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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Messages in the Routines



During these not-so-normal pandemic times, many of us have found that routines help us feel more comfortable. They give us some predictable structure in our lives.

Daily routines are even more important for children. Fred understood that, and he intentionally structured each program with predictable routines -- opening with his song and changing into his sweater and sneakers, using the Trolley to introduce and end the Make-Believe stories, sitting on the bench offering his closing thoughts, singing “It’s such a good

feeling” as he changed back into his jacket and shoes and went out the door.

Through a letter from a viewer, we learned just how much children relied on another *Neighborhood* routine – feeding the fish. The letter came from a father whose daughter was blind. She was worried that the fish weren’t always fed, because sometimes Fred put the food in the aquarium without **saying** he was feeding the fish. From then on, Fred made it a point to say out loud that he was feeding the fish.

Fred made sure to talk about another aspect of feeding the fish in this *Neighborhood* video. In this episode he was about to show his viewers something, but told them that he needed to feed the fish first. What an important message for children -- that we take care of our responsibilities first, like making sure the fish are fed, before doing other fun or interesting things. You’ll also hear how Fred addressed another example of children’s concerns about feeding the fish – what happens if he forgets?



Here are some other messages about the value of routines:

Connection with learning

With the predictable routines on each Neighborhood program, Fred helped his viewers know what to expect. Then they were comfortably ready to focus on the one new thing he showed them that day. We all know that focused attention is key to learning. Think about how much you help children be more focused and open to learning when your routines help them feel secure, comfortable, and less anxious about what's next.

Connection with trust

The routine of caring for fish has an added meaning for children. As part of my work these days, as a Senior Fellow at the Fred Rogers Center, I listen to audio tapes of the meetings Fred recorded when he was planning scripts with his chief consultant, Dr. Margaret McFarland. On one tape, they talked about how much young children identify with animals, especially pets like dogs, cats, birds or fish.

Children feel a natural connection with those pets -- because, like children, they are small and totally dependent on the care of adults.

That's why it was important for Fred to tell them, as he did on the video, that if he ever forgets to feed the fish, he comes back later to feed them "so they're always taken care of." When children see that adults are taking good care of pets, they are more likely to trust that adults will take good care of them, too.

Connection with coping

While we acknowledge that routines help children feel safe, we also know that sometimes the routines change – maybe when there's a substitute teacher, absent friend, field trip, rainy day or a celebration. While some children adjust easily to changes, there are others who need extra support through those times. By helping them cope with changes, you're also helping them develop resiliency which will benefit them in all kinds of difficult situations, now and later.

A teacher once told me that she prepares children for a change in routine – starting with the very first day of school. When she explains the daily schedule, she displays it with pictures on cards showing circle time, free play, snack, etc. But then she shows them a blank card that she'll attach temporarily to the schedule, just in case things do change on a particular day. And she explains that even though they may do things differently one day, she assures them that things will be back to normal the next day.

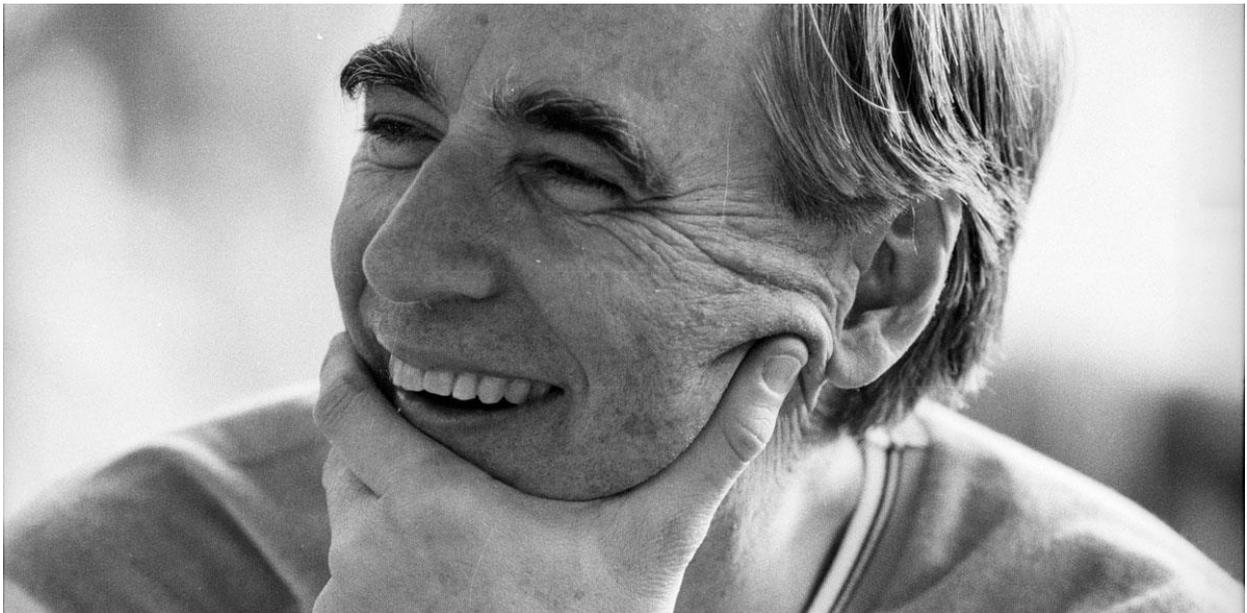
Something else struck me on the video when Fred sang, "I like to take care of you....Yes, I do. Yes I do." He seemed to be telling children that besides taking our caregiving responsibilities seriously, it makes us feel good to take care of them. When you let children know that it makes you feel good to do the things that help them feel safe, loved, and cared for – like establishing routines and responding to their concerns – you're strengthening your relationship with them. As Fred often said, "It's through relationships that we grow best and learn best."

Thank you for being our neighbor,



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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"Children feel far more comfortable and secure when things happen predictably – with routines, rituals, and traditions. Those traditions, big or small, create anchors of stability, especially in rough seas."

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