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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Nurturing Kindness



There's one word that keeps coming up when people talk about Fred these days – KINDNESS. Maybe because we're all hungry for more of it in today's world -- and hopeful for it in tomorrow's world.

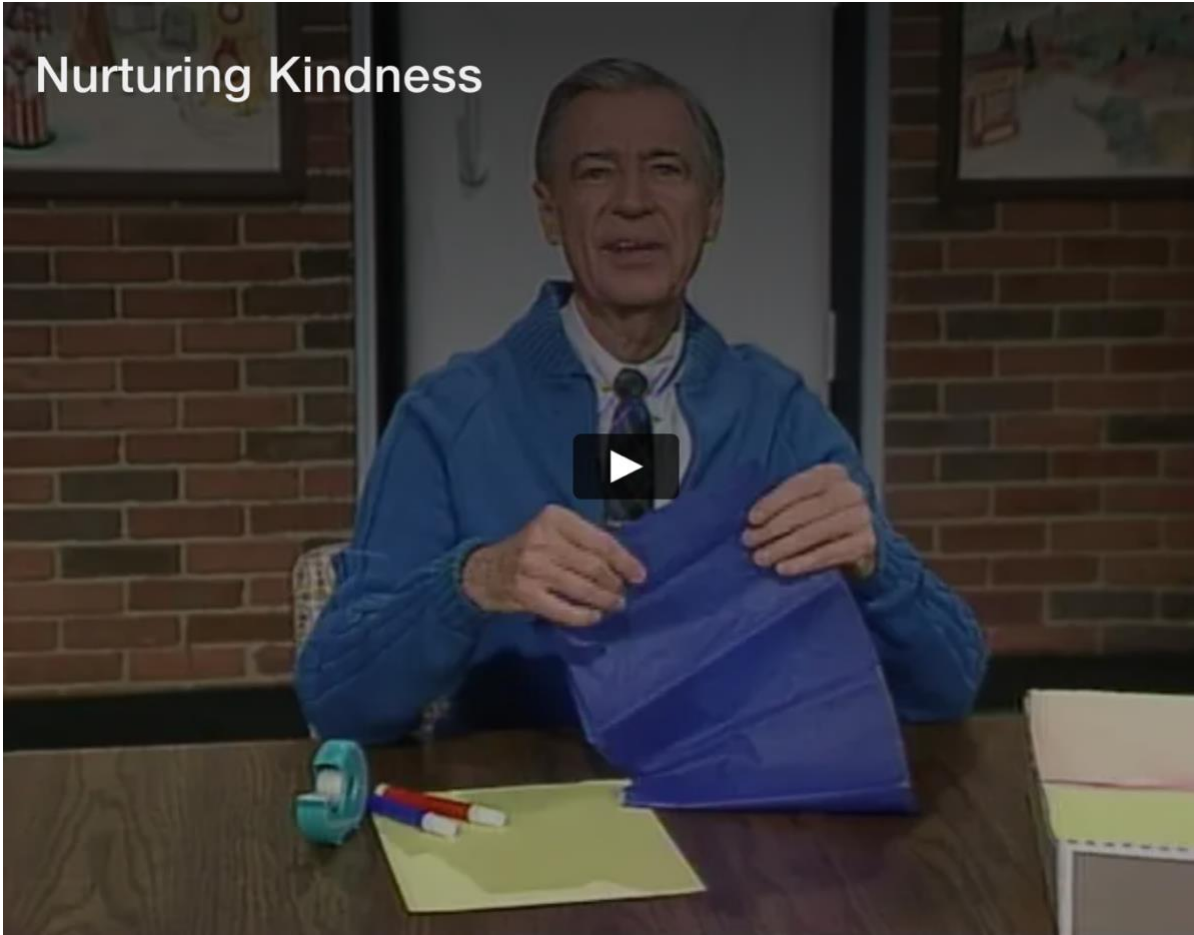
We want children to grow up to be kind -- to be considerate, respectful, neighborly. Those behaviors are connected to the social skills that we, in early childhood, focus so much of our time and energy on -- sharing, empathy, conflict resolution. What a challenge it can be to teach children those skills in these times of physical

distancing, limited sharing, masks that cover facial expressions, and especially virtual learning.

I've always said that Fred didn't "teach" us, he "helped us learn." That's how he helped us with kindness. He showed us what it looks like and sounds like to be a caring neighbor. Starting with his welcoming song, "Won't you be my neighbor," he invited us all in – no matter what we look like, or what we can or cannot do. He included everyone. Whether he was talking with one of his regular neighbors or someone new, he was gracious and respectful, wanting to know more about them. In Make-Believe, the neighbors often faced conflicts and dilemmas, but with caring understanding and kindness, they helped each other through them. Each half-hour was a subtle lesson in being "neighborly."

Fred appreciated other people's kindness, too. We often heard him say "Thank you" even for small everyday things, like on his visit to the restaurant when the waitress showed him to a table or when the librarian told him how to get to the children's activity room. On this video he showed his appreciation another way, by making a thank-you card for Mr. McFeely. As you watch, listen to the kind way he talked about his neighbor and to the way Mr. McFeely reacted to his kindness.

Nurturing Kindness



Here are some ways we can nurture kindness in today's challenging times:

Modeling

One of Fred's favorite quotes was the Quaker saying, "Attitudes are caught, not taught." Children want to be like the important adults in their lives. They're watching and listening. That's why it's so helpful for children to see us being kind, like saying "thank you for..." to a child or parent or anyone on staff, like someone who delivers lunch...showing appreciation for a simple gift of a child's drawing or a family's treat...saying "I'm sorry" ...warmly welcoming a new child into a group.

Noticing

Kindness usually happens quietly or in a little moment, so to notice it, we sometimes have to be detectives and intentionally look for it. In a virtual learning situation, you might see a sibling handing child a pencil or a tissue. In the

classroom you might see a child do something helpful, like pick up some papers that fell on the floor after an art activity or offer to give a hand to another child who's trying to move a heavy block.

Think about what it can mean when you say to children, "That was kind of you," when you notice their caring or helpful acts or gestures. We call that "catching them doing something right." And that's the kind of behavior we want to reinforce.

Finding ways to say thank you

As Fred said in the video, "Thank you – two of the best words we can ever learn!" And yet we've all been in situations where a parent or teacher tells a child to say "thank-you," and the child doesn't respond. Children need our help in understanding *why* we say "thank you" -- that it gives someone "such a good feeling" to hear those words. It's a way of letting someone know that you like what they did, what they said, or what they made or bought for you. But young children are basically ego-centric. That's why it can be difficult for them to say thank you. It's hard for them to think about someone else's feelings. Through your nurturing care, you're helping them in their journey of developing one of the core aspects of social behavior – empathy – being able to see something from someone else's point of view.

In today's world, it's important for all of us, now more than ever, to surround children and their families in kindness -- to help them grow up to be respectful, kind and caring neighbors. Thank you for all the work that you're doing with children and families in these atypical times, and thank you for being our neighbor.

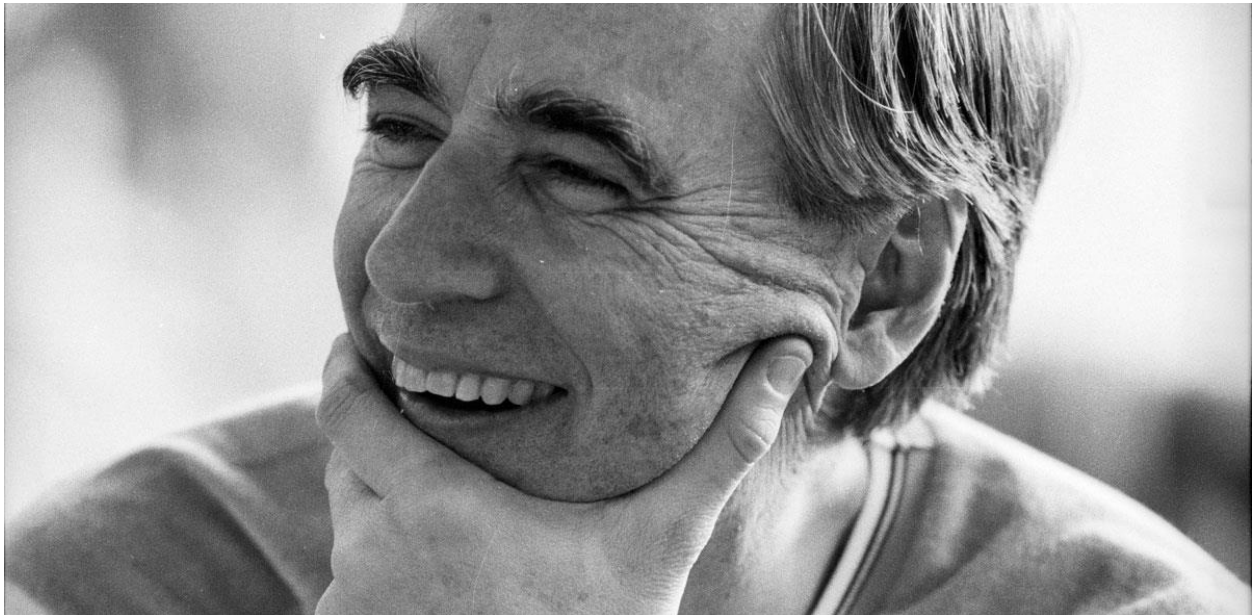


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P.S. By the way, I was going to save the video of Mister Rogers making a thank-you card for the November newsletter, around Thanksgiving time. But I decided to do it this month because I think it's much more important to think of kindness and "thank you"...as an every day...any day...today... idea.

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



“Imagine what our real neighborhoods would be like if each of us offered, as a matter of course, just one kind word to another person. There have been so many stories about the lack of courtesy, the impatience of today’s world, road rage and even restaurant rage. Sometimes, all it takes is one kind word to nourish another person. Think of the ripple effect that can be created when we nourish someone. One kind empathetic word has a wonderful way of turning into many.”

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