FRED ROGERS’ SIX BASIC NECESSITIES OF LEARNING

With so many children home from school and out of their routines, adults may be wondering about the kinds of learning and stimulation children need to continue to grow. In 1983, Fred Rogers and Barry Head considered this question. In Mister Rogers Talks with Parents, they introduced these six basic necessities of learning. This list may be a reminder that what children need for learning is simple and deep. Below you will find some ideas about each.

1. a sense of self-worth,
2. a sense of trust,
3. curiosity,
4. the capacity to look and listen carefully,
5. the capacity to play, and
6. times of solitude.
Fred Rogers believed that a sense of self-worth is one of the most important things we can help children to gain. It helps them to see value, not only in themselves, but in others as well. You are helping a child to see their self-worth every time you show them how to wash their hands to protect their body from illness, every time you listen to their stories, feelings, and questions, and every time you give them the chance to be a helper at home. When you talk this week about why you are staying home to protect others from illness you are teaching children that every single person is valuable. When you help children know that every person is worth protection and love, you are setting them up for a lifetime of learning and healthy relationships. The children in your life are so fortunate to have you.
Fred believed that a children’s sense of trust came from having caring and supportive adults around them. That it’s the adults “being there” that matters most. During these times when everything may seem uncertain and ever changing, we can easily get swept up in trying to make every moment “perfect” or “normal.” It is important to remember that even brief, high-quality loving moments with children help to build their sense of trust in you and in themselves.

You are helping your children to trust that even in the uncertainty, there will be adults in the world who are helping, who are supporting, and who are ready to listen. Talking with children about your own feelings can continue to build their sense of trust - in you and in other helpers. In the end, children may not remember every activity and moment of every day, but they will remember that you did what you could, with what you had, to be there for them. That you made these times special - and safe - just by being there.
With so many children home from school and out of their routines, adults may be wondering about the kinds of learning and stimulation children need to continue to grow. Over the next few days, we are sharing what Fred Rogers and colleagues thought about this. Today, we are sharing a little about curiosity.

The world can be a wonderful place, full of wonderful things. It can also be scary, especially for children. Fred Rogers promoted curiosity in children by helping them to explore their imaginations and the world around them through Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood. He also made sure children could engage with their worlds in ways they could understand. Children may be curious about what is happening right now in the world around them. Knowing that you are there to keep them safe allows children to continue to be curious, even in times that seem to be ever-changing.
Whether play is independent, with friends or siblings, or with adults, children are working out problems, creating solutions, dreaming up new ideas, and discovering the world. You can support a child’s play by simply allowing space for it. We know that working from home, caregiving, and teaching can be overwhelming. We hope you are able to embrace that your child’s play during these less structured days is “serious learning” - and take some moments to enjoy playing with them, too.
As we continue to reflect on Fred Rogers’ thoughts on what all children need to learn and grow, today we think about what it means to look and listen carefully. It may seem like the world is moving faster and faster right now. One thing Fred Rogers taught us to do is to slow down and appreciate the world around us. We help children to look and listen carefully when we notice something about them, reflect that to them, ask questions about what they notice, and help them to slow down to appreciate their own worlds. A dear friend of the Fred Rogers Center, Melissa Butler, once told us that learning to notice and to look and listen carefully means thinking about “what’s there, what’s not there, what was there before, and what might be dreamed there.” What can we notice when we slow down to look?
This is a deep and simple wish from Fred, and we wish it for you - that today, you will give yourself the gift of a quiet moment. Know that this is an essential gift for children, too. Fred saw solitude as one of the six basic necessities for being able and ready to learn. You do not need to fill a child’s day with activities and lessons and stimulation. When a child can pause and be alone with their thoughts, they will be able to learn more about who they are, and they will be ready to learn about others and the world.