

October 2021

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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Dress-up Play



However you're dealing (or not dealing) with Halloween in your work with children, this holiday reminds us of how much children love to dress up in costumes and how much they get from it.

One of Fred's favorite stories was about a boy who insisted on wearing his superhero cape when he went to the doctor for a checkup. I always thought that was a great message about how much pretending means to children – especially when they're wearing a costume – or even something that represents a costume, like a

crown, a cape or a purse.

That's also why Fred worked so hard to help children know what's real and what's pretend. He made a very clear distinction between what happened in his "reality-based" Neighborhood and the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. Children can easily get so "lost" in their pretending that they lose sight of reality. They need our watchful eye to make sure they're doing things that are safe, and not jumping off a high place when they're pretending to be a superhero. But don't forget that getting "lost" in their pretending also has great benefits because it can give them the opportunity to explore some of their feelings, develop empathy and build self-regulation.

Here's another way that Fred encouraged pretending – through one of his songs. I especially liked the thought at the end of the song, "You can try out life by pretending."



Here are some reasons why we applaud, appreciate and encourage dress-up play:

An opportunity to explore some feelings

Children often feel powerless, so no wonder they like to put on symbols of power, like a superhero cape, a mommy’s purse or a daddy’s vest. Or maybe they feel pressured to be bigger or jealous of attention given to the new baby or younger sibling, so in their play, with a baby bottle and a blanket, they might use babytalk or cry – and enjoy the feeling of being taken care of and comforted by “mommy” or “daddy.”

A vehicle for developing empathy

Through pretending, children are literally “walking in someone else’s shoes.” Dress-up play gives them a chance to see what it feels like to be somebody

else...to feel somebody else's feelings and needs...to think of situations from other people's perspectives. What an interesting way for us to be nurturing empathy.

A way to support self-regulation

I always appreciated the way Deborah Leong and Elena Bedrova in their "Tools of the Mind" workshops talked about the connection between role play and self-regulation. I love their story about the preschooler who was pretending to be a customer in a restaurant at playtime. She knew she should sit in her chair at the table and wait for her food to be served. But finding it hard to wait, she kept going into the "kitchen," which annoyed the "chef," creating a conflict that disrupted the play. But when the teacher gave her some props - a purse and a hat, that was all she needed to remind her to stay in her role, sitting and waiting for her meal. Children do know the rules and expectations that go with the role they're playing, and a prop or costume can give them a tangible reminder that helps them regulate their own behavior and stay in that role.

When you give children the opportunity to put on different kinds of costumes (simple or elaborate), you're giving them wonderful opportunities to develop some of these important social-emotional skills that come with dress-up play.

Thanks for being our neighbor,

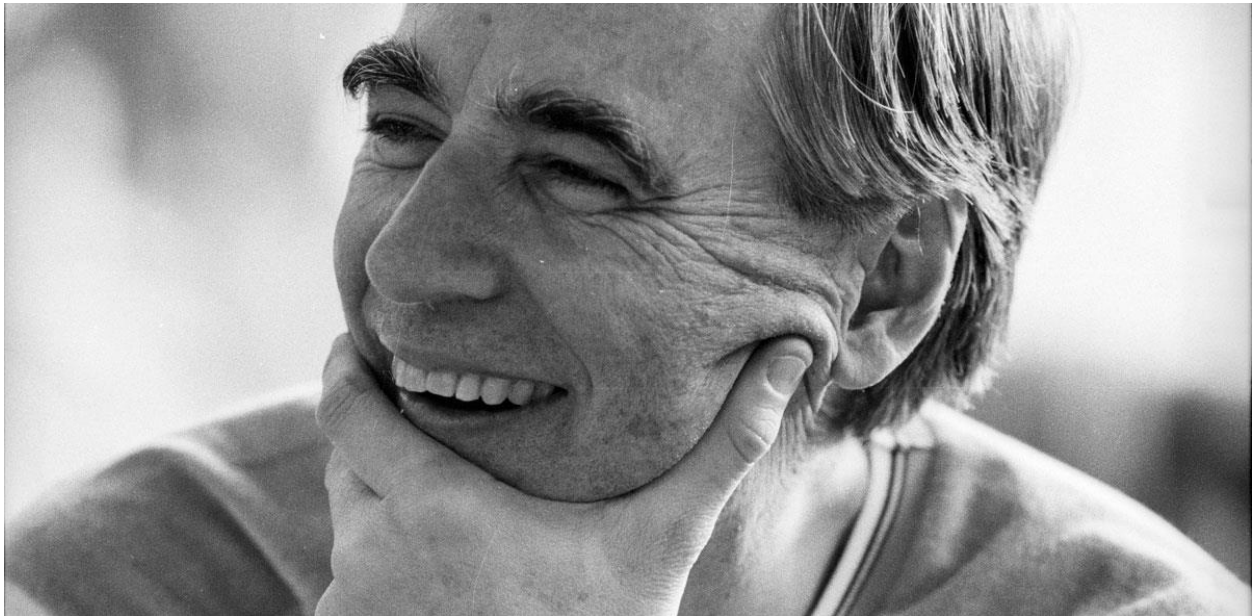


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P.S. A new Mister Rogers sculpture created by the British internationally-acclaimed artist, Paul Day, will be unveiled on the Rollins College campus, October 28. To read more about the sculptor and the unveiling, click **HERE!**



Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"What nourishes the imagination? Probably more than anything else, loving adults who encourage the imaginative play of children's own making."

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