Around The Neighborhood

A Special Issue On Self-Esteem

Watch for the new week of programs about EVERYBODY'S SPECIAL and the many ways this message is emphasized on every Neighborhood program.

Exercising with identical twins, looking in a mirror, and making raisin-nut sandwiches that are each different — those are some of the concrete ways Fred Rogers helps children feel good about themselves and their uniqueness in his new week of Neighborhood programs about EVERYBODY'S SPECIAL (programs #1686-1690), premiering the week of August 28th.

Fred Rogers' lifelong studies in child development have helped him appreciate the basic need of children to feel good about who they are. “You are special” has become one of his trademark sayings. As pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton says about the Neighborhood, “Young children can't get enough of 'I like you just the way you are.'”

On every Neighborhood program, that is a double message: reassurance that there are hopes and feelings we all share, coupled with the delight in knowing that each human being is unique. When children can appreciate how they are like others and how they are unique, they are more likely to feel good about themselves — and they’re more likely to accept differences in others.

As we were going to print, we received the sad news that our good friend Don (“Chef”) Brockett died of a heart attack. His visits on Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood are woven into the fabric of our series (including our newest week about EVERYBODY'S SPECIAL in which he, Maggie Stewart, and Mister Rogers make raisin-nut sandwiches). We are grateful that through television, we can continue to offer our viewers Chef Brockett’s love of food, his openness in sharing his feelings about his disability, and his warm friendship with Fred Rogers.

In the Neighborhood of Make-Believe stories, each puppet character is valued, from the shy Daniel to the mischievous Lady Elaine. Through the rich variety of personalities in Make-Believe, children can know that each person has a valuable place in this world, with all of his or her feelings, weaknesses, and strengths.

Neighborhood Songs
Fred Rogers writes all of the Neighborhood melodies and lyrics, and his songs reinforce his messages about self-esteem:

- “Everybody’s Fancy...Your body’s fancy and so is mine!”;
- “Good People Sometimes Do Bad Things... Once in a while we do”;
- “It’s You I Like...Even when you’re feeling blue.”

When child-care providers use these songs after the program is over, the positive messages can have even more benefit because children hear them from people whose love and approval are important to them.

Silence
Most people don’t think of offering silence as an essential part of communicating self-esteem, but it can be. Fred Rogers purposefully leaves a lot of silence on his program, letting children know he respects the thoughts and ideas they bring to the visit.

Listen for all the questions Mister Rogers asks, like “Did you ever feel like that?” and “What do you think will happen?”...and listen for all the time he leaves for children to think and to answer.

Pride in Growing
Young children naturally feel “small,” and growing seems to take too long. To help children appreciate how much they’re growing, Mister Rogers often reminds them that growing happens little by little. He talks about things they can do now that they couldn’t do when they were younger, like tying shoes and using scissors.

While physical growing is exciting, it’s inside growing that’s given special attention in the Neighborhood programs: learning to wait and to keep on trying, being able to talk about feelings and to express those feelings in constructive ways. These signs of growing need at least as much notice and applause as the outward kind, and children need to feel proud of them — even more proud than the marks moving up on the growing chart.

The Closing Message
Mister Rogers usually ends each program saying, “You’ve made this a special day by just being you. There’s only one person in the whole world like you, and people can like you exactly as you are.” That’s a message we can’t get enough of, no matter how old we are.

For a free copy of “When Your Child Goes to School,” send a business-sized, self-addressed, stamped envelope to Department CC, Family Communications, Inc., 4802 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213.
A Letter From Mister Rogers

Dear Parents and Providers,

It's hard to know why some children seem naturally inclined to keep on trying to do something until they succeed and why others seem so ready to give up. It's possible that some are born more one way than the other, but even if that's true, heredity can't be the only answer. It seems to me that feeling frustrated and discouraged is something that none of us can avoid, and that our different ways of coping with those feelings are among the many things we learn.

If, as young children, we are faced with tasks that are far beyond our capabilities, we may come to feel that trying is useless because our trying never works.

On the other hand, if we are encouraged to do small tasks that we can accomplish with a little effort, we may, very early in our lives, experience the pleasure that comes with success. We may then grow up knowing that trying always comes first, but that it's always worthwhile because trying is a path that can take us where we want to go.

The capacity to try new things depends a lot on how our earliest caregivers reacted to our natural curiosity. When our curiosity led us into places where we had no business going — like into dangerous situations or into other people's private possessions or private places — did we feel it was our curiosity that was being punished, or just that there were limits on the direction it was taking?

It's very different to be told, “Don't be so nosy!” rather than, “I understand you're interested in your daddy's tools, but they're his. If you want to use them, you'll have to ask him.” And, when Daddy says yes or no, it will help for him to remember how he felt about his own father and his own father's tools — and tell his child about it.

Did we feel that those close to us put value on learning new things? Did we feel appreciated for our earliest achievements? Were those accomplishments celebrated? Or were they just taken for granted and dismissed as the kinds of things all kids learn sooner or later?

Perhaps, above all, I think that the willingness and the courage to keep on trying may develop best if there is someone we love close by who can lend us some of the strength we do not yet have within ourselves. I don't mean someone who will do a task for us when we can't do it for ourselves, but rather someone who will share our times of trying just by being around and being supportive...someone who can sustain a belief that we can succeed even when we doubt it ourselves. We all need people like that — whether we're grownups or children.

Sincerely,

Fred Rogers
When parents say, “You’re a terrific kid!” or “I love you,” they’re helping their children feel good about themselves. Here are some other ways that parents help their children know deep inside that they have value and worth:

Help your child feel proud of what he or she can do.

Help your child find “jobs” to do around the house. Even small jobs, like putting spoons or napkins around the table or sorting socks in the laundry, can help a child feel important and needed.

Praise your child for trying. It can be frustrating when children are learning something new, like tying shoes or writing their names. You could help them know you understand learning something new is hard, but that you think it’s wonderful that they’re trying.

Break down jobs into small pieces. For example, when you need to clean up a room with toys everywhere, ask your child to help you find all of the blocks and put them in a bucket. Then look for all the cars or all the animals. A job doesn’t seem so hard when people focus on one piece of it at a time.

Remember that discipline works best when it’s balanced with warm, loving times.

Say loving things to your child through the day. Then your child might be more willing to listen when you need to talk about what not to do. You could say things like, “You’re really helpful today!” or “Even though you didn’t find it, I’m glad you wanted to help me look for it” or “You worked hard on that picture you drew!”

Children need clear and firm limits about what they CAN do and what they can NOT do. They can’t learn that by themselves. Children need to have parents set limits in caring, non-anxious ways. Sometimes, too, because they’re just learning about controls, children can’t stop themselves when they’re doing something wrong — and need a parent to help by picking them up or putting a hand on their shoulder or by taking them out of the situation.

Feel good about yourself and all the strengths you bring to your parenting.

Remember that parenting is hard work. No one does it perfectly. Every person is special and unique. Each one of us has weaknesses and strengths.

We all make mistakes. When we are willing to accept and admit our mistakes, we’re helping children learn to accept their mistakes and weaknesses, too. It makes us more powerful (not less powerful) when we can say, “I lost my temper and said some things I didn’t mean. I’m sorry if I scared you or hurt your feelings.”

Think about the things that really set you off, and then think of things you can do to help yourself through those times. Can you tell when you’re starting to lose control? For example, is it just before mealtime? Maybe you and your children could eat a light snack while you’re fixing dinner or listen to soft music on the radio to help you relax.
Check ‘Em Out! — Books to Share With Children

July 3-7 — “Going Away & Coming Back”
The Little House by Virginia Lee Burton. The little house that once stood where apple trees bloom in the spring becomes surrounded by the city, until one day when it’s brought back to the beautiful countryside.

July 10-14 — “Fast & Slow”
The Hare and the Tortoise by Semiotics. Although he moves very slowly, the wily tortoise is able to fool the boastful rabbit in this classic story of a race well run.

July 17-21 — “Playthings”
Omo and Bobo by Amy Schwartz. Omo’s red potholder is just the thing to capture Bobo’s attention and win a blue ribbon.

July 24-28 — “Dance”
The Dancer by Fred Burnstein. The sights and sounds of a city neighborhood are related in English, Spanish, and Japanese, as a little girl and her father walk to dance class.

July 31-August 4 — “Mistakes”
Foolish Rabbit’s Big Mistake by Rafe Martin. Based on an ancient tale from India, the foolish rabbit thinks an apple falling from the tree means that “the earth is breaking up.”

August 7-11 — “Abilities & Disabilities”
Where’s Chimp? by Berenice Rabe, photographs by Diane Schmidt. Misty, a little girl with Down Syndrome, and her father review her day’s activities in their search for her stuffed monkey.

August 14-18 — “Going to School”
Shawn Goes to School by Petronella Breinburg. Shawn is apprehensive about school until he gets there and discovers other children are just as worried. (On program #1461, Mister Rogers shows The Big Treasure Book of Wheels — 70 Things That Move on Wheels.)

August 21-25 — “Making a Musical Story”
Sing a Song of Popcorn by Beatrice Schenk DeRegniers, illustrated by prize-winning artists. Wonderful poems, some long and some short, make this a collection for everyone.

August 28-September 1 — “Everybody’s Special”
My Mother is the Most Beautiful Woman in the World by Becky Reyher. Her mother is beautiful to Varya, yet when she’s lost and friendly farmers try to help her, no one recognizes the description of the woman who is Varya’s mother.

September 4-8 — “Learning”

September 11-15 — “Competition”
A Story by Gail Haley. Anansi the spider must accomplish three difficult tasks to win the right to have stories called “spider stories.”

September 18-22 — “Play”
Play with Me by Marie Hall Ets. A lonely little girl sits quietly and coaxes the animals of the forest to join her in a game of hide-and-seek around a forest pool.

September 25-29 — “Discipline”
Lili at Ballet by Rachel Isadora. Lili, who dreams of becoming a ballerina, looks forward to her ballet lessons and practice sessions.

Special thanks to Dr. Margaret Kimmel of the University of Pittsburgh School of Library Science for suggesting these books for our newsletter.

Around The Neighborhood
Summer/1995
A Newsletter For People Who Care For Young Children

Family Communications, Inc.
4902 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
412-687-2980

“For more information about the Child Care Partnership, contact your local public television station or Family Communications.© 1995 Family Communications, Inc.”
Plan & Play Activities For Aug. 28-Sept. 1/Theme: Everybody’s Special

Thoughts For The Week
We're all so much alike...and yet we're all so different! A child's sense of identity grows slowly and for several years isn't likely to be very secure. As children grow, they need opportunities to express their uniqueness, whether in choosing the clothes they want to wear or in developing their unique art projects. There are always times when children need to do what everyone else is doing, but there are also many times when we can support children's self-esteem by helping them carry out their own ideas.

Afterwards you can talk with them about how hard it is to move exactly like another person is moving. That's because no two people are exactly the same. Each one of us is special.

#1686 Monday
Mister Rogers looks in a mirror and talks about the fact that no two people are exactly alike. Chef Brockett prepares a birthday cake with raisins and nuts.

Rice-Cake Faces
You might begin this activity by letting the children look in a mirror to see their own faces. As the children take turns doing this, you can ask them to either point to or name facial features: nose, mouth, eyes, eyebrows. The children can help prepare snacks by making rice-cake or sandwich faces. Spread a rice cake or round piece of bread with a little bit of peanut butter and use raisins to make eyes, noses, and mouths. Encourage the children to do this any way they like and point out that no two have to be exactly the same.

#1687 Tuesday
Mister Rogers shows pictures of twins who look almost exactly like one another. Even though they look alike, have the same parents and same birthday, each one is special.

Mirror Play
You can begin this activity by letting the children take turns looking in a mirror and making movements. Talk with them about the way the reflection moves when they move to introduce this game of mirror play. Children then get a partner and take turns being the leader and the reflection. As one child moves, the other child imitates the actions. Some children might want to touch fingertips to have a better sense of how and when the other person is moving.

#1688 Wednesday
Joe Negri plays music on his guitar as Mister Rogers shows pictures in a book of children dressed in animal costumes. Mister Rogers has fun with a cardboard guitar.

Talking for the Toys
Using toy people or animals, let the children take turns “talking” for the different characters. Children can decide which “puppets” they want and how to talk for them. Some children may be able to switch roles and change voice tones as they pretend about being two different characters. You might even write down some of their words so that children can see how “plays” are developed.

#1690 Friday
Corney has felt left out all week, thinking everyone forgot his birthday. His friends in Make-Believe surprise him with their celebration and help him know how important he is in their Neighborhood.

Birthday Party Play

You can set the stage for birthday party play by bringing in materials that children could use to pretend about birthdays. Here are some supplies to have on hand:

- birthday party hats or materials to make them;
- modeling dough to make pretend cakes;
- popsicle sticks for pretend candles;
- wrapped boxes or empty boxes and old wrapping paper and ribbon.

Let the children use their own ideas for pretending about birthdays. The children could pretend that one of the dolls or stuffed animals is having a birthday. Or, they might want to take turns pretending it’s their birthday. If you keep these supplies stored in a bag or box, the children can take them out whenever they want to pretend about birthdays.
Highlights of Coming Programs

Using switches, Mister Rogers makes the earthmover move in lots of different ways on program #1680 (scheduled for July 7). As children develop self-esteem, powerful machines like the earthmover can be especially fascinating.

Neighbors Betty Aberlin, Chuck Aber, Zelda Pulliam, and Don Brockett join in a three-day musical story, JOSEPHINE THE SHORT-NECK GIRAFFE on programs #1608-1610 (scheduled for August 23-25). With the help of her friends and the School for Growing, Josephine the short-neck giraffe comes to appreciate herself just the way she is.

Capping off the new week about EVERYBODY’S SPECIAL on program #1690 (scheduled for September 1), Betty Aberlin and Chuck Aber join puppet neighbors for Corney’s surprise birthday party. Birthdays are special days, and children make everyday a special day — just because of who they are inside.
How To Use The Broadcast Schedule

The broadcast schedule identifies the Mister Rogers' Neighborhood programs that PBS stations broadcast on specific dates. (Check with your local PBS station to find out if Mister Rogers' Neighborhood is broadcast on dates different from those shown on this schedule.) The schedule also shows the theme for each week of programs and some of the events occurring in each episode.

The specific episode number (for instance, "1566" for July 17th) corresponds to the program description and activities in the Mister Rogers' Plan & Play Book. The 370-page Plan & Play Book contains easy and appropriate activities for preschoolers. It also contains words to many of the songs from Mister Rogers' Neighborhood and a special section with recipes and how-to's.

The activities for the first two weeks in July, soon to be in supplements, are so recent they have not yet been included in the Plan & Play Book. You can find the activities in past newsletters (GOING AWAY & COMING BACK—Winter, 1995 and FAST & SLOW — Summer, 1994). If you need copies of those activities or a Plan & Play Book, call your local public television station or Family Communications.

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