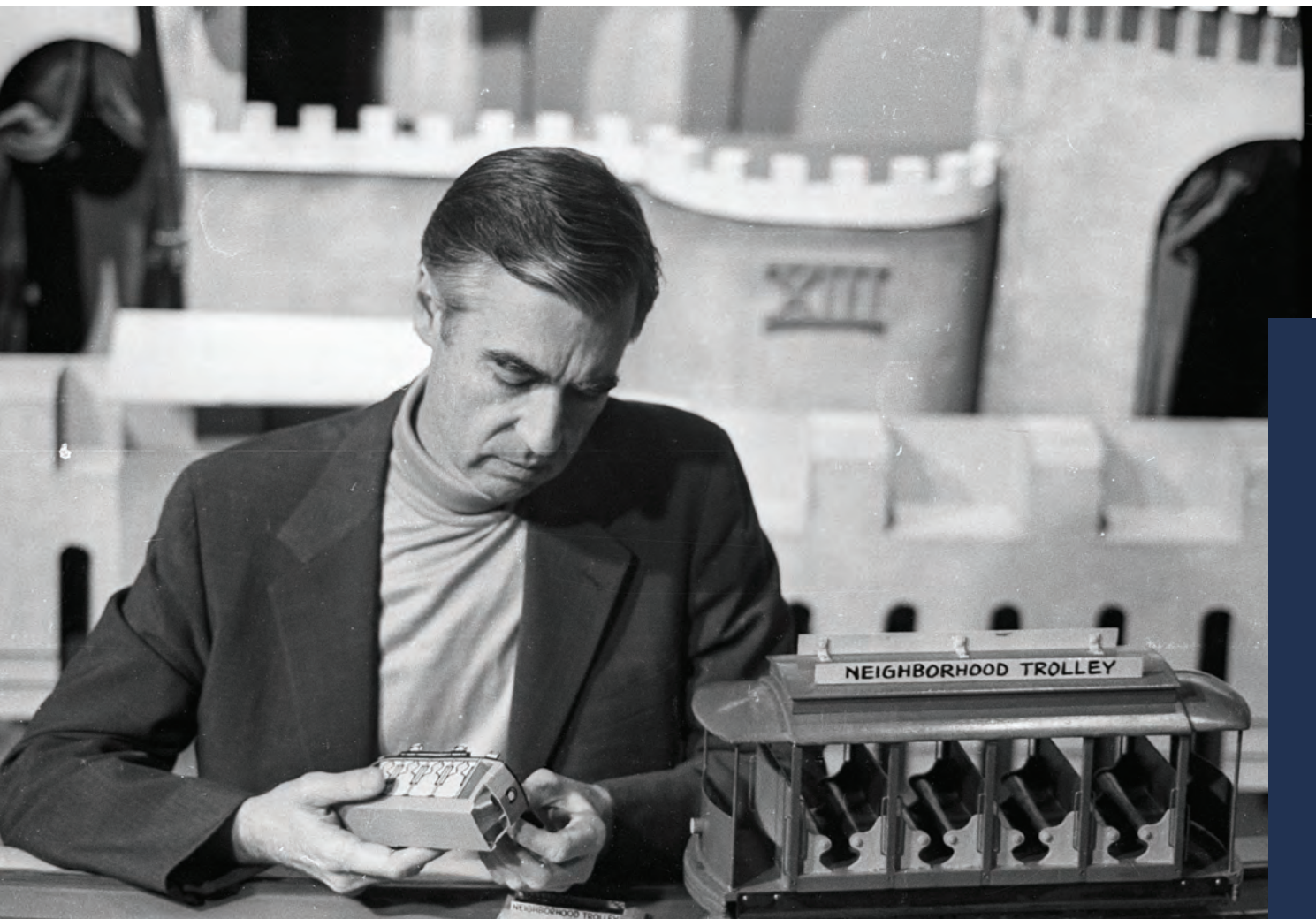


FRED ROGERS INSTITUTE

# FUNDAMENTALS OF LEARNING AND GROWING

Inspired by Fred Rogers and educator practice

- A sense of self-worth
- A sense of trust
- Curiosity
- The capacity to look and listen carefully
- The capacity to play
- Times of solitude



# INTRODUCTION

There is so much we think about when we help children learn and grow. We wonder what activities to plan, what experiences are important, what materials and toys are necessary, how to create a supportive environment...all while meeting basic needs and balancing opinions and outside influences.

Fred Rogers reminded us that what people need is simple and deep. In *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*, Fred Rogers and Barry Head introduced what they considered to be “six basic necessities of learning” - the fundamentals a person needs to be able to learn and grow.

6

**Fundamentals  
of Learning  
and Growing**

A sense of self-worth

A sense of trust

Curiosity

The capacity to look and listen carefully

The capacity to play

Times of solitude

This list was originally written for parents considering television’s role in child development and learning readiness. Fred Rogers noted that while these six fundamentals are not all-inclusive, they are what all children need to feel ready to learn. In his work, Fred Rogers considered how television can “help or hinder” the development of these fundamentals. Today, these fundamentals continue to be a reminder of what is really essential in childhood and beyond, and can give us anchors to ground our choices about supporting learning.

At the Fred Rogers Institute, we have been thinking about what these fundamentals mean for helpers today across a wide variety of contexts - early childhood, K-12 schools, out-of-school learning programs, higher education, community organizations, and more. The pages that follow describe the six fundamentals of learning and growing inspired by Fred Rogers and educator practice. We examined artifacts and writings from the Fred Rogers Archive, including speeches, episode clips, songs, and quotes. We also asked over 150 educators participating in a global community of practice, [Educators’ Neighborhood](#), to define and share their experiences with the six fundamentals in practice. Through more than 30 hours of discussion and written reflection over the course of a year, educators investigated these six ideas. To create this document, we incorporated information from our deep dive into the Fred Rogers Archive and the wealth of information shared by educators. Our hope is that this can offer insight into how you can support these six important ideas in your own work and life.

**The Fred Rogers Institute advances the legacy of Fred Rogers by investing in the strengths of families and caring adults to support the healthy development of children.**

- We Value Relationships** – Human relations are the foundation of learning and growing.
- We Value Belonging** – Every child and adult should be celebrated for their differences and know they matter in the world.
- We Value Families & Caring Adults** – Supporting families and caring adults begins with respecting the essential role they play in the lives of children.

**We Value Childhood** – Helping children become who they are requires cherishing childhood here and now.

To learn more about the Fred Rogers Institute please visit:  
[www.fredrogersinstitute.org](http://www.fredrogersinstitute.org).



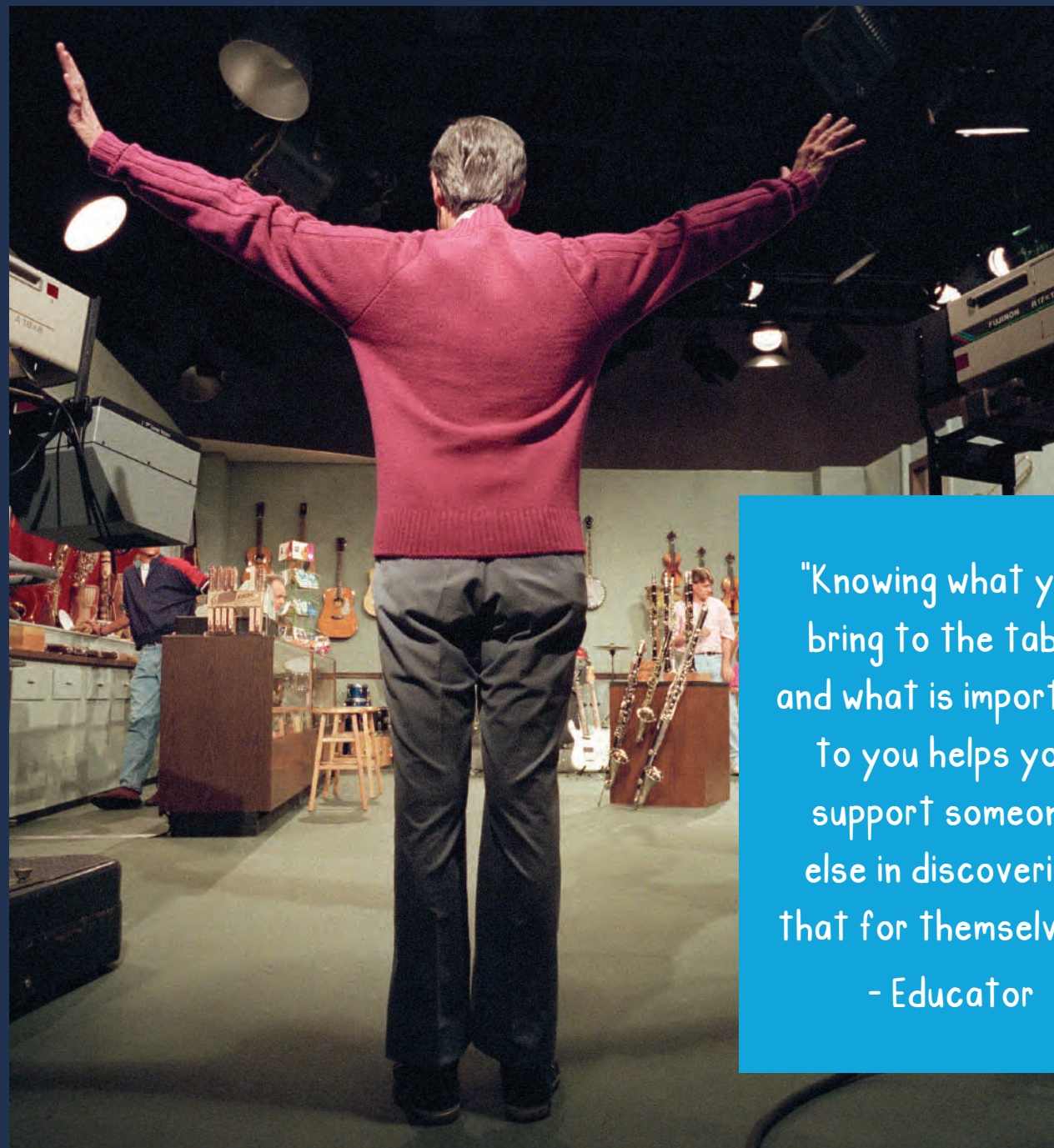
# SENSE OF SELF-WORTH

*“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.” - Fred Rogers*

A sense of self-worth is a person's belief in their innate value as a unique individual and that they are worthy of love. It is tied to how someone values and respects all parts of themselves, consistently over time. Self-worth is reflected in someone's level of confidence, self esteem, and ability to acknowledge areas for personal growth. Self-worth can be related to the difference someone can make in the world, using their gifts to support others. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and a person's own sense of self-worth can help them appreciate, see value in, and support a sense of self-worth in others.

Click on the button below to read the lyrics of "It's You I Like" from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

"It's You I Like"



"Knowing what you  
bring to the table  
and what is important  
to you helps you  
support someone  
else in discovering  
that for themselves."

- Educator

Imagine how much a person can grow, learn, and become when they believe that they matter and have value that is unique and inherent. You can encourage a sense of self-worth in yourself and others when you:

- Share what you notice that makes a child unique, and talk about what makes others unique
- Allow for mistakes and let them be a normal part of growing and learning
- Encourage children in their efforts more than their outcomes
- Are present when a young person is sharing about themselves
- Help children honor and express their emotions
- Expect children to take on developmentally appropriate responsibilities and invite their participation in meaningful tasks
- Take care of yourself in ways that model love for yourself and respect for your own needs
- Use your own strengths to help others
- Set and model boundaries that create an environment of respect for yourself and others
- Express gratitude and appreciate others



## SENSE OF TRUST

A sense of trust refers to a person's level of confidence in others and in themselves. Trust can develop through relationships. Trust is reflected in a person's ability to rely on others, be vulnerable, and feel comfortable as themselves. Having a sense of trust in someone can help a person talk about their feelings and cope with the changing world around them.

"(I work to build trust by) working very hard to build relationships so students know that I care in a genuine way and honor them." - Educator

A child's trust of others and trust in themselves allows them to feel safe and ask questions that are essential for learning. You can encourage a sense of trust in yourself and others when you:

- Encourage young people to work independently, and keep access to support open
- Allow for conversations and questions around all topics
- Build routines and create consistency in children's days
- Talk together about what to expect when facing something new
- Apologize when you say or do something that hurts someone
- Offer choices that let children make their own decisions about their time and body
- Give young people freedom to learn about their own strengths and limits
- Believe in yourself and the decisions that you make
- Meet children where they are to foster relationships
- Find common ground with others in conversation
- Respect others' need for privacy and confidentiality

Please click on the button below to read Fred's NAEYC speech from 1983, "Past and Present," which talks about trusting self as "a positive contributor to children's development."

"Past and Present"



A Jim Judkis Photo.

"Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we're not alone."

- Fred Rogers



# CURIOSITY

Curiosity is how people wonder, explore, and learn about the world around them. Maintaining and developing a person's natural curiosity can help people become life-long learners and thinkers. This can involve someone's interest and excitement in learning, discovery of new things, and inquisitiveness. Someone who is curious might ask questions and seek out new experiences.

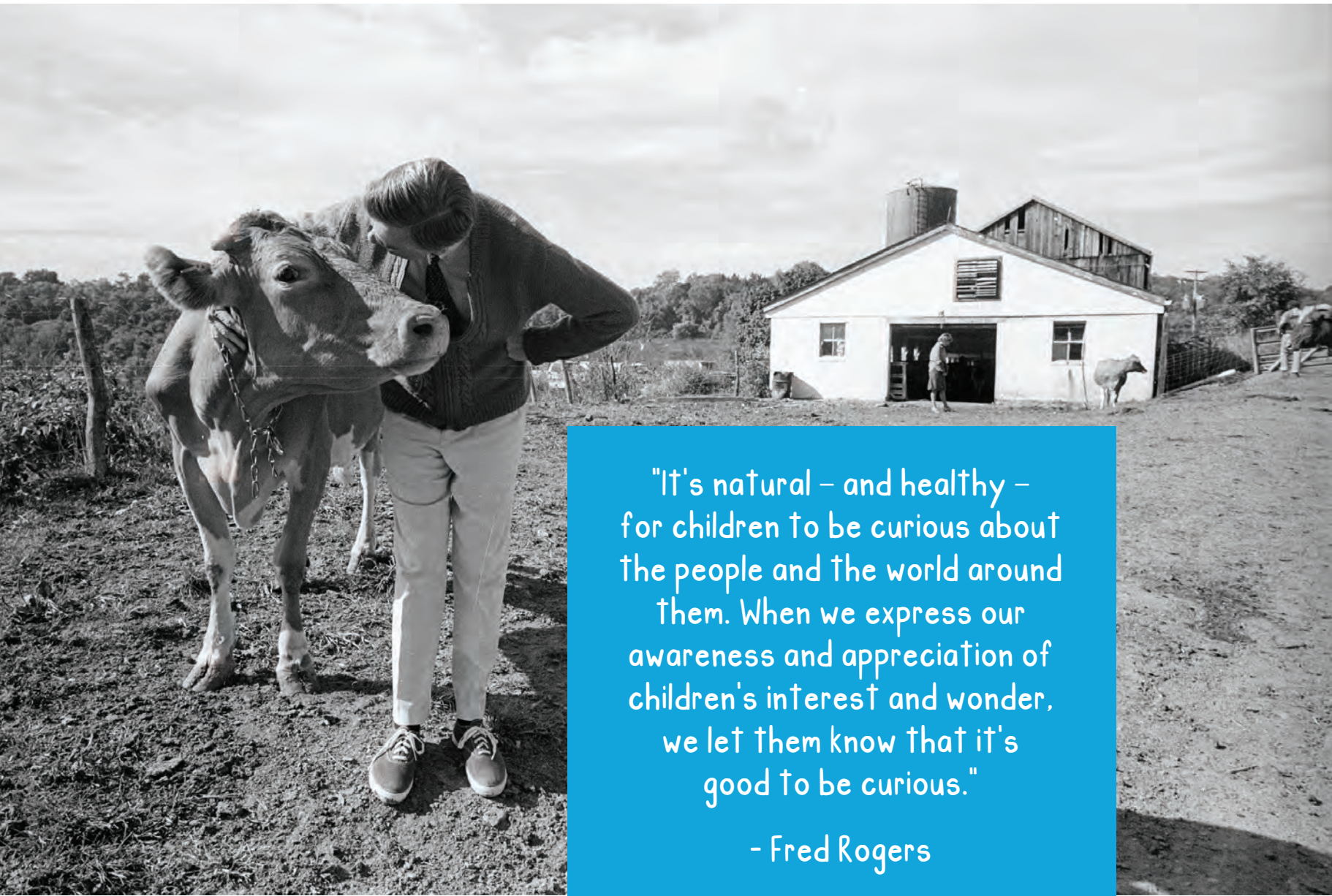
*"With students, I see it in how they interact and respond within the environment. They ask questions, they investigate objects, and they play. Sometimes it may look like trying a new role in the dramatic play area or trying to make something with building toys." - Educator*

Curiosity is the very heart of learning. You can encourage curiosity in yourself and others when you:

- Encourage and welcome questions and wonderings
- Introduce children to new ideas, people, places, and experiences
- Talk about new experiences
- Are honest about not having all the answers
- Share what you wonder about and ask questions
- Give children time to think and discover before offering answers or solutions
- Work to accept the discomfort in uncertainty

Click on the button below to read the lyrics of "Did You Know?" from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

"Did You Know?"



"It's natural – and healthy – for children to be curious about the people and the world around them. When we express our awareness and appreciation of children's interest and wonder, we let them know that it's good to be curious."

- Fred Rogers



# THE CAPACITY TO LOOK AND LISTEN CAREFULLY

*“There are many different ways for children to find out about the world around them - looking carefully at things, touching and feeling the things they see, and listening carefully to the sounds they hear and the words people say. By looking and listening carefully they can begin to understand the world around them - and the people in that world.” - Fred Rogers*

The capacity to look and listen carefully is the ability to intentionally observe and learn from the world around a person. Listening carefully refers to a person’s active listening and attentiveness. Looking carefully refers to a person’s process of stepping back to observe and gather information. With the capacity to look and listen carefully, a person can begin to intentionally communicate with others without judgment.

Life can push people to hurry, do more, consume more, and create more. It is easy for a person’s attention to be divided. An important part of learning is slowing down to appreciate and begin to understand what is in each moment. You can encourage the capacity to look and listen carefully in yourself and others when you:

- Give your full and careful focus, when you can, if someone is showing you something special or telling a story
- Spend time with children, quietly listening to your surroundings or looking closely at an object and sharing all of the things you notice and wonder
- Ask children questions to get to know them on a deeper level
- Actively listen to young people by noticing body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions, in addition to their words
- Observe children’s play and learning without intervening
- Offer unbiased feedback that describes, but does not judge
- Pay attention to the needs of others

Click on the button below to read the lyrics of “Look and Listen” from *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*.

["Look and Listen"](#)

"The capacity to look and listen carefully is the primary way I learn about the children in my classroom space. From observing children closely during play, to the way they interact with peers and materials, to the way they navigate their day to day lives at school, I find I can learn a tremendous amount by being almost a grounded 'fly on the wall.'"

- Educator





# CAPACITY TO PLAY

*“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. At various times, play is a way to cope with life and to prepare for adulthood. Playing is a way to solve problems and to express feelings. In fact, play is the real work of childhood.” - Fred Rogers*



The capacity to play refers to a person’s ability to be creative, explore, and express oneself. Play can offer a person opportunities to share their feelings and connect with others. Play can take the form of pretending, experimenting, and engaging in activities to express oneself and gain an understanding of the world. Play is for everyone, adults and children alike. There is no one way to play; it might happen individually or in groups, it could be active or quiet. Through play, everyone can learn and grow.

It’s simple and true: children and adults learn through play. You can encourage the capacity to play in yourself and others when you:

- Ensure there is freedom in a schedule and routine for unstructured play
- Set up simple prompts and invitations for play, like an old and familiar toy displayed in a new way or recycled materials on the table with crayons and glue
- Avoid interrupting when a child is deeply engaged in play
- Create art, music, or dance together
- Allow time and space for dramatic play, physical movement, and outdoor play
- Practice and model storytelling
- Welcome humor with games, jokes, and lighthearted conversation
- Imagine “what if” scenarios
- Offer hands-on learning activities

*“Play is the ability to experience childlike joy and wonder without limitations. I believe in the power of play! Play ignites laughter which is good for the brain.” - Educator*

Click on the button below to watch the *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* episode on Fun and Games.

["Fun and Games"](#)



## TIMES OF SOLITUDE

Solitude is being present and intentionally connecting with oneself. Times of solitude can happen alone or with others in a space that feels safe. During times of solitude, a person can slow down, reflect, and explore their feelings. If someone is alone during times of solitude, they may not feel lonely. A person can choose when and how to have times of solitude; it might look different for everyone.

"At the end of the day, as the last students leave, I feel a moment of solitude. I have a chance to soak in a moment of peace and reflect on the day." - Educator

Time to slow down and be present, either alone or with others, is as important for learning as the fast-paced times of engaging with others and the world. Just like sleeping gives physical bodies the chance to grow, solitude gives minds the chance to make meaning of all they are taking in. You can encourage solitude in yourself and others when you:

- Protect time in your schedule for quiet
- Establish a routine of rest time during the day
- Respect childrens' time for quiet and rest
- Talk about alone time as a gift people can give themselves
- Take time alone for yourself when you need it
- Model reflection with children
- Listen to music that brings yourself a sense of peace
- Make solitude a choice rather than a punishment
- Give children agency in how and when they spend free time
- Practice and encourage activities for solitude alongside others
- Create an environment that can foster slowing down and being present

Click on the button below to watch Fred's induction into the Television Hall of Fame.

"TV Hall of Fame"



"For young children, comfortable solitude often means being near someone they love. It's only when they are a good deal older that they may seek out aloneness in their rooms or in another part of the house. For a long time before this, they may need to see or hear someone they love nearby. But it's still a form of solitude. Some children may simply lie down on the carpet, eyes open, seeming to be doing nothing at all. But you can be sure that inside they're doing things they need to do in order to go on growing." - Fred Rogers