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PEACEMAKING IN THE FAMILY BY MISTER ROGERS

FOUR INTERGENERATIONAL EVENTS FOR YOUR CHURCH

By: Fred Rogers and Barbara Marsh

Published by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

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 a fellow Rollins undergraduate. He attended the 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*. For the first time he appeared on camera as the program's host. By 1964 the series had been renamed *Misterogers' Neighborhood* and the programs were twice as long. In 1965, however, he chose to return to WQED in Pittsburgh, bringing the series with him. The programs were distributed over the Eastern Educational Network. In 1968, it was made available to the 200 affiliates of the Public Broadcasting Service—the same year in which Rogers was appointed Chairman of the Forum on Mass Media and Child Development of the White House Conference on Children. Distinctions and awards have followed ever since, including a George Foster Peabody Award and Emmys.

Rogers is President of Family Communications, Inc., the nonprofit corporation he founded in 1971 and which now produces a wide variety of materials that bear 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) and currently reaches 7 million families each week. There are 534 episodes in the series, and Rogers continues to write and produce the longest-running children's series on Public Television. Now in its 18th year of production, *Mister Roger's Neighborhood* remains "a place where friends help children find within themselves the courage to grow."

Rogers, his wife, and their two grown sons still live in Pittsburgh.

Barbara Marsh, born in 1945 to Jane and J. Ross Philips, has a masters degree in clinical psychology and is currently studying for her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. She has worked professionally as a teacher and as an advocate for children in the juvenile justice system.

Her family plays an important role in her life. She is married to the Rev. Helsel R. Marsh, Jr., a Presbyterian minister, and is mother to Liz and Andrew. All three bring meaning and joy to her life.



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Introduction

Families are important to us—not only when we are little and need the physical care and support that they provide, but also when we are older and caring for ourselves. We still feel the human bonds between our parents and ourselves. Much of what we do for our own children is an expression of what we learned from our parents. As we grow, most of us learn to feel mature love for our parents, as well as to nurture the next generation. The emotional ties between parent and child change, but are not broken. Love which is established does not disappear with physical separation, or with age, or even with death.

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

Peacemaking is the effort to bring about that nurture and support—even in times of crisis. Peacemaking allows everyone to feel self-worth—to know that his or her own uniqueness is special and worth preserving and developing. Sometimes our actions communicate that 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 of giving and loving through the relationship between God and Jesus. God stayed with Jesus throughout his experiences on earth: through his joys, his friendships, his celebration, 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 of what to do with the power given to him by God. And, he struggled with the ultimate choice of whether or not 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, but allowing the other persons to choose their

own ways of life.

This material 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 of background information, and a suggested curriculum design for an intergenerational event for congregations.

Each curriculum design covers several subjects. A suggested time for covering each subject is indicated at the beginning of each subject section. The suggested total time for the curriculum design for each session is 1½ hours. The suggested total time for the fourth session, "Families and Celebrations," is 1 hour and 45 minutes.

For each of the subjects there is an activity and suggested outline for a brief presentation. Please feel free to adapt this material in ways which can be most helpful to your particular congregation.

The material for this booklet has been developed from the book *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*, by Fred Rogers and Barry Head, Berkley Press, \$5.95. Available from your local bookstore or from

The Special Sales Department
Berkley Publishing Group
200 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016
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Discounts are available for quantity purchases from the above address.

If you have questions, or comments about using this booklet, contact either the Atlanta or the New York office of Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, the publisher of this booklet.

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Families and Feelings

Background Information

Being a parent is a rewarding but awesome task. It is not always clear what choice to make or what words to say when living with our children. In these times of uncertainty, feelings are aroused in our children and in ourselves. Parents 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 is experienced as one watches his or her child grow and learn. Parents 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 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 Have Feelings, Too!

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

Have you ever watched a movie or read a book which portrayed a special caring relationship between two people and 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 the situation in which we are involved and then begin to feel that feeling. 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 wonderful expression of who we are. The more clearly we recognize our own feelings, the better we know ourselves. And of course, as we share with others what feelings we are experiencing, we will be making it possible for others to know us in an intimate way. The more we know one another, the more we can enjoy one another, support one another, and care for one another. This 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 or not we want to share them. It is helpful in those times, however, 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 disclose about ourselves.

The interesting aspect of parenting is that we find ourselves remembering and re-experiencing feelings that we ourselves had as children. As our 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, parenthood is an inner change (see page 11 of *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*). 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. Whereas we may have just lived through the relationship as a child, we can understand it as an adult. These revelations about ourselves create opportunities to grow because we are parents. It is a gift our children give to us without knowing that they are doing so.

It is an old truth that what parents do, their 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 our children, the more they will be able to

share with us. As parents, we provide an avenue of communication by speaking about ourselves to those we love. They will then have the opportunity to learn 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, however. 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 very serious business to them. It is their expression of the world as they see it. Their feelings, their thoughts, their unique approach to situations, their perspective—all are incorporated as 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 which are sustained are taken into their play. This is a time when they do have control. They react to dolls, push 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 other people.

During play, children express feelings about themselves as well as about other people. A good way for a parent to learn about a child's feelings is to be observant during the child's play. A child may bring a picture to show Mom or Dad. If the picture has a boy, a house, and a tree, the parent could ask who the boy is?—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. The picture will not necessarily be a deep emotional experience for the child, but it could be an important experience of life.

The feelings of our children may sometimes be surprising to us or confusing. Or, we may think that we understand the feelings expressed by our children, only to discover that their thinking is quite different. One thing is certain: there will always be a reason for a child's feeling (see page 188 of *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*). 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 feeling as legitimate. Because a feeling grows out of people's perception of their world, there can be no other reaction for that person at the moment. To understand the perception of the child is to understand that child's experience more fully. Until we see the world as he or she sees it, we won't grasp the meaning of the feeling.

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

feelings or to be controlled by them. Instead, we can learn to work with our feelings.

I mentioned earlier that feelings are not necessarily easy to understand. If that is true for adults, it can be even more true for children. Very young children often confuse the boundary between fantasy and reality. If a child is very angry at someone and wishes that that person would go away forever, that wish and that feeling are 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 that as they grow. This point is reflected in the song, "Wishes Don't Make Things Come True," which is found on page 64 of *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*.

Adults can help children realize that a feeling is something that is inside of us and stays inside. That internal feeling does not cause harm to anyone. It is what we do with that 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 the child begins to learn that the feelings are inside, he or she can also begin to understand that bringing those internal feelings outside can be helpful. If something can be mentioned, most likely it can be managed (see page 187 of *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*). 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 on a dim area.

Feelings are often quite complex. We may feel disappointed and angry at the same time. We can feel excited, but hesitant over one task. Sometimes we're not aware of this mixture of feelings until we begin to talk about a situation. As adults finding the words to express this complexity may be easier for us than for our children. We may need to pay close attention to a child in order to see the complexity that he or she is experiencing.

There are times for each of us 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 bored with reading on a particular night, my children will probably sense my boredom. My children will be helped if they hear that I usually enjoy reading with them, but am not enjoying it that one time. Talking about those conflicting feelings may bring about a way to resolve them.

The most important result of talking about conflicting feelings is that our children will learn to do the same. Honesty in parents breeds honesty in children. If we are willing to speak the truth about ourselves, and if we provide an environment which encourages our children to have freedom to speak the truth about themselves, we will be helping our children to develop the capacity to love themselves and to love other people. That is why, in the beginning of this section, parents are called 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.

Families and Feelings Curriculum Design:



Opening and Introductions (20 minutes)

Begin with a prayer which alludes to the gift of love and support made possible through family relationships.

Sing two hymns relating to feelings:

- "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."

Read a scripture passage, such as John 15:12-17.

Introduce families to one another. Even if those present already know one another's names, this can be a helpful activity.

- The objectives of this exercise are: 1) to help families learn one another's names, and 2) to help participants to begin to think about other family members in relation to their feelings.

- Instructions: Ask the family member whose birthday is closest to the date of the evening to introduce each member of his or her family, telling one thing that makes each person happy.

Parents and Feelings (15 minutes)

Presentation—

Review the major points from the above background information, using the introductory paragraphs and the section entitled "Parents Have Feelings, Too!" For further study, refer to chapter one of the text, *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*. 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..."

- The objectives of playing this game are:
 - 1) to help people remember feeling reactions to specific situations;
 - 2) to help children notice reactions their parents have had to certain situations;
 - 3) to provide a sense of fun and movement.

- The instructions for this game are fairly simple. Have everyone sit in a large circle. Read a list of statements, beginning with: "Stand up if..." Each person stands when the statement is true for him or her. People remain standing until everyone present is standing. Then read a list of statements beginning with: "Sit down if..." until everyone present is sitting down again.

- You will need a list of statements which are varied enough that some people will respond to each statement. Some examples follow:

"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're happy."

"Stand up if you ever slam doors when you're mad."

"Stand up if you criticize other people when you're mad at them."

"Stand up if anything embarrassing happened to you in first grade."

"Stand up if you are 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 got angry when you were spanked."

"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 are happier reading a book than talking on the phone."

"Sit down if you like John Wayne 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." Refer to chapter five in *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents* for further study. 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 feeling.

The reason(s) helps us to understand the experience of that person.

Activity—

Make Pictures or Collages

- The objectives for this activity are:
 - 1) to demonstrate play and its relationship to internal feelings;
 - 2) to allow families to discuss a feeling;
 - 3) to have members show one another the things which they associate with a particular feeling.
- Instructions are as follow:
 - 1) Have each family sit together as a group and decide which of four feelings they want to build their pictures around—"mad," "sad," "glad," "afraid." If people are present without their family, have them either form a separate group or join a family.
 - 2) Then have each member either draw a picture or make a collage projecting that feeling.
 - 3) Family or group members can then show one another their pictures, describing them further if they wish. Pictures can then be hung on the walls.
 - 4) Caution people not to judge the associations made with a feeling. Each person's experience is unique.
 - 5) A table with markers, paper, magazines, masking tape, scissors, and glue will be needed.

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

Preparation—

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. Boxes can be of various shapes and sizes, colorfully decorated. Ask families to place the box in the center of the circle and not to open it.

Presentation—

Review the major points described in the background information from the section entitled, "What Can We Do With Our Feelings?" Refer to chapters three and eight of *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*. 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, help 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—

Lead the families in an activity called, "The Box."

- The objectives for this activity are as follows:
 - 1) to help families experience the difference between imagination and reality;
 - 2) to encourage families to talk about bad feelings *and* good feelings;
 - 3) to symbolize the bringing outside of that which is inside;
 - 4) to produce a list of feelings from the whole group.
- The leader should guide participants through this exercise:
 - 1) Ask each person in the family or group to imagine something he or she does not like in the box, and then to tell the other family members what it is and how he or she feels about it.
 - 2) Then ask each person to imagine something he or she does like in the box. That person then tells what it is and how he or she feels about it.
 - 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 which family members recall being mentioned by each person.
 - 4) When everyone is finished, families may open their boxes and discover what is inside. (Suggestions: popcorn, candy, cookies, dried fruits.)

Closing (5 minutes)

As people munch on goodies inside the boxes, ask one member of each family or group to hang the list of feelings on the wall. The leader can read some, pointing to the variety of feelings.

Mention that during the next session the group will focus on the individuality of family members.

Close the session by reading the lyrics from "The Truth Will Make Me Free," (pp. 62-63 in *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*), and then a prayer.

Living in Families and Growing as Individuals

Background Information

At any level, whether worldwide, within one 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 all individuals, with unique perspectives on life, with varied interests and attitudes, and sometimes with 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 with those we love so much, but we also want to develop as individuals. Tension is created by balancing those two desires, and it is often hard to know how to accomplish that balance satisfactorily.

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

Growing in Self-Esteem

Having a sense of oneself 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 to try new challenges.

The pleasure a baby experiences in discovering his or her 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. The experience of toes and fingers that belong to an infant and that can be controlled is a wondrous new idea. This is the beginning of a lifelong 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 perhaps to see the changes and the learning that take place. But realizing that this type of 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 have to be 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. Then the skills that we develop affect our willingness to act on our own as we move through life.

Parents can be quite helpful to children as they learn a sense of competence and independence. Parents 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 is to recognize the readiness on the part of the child and allow exploration. A child who is ready to explore and is not given room to do so will be frustrated. A child who is not ready to explore and is pushed to do so will also be frustrated.

Listening to exactly 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 to understand the pressure he or she will be under that evening. That student probably does not want the parent to organize the student's schedule so that the work gets done. Most parents want to show concern and be helpful to their children. Spouses generally want to help one another in similar ways. Taking over a difficult problem for someone else does not help.

Issues of Control in Families

Issues of control abound in families. Parents wonder how much control is enough and how much is too much. Spouses 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 control by others. People who can count on themselves to make competent decisions and to act in a way that will be 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 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 him or her. That little person is beginning to understand that he or she has 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'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 is a lonely, scary feeling. Sometimes it is delightfully intriguing. In their need to sort out what choices to make for how and who to be, adolescents often express rejection to the parents.

Parents can often feel like "victims" in relationship to their children. Knowing that the child is struggling with self more than he or she is struggling against the parent can help to ease the difficulty of living through these times. But parents 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, the parent 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 he or she 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 he or she wants 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 begin 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 growing. How families adapt will depend on who the members are and what they are comfortable with. It is to be hoped that 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. A husband and wife live together, love one another, share values, friends, and experiences. They are still two different people, however. 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 and from their brothers and sisters. And a husband and wife 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 to 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 parents 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 come to know their children intimately. The parent learns to anticipate the child's needs and can sometimes guess what his or her reaction might be. This is a skill that parents develop. However, this skill combined with the enormous size of the parent in relationship to the child leads the child to think that perhaps the parent is omnipotent. "That parent guesses what I am thinking and is so big and powerful!"

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

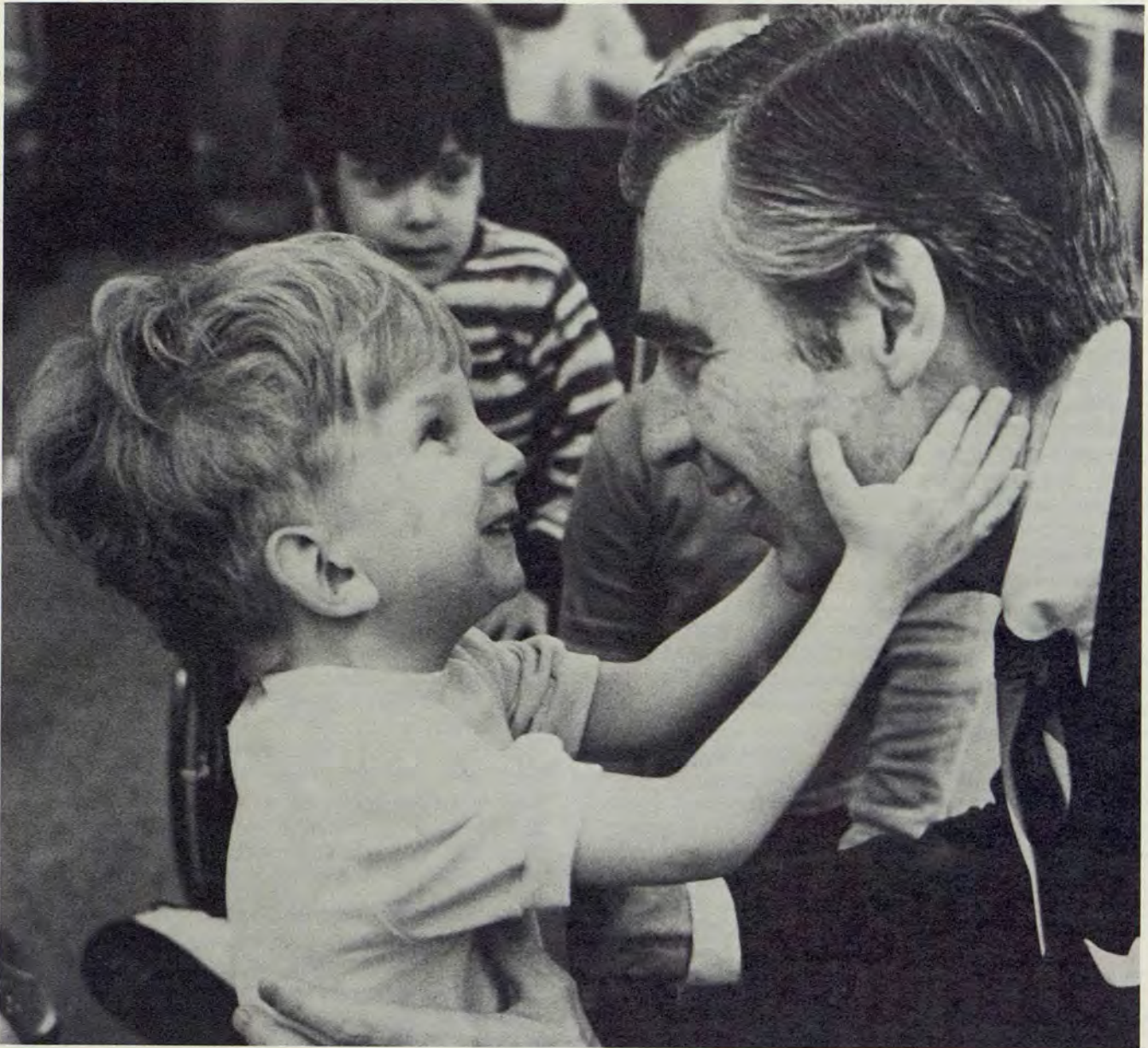
If a parent is incorrect in his or her assumption about a child's thoughts, it helps for the parent to accept the correction by the child. How often do we assume that we know what someone else is really thinking? How often are we afraid that someone else will find out what we are thinking? The fears 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 a person 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-growth grows from experiences of competence, self-control, and privacy.

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

Living in Families And Growing As Individuals Curriculum Design:



Opening and Warm-ups (20 minutes)

Begin with a prayer which thanks God for the enrichment created by the uniqueness of individuals.

Have participants re-introduce themselves by playing the name game. If you have a very large group, ask people to get in circles of twenty.

- The objectives of this activity are:

- 1) to help those present to recall the names of each person;
- 2) to notice that even though all people feel happy at times, the situations which create happiness for each of us are different.

- Instructions: Begin with the person next to you in the circle and ask that person to say his or her name plus what was mentioned in the previous session that makes him or her happy. As each person does this, he or she must then repeat the names (in order) 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 fun exercise, but difficult. People generally take the pressure off by giving clues when someone is having trouble recalling a name.

Read the scripture passage Romans 12:3-8. Then

read the letter written to Fred Rogers which is quoted in his book, *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents* (pp. 84-88). Both of these passages focus on the contribution made by individuals because of their uniqueness. The story from Fred Rogers' book emphasizes that we each have handicaps, but we also each have skills that we can accomplish.

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." For further study, refer to chapters two and three of the text, *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*. 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—

Family Charades of a Different Kind:

- The objectives of this activity are:
 - 1) to help families discern the unique gifts each of their members has;
 - 2) to provide a sense of fun and activity as the families act out that gift for others.
- Instructions for Charades:
 - 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 separate group 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 his/her gift to be acted out. Someone may not feel like having his/her 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.

Issues of Control in Families (25 minutes)

Presentation—

Review the major points from the background information on control. For further study refer to chapters two and seven in *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*. 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 a parent's authority.
- Having an opportunity to make choices gives people a feeling of having some control over a situation.

Activity—

Provide opportunities for choice-making for individuals who are present.

- The objective of this exercise is to demonstrate ways in which people may be given choice within a situation.
- 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.

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

After these decisions have been made, build a prayer of thanksgiving for the members of each family or group.

- The objectives of this exercise are:
 - 1) to remind the families of the special contributions each member brings to the family;
 - 2) to give thanks to God for our individuality.
- Instructions: 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)

Mention that the next session will focus on hard times experienced by families.

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 reviewing the ideas (no more than five minutes per section) and more time on family activities. People learn more by doing.

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 these times of stress we depend on our faith, our learning, and the trust we have built into those relationships to sustain us. Hopefully, the relationship itself 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 good for them. 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.

Discipline depends on intimacy and trust more than distance and authority (see page 151 of *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*). As we care for our children, we move close 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 will our teaching be.

When our children break away from our teaching in ways that 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 period 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. Parents want the same. In the midst of 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 parents, feel like we must compete for someone else's love. In class, with brothers and sisters, and with parents, 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 to see that there are indeed things that are special about them.

When we think of adults as modeling discipline—care and nurture—for children, it's important to consider the impact of television on our lives. Much of the behavior displayed on television lacks 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 television 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 television.

Anxious feelings may be the result of this display of violence. We can present a different option for behaving to 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 of 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 booklet cannot cover the wide scope of information available. What we can do here is to talk about family relationships in the midst of 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 sometimes hope to spare children by not sharing their sadness with them. This is often a mistake. Children develop, from the moment of conception, 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 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 is 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. "Why did Daddy go away?" doesn't give a clue as to what the child really wants to know. If the parent asks, "Why do you think Daddy went away?" the child's response may help to illuminate what he's worried about. If the child says, "Because I was bad," then the parent is in a better position to speak to what is really worrying the child. We have to talk and listen at length with our children in order to understand what their questions and statements mean.

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 afford 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 a 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 during these difficult moments. Parents 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 is a parent, he or she is always a parent. If the children leave home, if the relationship is strained, even if the child dies, the parent knows the feeling of having cared for a person who is a part of him or her. Parenting evokes memories and changes that are not forgotten. They occur because the parent is there—present with the child as he or she grows.

Because stressful times test our parenting skills to the limits, we want to mention here four ways in which a parent can be present with a child all of the time—in stressful times and good times. Being there is the skill of parenting as the parent listens, waits, stands firm, and talks together 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 parents, 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, his or her experience in school, what the teacher said or did, what the child thought about the experience—all of these things are waiting to be told if we listen.

Much of parenting is waiting. Parents wait nine months for a child to be born. They wait for that child to walk, talk, go to school, play on teams, bring the car home at night, get married, and have children. It is an expectant, active waiting. Parents 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 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. Girls who are twelve may play with dolls 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 can also mean standing firm. Being a parent 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, husbands and wives have to learn how to mesh two different backgrounds. Marriage gives two people the opportunity to think about their values, their beliefs, and their habits. When children enter the family, both people need to be comfortable with the limits chosen.

Standing firm allows children to know with assurance what their parents 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 parents, the parents need to respond in a way that the children's beliefs are respected, too. Comparisons allow a child to understand the different choices that he or she will eventually have to make for his or her own life. Living within limits set by the parent, but examining other options, will lead the child toward a self-discipline based on choice.

Perhaps the most important part of parenting 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 preciousness of life (see page 184 of *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*). The sharing of good experiences and bad ones help both parents and children grow as human beings. It will also lead them toward a closer relationship.

Families And Hard Times Curriculum Design:



Opening and Warm-Ups (10 minutes)

Begin with a prayer thanking God for forgiveness and grace.

Read the scripture passage Romans 8:35-39. Then sing some hymns which refer to the enduring love and salvation offered to us by God, through Jesus Christ. (Suggestion: "Amazing Grace")

- The objective of this short opening exercise is:
 - 1) to help participants focus on the session's topic: difficult experiences within the family;
 - 2) to remind them from the very beginning that

love is the sustaining power that will bring a person (and a family) through those difficult experiences.

Discipline (25 minutes)

Presentation—

Review the major points from the background information, both the introductory paragraph and the section on "Discipline." For more study, refer to chapters one, six, and seven of *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*. 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 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 to 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

- The objectives of this exercise are to:
 - 1) talk about values important to the family;
 - 2) understand how punishments are experienced;
 - 3) let children have an opportunity to hear stories of parents' misdeeds.
- Instructions: Have families sit together in a circle. People who are present without families can form a separate group. Then ask each person to answer three questions for himself or herself 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." Refer to chapters eight, nine, and ten in the text. 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.

- The objectives for this exercise are:
 - 1) to ask those present to remember a time when a family member was helpful to him or her.
 - 2) to encourage them to respond with thanks.
- 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.

- Then ask that each person make a gift for the person who was helpful and wrap that gift for later in the session.

- 1) 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.
- 2) Young children may need guidance thinking about a particular incident and a gift they would like to make. Their parents might help them think about the activity.
- 3) Provide wrapping paper (comic strips and old wallpaper are great!), ribbon and boxes for wrapping gifts.

Being There (20 minutes)

Presentation—

Review the major points from this section of the background information. Pages 129 through 134 of the text provide further explanation. 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

- The objective of this exercise is to let family members know about the times when they were helpful to another person in the family. Sometimes we are unaware of the support we have provided.
- Instructions: 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 at a later date, if possible.

Closing (5 minutes)

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.

If you have a copy of *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*, read the lyrics from the song, "Good People Sometimes Do Bad Things." (pages 278-280).

Close with a prayer thanking God for being with us when times are hard.

Families And Celebrations

Background Information

The Celebration of Life

Healthy growth and worthwhile joint enterprise require caring relationships (see page 164 in *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*). The fostering of these relationships is the purpose of this peacemaking booklet—to help family members to 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, homecomings, 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 of all a child must determine the difference between himself or herself and other objects. Then comes the recognition that people all have certain relationships to one another. Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers—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 his or her 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 brothers and sisters. 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 that provides the daily care so important to growth.

Sometimes conflict arises for parents because of those differences. But parents 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 he or she looks 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 he or she does 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 on T.V., 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 a part of planning.

Organizational details are only 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 were little. The stories help to sort out that life-long puzzle of who we are in relationship to others. A dad who felt pleasure when he was a child playing with trains at Christmas time may be the dad who helps his son or daughter build a train set. A mom who enjoyed decorating the tree as a child may be the mom who looks forward to decorating the tree with her own children. Also, there may be new traditions that we will start with our children which 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 which 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!

In the midst of large celebrations, festive spirits are often contagious to adults and children. The preparations, the feelings, and the expectations culminate in the activity of celebrations 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 particularly busy with others, perhaps your child would like some private time with you. Parents are particularly sensitive to behavior changes in their own children. Paying attention to what they are doing can often help us to foresee their tiredness, overstimulation, or loneliness before they get overwhelmed by the feeling.

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

Quiet family gatherings can also be ways of celebrating. The fact that each person is reserving time to be with the 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, 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 a fun experience for someone else, we are giving ourselves. We want the recipient of our gift 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 as well as 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 that we love. The very best gift we can receive is the confirmation of who we are in the family. That it 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 and sit at the head of the table. Values, traditions, and faith are passed from generation to generation.

Families And Celebrations Curriculum Design:



Opening and Warm-Ups (5 minutes)

Begin with a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of families—their variety, their support, their membership in the larger church family.

Explain that in this, the last session, we will talk about who, how, and what we celebrate as families. Read Psalm 100 in unison.

Sing a hymn of praise. For example:

“For the Beauty of the Earth”
“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.” All material for the entire session comes from chapter eleven of *Mister Rogers Talks with Parents*. 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

• The objectives of this exercise is to help families understand connections among relatives by diagramming them on paper.

• 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 the rest of their family can draw their own family tree.

Instructions:

1) Draw a family tree. Make the roots represent the parents, grandparents, great-grandparents. The trunk represents the marriage. The branches can represent the children.

2) Depending upon time and energy, aunts and uncles can also be included in the family tree.

3) 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 relationship and yet the maintenance of the relationship with the child. Children need to know how they are connected to their parents even if those parents are not living together.

- 4) Showing a pre-drawn sample of your own family tree will be helpful.
- 5) Hang 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 views of who we are as family members.
- Rituals that cause difficulty for some family members can be altered slightly to help that person.
- Choices in the midst of celebration helps us to have some control over what will happen to us.

Activity—

Plan a Party!

- The objectives for this activity are:
 - 1) to give participants practice in talking together about celebrations;
 - 2) to allow families to plan for an event that really will occur in the near future.
- Instruct families to get a sheet of notebook paper and a pencil and sit together. If you have formed a group of people who are there without families, ask them to tell one another about the next festive event in their lives. Ask the families to decide what family gathering will be coming up soon and then, having decided, to plan that event right now. Participants are to keep in mind the following:
 - 1) "Family gathering" can be defined any way that they wish.
 - 2) Each person's comments are to be taken seriously.
 - 3) Pleasing all of the people all of the time is the goal.
 - 4) 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 the Morning After (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

- The objective of this activity is to encourage families to think about traditions and values that symbolize who they are as a family.
- Instruct families to 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.
- Then give each family a packet containing felt pieces and glitter. Glue and scissors need to be provided also. Ask them to make their family symbol in order to hang it on a banner of the church's family tree. If there is a group of people who do not have their families present, give each of them a packet and ask them to make a family symbol.

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

Activity—

Decorate a Banner.

- The objectives of this activity are:
 - 1) to help families view themselves as members of the larger family of God;
 - 2) to bring the entire intergenerational experience to a close.
- 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. 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.
- 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.
- Suggest to the families that letters about the experiences they have had during the four sessions would be welcomed by both the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program and by Mister Rogers. Let them know that letters sent to the address below will be read by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program and then passed along to Mister Rogers' office.

Mister Rogers
c/o The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program
Room 1101
475 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10115

- 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."
- Close with a prayer for God's guidance as we work to be peacemakers within our own families, in the church community, and in the world.

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