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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Reflective thoughts for the New Year



Here we are at the beginning of the year when we're "looking ahead," wondering what this new year will bring. It seems kind of ironic, but "looking back" can help us with our journey ahead. There's even a name for that in early childhood -- *reflective teaching*.

As early childhood professionals, we're encouraged to be reflective – to look back on what worked and what didn't work. But we all know how hard it is to set aside time for that. I also wonder if one of the problems with "looking back" is facing the fact that we did some things that didn't turn out the way we thought or hoped they would.

We all know that's not a good feeling – facing our mistakes. At times like that, I'm reminded of Fred's comforting perspective – making mistakes is part of being human – for children and for adults, too. Here's a great example of that from the time when Fred just happened to mistakenly button his sweater wrong. Watch how he handled it.



Forgiving ourselves

I will never forget when I showed that video of Fred buttoning his sweater wrong to parents in a support group, and a mother told me that the most meaningful line for her was when Fred said, “I thought I was doing that just right.” We so often do things with the best of intentions, and then we find out that life is much more complicated – and not always in our control! I remember Fred saying that forgiving ourselves may be the hardest thing of all.

Learning from our mistakes

The best teachers help us know that mistakes can be valuable learning tools. When world-class pianist Andre Watts visited on our program, he told Fred that mistakes help him, because they let him know what he needs to keep working on. Reflecting on our mistakes can help us keep working to find better ways to communicate with children...better ways to handle situations...and maybe even be more willing to ask

for help.

More realistic expectations

I remember Fred saying, “There are no perfect parents, and there are no perfect children.” Let’s add, “...and there are no perfect early childhood professionals.” And, as I’ve learned from Fred, everything doesn’t have to be perfect in order to be meaningful.

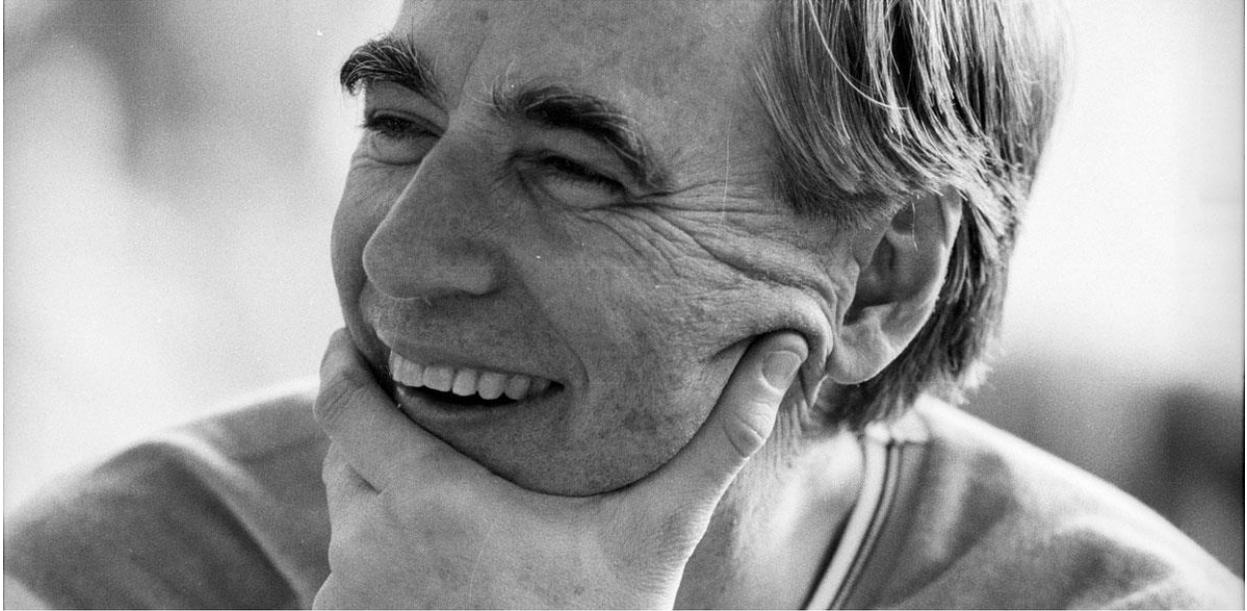
When we can forgive ourselves for our mistakes and our own imperfections, my hunch is that we become more accepting of others – our family, friends, neighbors, children, their families and the people we work with. Fred always reminded us that the beginning of positive change starts with feeling good about who we are, with all our strengths and weaknesses. That’s like my favorite t-shirt with the words: *I may not be perfect, but parts of me are excellent!* What a comforting – and helpful – way to begin our journey through this new year.

Warmest wishes from all of us here at The Fred Rogers Center for a healthy and happy new year.



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

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"Some days, doing the best we can may still fall short of what we would like to be able to do, but life isn't perfect – on any front – and doing what we can with what we have is the most we should expect of ourselves of anyone else."

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