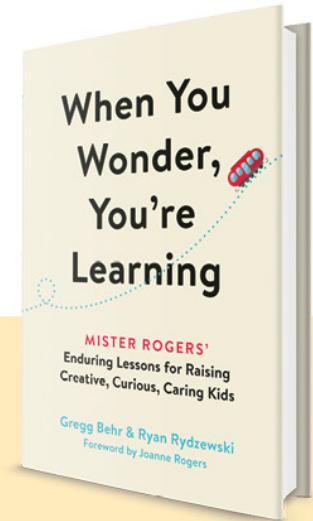


Mister Rogers gave us the gift of wonder



Written by RYAN RYDZEWSKI
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“Did you know?” Mister Rogers sang.
“Did you know when you wonder,
you’re learning?”



From 1968 to 2001, his beloved children’s program, “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood,” helped countless kids explore the world around them. Whether visiting a factory or wandering in a garden, the message was always the same: There’s so much to wonder about out there.

Science has shown just how much a sense of wonder matters. The more curious kids are, the more they want to learn — and the more their learning sticks.

With Mister Rogers in mind, here are five ways parents, teachers and other caring adults can nurture children’s wonder:

1. Trust kids to be curious.

Kids are born curious. That’s why renowned educator Melissa Butler sometimes starts class by giving kids a button — the kind they might find on one of Rogers’ sweaters. It takes time, but eventually, they start to notice things: a tiny bump, a scratch, a mystery. And then they start to wonder. “Too often, we don’t allow questions to emerge from what children are interested in,” Butler said. “If we would just do that and listen, then their curiosity evolves.”

2. Show kids that their questions matter.

It’s up to adults to give kids the space and permission to ask about what’s truly on their minds. Hedda Sharapan, who worked on “Neighborhood” for decades, gave the example of an “Ask It Basket” she saw in a classroom: “When the children would ask a question, (the teacher) would write it down and say, ‘That’s a great one to put into the Ask It Basket,’” she said. “That simple action told children that their questions matter.”

3. Create safe, warm, nurturing spaces.

It’s hard to wonder what a meteor is made of if you’re hungry or hurting or scared. That’s why Rogers wore comfy sweaters and established consistent routines: He was trying to convey safety, predictability and warmth. He wanted the “Neighborhood” to help kids feel comfortable enough to be their curious selves.

4. Start with what’s familiar.

Rogers “didn’t expect children to be curious about something they knew nothing about,” said Roberta Schomburg, former director of the Fred Rogers Center. Instead, he showed them simple, familiar objects such as spoons or crayons. Then he wondered aloud: What else might a spoon be used for? Have you ever wondered where crayons come from? That balance of what’s familiar with what’s unknown creates curiosity’s foundation.

5. Model curiosity.

Rogers knew that wonder is caught, not taught. So, what makes *you* wonder? Try going back to old habits: Pull out those abandoned paintbrushes or dust off that old guitar. It helps to verbalize your questions in front of kids: I wonder what would happen if I mix these colors together? How does this knob change an instrument’s sound? *at home*

Ryan Rydzewski is an award-winning science and education reporter. Gregg Behr is executive director of The Grable Foundation and co-chairman of Remake Learning. Their book, “When You Wonder, You’re Learning: Mister Rogers’ Enduring Lessons for Raising Creative, Curious, Caring Kids,” is available from Hachette. Learn more at whenyowonder.org.