainstorm ways to settle their differences. It's empowering when you help them try to find a workable solution.

It can be frustrating when you feel you spend most of your time and energy helping children deal with conflicts and concerns about their relationships with each other. Isn't it good to hear about research that confirms how important that work is! In fact, according to this research, the work you do to strengthen social skills may be some of the most important learning that happens through your care.

Thank you for being our neighbor,



Hedda Sharapan

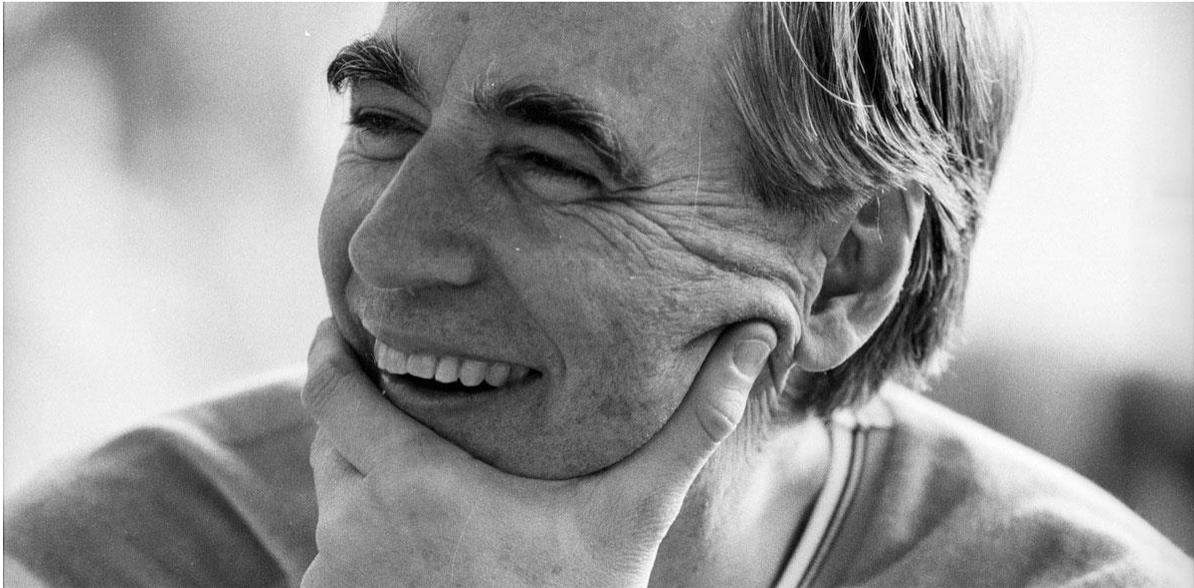
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P.S. Check out the messages and videos about friendships and strengthening relationships on a section of the misterrogers.org legacy website.

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"One of life's greatest joys is the comfortable give and take of a good friendship. It's a wonderful feeling not only to have a friend, but to know how to be a friend yourself."

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