



**Saturday  
March 22, 2014**

# Fred Rogers' Approach to Neighborliness



Fred Rogers spent his lifetime helping people understand what it means to be neighborly. Here are some of his messages that can help you as you create an event in your neighborhood and publicize it.

## **Appreciating our — and each other's — uniqueness**

*"As human beings, our job in life is to help people realize how rare and valuable each one of us really is, that each of us has something that no one else has — or ever will have — something inside that is unique to all time."*

Think of ways that allow **everyone** to know that his or her ideas and creations have value. Keep in mind that we discourage contests — because that singles out one or a few "winners."

## **Encouraging generosity**

*"All of us, at some time or other, need help. Whether we're giving or receiving... each one of us has something valuable to bring to this world..."*

While it may be tempting to promote an event (like the *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* Sweater Drive) as "bring something for the needy or less fortunate," Fred Rogers was very clear in stating that people who bring items have needs, too, and those who receive them have strengths. It's better to say, "Bring things for people who need them but can't afford to buy them."

## **Caring for the environment**

*"When we turn off lights, when we recycle, when we marvel at a flower, we are letting our children know that caring for our planet is important to us. Then those things are more likely to be important to them as well."*

Think of activities that are appropriate for young children — like recycling greeting cards or making playthings out of throwaways.

- Help children appreciate nature and the world around them.
- Make families aware of what your institution is doing to care for the environment.





## **Valuing what children can do**

*"I think it helps children feel good about who they are when we adults put value on the many things children can do. It's a way for us to let them know that we don't want or expect them to be more grownup than they're ready to be – that we really do like them just the way they are."*

- Try to provide activities that are appropriate for various age groups of children.
- For young children, process is more important than product. They're generally more interested in "doing" something than making "something" which looks like a finished product.
- Think of ways you can encourage children to be helpful in their own family — doing simple chores like setting the table or feeding a pet.
- You might want to encourage families to include children in being helpful to their real neighbors, like working at a soup kitchen together, helping to carry in groceries, or holding a door open for someone.
- Read books or tell stories about people who have helped others in their communities.



## **Offering positive role models**

*"Attitudes are caught, not taught"* — a Quaker folk saying that was one of Fred Rogers' favorites.

Showcase people who love what they do and want to share it with children — your staff, artists, firefighters, chefs, scientists, engineers, etc. Their love of what they do is contagious! Sharing their interest is a way for them to be a caring neighbor, too.

## **Being a gracious receiver**

*"Thank you" is the most important phrase in any language."*

Create opportunities for children and families to show, say, or make something as a way to express their thanks to others.