



Peacemaking *in the* Family by Mister Rogers

*Four Intergenerational Events
for Your Church*

Written by Fred Rogers and Barbara Marsh
Second Edition Adapted by Vickie Dieth



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission

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Originally published in the 1980s, *Peacemaking in the Family* was updated and re-released in 2023. This version was produced with the understanding that not all children are raised in homes with two biological parents present and seeks to be inclusive of all family configurations; families with two parents, single parents, grandparents or others as primary caregivers, and *your* family.

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The Authors

Fred McFeely Rogers was born in 1928 in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, a small industrial town about an hour's drive east of Pittsburgh. His family was involved in manufacturing and banking, and it was in traditional and "comfortable" surroundings that Rogers spent his earliest years. He was an only child until the age of 11, at which time adoption brought him a baby sister. He was married in 1952 to Joanne Byrd, a pianist and fellow Rollins undergraduate. He attended Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and was ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1962.

In 1963, opportunity led Rogers to Toronto where he created a 15-minute children's series called *Misterogers*. By 1964 the series had been renamed *Misterogers' Neighborhood* and he had returned to WQED in Pittsburgh.

Rogers was President of Family Communications, Inc., the nonprofit corporation he founded in 1971 and which now is named Fred Rogers Productions and produces a wide variety of materials that focus on the healthy emotional growth of children and their families. The television series has, since 1969, been retitled *Mister Roger's Neighborhood* (out of concern for children's early reading skills). *Mister Roger's Neighborhood* and spin-off *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* remain "a place where friends help children find within themselves the courage to grow."

Rogers died in 2004 but his work is continued by both the [Fred Rogers Institute](#) and [Fred Rogers Productions](#).

Barbara Marsh is a retired licensed psychologist with a Ph.D. in developmental psychology from the University of Pittsburgh. When working, she saw children, adults and couples for psychotherapy. She has frequently co-lead adult classes in Pittsburgh area churches with her husband, Rev. Helsel R. Marsh, Jr. In retirement, she has enjoyed spending time with her growing family. Her daughter, Liz, and son, Andrew, have wonderful families of their own. Son-in-law Bibhash, daughter-in-law Jenny, and five beautiful grandchildren add much joy to her life. Undergirding all is the support of the church and parents who have nurtured her faith as she journeys through life.

Vickie Caro Dieth updated this resource for its second edition. She is a Christian educator and ruling elder in the PC(USA) and has served churches in Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, and Georgia. She lives in Columbus, Georgia, where she is the Director of Educational Ministries at First Presbyterian Church.



Introduction and Overview

Families are important to us. When we are young, we need the physical care and support they provide. As we grow older and more independent, there is still a connection to our immediate family. Much of what we do for our own children is an expression of what we learned from our parents. In healthy families, we develop a mature love for our parents as we nurture the next generation. The emotional bond between parent and child changes but is not broken. This love does not disappear with physical separation, age, or even death.

So, why is peacemaking needed within families? Perhaps it is because the level of emotion and caring is so deep. Those we love are the subjects of our dreams and the objects of our frustration, anger, and disappointment. For all the times we reach out to nurture and support those we love, there are also times of crisis and stress when we do not know how to respond to, or how to include, members of our family.

Peacemaking is the effort to bring about nurture and support—even in times of crisis. Peacemaking allows everyone to feel self-worth—to know that their own uniqueness is special and worth preserving and developing. Sometimes our actions communicate this message and sometimes they do not. When they do, we are being peacemakers. When they do not, we need to find ways to get back on track—to know what to do in order to be a peacemaker.

The Christian faith shows us a model for giving and loving



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through the relationship between God and Jesus. God stayed with Jesus throughout his experiences on earth, through his joys, his friendships, his celebrations, his grief, his anger, and his decision-making. Jesus shared the depth of his feelings with God in prayer. He found sustenance in the relationship. He was allowed to make choices regarding the power given to him by God. Additionally, he struggled with the ultimate choice of whether to give his life in order that we might live. Throughout all of these experiences, God gave strength and support to Jesus. God was with him in his successes and in his struggles. That is what we can do as families—be with one another, lending our strength and support, while allowing others to choose their own ways of life.

This resource on peacemaking within the family presents four areas of family life where peacemaking skills can build self-esteem in family members:



1. Families and Feelings
2. Living in Families and Growing as Individuals
3. Families and Hard Times
4. Families and Celebrations

For each of these four topics, there is a section with background information and a suggested curriculum design for an inter-generational event with faith communities.

Each curriculum design covers several subjects. A suggested time is indicated at the beginning of each subject section. Each session is designed to be 1½ hours, while the fourth session, “Families and Celebrations,” is 1 hour and 45 minutes.

For each subject there is an activity and suggested outline for a brief presentation. Feel free to adapt the material in ways that are most helpful in your particular setting.

This material was developed using the book *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*, by Fred Rogers and Barry Head, Berkley Press, 1983. As the book is no longer in print, you may consider sharing copies of the *Background Information* for each session with families digitally or in the form of a printed handout, allowing families to reference the information later.



SESSION ONE

Families and Feelings

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Being a parent or caregiver is a rewarding but awesome task. It is not always clear what choices to make or what words to say when living with our children. Parents and caregivers may wonder if their actions are going to help their children or hurt them, or if they are being too hard or too permissive. Children may wonder why parents don't see how hard they are trying. Feelings of doubt, confusion, resentment, or guilt may arise.

Fortunately, the feelings experienced within a family are not all negative. The joy of being a parent or caregiver is experienced as one watches their child grow and learn. Parents and caregivers feel a special warmth as their children develop. Children respond to love and affection with a sense of security and a feeling of comfort.

All of our feelings, both positive and negative, are an integral part of being human. They are our clue to understanding one another and to the resolution of our disagreements. The recognition and acceptance of each person's feelings is critical to the nurture and growth of a person's self-esteem. As parents and caregivers demonstrate this recognition and acceptance of feelings, they initiate a process of peacemaking in each person and in the family as a whole. They become leaders in the most important task a family can undertake. In this sense, peacemaking allows each person to feel acceptable and trustworthy, even in the midst of arguments.

Parents and Caregivers Have Feelings, Too!

Feelings are not always easily understood. Just when you think you are having a logical discussion with someone, you get a familiar knot in your stomach and hear your voice rising in tempo and tone. When that happens, you can be sure something in the discussion has touched a very sensitive spot in you and you are experiencing some deep feelings about the issue.

Have you ever watched a movie or read a book that portrayed a special caring relationship between two people, then discovered that tears were rolling down your cheeks at the most tender part of the story? The depth of love shown touched

some part of your life, and you responded with feelings. We don't ask ourselves what feeling is appropriate to a situation and then begin to feel it. We respond with feeling immediately to situations. We respond in different ways because each of us is unique. But all of us have feelings as a part of our ongoing experience of life.



Feelings are a genuine expression of who we are. The more

clearly we recognize our own feelings, the better we know ourselves. Of course, as we share with others what feelings we are experiencing, we make it possible for them to know us in an intimate way. The more we know one another, the more we can enjoy, support, and care for one another. That is peacemaking.

This sharing of feelings may be a new idea for some people. Some of us have grown up learning to keep our feelings to ourselves. We may not be comfortable sharing our feelings with others. We can only do what seems appropriate to us. What is important is that we don't hide our feelings from ourselves. We can recognize them and choose whether we want to share them. It is helpful in those times to explain to others that what we are experiencing is not something we want to share. In that way we can acknowledge what others are probably already sensing without disclosing more than we wish to about ourselves.

One interesting aspect of parenting or caregiving is that we find ourselves remembering and re-experiencing feelings we had as children. As children act in ways familiar to us, we recall how it was for us when we were in a similar position. Viewed from our current, older perspective, these old feelings may become more understandable to us. In this way, parenting and caregiving foster an inner change. Our own experience of our past takes on new meaning for us. We learn about ourselves as we observe and attend to our children's growth.

As children, we may have enjoyed pets that we had. As we see our children become attached to their own pets, we may recall the strength and comfort of that special relationship when we were children. While we may have *lived* the relationship as a child, we can *understand* it as an adult. These revelations about ourselves create opportunities for growth. It is a gift children give to us without knowing they are doing so.

It is an old truth that what parents and caregivers do, children will do. We serve

as models for our children. By sharing our feelings with our children, we are teaching them to do the same. If we demonstrate an acceptance and an honesty about our feelings, our children will most likely learn to express their feelings as well. The more we share with children, the more they will be able to share with us. As parents and caregivers, we provide an avenue of communication by speaking about ourselves to those we love. They can learn from us that sharing oneself with others is both acceptable and desirable.

Play is an Expression of Feelings

Children may not express their feelings in the same way as adults. Children, especially young children, express themselves by what they *do* more than by what they *say*—and what children do is play. Their play is serious business. It is their expression of the world as they see it. Their feelings, thoughts, unique approach to situations, perspective—all are incorporated in their play.

Children are often in situations in which they have very little control. They react initially to a parent and then life goes on. The feelings that are sustained are taken into their play. This is a time when they do have control. They react to dolls, push toy cars, and draw pictures in ways that express their own experience of life. It is here that they try out their feelings in ways that can't harm others.

During play, children express feelings about themselves and other people. One way for a parent or caregiver to learn about a child's feelings is to observe the child's play. A child may bring a picture to show a parent or caregiver. If the picture has a boy, a house, and a tree, the parent or caregiver could ask, "Who is the boy? Does



he live in the house? Is the tree for climbing or sitting under?" Whatever the child wants to say about the picture will be what the child is willing to share. It may not necessarily represent an emotional experience for the child, but it could be an important experience of life.

The feelings of our children may sometimes be surprising or confusing to us. We may think we

understand the feelings expressed by our children, only to discover that their thinking is quite different. It is important to remember: there will always be a reason for a child's feeling. The feeling a child has will be related to the child's perception of a situation. That perception and that feeling may not be similar to our own, but it will be true for the child. That is why it is so critical to accept someone else's feelings as legitimate. Because a feeling grows out of an individual's perception of the world. There can be no other reaction for that person at the moment. To understand the perception of the child is to understand the child's experience more fully. Until we see the world as they see it, we won't grasp the meaning of their feelings.

A child may have gone to school quite routinely for several weeks. One day that child may cry and ask to stay home from school. The parent or caregiver can be sure that the child has a reason behind the tears. Perhaps the child is missing being home. Perhaps the other children on the school bus seem to know one another and have a friend to sit with. Whatever the reason, the child is experiencing strong feelings in reaction to their world.

What Can We Do with Our Feelings?

Feelings are an important part of our experience, but they are only one part of that experience. What we do with those feelings, how we think about them, how we act on them—these expressions of our feelings help to shape our lives. People do not need to control their feelings or be controlled by them. Instead, we can learn to work with our feelings.

Remember, feelings are not necessarily easy to understand. If this is true for adults, it can be even more so for children. Very young children often confuse the boundary between fantasy and reality. If a child is angry at someone and wishes that person would go away forever, that wish and the accompanying feeling can be a scary experience for the child. To the young child, the wish may come true. Adults know that wishing something can't make it happen, but young children have to learn this as they grow.

Adults can help children realize that a feeling is something that is inside of us and stays inside. This internal feeling does not cause harm to anyone. It is what we do with the feeling that makes a difference to other people. Our real self may push someone away from us, but *imagining* that we are pushing someone away does not move them.

As children begin to learn that the feelings are *inside*, they can also begin to understand that bringing those internal feelings *outside* can be helpful. If something can be mentioned, or named, most likely it can be managed. Expressing our feelings

helps us to clarify them, understand them, and choose how to act on them. Bringing what is *inside* to the *outside* is analogous to shedding light in the darkness.

Feelings are often quite complex. We may feel disappointed and angry at the same time. We can feel excited, but hesitant over a particular task. Some-

times we are not aware of this mixture of feelings until we begin to talk about a situation. For adults, finding the words to express this complexity may be easier than for our children. We may need to pay close attention to children in order to see the complexity they are experiencing.

There are times when we are not particularly proud of what we are feeling or how we are acting. During those times, it is hard to be accepting of ourselves. We want to deny what we are experiencing. Especially at those times, it is helpful to be honest with ourselves. If I think it is important to read with my children before bed, but I'm feeling distracted on a particular night, my children will probably sense my distraction. My children will be helped if they hear that I usually enjoy reading with them, but I am not able to focus my attention on them right now. Talking about those conflicting feelings may bring about a way to resolve them.

The most important byproduct of talking about conflicting feelings is that our children will learn to do the same. Honesty in parents and caregivers breeds honesty in children. If we are willing to speak the truth about ourselves, and we provide an environment that encourages our children to have freedom to speak the truth about themselves, we will help our children develop the capacity to love themselves and other people. This is why parents and caregivers are the initiators of peacemaking in the family. Our attitude toward ourselves and the atmosphere we provide for our children's growth sets the stage for the development of each family member.



Additional Information

For more information, particularly on young children and feelings, visit the podcast, [Raising Children in Wake County](#), by the Project Enlightenment Foundation. Of particular relevance:

Episode 4: [Supporting Social Skills Development with Christine Burkhart](#)

Episode 11: [How Children Learn through Play with Kim Hughes](#)



SESSION ONE

Families and Feelings

CURRICULUM DESIGN

OBJECTIVES:

1. To encourage families to talk about feelings by exploring a feeling together
2. To help children recognize that parents and caregivers have feelings too
3. To help families experience how play can be a way to express feelings
4. To be able to name different feelings and create a group list

MATERIALS:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nametags | <input type="checkbox"/> Magazine or cut out pictures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Markers | <input type="checkbox"/> Popcorn, pretzels, goldfish, or other snacks to put in boxes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Word and music for hymns/songs | <input type="checkbox"/> Small wrapped boxes (enough for each family group with snack inside) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bible | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsprint |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White and colored paper | <input type="checkbox"/> AV Equipment if showing video or playing song |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scissors | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Glue | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tape | |

Opening and Introductions (20 minutes)

1. Begin with a prayer giving thanks for the gifts of love and support made possible through family relationships.
2. Sing several hymns or songs related to feelings. Here are two suggestions:
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
Kum Bah Yah—include verses beginning with “Someone’s crying . . . , laughing . . . , singing . . .” It’s also possible to make your own verses: “Someone’s angry . . . , loving . . . ,” etc.
3. Read a scripture passage, such as John 15:12–17.

4. Introduce families to one another. Even if those present already know one another's names, this can be a helpful activity. Ask the family member whose birthday is closest to the date of the evening to introduce each member of their family, completing the statement, "[Name] feels happy when _____."

Parents, Caregivers and Feelings (15 minutes)

PRESENTATION

Review the major points from the above background information, using the introductory paragraphs and the section entitled "Parents and Caregivers Have Feelings, Too!" The points you might include are:

- Doing peacemaking in the family requires concern for the feelings of each family member.
- Feelings are always present in our experience.
- Talking about feelings helps to share who we are and helps us grow as human beings.
- Speaking about feelings encourages others to do the same.

ACTIVITY: PLAY "STAND UP IF . . ."

Instructions are as follows:

1. Have everyone sit in a large circle.
2. Read a list of statements, beginning with, "Stand up if . . ."
3. Each person stands when the statement is true for them.
4. People remain standing until everyone is standing.
5. Then read a list of statements beginning with, "Sit down if . . .," until everyone present is sitting down again.

Some examples follow, but feel free to make up your own:

- "Stand up if you cried on the first day of school."
- "Stand up if you ever feel like being bossy."
- "Stand up if you ever giggle when you feel happy."
- "Stand up if you ever slam doors when you feel mad."
- "Stand up if you criticize other people when you feel mad at them."
- "Stand up if anything embarrassing happened to you in first grade."
- "Stand up if you feel afraid to watch scary movies alone."
- "Stand up if you ever wished your family was like someone else's family."

- “Stand up if you ever felt bad when someone insulted you.”
- “Stand up if you ever felt bad when you insulted someone else.”
- “Sit down if you like to talk on the phone a lot.”
- “Sit down if you feel happier reading a book than scrolling on the phone.”
- “Sit down if you like Disney movies.”
- “Sit down if you ever pout when the family votes to do something you don’t want to do.”
- “Sit down if you don’t like family members to see you cry.”
- “Sit down if you’ve ever felt like you were weird and everyone else was ‘okay.’”

Play is the Expression of Feelings (20 minutes)

PRESENTATION

Review the major points from the background information, “Play is the Expression of Feelings.” Your points might include:

- Play is a way for children and adults to express their feelings, thoughts, creativity, and perceptions.
- We all like to talk about what we do. Children like to talk about their play and this can be a way of sharing their feelings.
- There is always a reason, or reasons, for a person’s feelings.
- The reason(s) helps us to understand the experience of that person.

ACTIVITY: MAKE PICTURES OR COLLAGES

Instructions are as follows:

1. Prepare a table with markers, paper, magazines, masking tape, scissors, and glue.
2. Have each family sit together as a group and decide which of four feelings they want to build their pictures around—mad, sad, glad, or afraid. If people are present without their own family, have them either form a new group together or join a family.
3. Have each member draw a picture or make a collage projecting that feeling.
4. Group members can share their pictures, describing them further if they wish. Pictures can then be hung on the walls.
5. Caution people against judging the associations made with a feeling. Each person’s experience is unique.

What Can We Do with Our Feelings? (15 minutes)

While family or group members stay in their small circles, pass out a wrapped box, a sheet of newsprint, and a magic marker to each group. Boxes can be of various shapes and sizes, colorfully decorated. Ask families to place the box in the center of the circle, but not open it.

PRESENTATION

Review the major points described in the background information from the section entitled, “What Can We Do With our Feelings?” Your points might include:

- There is a difference between fantasy and reality. Our wishes do not cause things to happen.
- Feelings are internal and are often powerful experiences.
- Anything mentionable is manageable. Bringing our feelings outside, by talking about them, helps us to understand ourselves better.
- Willingness to speak the truth and an environment which encourages freedom for the expression of that truth help people develop the capacity to love themselves and others.

ACTIVITY: “THE BOX”

Instructions are as follows:

1. Ask each person in the family or group to imagine something they do *not* like in the box, and to tell the other family members what it is and how they feel about it. Encourage them to use a *different* feeling than those already used.
2. Ask each person to imagine something they *do* like in the box. That person then tells what it is and how they feel about it. Again, use feelings that haven’t already been named.
3. After these discussions are finished, the oldest person in the family or group can use the newsprint and magic marker to record the feelings that family members recall being mentioned by each person.
4. When everyone is finished, families may open their boxes and discover what is inside. (Suggestions: a simple snack of popcorn, candy, cookies, dried fruits, or another small surprise.)

Closing (5 minutes)

1. As people enjoy the goodies from the boxes, ask one member of each family or group to hang their list of feelings on the wall. The leader can read some, pointing to the variety of feelings.
2. Ask how difficult it was to think of feelings that had not already been used.
3. Explain that it can be difficult to name feelings beyond *mad, sad, glad, and afraid*. Distribute copies of the [feelings wheel](#) for families to use at home to help identify other feelings.
4. Mention that during the next session the group will focus on the individuality of family members.
5. Close the session by reading the lyrics from “The Truth Will Make Me Free,” (from *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*), or watch the video of Mister Rogers singing it at <https://misterrogers.org/videos/the-truth-will-make-you-free/>. Then close with a prayer.

The Truth Will Make Me Free

What if I were very, very sad
And all I did was smile?
I wonder after a while
What might become of my sadness?

What if I were very, very angry?
And all I did was sit
And never think about it?
What might become of my anger?

Where would they go, and what would they do,
If I couldn't let them out?
Maybe I'd fall, maybe get sick
Or doubt.

But what if I could know the truth
And say just how I feel?
I think I'd learn a lot that's real
About freedom.

I'm learning to sing a sad song when I'm sad.
I'm learning to say I'm angry when I'm very mad.
I'm learning to shout, I'm getting it out!
I'm happy, learning exactly how I feel inside of me.
I'm learning to know the truth.
I'm learning to tell the truth.
Discovering truth will make me free.



SESSION TWO

Living In Families and Growing as Individuals

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At any level, whether worldwide, within a single country, one community, one church, or one family, peacemaking is the process of helping people live together in a healthy way. The difficulty in that task is inherent because the people who must live together harmoniously are individuals with unique perspectives on life, varied interests and attitudes and, sometimes, conflicting goals.

Within the family, the number of people who live together may not be large, but the task of cooperating is no less difficult. We want to be connected to those we love so much, but we also want to develop as individuals. Tension is created when trying to balance those two desires, and it is often hard to know how to accomplish this balance satisfactorily.

The task is difficult enough for each of us, but parents and caregivers have the additional task of leading the family in such a way that each member can grow successfully within the circle of the family. Children and adults grow in relationship to one another. Family shapes change. People become more and more independent, yet they can deepen their relationships with one another. Everyone is affected by these changes, but parents and caregivers probably feel the most responsibility for them. Some of the issues involved in this growth task are the focus of this session of *Peacemaking in the Family*.

Growing in Self-Esteem

Having a sense of one's self as a competent person is an important step toward developing an understanding of one's own uniqueness. We learn to trust ourselves as we see that the things we do help us to get along in the world. From the very moment of birth, we begin to reach out and make an impact on the world. The response we receive influences our attempts to reach out again. The better we feel about our actions, the more competent we feel, and the more willing we are to try new challenges.

The pleasure a baby experiences in discovering its hand can be seen in the baby's facial expressions. This is an enormous discovery for a child. The newborn has to

learn the difference between self and the rest of the world. Learning that toes and fingers can be controlled is a wondrous new idea, and is the beginning of a life-long learning of what is *me* and what is *not me*; what I can do and not do; what things I do that are helpful to others and what things are not helpful.



Because the world is so new to a baby, it is easier to see the changes and learning that take place. Realizing this fascination with life is never-ending can bring a fresh new look at people of all ages.

Think of the toddler who has just learned to walk, children who can tie their own shoes before school, the student who works hard to make the team, or the adult who begins to learn a new sport just for the fun of it. Our efforts are part of who we are. The satisfaction of succeeding brings good feelings, and the disappointment of failure is something with which we struggle. The results of our efforts are absorbed into our picture of ourselves. We are constantly evaluating that picture in light of our experience.

Where do families fit into this developing understanding of self? It is the family that we turn to for support and encouragement in our successes, as well as for sympathy and understanding in our failures. We draw strength from family members to experiment with life. This is especially true when we are young. The skills that we develop affect our willingness to act on our own as we move through life.

Parents and caregivers can be helpful as children learn a sense of competence and independence. These adults can provide the home base from which the child explores. If that home base is warm and secure, the child will grow strong. Then, because each of us has a desire for acting on our own, the child will reach outside the security of the family. The task of the parent or caregiver is to recognize the readiness of the child and to allow exploration. A child who is ready to explore and is not given room to do so will feel frustrated. A child who is not ready to explore and is pushed to do so will feel frustrated, as well.

Listening to what another person wants in the way of help is a good way to support that person without stepping in and taking over the situation. A student who comes home and exclaims, “You should see how much homework I have!” may want the

parent or caregiver to understand the pressure they will be under that evening. That student probably does not want the parent or caregiver to organize the student's schedule so that the work gets done. Most parents and caregivers want to show concern and be helpful to their children. Taking over a difficult problem for someone else does not usually help.

Issues of Control in Families

Issues of control abound in families. Parents and caregivers wonder how much control is enough and how much is too much. They sometimes disagree about who is in control. The issue of control is important because it underlies the struggle of the person to gain that precarious balance between independence from others and connectedness to them.

It is helpful for individuals to work toward self-control rather than being controlled by others. People who can count on themselves to make competent decisions and to act in ways that are nondestructive to others are learning self-trust. Knowing that others count on you to be trustworthy encourages you to be that way. To be trustworthy and to trust others is basic to healthy relationships. The more people learn to monitor their own behavior and allow others to monitor theirs, the more respect will be communicated for each person's individuality.

If parents and caregivers can remember that gaining self-control is part of the effort to discover who one is, then the struggles of the "terrible twos" and of adolescence can be viewed quite differently. The two-year-old learns the word "no" and uses it with great frequency. When the child says, "No!" to a request by the parent, the statement may sound like a challenge to the parent's authority. It is not. The child is beginning to sort out the use of language as an expression of what is important to them. That little person is beginning to understand that they have opinions which can be asserted. The child is learning how to control body muscles. Experimenting with giving in or holding back is a way the child can learn self-control.

In adolescence, once again the parent or caregiver's authority seems to be the focus of disdain by the child. Adolescents are concentrating on what it means to be a separate self. Sometimes that creates lonely, scary feelings. Sometimes it is delightfully intriguing. In their need to sort out what choices to make regarding how and who to be, adolescents often express rejection to adults.

Parents and caregivers can often feel like victims in relationship to their children. Knowing that the child is struggling with *self* more than they are struggling against the adults can help to ease the difficulty of living through these times. But parents and caregivers can do more than understand and tolerate these situations. Instead of

battling for control or just giving in to the child's need for self-expression, parents and caregivers can look for ways to change the situation so that the child can feel that an opportunity for choice is present.

The two-year-old who says, "no," to wearing a pair of pants can be asked, instead, which pair of pants they would like to wear. The parent can say clearly that



getting dressed is a necessity, but that the child can make choices within those boundaries.

Similarly, the teenager who objects to going to a family get-together may be saying that they want to be consulted about family plans before they are set in stone. Adolescents often have busy lives of their own, and perhaps the structure of the family needs to change to accommodate the changing needs of its members.

As individuals grow in families, the family's way of functioning needs to be flexible enough to respond to that growth. How families adapt will depend on who the members are and what changes they are comfortable with. Hopefully, adaptation will move toward greater control on the part of each family member as the family works together.

Boundaries Within the Family

A sense of competence and a knowledge that one can control one's own actions lead to a growing sense of what it is that makes that person different from others. The very concept of differentness encourages the questioning of what is unique about me—what is a part of me that is not a part of you.

This differentness creates boundaries between people. For example, spouses living together love one another, share values, friends, and experiences yet they are still two different people. They may have strong differences between one another regarding certain likes and dislikes. They also have their own unique reactions and thoughts. Children, too, are separate from their parents or caregivers and from their siblings. Likewise, adult parenting partners share experiences as a couple that they do not share with their children.

All of this separateness means that there are times when individuals need to be alone. Privacy for each person is something that helps us remember our separateness.

Even if we have no place to go where we can be alone, we may want to be alone with our own thoughts or a book to read. We may not want to share what we are thinking. Unless we are keeping information from others that they need to know, we have a right to our own thoughts and our private experiences. We can explain to others that we want some privacy and we can grant others their privacy. A good way to model respect for others is for the adults in the household to ask children if they can play with them, or if a child would prefer to be left alone. Even babies turn away when they don't want to be handled. Respecting that message is respecting the other person's desire to not be intruded upon.

Because we need such total care when we are babies, parents and caregivers come to know their children intimately. The parent or caregiver learns to anticipate the child's needs and can sometimes guess what their reaction might be. This is a skill that parents and caregivers develop. However, this skill, combined with the enormous size of the adult in relationship to the child, leads the child to think that perhaps the adult is omnipotent and omniscient.

Children need to be assured that no one can really know their thoughts and feelings unless they choose to share them. A parent or caregiver may guess the reaction of a child, but unless the child confirms the accuracy of that guess, the adult cannot be certain. Children do not know this, and adults can help them by asking.

If parents or caregivers are incorrect in their assumption about a child's thoughts, it helps for them to accept the correction by the child. How often do we assume that we know what someone else is really thinking? How often are we afraid that someone else will find out what we are thinking? The fears and misconceptions of childhood sometimes stay with us through adulthood.

Acceptance of Self and Others

This whole section on growth as individuals has emphasized that people are different from one another. They have different strengths and different weaknesses, different abilities and different limitations, and a whole wealth of feelings which they experience. Each person is unique, and that is one of the most important things someone can learn. To know my own uniqueness and to *value* that uniqueness is to accept who I am as a separate person in this world. This sense of self-awareness grows out of experiences of competence, self-regulation, and privacy.

This learning is lifelong because our knowledge of ourselves changes as we grow. If we begin to accept differentness in ourselves at a young age, we will begin to accept the differentness in others as well. Then, peacemaking outside of the family will be more easily accomplished. Differentness will not be something to fear, but something that can enrich all our lives.



SESSION TWO

Living In Families and Growing as Individuals

CURRICULUM DESIGN

OBJECTIVES:

1. To discern and recognize the unique gifts of each family member
2. To demonstrate ways in which individuals may be given choices within a situation
3. To give thanks together to God for individuality

MATERIALS:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bible | <input type="checkbox"/> Stickers and other art items to decorate “frames” of prayers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Colored construction paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Scissors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Glue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Markers | <input type="checkbox"/> Tape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Colored pencils | |

Opening and Warm-ups (20 minutes)

Instructions are as follows:

1. Begin with a prayer which thanks God for the enrichment created by the uniqueness of individuals.
2. Have participants re-introduce themselves by playing a name game, for example the one below. If you have a very large group, ask people to get in circles of no more than twenty.
3. Ask everyone to recall their introductions from the previous session. Beginning with the person next to you in the circle, invite them to complete the following sentence: “My name is _____ and I feel happy when _____.” As each person does this, they must then repeat the names (in order) and the “happy” of those who have already spoken in the circle. As the leader, you can be last, saying the names and situations of each person in the circle.

This is a helpful exercise, but can be difficult. Consider having everyone repeat the names and “happies” together, promoting a sense of communal support as well as helping everyone learn names a bit more easily.

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4. Invite a volunteer to read the scripture passage Romans 12:3-8.
5. Next, ask participants to keep the words of Romans in mind as you show the video, [I'm An Artist Movie Trailer](#).
6. Ask the group, "What do the reading and the video have in common?"

Both the scripture passage and the video focus on the contribution made by individuals out of their uniqueness.

Growing in Self-Esteem (30 minutes)

PRESENTATION

Review the major points from the background information, using the introductory paragraphs and the section entitled, "Growing in Self-Esteem." The points you might mention are:

- Tension is created within people by their desire both for independence and for connectedness with others.
- Feeling good about what we do moves us toward a sense of competence in the world.
- The more we trust ourselves, the more we are willing to try new challenges.
- Learning the difference between ourselves and others is a lifelong task.
- Helping other people means supporting them in their efforts, but not taking over.

ACTIVITY: PLAY FAMILY CHARADES OF A DIFFERENT KIND

Instructions are as follows:

1. Have each family sit together and determine one thing that each member does better than the other members of the family. For instance, a two-year-old can crawl under a chair better than an adult. If you have people present without their family, ask them to form a new group together or join a family.
2. Then have each family or group figure out a way to act out those unique talents of its members. Each member must give permission for their gift to be acted out. Someone may not feel like having their talents shared with the rest of the group. It is important to respect that person's wishes.
3. Bring the families or groups together and spend about fifteen minutes letting families act out one of their member's gifts while other families guess what that gift is. Try to do at least one charade for each family.

Issue of Control in Families (25 minutes)

PRESENTATION

Review the major points from the background information on control. The points you might include are:

- Who is in control is sometimes an issue in families.
- Individuals who move toward self-control rather than control by others learn to trust themselves.
- Children who seem rebellious are often struggling with their own self-image rather than rejecting an adult's authority.
- Having an opportunity to make choices gives people a feeling of having some control over a situation.

ACTIVITY: CREATE A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Instructions are as follows:

Explain that in the exercise which will be a part of the next section, families or groups will be constructing a prayer of thanksgiving and framing it. (Show an example of a finished product). In order to accomplish that task, certain choices must be made. You, as the leader, will instruct different members of each family to make certain decisions. No one else in the family is to dispute the decision or to influence it.

Give directions:

1. The youngest person in each family or group can choose the color of construction paper which will frame the prayer.
2. The next oldest will choose the art supplies for decorating the frame.
3. The next oldest will get the white paper and choose the marker for writing the prayer.
4. The next oldest will choose who in the family will write down the words of the prayer.
5. The next oldest will choose the order of the names on the paper.
6. The next oldest will choose how many items will be listed under each person's name.

If there are more than six people in a family, give the tasks to the children. If less than six, allow children an extra choice.

After these decisions have been made, ask families or groups to utilize the decisions made earlier by family members in building a prayer of thanksgiving. The prayer should contain a separate list for each person's special gifts.

Example:

Thank you, Lord, for _____, her ease at getting up in the morning, her greeting to each person at night, her interest in animals, etc.

Closing (20 minutes)

1. Mention that the next session will focus on hard times experienced by families.
2. Close with the prayers prepared by the participants. Sit in one circle (or several, depending on the size of your group) and have each family or group read its prayer. The leader can then close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the families present.

Note: This can be a long session. Spend less time on reviewing the ideas (no more than five minutes per section) and more time on family activities. People learn more by doing.



SESSION THREE

Families and Hard Times

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There is no family that sails through life without facing hardships. Because of the closeness of relationships, family members often feel tension between them. And sometimes situations beyond our control occur and greatly influence the normal functioning of our lives. During the times of stress we depend on our faith, our learning, and the trust we have built into those relationships to sustain us. Hopefully, the relationships themselves will grow, not just the individuals.

Discipline

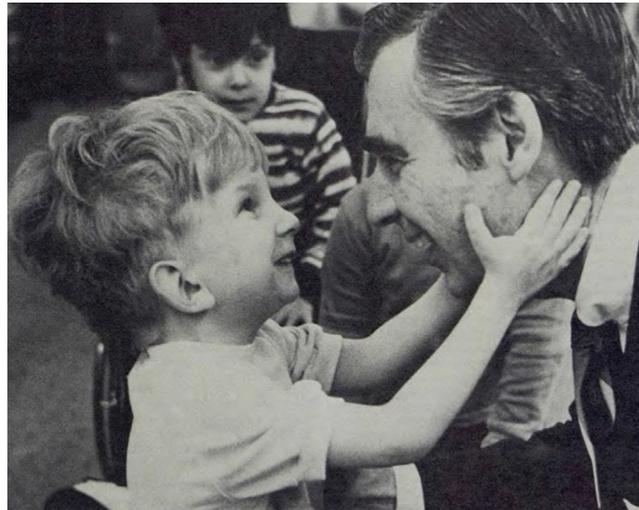
Discipline is a difficult word because it has so many different meanings for people. Often people attach a negative connotation to discipline. But discipline and punishment are different. Discipline is positive. It is teaching children things which are important. The root for the word “discipline” is the same as the root for the word “disciple.”

Discipline is the gift we give to our children daily as we help them to learn what is good for them and what is not. As we set examples for our children, pass on traditions and values, and as we comfort and nurture our children, we are leading them toward self-discipline and independence. We do the same in faith formation, nurturing the *discipline* of spiritual practices as we share our faith with our children.

Discipline depends on intimacy and trust more than distance and authority. As we care for our children, we move closer to them both physically and spiritually. They absorb the values we hold dear and begin to live as we live. The better our children know and understand us, the more successful our teaching will be.

When our children break away from our teaching in ways we cannot allow, then we have to choose what to do. At these times, parents can choose between power punishments and loving punishments. Power punishments are often physical and accompanied by intense anger. Loving punishments are usually restrictions appropriate to the situation. These restrictions are understandable to the child, occur within a short time after a rule is broken, and don't communicate that the child is bad.

Children want very much to be loved. They want to feel secure in their relationship with their parents and caregivers. Parents and caregivers want the same. Amid conflict over rules, that love may feel strained. But we can know that our love and our children's love continue and can outlast anger and conflict.



Sometimes our children, and we as adults, feel like we must

compete for someone else's love. In class, with siblings and with adults, we sense the differences of others and can wonder if we are losing the respect and attention of someone important to us. Reassurance is needed by those we love. We want to know that what we have to offer is still important to that special person. A comforting adult can help children see that there are indeed things that are special about them.

When we think of adults modeling discipline—care and nurture—for children, it's important to consider the impact of television and social media on our lives. Behavior displayed via these avenues can lack the kind of maturity we wish for our children and ourselves to develop. We all have violent feelings from time to time. Seeing behavior on screens that is not held in check may lead children to wonder if adults know how to control themselves, or if they even want to. Some children live in the midst of violence gone unchecked, and this type of life is repeated on the screens of their devices.

Anxious feelings may be the result of this display of violence. We can present a different behavioral option for our children. We can build a world of reality that they can trust to be workable even in the most difficult circumstances. After all, what good is peacemaking if it cannot be useful during times of conflict?

Especially Hard Times

Sometimes the experiences of life are difficult and call for all the strength that we can muster. Death, divorce, severe illness, and drug abuse are some examples of situations which are especially hard—both for individuals and for families.

Much has been written on how to cope with each of these situations. This resource cannot cover the wide scope of information available. What we can do here is to talk about family relationships during these crises.

The first step in coping with any difficult moment is to acknowledge the complexity of feelings one is having. We can't escape the severity of a situation by pretending to be stoic. Real courage is the willingness to admit the depth of your personal response to a crisis. At that point you can then find ways to cope with the feelings.

Parents and caregivers sometimes hope to spare children by not sharing their sadness with them. This is often a mistake. From the moment of conception, children develop a skill of picking up the feeling level in a conversation or even in a body movement. They sense that something is different before they understand what that something is. They respond to our tone of voice as much as to our words of reason. They learn to know their parents or caregivers intimately.

For this reason, in most situations, it is wiser to share with a child the truth of what is happening. If children are left to wonder what is wrong, their imaginations often produce an answer that is far worse than the actual truth. The truth is tangible and can be dealt with. An unknown fear that can't be discussed is confusing and anxiety-producing.

Family members may be perceiving a situation differently, and so it important to pay attention to these differences. One way to clarify how children are perceiving a situation is to listen carefully to their questions and then ask a question as a response. For example, "Why did Mommy go away" doesn't give a clue as to what



the child really wants to know. If the parent asks, "Why do you think Mommy went away?" the child's response may help to illuminate what the child is worried about. If the child says, "Because I was bad," then the adult is in a better position to speak to what is really worrying the child. We have to talk and listen to children in order to understand the meaning of their questions and statements.

Children may believe that a bad situation has been caused by them. They need to know that sometimes bad things just happen, and they are not necessarily anybody's fault. We can do our best, but we can't always explain the rest of the world's actions, or nature, or accidents.

When stress is being felt by everyone, constant questioning by children is tiring. What we need to understand is that children gain reassurance by hearing the

repetition of an answer. Just as a familiar story is comforting, the same answer over time reassures the child of what is true. It takes time and repetition for the truth to be absorbed and believed.

Children need their parents or caregivers during these difficult moments. Parents and caregivers may also find that their children can be a source of support for them. The very presence and liveliness of children can remind people of the beauty of life. Their need for care can draw adults out of their misery and give purpose and meaning to life. And their sensitivity to others' feelings in moments of real crisis can bring warmth to a person who is suffering.

Being There for Your Children

Once a person becomes a parent, or even a caregiver, they will always know that role. If the child leaves home, if the relationship is strained, even if the child dies, the adult knows the feeling of having cared for a person who is a part of them. Parenting and caregiving evoke memories and changes that are not foreseen. They occur because the adult is there—present with the child as they grow.

Because stressful times test our skills to the limit, we want to mention four ways an adult can be present with a child all the time—in stressful times and good times. Being there is a skill that parents and caregivers develop as they listen, wait, stand firm, and talk with the child. It results in mutual growth. It changes who we are.

Listening to our children is of primary importance. If we make ourselves available to them and listen to what *they* want to say, we will hear what is important to them. When we talked about feelings in the first session, we said that children will talk about their play. When they do talk, we, as adults, need to listen to their message. Sometimes it is tempting to begin to evaluate what the child is saying and respond with our interpretation. If we can stop and listen first, we may learn more. A child who comes home from school and says, “I hate my teacher!” has more to say about what happened that day in school. If we get caught up in a discussion of the appropriateness of the child's language, we'll probably never hear the end of the story. The child's strong feelings, their experience in school, what the teacher said or did, what the child thought about the experience—all these things are waiting to be shared if we listen.

Much of parenting and caregiving involves waiting. You wait for a child to arrive. You wait for that child to walk, talk, go to school, play on teams, bring the car home at night, get married, and perhaps have children. It is an expectant, active waiting. Parents and caregivers anticipate the pleasure the child can have and wait to see what kind of person the child will become. Knowing that the child will act when ready helps parents and caregivers to relax.

The transition from one stage to another is unsettling for children. They take comfort in the familiar ways of functioning. They may even go back a step or two before moving forward. They are getting themselves ready for a change. Children who are twelve may play with toys one day and talk about the school dance the next day. They need to test out this new way of life before committing themselves to it.

Being there as a parent or caregiver can also mean standing firm. It means being who you are as a person. We let children know which values are important to us because of who we are and how we were raised. We set limits because of those values, and we set limits to protect our children.

Because limit-setting grows out of who we are, spouses have to learn how to mesh two different backgrounds. Building a family gives people the opportunity to think about their values, their beliefs, and their habits. When children enter the family, the adults need to be comfortable with the limits chosen.

Standing firm allows children to know with assurance what their parents or caregivers believe. It provides a strong sounding board against which they can test out their own beliefs. When they do test their beliefs, and those beliefs challenge those of the adults, the adults need to respond in a way that the children's beliefs are respected, too. Comparisons allow a child to understand the different choices they will eventually have to make for their own lives. Living within limits set by adults, but examining other options, will lead children toward a self-discipline based on choice.

Perhaps the most important part of parenting and caregiving is talking together with a child. Talking and listening with our children means including the very good times and the very difficult times. We will talk about sadness, disappointment, anger, frustration, danger, and death. But we will also talk about love, compassion, commitment, integrity, and the preciousness of life. The sharing of good experiences and bad ones help both adults and children grow as human beings. It will also lead them toward closer relationships.





SESSION THREE

Families and Hard Times

CURRICULUM DESIGN

OBJECTIVES:

1. To remember that love is the sustaining power that will bring a person (and a family) through those difficult experiences
2. To explore and name values important for each family
3. To begin to understand feelings when family rules are broken
4. To share times when a family member has been helpful or supportive

MATERIALS:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bible | <input type="checkbox"/> Art supplies for gift making |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hymnal or hymn words | (modeling clay, water colors, etc) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Piano or recording | <input type="checkbox"/> Markers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pencils/pens | <input type="checkbox"/> Glue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strips of paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Tape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Box or bowl to draw from for each group | <input type="checkbox"/> Scissors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Card making supplies (blank cards, envelopes) | <input type="checkbox"/> Construction paper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stickers | <input type="checkbox"/> Wrapping paper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Punches | <input type="checkbox"/> Boxes |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Ribbons/bows |

Opening and Warm-Ups (10 minutes)

Instructions are as follows:

1. Begin with a prayer thanking God for forgiveness and grace.
2. Read the scripture passage Romans 8:35–39.
3. Sing some hymns which refer to the enduring love and salvation offered to us by God, through Jesus Christ. (Suggestion: “Amazing Grace.”)

Discipline (25 minutes)

PRESENTATION

Review the major points from the background information, both the introductory paragraph and the section on “discipline.” The points you might include are:

- Discipline is positive. The root of the word “discipline” is the same as the root for the word “disciple.” It is the continuing care and nurture which parents and caregivers provide for their children.
- Discipline depends on intimacy and trust more than distance and authority. It is by sharing our values that we help people know who we are.
- Punishment is what sometimes happens when someone breaks away from a set limit or value. Punishment can be based on power or love.
- Love continues throughout anger and conflict. Reassurance of a person’s love is important.
- We learn self-discipline by having it modeled for us.

ACTIVITY: TELL FAMILY STORIES

Instructions are as follows:

Have each family sit in a circle. People who are present without families can work together or join another family if there aren’t enough to create a new group. Ask each person to answer three questions and then relate those answers to the rest of the family. The three questions are:

1. What is one family rule which you have broken?
2. What happened when you broke that rule?
3. How did you feel as a result of what happened?

Note: It will be helpful to families if you can give an example from your own life. A friend once told us that she failed a course because she cut too many classes. Her father, who highly valued education, responded by asking, “Did you do your best?” The friend felt the meaning of those words far more than any punishment. She disappointed her father and wasted his money.

Especially Hard Times (30 minutes)

PRESENTATION

Review the major points from the background information, “Especially Hard Times.” Your points might include:

- Sometimes families face situations which are unusually difficult, like death, divorce, severe illness and drug abuse.
- Coping with these crises means acknowledging the feelings we have in response to them.
- Often, if we are not told the truth, we will make up our own explanations for the feelings we sense in another person.
- Difficult things are not necessarily anyone’s fault. We sometimes need reassurance that this is so.
- Children and adults can be a source of support for one another during difficult moments.

ACTIVITY: MAKE A GIFT.

Instructions are as follows:

1. Ask families or groups to sit together and put their names on slips of paper in a box. Each person will draw one name from the box. Then each family member will think of a time when he/she was sad or in difficulty and the person whose name was drawn did something helpful. The experience does not have to be as severe a crisis as death or divorce. Any situation that is important to the person will demonstrate the importance of family support.

People who are participating without their families should do this activity even if the person they are remembering is not present. They would not put a name in the box, however.

2. Ask each person to make a gift for the person who was helpful and wrap that gift for later in the session.
 - A big table with a large variety of art supplies should be available for picture drawing and special creations. Since some people don’t enjoy crafts, they might enjoy writing a letter of thanks, a poem, or a short story about the incident.
 - Young children may need guidance thinking about a particular incident and a gift they would like to make. The adults in their group might help them think about the activity.
 - Provide wrapping paper, ribbon and boxes for wrapping gifts. Tape and scissors will be helpful, too.

Being There (20 minutes)

PRESENTATION

Review the major points from this section of the background information. Your points might include:

- We are all able to grow as people stand with us and support us.
- Being there means listening to each other.
- Being there means waiting. None of us grow or change until we are ready to do so.
- Being there means standing firm with our values but respecting other people's values as well.
- Being there means talking together. Talk about sadness, disappointment, anger, frustrations, danger, and death. But also talk about love, compassion, commitment, integrity, and the preciousness of life.

ACTIVITY: PRESENT THE GIFT

Instructions are as follows:

Ask families to sit together again. Members should take turns presenting their gifts to one another. As a gift is given, the story behind it should be shared. The recipient can then open the gift. People who made a gift for someone not present should tell the story behind the gift and present the gift to that person later, if possible.

Closing (5 minutes)

1. Draw families together and tell them that in the next and final session you will be discussing family celebrations. Remind participants that the fourth session will last an hour and 45 minutes.
2. Read the lyrics to the song, "Good People Sometimes Do Bad Things" (*Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*).
3. Close with a prayer thanking God for being with us when times are hard.

Good People Sometimes Do Bad Things

Good people sometimes think bad things,
Good people dream bad things, don't you?
Good people even say bad things,
Once in a while we do.

Good people sometimes wish bad things,
Good people try bad things, don't you?
Good people even do bad things,
Once in a while we do.

Has anybody said you're good lately?
Has anybody said you're nice?
And have you wondered how they could,
Wondered once or twice?

Did you forget that good people sometimes feel bad things?
Good people want bad things, they do!
Good people even do bad things,
Once in a while we do,
Good people sometimes do.



SESSION FOUR

Families and Celebrations

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Celebration of Life

Healthy growth and worthwhile joint enterprise require caring relationships. The fostering of these relationships is the purpose of this peacemaking resource—to help family members live together in mutual trust, building one another’s self-esteem.

Family members provide the support and care for one another that we need as human beings, but the relationships are not without work. They are a gift from God that we must nurture. As we work at ways to express our feelings and our individuality, as we listen to others do the same, and as we experience the hardships of life, we move toward an intimacy that brings deeper meaning to our lives.

This recognition that life is indeed precious is what we celebrate from time to time when we gather together. In spite of our differences and our difficulties, we share a common bond. The celebration of that bond refreshes us and reminds us of our commitment to one another.

For Christians, that commitment begins with God and is strengthened by God. As we celebrate—birthdays, Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, MLK Day, the Fourth of July, Juneteenth, homecoming, send offs, whatever the occasion—we remember the preciousness of life and the richness of relationships.

Family Connections

Family gatherings bring us together with those who have a special connection to us. Families share histories from generation to generation. To understand these connections is a mammoth task for young children. First, they must determine the difference between themselves and other objects. Then comes the recognition that people all have certain relationships to one another. Parents, caregivers, grandparents, siblings—each has a certain place in the family. Imagine the confusion when first grasping such concepts as grandparents, cousins, uncles, and aunts! How can my mommy have a mommy? Something that seems so simple as we grow older is confusing in the beginning. The more a child gets together with the larger family, the more

that child sorts through their own place within that family. One of the things that we all learn by living in families is that the love of those people important to us must be shared with other people in the family. As children, we see our parents show affection to our siblings. At larger family reunions we see uncles, aunts, and grandparents spend time with us and time with cousins. The wonderful lesson in what we see is that, unlike material goods, affection given to one person doesn't diminish the amount left for me.



How wonderful for children to discover that many, many people love them. Sometimes children develop very special relationships with grandparents. Grandparents are different from parents. They may allow children to do things that their parents do not allow or restrict them in other ways. Whatever the differences, the child develops a bond with someone connected to him or her. Yet, this person is different from the parent or caregiver who provides the daily care so important to growth.

Sometimes conflict arises for parents or caregivers because of those differences. But they can be sure that their authority is not being replaced when grandparents use different rules with children. Those grandparents are widening the circle of love for the child. The child will learn to respond with a special love for the grandparent.

Preparing to Celebrate

Although much of the physical planning and preparation is left up to the adults in a family, each person, adult and child alike, has expectations and feelings as they look forward to a special family event. Including each person in some way in the preparations can help us realize what is important to those individuals. What a wonderful opportunity to talk—about family relationships, about values, about the traditions that we hold most dear!

Usually, the person who is planning for an event has a vision of what will happen. That person organizes everything around that vision, sometimes only to discover that others have been working with different visions. If the New Year's Day dinner is hot and steaming on the table, but the family is watching the last exciting minutes of a bowl game, the cook and the football fans didn't share the same vision. Talking

together ahead of time about what is going to occur can help to avoid these misunderstandings. The best time to share a meal, who expects to sit where, what job each person will do, and lots of other details are part of the planning.

Organizational details are only one part of the planning, though. Because family gatherings are attended by the people who are so special to us, we have a wealth of feelings and experiences to think about as we look forward to the celebration. We remember what we did with whom and how we felt about it. Those memories come rushing forward as we anticipate seeing these people. As we talk about those feelings and experiences, we can begin to realize what makes events so special to us.

As our children prepare, they love to hear stories about times when they were little and times when their parents or caregivers were little. The stories help to sort out that lifelong puzzle of who we are in relationship to others. A parent or caregiver who felt pleasure as a child playing with trains at Christmastime may be one who helps a child build a train set. A parent or caregiver who enjoyed decorating the tree as a child may be the adult who looks forward to decorating the tree with their own children. Also, there may be new traditions that we will start with our children that will become special for them as they grow.

The same practices that lend a sense of specialness to the occasion for an older child or an adult may be the very practices which are difficult for younger children in the family. Sitting for a long time at the table around a special meal is frequently a part of family gatherings. The enjoyment of that habit is something children develop as they grow. Letting the younger children get up and play between the main course and dessert is one way to keep the tradition of the leisurely meal and yet be responsive to the capabilities of the youngest family members.

There are for each of us parts of celebrations that we do not like. Talking about those ahead of time often helps us think of new ways to respond. When a celebration becomes an obligation to do things that we don't enjoy, it is no longer a celebration.

Let's Celebrate!

During large celebrations, festive spirits are often contagious to adults and children. The preparations, feelings, and expectations culminate in the celebration itself. The more people present, the more stimulation we receive.

Sometimes it is good to take a step back during a celebration and check out what is happening for your child. If the excitement has been building, your child may need a moment or two of quiet with you. If you've been busy with others, perhaps your child would like some private time with you. Parents and caregivers are particularly sensitive to behavior changes in their own children. Paying attention to what children are

doing can often help us to foresee their tiredness, overstimulation, or loneliness before they get overwhelmed by the feeling.

Touching base with children at these moments reminds them that your relationship is a safety zone. When we begin to feel overwhelmed during an experience, the people most special to us are the ones who can help us regulate our emotions.



Quiet family gatherings can also be ways of celebrating. The fact that each person is reserving time to be with others underlines the importance each is placing on being together. Families whose members are very busy might well choose to celebrate a birthday in a quiet way.

Celebrations are an expression of the joy we feel in response to a special event. The birth of a person in our family, the beginning of a marriage, a graduation, the success of a crop, the achievement of a goal—each is a landmark in the life of a person or the growth of a group. Weekly worship for Christians is the celebration of our relationship with God made possible through Jesus Christ.

Often, because of our wish to express this joy, we look for the gift or the experience that will match the feeling. In giving a gift or providing an experience for someone else, we are giving ourselves. We want the recipient to feel the depth of our caring because that is our true gift. An item in the box or the offering plate is an important symbol.

What we need to remember, both in giving and receiving gifts and in planning and participating in celebrations, is that the person behind the gift and the celebration is what is important. Each of us has a tremendous longing to be accepted and appreciated for who we are by those we love. The very best gift we can receive is the confirmation of who we are in the family. That is the free gift we receive from God. That is the free gift we can give to others.

After the Party is Over

Have you ever ended a celebration and wished it could have lasted forever? Family vacations can sometimes be that kind of celebration. And then there are times when celebrations are over, and you know that they were not quite what you had in mind.

Pondering these thoughts, both about successful celebrations and disappointing ones, can help a person prepare for the next celebration. After some time has passed, the family can share reactions to what happened during a family gathering.

Responses to gifts and activities are as varied as the people involved. An extravagant gift or party can create gratitude or guilt depending upon the recipient. Families can talk about feelings that arose, which things were done that were helpful, and which things were done that were disappointing. In this process, family members will begin to see that an event is not all bad or all good, but that it is an experience from which the family will grow and learn.

By talking about the things that each person would do the same or differently, the family emphasizes the continuing importance of each person's participation. The family looks forward to the next event, with the expectation that the members will be glad to be together.

Although events end, ideas change, and family members grow up, move away, and die, the continuity of the family is maintained. The living of life creates the memories and the relationships which pass from generation to generation. The basic truth of the love that is given brings meaning that never passes away. A child that plays around the table may one day grow up and sit at the head of the table. Values, traditions, and faith are passed from generation to generation.



SESSION FOUR

Families and Celebrations

CURRICULUM DESIGN

OBJECTIVES:

1. To name connections among relatives visually creating an family tree
2. To practice in talking together about celebrations
3. To plan for a family event that really will occur in the future
4. To experience being members of the larger family of God

MATERIALS:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bible | <input type="checkbox"/> Felt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hymn words and music | <input type="checkbox"/> Glitter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsprint | <input type="checkbox"/> Glue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Markers | <input type="checkbox"/> Scissors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tape | <input type="checkbox"/> Straight pins |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White paper or notebook paper
branches | <input type="checkbox"/> A large felt banner with tree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pens/pencils | |

Opening and Warm-ups (5 minutes)

1. Begin with a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of families—their variety, their support, their place in the larger church family.
2. Explain that in this, the last session, we will talk about who, how, and what we celebrate as families. Read Psalm 100 in unison.
3. Sing a hymn of praise. For example, “For the Beauty of the Earth” or “’Tis a Gift to Be Simple”.

The Celebration of Life (20 minutes)

PRESENTATION

Review the major points from the background information's two sections, "The Celebration of Life," and "Family Connections." Your points might include:

- Peacemaking is the fostering of caring relationships.
- Family gatherings give us the opportunity to celebrate the preciousness of life and our commitment to one another.
- Love can be shared without being diminished.

ACTIVITY: MAKE A FAMILY TREE

Instructions are as follows:

1. Ask families to get a large sheet of newsprint and a magic marker and then to find an area in the room to work together. Those who are present without their family can draw their own family tree.
2. Draw a family tree. Make the roots represent the parents, grandparents, great-grandparents. The branches can represent the children.
3. Depending upon time and energy, aunts and uncles can also be included in the family tree. Encourage families to get creative if they need to represent special people who are *like* family.
4. Graphic representation will help children visualize the connections among members more easily. This is important even if death or divorce has occurred within families or if there is family blending. Creative ways can be found to show the exiting of a spouse from a marriage and yet the maintenance of the relationship with the child. Children need to know how they are connected to their family even if the family does not all live together.
5. Showing a pre-drawn sample of your own family tree will be helpful.
6. Display the family trees on the wall if you wish.

Preparing to Celebrate (20 minutes)

PRESENTATION

Review the major points in the background information's section on "Preparing to Celebrate," which include:

- Including each family member in planning for special gatherings sheds light on each person's expectations and feelings surrounding that gathering.
- Talking together as plans are made helps to avoid misunderstandings.
- Family gatherings evoke special memories and feelings.
- Telling stories of earlier gatherings solidifies our view of who we are as family members.
- Rituals that cause difficulty for some family members can be altered slightly to help those persons.
- Choices in the midst of celebration help us to have some control over what will happen to us.

ACTIVITY: PLAN A PARTY!

Instructions are as follows:

1. Instruct families to get a sheet of paper and a pencil and sit together. If you have formed a group of people who are present without their families, ask them to tell one another about the next festive event in their lives.
2. Ask groups to decide what family gathering will be coming up soon and to plan that event right now. Participants are to keep in mind the following:
 - "Family gathering" can be defined any way that they wish.
 - Each person's comments are to be taken seriously.
 - Pleasing all of the people all of the time is the goal, but each person may need to compromise.
 - If families are not finished at the end of the allotted time, they should make an appointment with one another for the purpose of completing the task.

Celebrating and After the Party (20 minutes)

PRESENTATION

Review the major points from the sections in the background information entitled “Let’s Celebrate,” and “After the Party is Over.”

- At special celebrations, we should pay attention to what is happening for each member of our family and offer caring if it’s needed.
- Celebrations are an expression of the joy we feel in response to a special event.
- Gifts are symbols for our caring.
- Each of us has a longing to be accepted and appreciated for who we are by those we love. The confirmation of that person is the best gift of all.
- Sharing our appreciations and disappointments about a recent celebration helps us to plan for the next one.
- The continuing of the love that passes from generation to generation brings meaning to life.

ACTIVITY: MAKE A FAMILY SYMBOL

Instructions are as follows:

1. Have families sit together and decide what symbol best characterizes their family. Examples of ideas that come to mind for your own family will stimulate other families’ ideas.
2. Give each family a packet of felt pieces, glitter, glue and scissors. Ask them to make their family symbol “banner” in order to hang it on a larger banner of the church’s family tree. If there are individuals who do not have their families present, give each of them supplies and ask them to make a family symbol of their own.

Closing: The Church's Family Tree (30 minutes)

ACTIVITY: DECORATE A BANNER

Instructions are as follows:

1. Show those present a colorful banner made from felt depicting a very large tree. The roots of the tree are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (or, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer). The trunk leads up to branches which are green but show no fruit. Explain that this is the church's family tree, and the families present are to hang their symbols upon it.
2. Ask each family in turn to explain its symbol and pin it on the tree. You will need to supply the straight pins for people to use.

CLOSING

1. When the above activity is finished, sing together the hymn which was sung at the opening of the first session: "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," or another familiar song.
2. Close with a prayer for God's guidance.



Peacemaking in the Family

Additional Resources

Building a Neighborhood Together

This is an intergenerational peacemaking project Neighborhood Together
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/building-a-neighborhood-together-an-intergenerational-peacemaking-project/>

Peaceful Neighbor: Discovering the Countercultural Mister Rogers

<https://www.pcusastore.com/Products/0664260470/peaceful-neighbor.aspx>

Fred Rogers Institute

<https://www.fredrogersinstitute.org/>

Fred Rogers Productions

<https://www.fredrogers.org/>

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood

<https://www.misterrogers.org/watch/>

Mr. Rogers Day

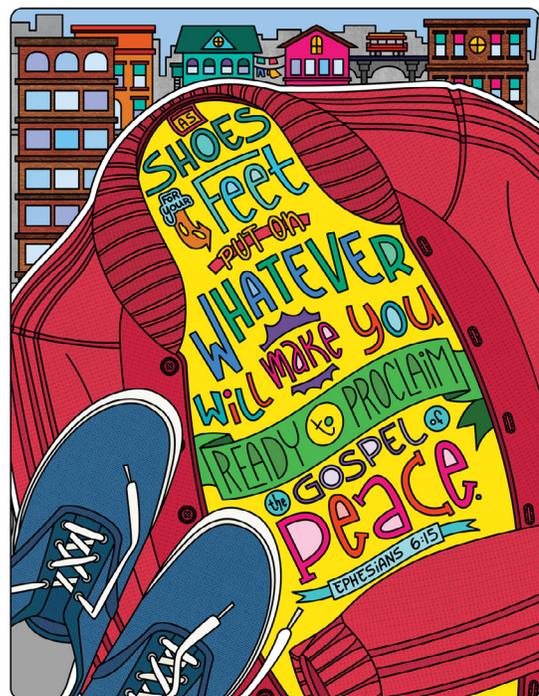
All PCUSA Mr. Rogers Day resources including worship outline, hymn, and additional activity suggestions.

www.pcusa.org/mrogers

Mr. Rogers Coloring Page

Reproduced on the following page or available online in different sizes.

www.pcusa.org/mrogers



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