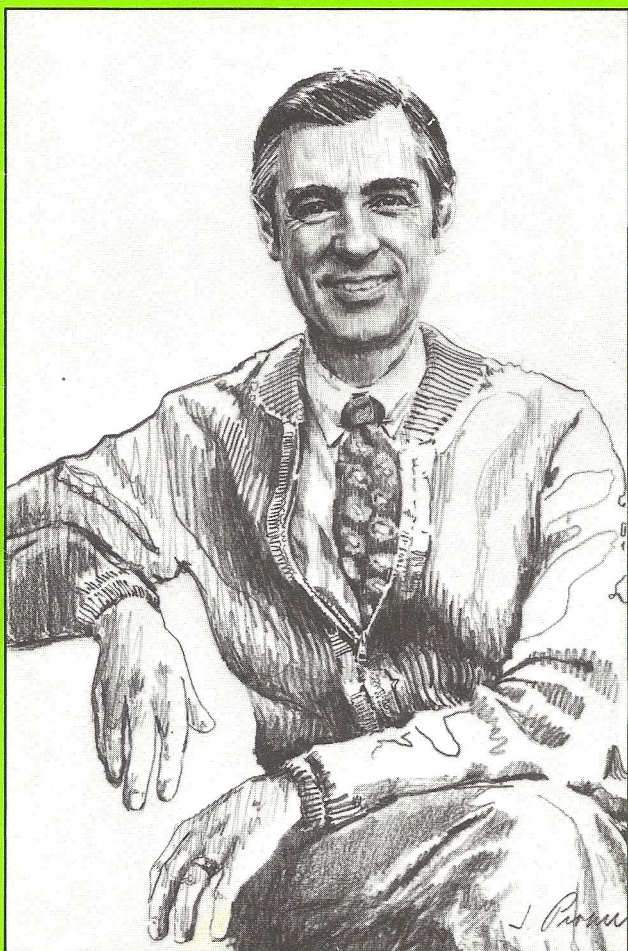


When Your Child Goes To School

LET'S
TALK
ABOUT
IT[®]

A MESSAGE FROM FRED ROGERS
(of *MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD*)



FAMILY COMMUNICATIONS, INC. produces audio, video and print materials designed to encourage communication between children and adults.

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ABOUT SCHOOL

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My very first school was a small-town school that had eight classrooms: one for each grade. It was the same school my mother and dad had gone to. Those desks and chairs and blackboards would certainly seem old-fashioned now! I must have had a good time there, because I have pleasant memories about it. I know I liked my teachers—Mrs. Curto, Miss Albert, Mr. Gallagher. And I was excited about learning to read and write. I made good friends there, too, and some of them are my friends even now that I'm grown up. Of course there's lots I *can't* remember about that first school of mine but I feel sure that the good feelings I had about it really helped me want to go on learning.

Most children are naturally eager to learn and to join the world of the "bigger kids" who already go to school. But like other important times in our lives, beginning school can bring mixed feelings. Some young children may even imagine that being sent to school is a punishment. They may feel that somehow they are less important to the family because they're away from home where all that's fun is going on. They may feel quite jealous of their younger brothers or sisters who get to stay home with their parents. When children feel uncertain about a new experience they sometimes behave in the ways they did when they were younger. They may cling more closely to their parents. Some may suck their thumbs again. Others may forget their toilet training now and then. It's not surprising for a child to ask for many kinds of extra attention or reassurance. Encouraging children to talk about what they might be thinking is one of the best ways to help them prepare for their first

days at school. Telling them the truth about how you felt when you were their age can help them realize that they're not alone with their feelings.

Because beginning school can represent such a big change to a child, it can be helpful to keep other changes to a minimum. If you've been thinking about rearranging furniture or redecorating a room, you might wait until your child has settled into school before beginning those changes. Familiar routines at home can mean a lot to your child at this time. Knowing *what* to expect and *when* can make new experiences easier for all of us.

There are several ways parents have found to make the first days of school more comfortable for their children. For instance:

If your child already has friends in the neighborhood who will be going to the same school, you might arrange with other parents for the children to get together and play. You could even encourage them to play about what they think school will be like.

Some parents call the school to see if they can arrange for their child (together with a few other friends) to tour the school building and meet the new teacher.

Children need to know their address and family's phone number. It's reassuring to hear that this information could help them get home if they ever got lost.

You could walk or ride with your child to the school and back just to show the route he or she will take.

Your child might like to meet the school crossing guard. The guard can become an important new friend.

An unhurried morning routine at home can help your child to get ready for school without haste or anxiety. And sending him or her off with a cheerful "Have a good day at school" is much more encouraging than a warning such as "Be good."

Some children like to take a special container for their pencils and erasers with them to school. It might be one you and your child have made together. If that's not practical, some other personal belonging can be a comfort when your child feels homesick.

One mother I know put a photograph of the whole family in her son's lunchbox. (You could put one in a notebook or jacket pocket.) This was a reminder that they would all be together again at the end of the day—that home would be there when it's needed.

Many children look forward to little projects or activities planned for after school. Here are some suggestions:

a special dinner or dessert that your child can help to prepare;

cards or decorations you can make together for holidays or birthdays;

playtimes with friends who now go to *different* schools;

“books” you can make together about anything the child chooses (old magazines can be a rich source of cutout illustrations);

a special 15 minutes set aside for reading out loud—a time for just the two of you.

With encouragement, your child might want to talk about the day’s school activities—what was fun, what was bad, what was easy, what was difficult, what the other children did, what the teacher said. Of course, children often love to exaggerate about how “bad” the other children were, or how “mean” the teacher was. And there are some experiences in school—and in life—that all children find hard to deal with. One example is children feeling embarrassed when a teacher scolds them in class. But as they try to do their best, children need to feel that you are “on their side” and that you are proud of the fact that they’re trying.

We hope that these ideas will be useful. Some time when you are talking with your child about going to school, you might want to read the next few pages together. The words and pictures may answer some questions and make it easier to talk about other things.

Helping your child get ready for school might bring back many feelings you had when you yourself began. No matter what those feelings are, if you can accept them truthfully and share them with your child you’ll be giving both of you another important chance to grow.

Your friend,
Fred Rogers

When you were a baby, grown-ups had to do just about everything for you. They had to feed you and get you dressed and carry you around. But you’ve learned to do many things for yourself. Now you’re old enough to learn to do even more things—like reading and working with numbers.



