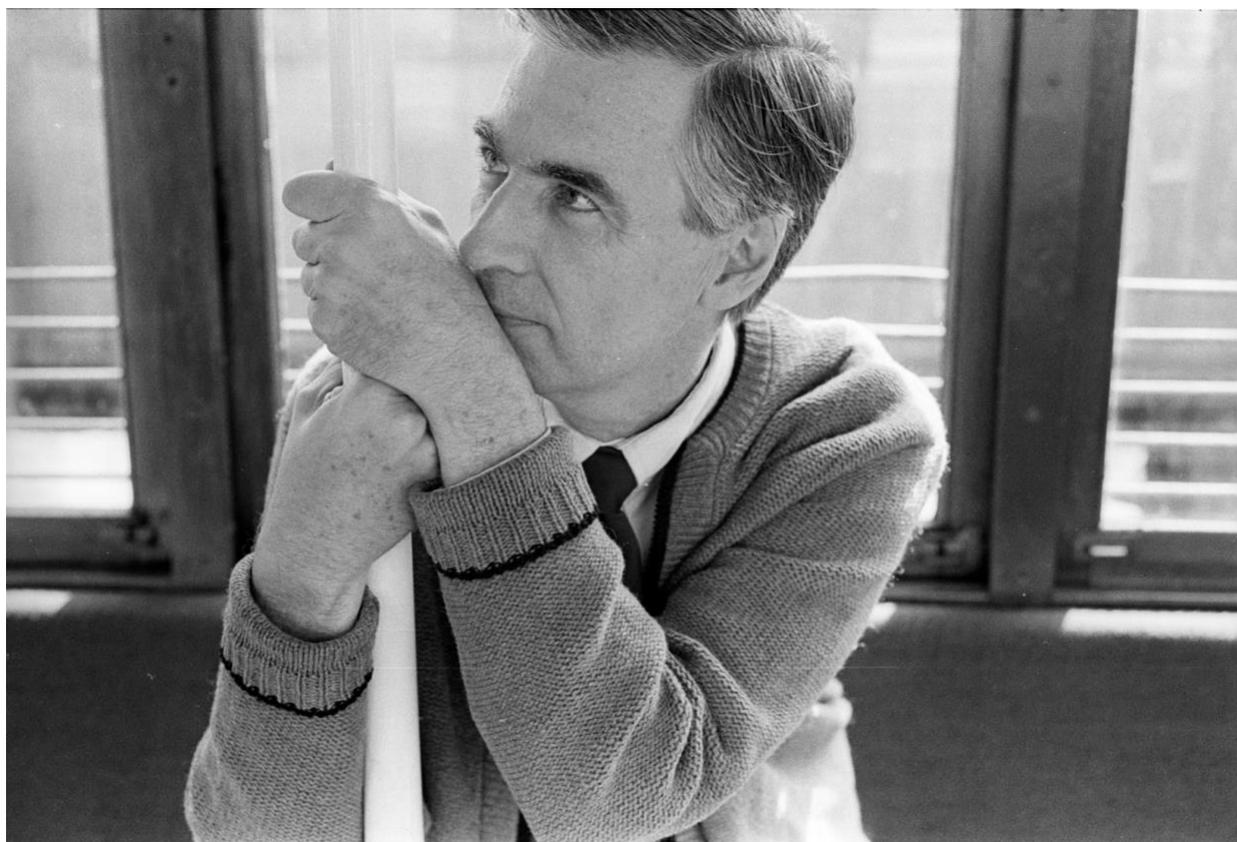


February 2021

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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



“It’s very, very, very hard to wait.”



Here we are, more than a month into the new year, and we're still waiting... still waiting for the pandemic to end and a “new normal” to begin. The waiting sure seems endless, doesn't it.

As hard as it is for us, imagine what waiting is like for children. So often they have to wait for their turn, wait for our attention, wait for a birthday or holiday, or maybe wait for a friend who's coming to play (outdoors, with masks on).

Fred's lifetime studies in child development gave him a very real understanding of how children experience things, and he shared that with us in his songs, his words and through his Neighborhood of Make-Believe stories, like he did in this nighttime visit between Daniel Tiger and Handyman Negri.



Fred was a master in addressing everyday feelings and offering developmentally appropriate ways of dealing with them. Here are ways we can use the messages in the video:

Letting children know their feelings are natural and normal

Through the conversation between Daniel and Handyman Negri, Fred was helping children know that their feelings are a natural part of being human and that others feel that way, too. Fred used to say, “There is no 'should' or 'shouldn't' when it comes to having feelings. They're part of who we are.”

I wonder if you've noticed, as I have, how much better it feels when someone says, "I understand. It's hard for me, too"? That calming affirmation is often just what we (children and adults) need to start dealing with our feelings.

Helping children find ways to manage their feelings

Children often feel overwhelmed by their feelings and don't even know there are things they can do to deal with those feelings. You're supporting their emotional development when you talk with them about healthy things they can do when they're impatient, sad, angry, frustrated, excited – or whatever they're feeling.

On the video, Daniel mentioned a few things that help him, but of course what works for one doesn't work for everyone. Some children are more active and need a physical outlet. Some might be more inclined to use their imagination and make up a story or a song or just think about something they like to do. It's like the open-ended message in a more familiar Fred song, “Let's think of something to do while we're waiting.”

Why not, at small group time, ask the children to talk about what helps them when they have to wait? You can even apply it to all kinds of feelings. When we help children know there are things they can do when they feel impatient, upset or frustrated, they don't feel so helpless. That's empowering.

It can also help if you talk about the things you and other adults do when we feel impatient or sad. Isn't it interesting to hear about how many people, during this

pandemic, have taken up baking, painting, knitting, or doing puzzles. Doing things like that help us fill the waiting time and to feel more in control.

Making the waiting time easier

Think about how often you've provided strategies, like songs or transition games, to fill waiting time during the day. You've been giving children tools to develop their own inner capacity to wait. If you work with toddlers, it can also help to have several of the same playthings that are exactly alike. Taking turns is especially challenging for toddlers and preschoolers, because it's hard for them to wait for their turn.

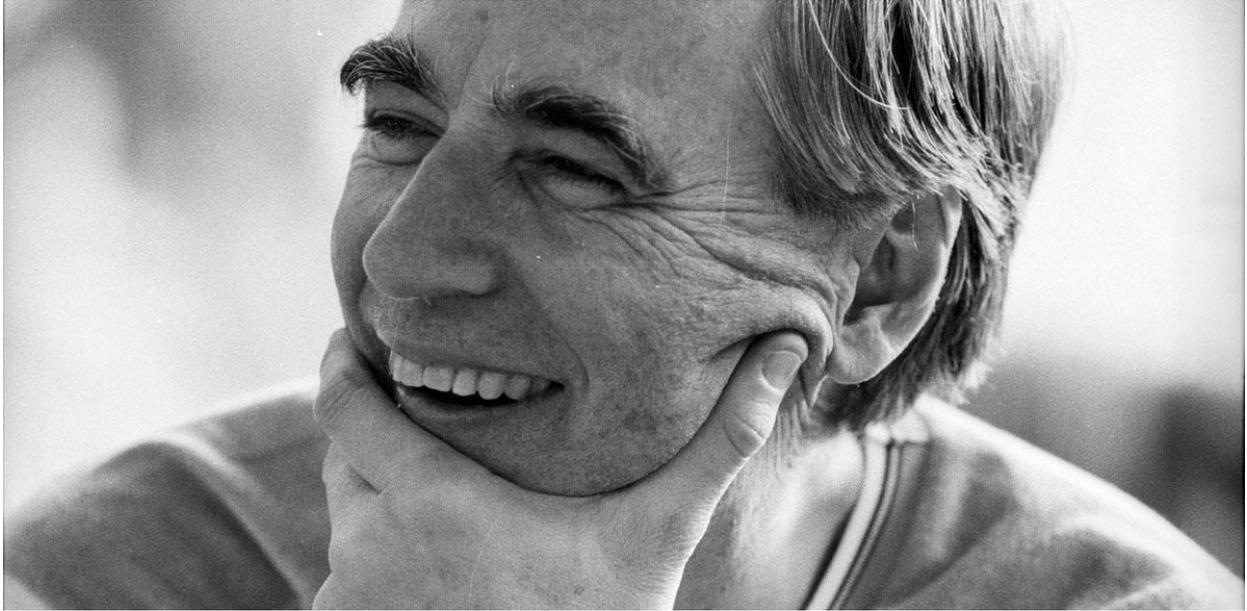
I will never forget my visit years ago to the lab school at the University of Delaware, when I was surprised that during "show-and-tell," the children were divided into two groups, one with the teacher and the other with the assistant teacher. Afterwards, they told me they know it's hard for children to wait their turn in the large group, so they split them into smaller groups. That cuts down on the waiting time and makes the experience more successful for them.

So as we settle into this new year, I want to again send our warmest wishes for a healthy 2021... as we all wait and wait and wait for more normalcy in our work and in our lives. I would imagine there are many of us who feel like singing with Daniel, "It's very, very, very hard to wait." Thank you Daniel, and thank you Fred. What constantly amazes me is how timeless Fred's wisdom is and how helpful his messages are in our world today, no matter how old we are. Thank you for being our neighbor,



Hedda Sharapan
M.S. Child Development
PNC Grow Up Great Senior Fellow
hedda.sharapan@stvincent.edu

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"'Growing on the inside' are the words I use when I talk with children about such things as learning to wait, learning to keep on trying, being able to talk about their feelings, and to express those feelings in constructive ways. These signs of growth need at least as much notice and applause as the outward kind."

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Saint Vincent College
300 Fraser Purchase Road
Latrobe, Pennsylvania 15650-2690

