



## What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



### *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* Special Helps Children with COVID-19 Concerns



In difficult times, we always heard from early childhood professionals and parents who appreciated the way Fred helped them talk with young children about their feelings and concerns. So when I heard about the August 17 premiere of a special episode of *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, produced by Fred Rogers Productions in response to COVID-19, I wanted to give you a sneak peek through this month's newsletter.

To give you some background, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, now starting its 5<sup>th</sup> season on PBS, has taken Fred's legacy on a new journey. Several of us long-time staff who worked closely with Fred and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* have been on that journey as script consultants.

This top-rated, Emmy-winning animated series on PBS takes place in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, and its cast features the next generation of the original and much-loved puppet characters. Each story takes four-year-old Daniel and his friends through everyday situations, and with the support of caring adults, the characters learn emotional and social skills that we all know – and research confirms – are necessary for school and for life.

One of the key elements that families find particularly helpful is its use of catchy strategy songs that reinforce each theme, building children's emotional vocabulary and giving them coping skills. They're like "little life lessons." I remember hearing from teachers who were introduced to *Daniel* when they overheard children using these strategy songs, like "Grownups come back" or "You can take a turn and then I'll get it back" – and now the teachers are using them, too.

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Here's a clip from the new *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood: Won't You Sing Along with Me?* special (with sing-alongs for parents), dealing with some of today's challenges and disappointments children and their families are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic.



There are lots of messages in this new *Daniel* special that can open the door for helpful conversations with children in today's world.

### **It's okay to feel sad sometimes**

These times are full of feelings – for all of us. We're in situations we've never been in, and we don't know how long until things get back to some kind of normal. It can help children to know that we, too, have lots of feelings about the "new normal" that we're in. Our feelings are part of being human. Whatever we're feeling is natural and normal, even in these not-so-normal times.

We can also provide a balance when we say there are happy times and sad times in everyone's life. And when we're sad or scared, we can do things to comfort each other – and little by little we'll feel better.

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### **It's okay to ask**

Children often don't understand what they overhear about what's going on with us or the world around us. They can be confused or fantasize much worse. That's why it's important to let them know they can ask us whatever is on their minds. Then, as caring listeners, we can acknowledge their feelings and address their misconceptions.

But with some questions, like "When will things get back to normal?", there aren't any answers. It may be kind of surprising to a lot of adults, but it really can be helpful for children when we tell them in all honesty, "I don't know." Children tend to see their parents and teachers as omnipotent and omniscient, all-powerful and all-knowing. Gradually in their development, children come to understand that the adults don't know everything, helping them grow towards a more realistic understanding of themselves and of others around them.

### **Changes are hard – but we can find ways to cope**

We're all wondering when things will be normal again. When children hear that living with uncertainty is hard for us, even as grownups, they also hear from us, at the same time, that we are coping. We're doing it together, finding ways to stay safe and have some fun, even now that things have changed. It's an important lesson that can help children develop resiliency, to know that even in hard times we can find good things in our family and in our lives.

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We wish you well for the many ways you're dealing with today's world...and the "new normal" we're all in with children and their families. Thank you for being our neighbor and Daniel Tiger's (who is offering a virtual "ugga-mugga" for you).



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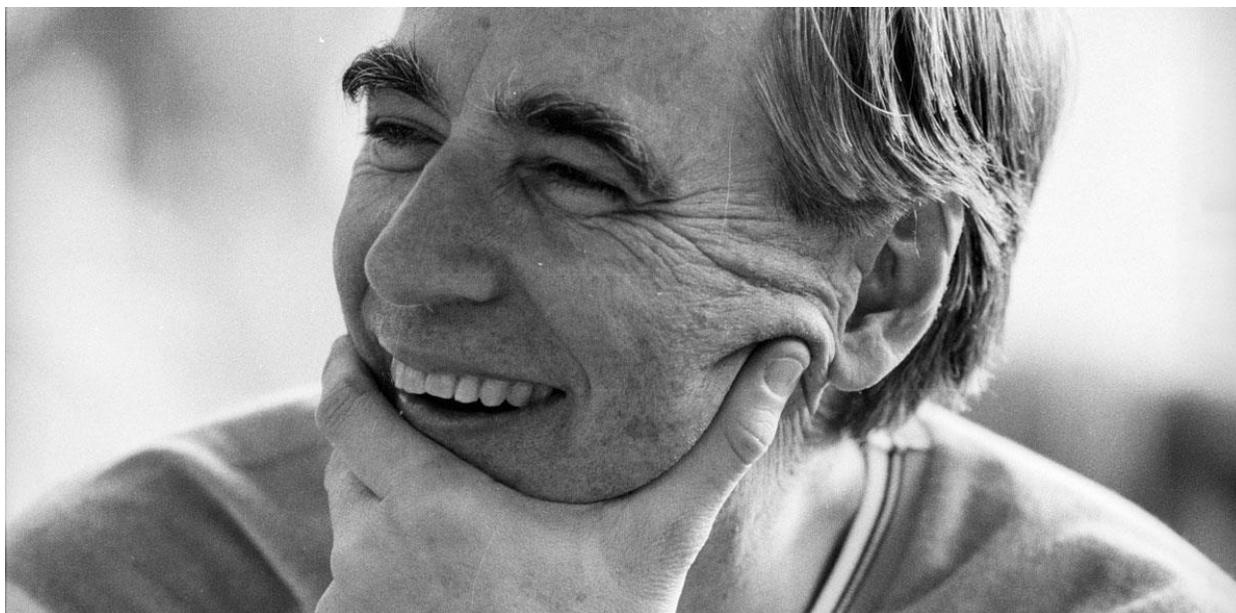
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P.S. You might also like to know about the PBS Parents panel discussion “Prepping for a very Different School Year: Strategies for Parents.” Panelists include child development and educational experts, along with Chris Loggins, supervising producer of *Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood*. Scheduled for Tuesday, August 18 at 3:30 p.m. E.S.T., this virtual event is open to parents of 2-8 year olds. [Here’s the link to register for it.](#)

[Here’s a link to the free Daniel Tiger Parent App.](#) Simple, educational and entertaining, the app features 50 strategy songs and short videos from Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood and is available in both English and Spanish.

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## Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



“No matter what the situation, if we can help children talk about their concerns and their feelings (and really listen to what they tell us), we are letting them know we care deeply about them.”

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