

It's You I Like!

Building Belonging in Our Neighborhoods— Lessons Learned from Fred Rogers

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International Early Childhood Inclusion Institute

June 2026

Image by Walczyk 2026





Today's Goals

The Rogers' Approach

Learn how Mister Rogers' Neighborhood integrated disability content across the program and related activities.

Learn about the 6 Fundamentals of Learning and Growing

Examples

Review examples from Mister Rogers' Neighborhood episodes, songs, and characters.

Review current children's television programs episodes and characters.

Strategies for Inclusion

Plan what you can do to live Fred Rogers' vision to improve the inclusion and sense of belonging for children with disabilities in their communities and programs.

Introductions

Dr. Jenna Weglarz-Ward

- Early childhood and special educator
- Faculty at University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Research Coordinator at Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center
- Executive Board of national and state Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC) and Family Voices
- Former Fred Rogers Inquiry Educator
- Always a PBS Kid
- Mom of 4

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This project is supported by the Fred Rogers Institute



What is a favorite childhood television, movie, or book moment that has stayed with you as a grown up?

Why has it stayed with you?

Please write it in the chat, if you want to share.



Welcome

Video from PBSKids



Mister Rogers' Neighborhood

DEC/NAEYC Inclusion Statement (2026)



Access

- Physical accessibility
- Social environment (mindset)
- Universal Design for Learning



Participation

- Embedded and routine-based learning
- Tiered support, differentiation, individualization
- Family partnership and coaching



Belonging

- Relationships and interactions
- Honor & affirm disability
- Co-create experiences & environments



Supports



- Professional supports
- Family supports
- Systems supports
- Adult learning

Belonging as Foundational to Learning


- Talked to the viewer
- Built a relationship with viewer
- ‘Breaking the 4th wall’
- Using developmentally appropriate language
- Explained ideas and concepts
- Slow pace and pauses
- Used repetition
- Modeled belonging



Image from Fred Rogers' Production



“What matters most is how children feel about their uniqueness once they begin to realize that they are different from everyone else. How each one of us comes to feel about our individual uniqueness has a strong influence on how we feel about everyone's uniqueness--whether we grow into adults who rejoice in the diversity of the world's people or into adults who fear and resent that diversity.”—Fred Rogers



Fred Rogers' Disability Work Across Time



Before Mister Rogers' Neighborhood

- 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children
- 1912 Children's Bureau (DHHS/ACF) is established
- 1922 Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) established
- 1926 NAEYC established
- 1935 CB Program for Crippled Children (Social Security Act)
- 1950 ARC established
- 1965 Maternal and Child Health and Mental Retardation Planning Amendments
- 1965 Head Start Established
- 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Rogers Activities

- 1968 Mister Rogers' Neighborhood premieres (runs through 2001, 912 episodes)
- Chef Don Brockett is recurring cast member
- Over 50 episodes are directly related to disability
- 1969 Fred Rogers testifies at Congress
- 1972 & 1975 Receives grant from BEH to produce episodes and materials specifically about disability inclusion and belonging
- 1973 Chrissy Thompson, Mr. McFeely's granddaughter, is introduced
- 1975 Deaf and HH Series Airs
- 1981 Jeff Erlanger visits
- 1989 Special Olympics Episode
- 1998 You and I Together Series Airs
- 2000 Extraordinary Friends (children's book) published

Disability Related Activities

- 1967 Bureau of the Education of the Handicapped (BEH)
- 1972 Mills and PARC Cases
- 1973 Rehabilitation Act Section 504 (end of Ugly Laws)
- 1973 Division for Early Childhood of CEC is established
- 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act
- 1986 Reauthorization of Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1986—Part C(H))
- 1990 Child Care and Development Grant
- 1990 Americans with Disability Act

Post Mister Rogers' Neighborhood

- 2012 Daniel Tiger—Chrissie, Max
- 2021 Alma's Way—Eddie
- 2021 Donkey Hodie—Jeff the Mouse

Other productions:

- 2015 Julia on Sesame Street
- 2020 Hero Elementary
- 2024 Carl the Collector
- 2025 Rae on Skillville

Continued Disability Related Activities:

- 2004 IDEA Improvement Act
- 2009 DEC/NAEYC Inclusion Position Statement (update coming 2026)
- 2010 Rosa's Law

• 2015 & 2023 Federal Inclusion Statements (2015; 2023)

“...to help get the handicapped into the mainstream of human activity to help both the non-handicapped and handicapped perceived that the handicapped belong in and are part of the mainstream society.”

–Fred Rogers from BEH Grant Proposal 1972



Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and their family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society...include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential.

DEC/NAEYC (2009); Policy Statement on Inclusion of Young Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs (2023)



Intentional Planning



Overall Approach



Introduce topic and wondering

See it the real world—
examples (guests,
fieldtrips, play)

See it in the Land of
Make Believe—
characters work things
out at the child level
Example

Leave us with big take
away and a song

Holistic Strategies to Inclusion



- Mister Rogers talks directly to children and their families.
- Integration of regular and guest characters
- People visit Mister Rogers and Mister Rogers visits others—learn from lived experiences and see examples of natural environments and inclusion (check out Episode 1730, July 1998)
- Grants to produce suites of materials—
 - I Like You Just the Way You Are (1972)
 - I Am, I Can, and I Will Series (1975)
 - Permanent sets (Brockett's Bakery)
 - Use of consultants
 - Supplemental materials (e.g., newsletters, books, music)

“Your show has taught us both so much....since she started walking (at 23 ½ mons!) she kissed the T.V.”

—Mother of child with microcephaly

Example of Episode Series



You and I Together (July 1998)

Episodes (5)

- Wheelchair adaptation for van
- Koko the Gorilla and sign language
- Going to the eye doctor
- Teenager with a disability, Trey, and guide dogs
- Visits Center for Creative Play

Newsletter—Mr. Rogers Neighborhood Childcare Partnership:
Around the Neighborhood

Connection—Neighborhood Poster (summary of episode,
activity, adult interaction ideas)

See similar approach on [Fred Rogers' Productions](#) and [PBSKids websites](#)



Songs and Music



- Songs were short and repetitive.
- We used many times across different episodes.
- We song to the viewer.

See full list of songs [here](#).

It's You I Like (1971)

It's you I like,
It's not the things you wear,
It's not the way you do your hair,
But it's you I like.
The way you are right now,
The way down deep inside you.
Not the things that hide you,
Not your toys,
They're just beside you.
But it's you I like.
Every part of you.
Your skin, your eyes, your feelings
Whether old or new.
I hope that you'll remember,
Even when you're feeling blue.
That it's you I like,
It's you yourself
It's you.
It's you I like.

Other notable songs related to inclusion of children with disabilities:

[*You Are You*](#)

[*Look and Listen*](#)

[*I'm Taking Care of You*](#)

[*It's You I Like*](#)

[*You Are Special*](#)




“[Paul] has learned all of your wonderful songs and can actually sing a song which expresses his feelings”—Mother of a child with autism

Name changed for privacy



Characters and Guests

“It’s the people who feel strong and good about themselves inside who are best able to accept outside differences—their own or others’. We help children develop this ability every time we affirm how special they are to us for being themselves how special to us are all they things that make each person different from anyone else.”—Fred Rogers



Recurring Character Highlights



Baker Don Brockett

Photo from Fred Rogers Productions



Maggie Stewart (Mayor Maggie)

Photo from Fred Rogers Productions

Often Guests Character Highlights



Eric Kloss

Photo from Neighborhood Archives



Tom Scanlon

Photo from Neighborhood Archives

Lasting Characters: Chrissie



“The episodes on visiting the doctor and hospital were particularly helpful....it was also wonderful to see Mr. McFeely’s granddaughter with a walker and crutches....she really enjoyed seeing Chrissy...It is important that children with disabilities are seen on television and in our communities.”

—Mother is child with multiple disabilities and uses a wheelchair

Chrissie Today



Lasting Characters: Jeff



What Jeff the Mouse in Donkey Hodie episode [Hee-hee Hiders and Seekers](#) (on PBS Kids)
Great [article](#) from Wisconsin PBS on the Jeff and Jeff the Mouse (voiced by Jay Manuel)



The 6 Fundamentals

(1983-present)



www.fredrogersinstitute.org



FRED ROGERS' FUNDAMENTALS OF LEARNING AND GROWING

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. These included...

- 1 Self-worth**
- 2 Trust**
- 3 Curiosity**
- 4 Solitude**
- 5 Looking & Listening Carefully**
- 6 Play**



Sense of Self Worth



- Belief in our value as a unique and important individual.
- Connected to value and respect of themselves and others.
- Relies on confidence and self-esteem.
- Ability to share your gifts with the world.

This is tied to the concept of Rightful Presence (see DEC/NAEYC (2026) Policy Statement on Inclusion in Early Childhood).

What are you doing in your family, community, or program to support the self worth of children with disabilities and developmental delays and their families?

“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

You are Special (1968)



You are my friend
You are special
You are my friend
You're special to me.
You are the only one like you.
Like you, my friend, I like you.
In the daytime
In the nighttime
Any time that you feel's the right time
For a friendship with me, you see
F-R-I-E-N-D special
You are my friend
You're special to me.
There's only one in this wonderful world
You are special.



Sense of Trust & Curiosity



Trust

- Consider your level of confidence in yourself and others.
- This is built through relationships.
- Relies on understanding and sharing your feelings and help others feel like they can share theirs.

How can we build trust with families and learn to trust children in their own learning?

Curiosity

- How we wonder, explore, and learn about the world
- We need safe environments and supportive caregivers
- We learn about ourselves, others, and the world

How are we allowing children with disabilities to be curious?

Look and Listen Carefully & Solitude



Look & Listen

- Listen and observe the world around us.
- Consider active listening, taking time to step back, not judging.
- Slow down—be mindful—give people your attention.
- Notice body language and interactions.

What do you do to listen to the observe the children, families, and communities around you?

Solitude

- Bring present and connecting with yourself.
- You can reflect and explore your feelings.
- Celebrate your joy, plan for your challenges.

How you do honor the solitude of children with disabilities, your families, and yourself?





Play!

How do we encourage or hinder play for children with disabilities and share play with families?





We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say 'It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.' Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes."—Fred Rogers



Resources



Engaging with the work of Fred Rogers

Fred Rogers Institute

- Educators Neighborhood
- Symposium Series
- Simple Interaction
- Work of Fred Rogers Conference
- [Archive](#)

Fred Rogers Productions

(you can also find current episodes and learning materials on PBS Kids)

You can watch Mister Rogers' Neighborhood on YouTube, PBSKids, Amazon Video, and Neighborhood Archive.





Using Children's Media



Children's Media and Disability



Children's Media Usage

- In 1968, there were limited children's programming and overall screen activities.
- Today, US children spent about 3 hours interacting with screen media (up to 7; See [American College of Pediatrics, 2020](#)).
- Pediatricians and media specialists recommend very limited screen time for children under 5—with focus on high quality programming and interactive watching (see [NAEYC/Rogers, 2012](#))

Disability Representation in Children's Media

- 1968 almost no representation of disability in media. Today, still very limited number of positive characters in children's media.
- In the past, disabled characters were often portrayed by non-disabled actors. Currently, disabled characters are more often portrayed by disabled actors.
- Disabled characters are more commonly included as villains or comic relief.
- Disabled characters are often not in regular cast, used for 'inspiration', or must overcome obstacles.

We are getting better!

- Chrissie and Max on Daniel Tigers' Neighborhood
- Eddie on Alma's Way
- Jeff the Mouse on Donkey Hodie
- Julia on Sesame Street
- Carl the Collector (Carl, Lotta, and Paolo)
- Hero Elementary
- Dougie and Jack on Bluey
- Goldie's Mom on Goldie & Bear
- Ice Cub on PJ Masks
- Rae on Skillsville
- Pablo on Pablo



Strategies for Using Children's Television to Support Inclusive Experiences



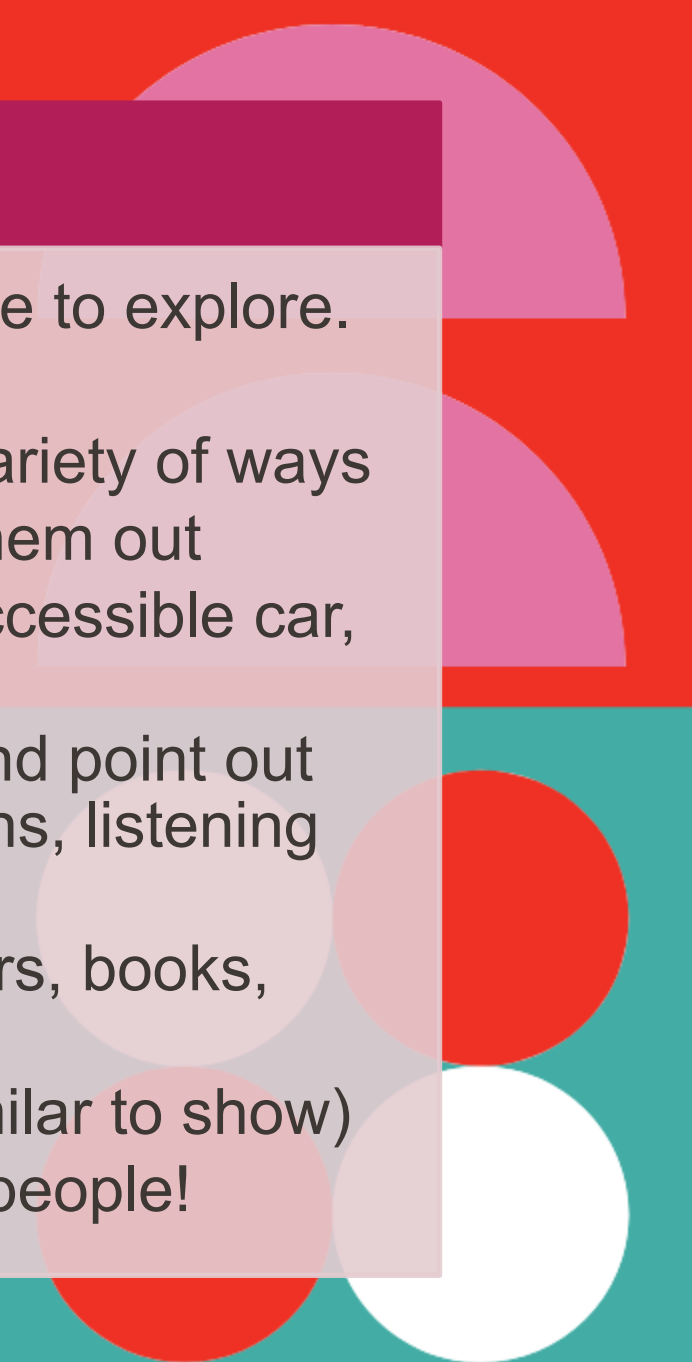
Things to ask/say before, during, or after

- What do you think this show is about?
- What do you think will happen next?
- How is this character feeling?
- What would you do in this story?
- What character would you like to be most?
- What is your favorite part of this picture?
- What did you not like about this story?
- How would you end the story?

Check out this guide from the [American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry](#)

Extend with Activities

- Have materials similar to show available to explore.
- Have activities about similar topics
- Sorting things similar and different in variety of ways
- Talk about different feelings and play them out
- Use blocks or drawing to 'design' an accessible car, playground, or house
- Take a walk about the neighborhood and point out accessibility features (sidewalks, buttons, listening devices, visuals)
- Include inclusive toys, figures/characters, books, pictures in environment
- Connect show with books (exact or similar to show)
- Connect with your local PBS amazing people!



Viewing Guide Example

Daniel Tiger Sample Viewing Guide: Chrissie

Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood

Season 4, Episode 3: Daniel's New Friend/Same and Different

Available via PBS Kids Website, App, or YouTube Channel

See clip of episode [here](#)



Summary of episode: This episode is about understanding the concept of same and different including finding similarities with other friends and people around us. This episode introduces Chrissie—which has a disability and used crutches to help move around.

Ideas to do before watching together:

Ask:

- What do you think different means? What are some things that make people different and the same?
- I love meeting new friends—what do you do when you meet someone new?

Ideas to do while watching together:

Ask:

- How is Daniel feeling when he meets Chrissy?
- Do you know anyone that moves like Chrissy? What do you think about that?
- What would you play with Chrissy and Daniel?

Sing along with Daniel and his friends.

Ideas to do after watching together:

Explain that some people have disabilities and they may talk, move, or learn differently—all of these ways are good and make our community amazing.



Ask if they have questions about people with disabilities.

Listen to the Mister Rogers song "[Its You I Like](#)"


Make a list together of things that are the same and different in the people in your family or class.

Print the Chrissie coloring sheet and color together (available from [PBSKids](#))

Read the book Meet Daniel's New Friend (available at your library and audiobook service).



“In every neighborhood, all across our country, there are good people insisting on a good start for the young and doing something about it.”—Fred Rogers





Let's Take it Back to Your Neighborhood

Take a moment to plan 2
things you can take back
into your lives and work.

Photo from Neighborhood Archive

Thank you!

Please feel free to connect with me at
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Note. Anything with a line underneath is a link and many pictures are also links

