



Wonder With Us

How Educators, Families, and Neighbors
Can Find Inspiration in Fred Rogers



Anyone who has cared for young people knows what it's like to wonder.

Whether we're parents, teachers, mentors, coaches, or family members, we've likely asked ourselves: What is it that learners need? And how can we help them find it?



The answers are rarely easy. They differ from day to day and change from child to child. One day, the thing they need most might be a bottle of milk. The next, it might be a fun-filled museum, extra help from a caring teacher, or a book they can't put down. When it comes to teaching and raising young people, perhaps the only constant is this: It takes a village.

Or a neighborhood.

Since 2007, a network called Remake Learning has been building that neighborhood in Western Pennsylvania. Its members—educators, parents, artists, scientists, and other caring adults—work together to give learners what they need: engaging, relevant, equitable experiences that help young people flourish. A robotics center partners with child-development experts to build a classroom app. Hip-hop artists partner with after-school providers to host teen poetry workshops. Parents and teachers team up to build trust and a sense of belonging in schools. The possibilities go on and on as the network connects classrooms, living rooms, libraries, museums, and more.

It's an approach inspired by the region's favorite neighbor: someone who lived and worked in Western Pennsylvania, and whose legacy continues to guide us today.

His name was Fred Rogers.



If his memory stirs warm feelings in you, you're not alone. The television program he created, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, gave millions of learners a place that cultivated their curiosity. That nurtured their sense of worth. That gave them time to notice and wonder.

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood was no accident. Everything you saw and heard and felt came from Fred Rogers' deeply considered intention to do what was best for his "television neighbors"—the children, families, and caregivers who tuned in to his beloved program. For more than three decades, Fred Rogers worked with world-class educators, artists, and experts in child development, all of whom helped him root his *Neighborhood* in the science of child development.

Here in the Pittsburgh region, we know this approach matters just as much today as it did when the program aired. It's a place where scholars at the Fred Rogers Institute continue to study his work. It's where Fred Rogers Productions creates new programs that live up to its namesake's standards—and kindle the same warm feelings as *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. And it's where countless parents, caregivers, and educators of every kind are inspired by Fred Rogers each day.

In fact, our favorite neighbor is so much on our minds that for Remake Learning, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is more than a television program. It's a blueprint—one that members can learn from and build upon as they combine timeless ideas with new ways of learning.



This publication explores some of their projects, revealing how Fred Rogers inspired a real-life neighborhood of learning in Western Pennsylvania. Along the way, we invite you to wonder with us: How might *all* of us bring more wonder, more belonging, and more joy to kids and families everywhere?



How Remake Learning is

Sparkling a Sense of Wonder



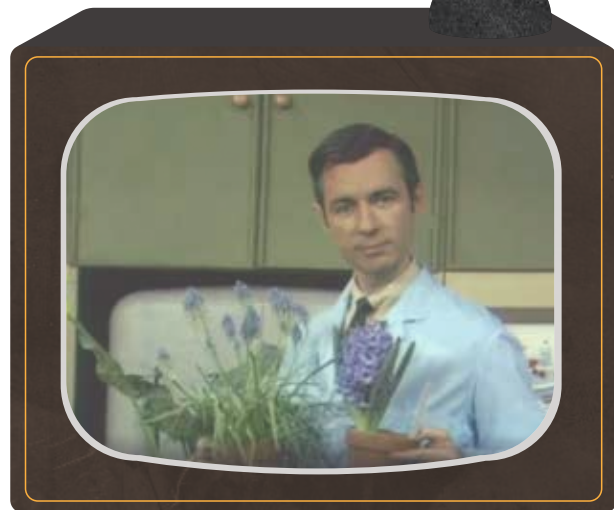
What

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood was full of slow, sometimes silent moments. In one episode, Fred Rogers held a potted plant for several minutes, letting viewers look closely and notice all they could. The point was to linger in a state of wonder—a feeling that, today, Remake Learning's members are finding new ways to spark and sustain.

Why

From Jean Piaget to B. F. Skinner to today's psychologists and neuroscientists, experts have long known how important a sense of wonder can be. In fact, the Association for Psychological Science reported that when it comes to learning, **wonder matters just as much as intelligence.**

The good news is that young people are born curious, and Remake Learning's members are nurturing learners' wonder in all sorts of ways—from showing them extraordinary things to simply slowing down.



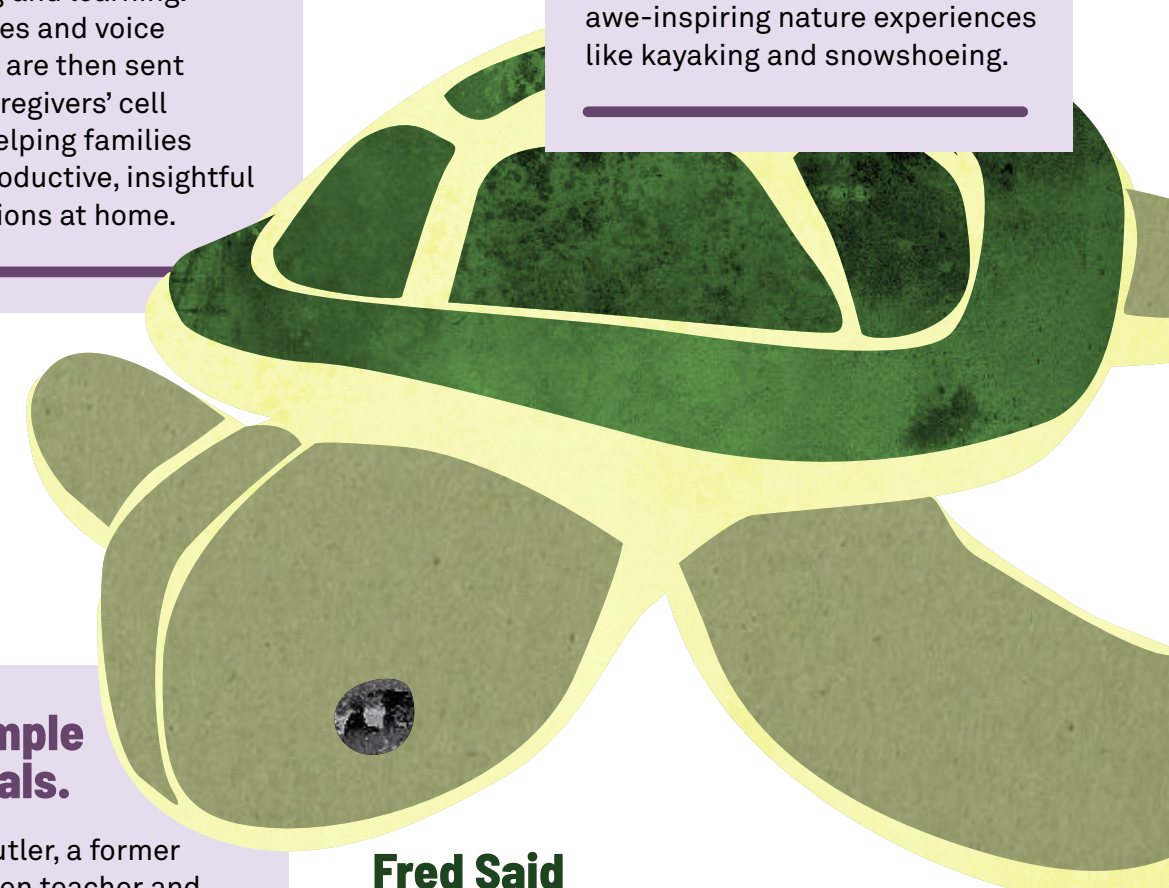
Learn what learners wonder about.

Developed by Trying Together and Carnegie Mellon University's CREATE Lab, a classroom app called Message From Me lets learners take pictures of—and record voice messages about—the things they're wondering and learning. The pictures and voice messages are then sent to their caregivers' cell phones, helping families prompt productive, insightful conversations at home.



Do something awe-some.

If you've ever experienced awe, then you know it makes you wonder. That's why teachers are turning to "Awe Walks," taking learners outside to show them something spectacular: a forest, a skyscraper, a lush community garden. In Pittsburgh, Venture Outdoors' Outdoor Learning Lab provides gear and guidance for awe-inspiring nature experiences like kayaking and snowshoeing.



Use simple materials.

Melissa Butler, a former kindergarten teacher and fellow at the Fred Rogers Institute, invites learners to explore small objects, like buttons. *What do you notice? What do you wonder?* With space to slow down, there's always more to discover about the world, a single button, and yourself. (She even wrote a picture book called *in a button!*)

Fred Said

"By looking and listening carefully, [children] can begin to understand the world around them—and the people in that world."

How Remake Learning is

Supporting the Work of Childhood

What

Fred Rogers took play seriously. Nearly every episode of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* included some form of play, from blowing bubbles to plinking along on the piano. Sometimes, he would even talk directly to the audience about how important play is for children—and for adults, too.

Fred Rogers' belief in the power of imaginative play is shared across Remake Learning's network. In schools, educators and parents are working to protect and expand time for play during the school day. Early childhood educators use play as the primary mode of learning with their students. And artists and museum educators design playful, exploratory learning experiences for tweens and teens.

Why

Play is how we learn. Play helps us explore our curiosity, sharpen our creativity, process complex ideas, and collaborate with our neighbors. As famed child psychologist Jean Piaget put it: "Play is the work of childhood." Sadly, that work is in decline: Citing the work of professor Peter Gray, the organization KABOOM! reported that today, only about one in four young people get the recommended 60 minutes of active play per day. It's essential for adults to ensure that children can play, grow, and imagine.



Play with your kids.

Play is so essential that the American Academy of Pediatrics "prescribed" daily doses of play for parents and their children. And guess what? Play works for teachers and their students, too! In the New Brighton Area School District, a basketball league pairs elementary school boys with fathers and father figures as a playful form of mentorship.

Take play seriously.

Once a year, Pittsburgh pulls out all the stops, bringing people of all ages together to play, have fun, and build community during Ultimate Play Day. Held annually in different city parks, the free event is hosted by Playful Pittsburgh, a coalition of people and organizations helping to make everyday life more playful.

Play with time.

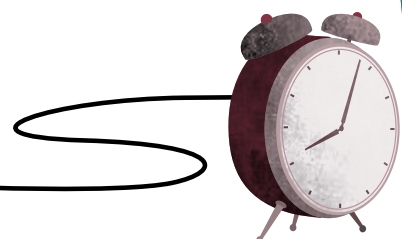
The Brownsville Area School District added a "What I Need" period to its schedule. Students from kindergarten through high school use WIN time to catch up on academics and to learn new skills, with educators teaching everything from fly fishing to crocheting to how to change a tire.

Fred Said

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

Let children lead.

"We want children to learn to be in control of their actions," wrote Fred Rogers and his colleague, Hedda Sharapan (who today advises the Fred Rogers Institute and Fred Rogers Productions). "If they are to do so, we need to let them control their play as much as they can, as long as their play remains within safe boundaries."



Helping Learners Manage Feelings



What

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood explored emotions: What they are, where they come from, and what we do with them. Most importantly, the show helped children—and the adults who care for them—face complicated feelings.

In his famous song, “What Do You Do with the Mad That You Feel,” Fred Rogers sang about how strong feelings may make us want to do something wrong, but that by acknowledging and talking about our feelings, we gain the power to find control—to choose constructive things to do with those emotions, expressing them in ways that don’t hurt ourselves or anyone else.

Remake Learning’s members don’t shy away from feelings, either. Teachers have brought mindfulness practices into their classrooms. Healthcare providers have partnered with schools to create spaces where students can work through their emotions and better focus on learning.

Why

In findings compiled by The Aspen Institute, science has shown that young people’s social-emotional development is at least as important as academic mastery. In fact, the two are closely related: Supporting students’ social-emotional growth has been shown to boost grades, test scores, attendance, and graduation rates. And the benefits last well into adulthood, linked to higher wages and better lifelong health.

Fred Said

“When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we’re not alone.”



Tune in to learners’ feelings.

Developed by child-development experts at the Fred Rogers Institute and elsewhere, the Simple Interactions tool helps educators and caregivers encourage, enrich, and empower human interactions. With the free toolkit (available at simpleinteractions.org) and help from the Simple Interactions team, adults reflect on their daily interactions with children in order to learn from—and build on—what they’re already doing well.

Create space for feelings.

Several school districts in Remake Learning’s network have built “Chill Rooms” where students can go when they feel anxious or overwhelmed. Staffed by professional therapists and outfitted with soft lights, cool colors, and comfortable furniture, Chill Rooms give learners a place to breathe, re-focus, and practice managing emotions.

Make it matter.

Often, feelings are put on the backburner—something to consider once the “real” learning is done. Not in the Duquesne City School District, where educators recognize that social-emotional skills are as core to learning as reading and math. The district created a new social-emotional course taught by the school psychologist and school counselor, who help learners express their emotions in healthy, constructive ways.

How Remake Learning is

Helping Learners Try New Things

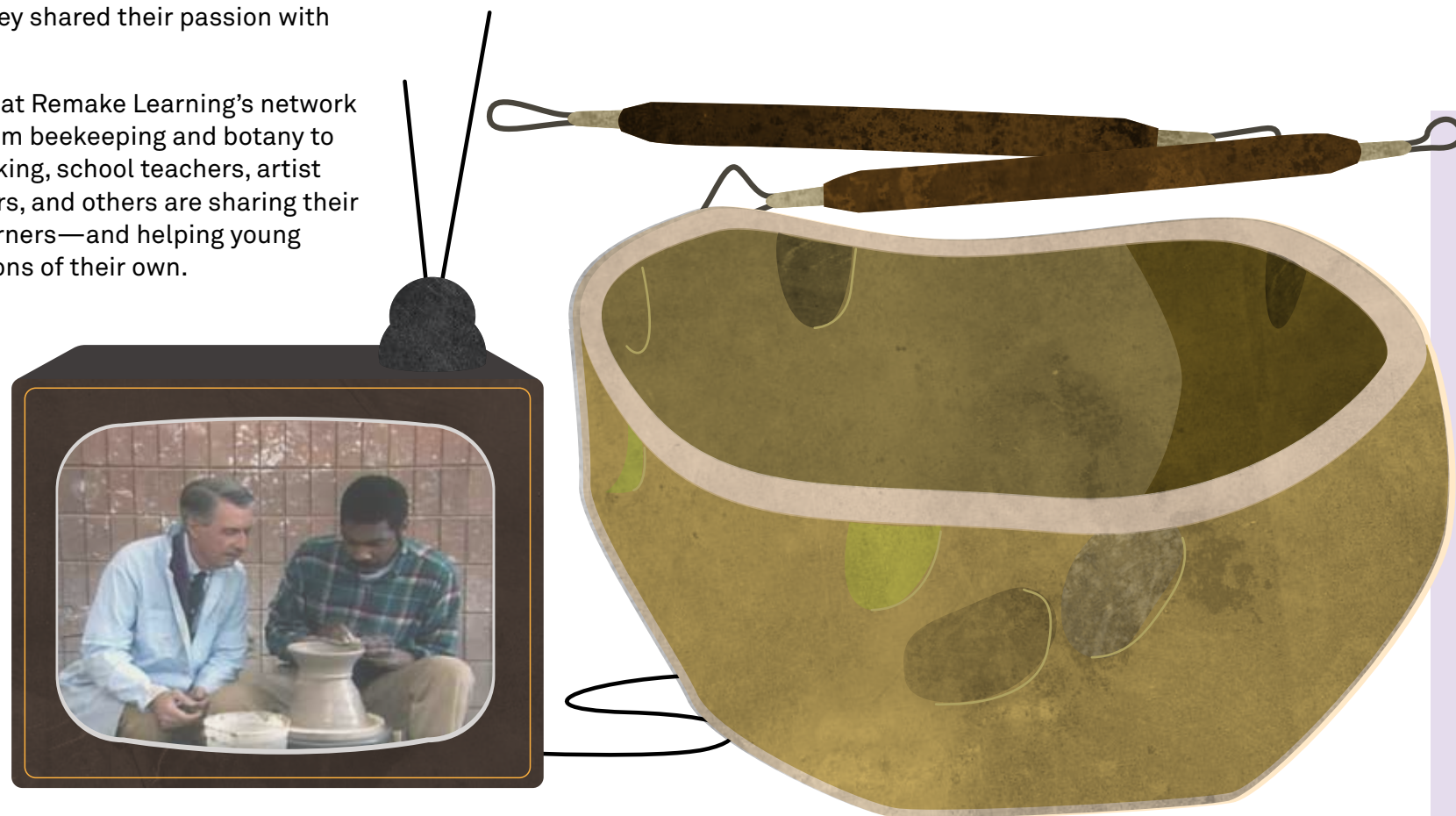
What

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood introduced children to cellists and trumpeters, scientists and chefs, ballet dancers and architects, basketball players and astronauts. These guests brought more than their skill and expertise: They brought palpable joy as they shared their passion with viewers.

And that's just what Remake Learning's network is doing today. From beekeeping and botany to flying and filmmaking, school teachers, artist educators, mentors, and others are sharing their passions with learners—and helping young people find passions of their own.

Why

As the renowned child psychologist and educator Dr. Margaret McFarland—borrowing from the Quaker philosophy—shared with Fred Rogers: **Attitudes are caught, not taught.**



Fred Said

“The best teacher in the world is the one who loves what he or she does, and just loves it in front of you.”



Praise the effort.

“Think about how helpful it can be when you let children know you’re glad they tried, even if they didn’t succeed,” writes Hedda Sharapan in a wonderful article for the Fred Rogers Institute’s newsletter. “Research tells us that instead of praising the success or final product, it’s much more important to praise the effort, the persistence, and the willingness to learn from mistakes.”

Do what you love in front of your kids.

During the pandemic lockdowns, Tim Rishel, a teacher in the South Allegheny School District, achieved a boyhood dream by earning his pilot’s license. His love for flying sparked an idea: What if the district helped more students get into aviation careers? With support from Remake Learning, the district bought a flight simulator and launched a new, four-year aviation curriculum for high school students.

Find something new to love—together.

Each spring, Remake Learning Days draws hundreds of thousands of families to what’s been called “the world’s largest open house for teaching and learning.” The annual festival that started in Pittsburgh now spans the globe, inviting kids and their families to try new things together—building robots, painting murals, performing plays, and more—in comfortable, judgment-free environments.

How Remake Learning is

Making the World More Neighborly



What

The Neighborhood of Make-Believe on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* was seldom a place of perfect harmony. In fact, disagreements among neighbors were common. *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* regularly featured people and puppets navigating the kinds of conflicts, questions, and misunderstandings that happen in children's everyday lives. Neighbors didn't always reach a happy resolution, but they worked to find ways to express their feelings and accept one another.

From kindness clubs that shift attitudes in the classroom to youth civics summits that shift policies across the region, Remake Learning's members are creating opportunities for young people to practice being neighborly.

Why

By telling his television neighbors, "People can like you just because you're you," Fred Rogers was cultivating the sense of self-worth that is foundational to children's ability to value the uniqueness of others. **When we feel loved, we can feel love for others.**

Fred Said

"Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like struggle. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now."

Show them you're glad they're here.

The Butler Area School District is partnering with city leaders in Butler, Pennsylvania, to develop the Butler Compact for Children: a commitment by the city's leaders to bring the whole neighborhood to bear on children's well-being. With support from Remake Learning, the district and city leaders are creating a Youth Arts Alley and transforming the city's Main Street into a Learning Lab.



Remember that each one of us has something to give.

In school districts across the Pittsburgh region, learners have transformed their school hallways to highlight powerful life lessons collected from teachers, parents, administrators, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and others. These "Wisdom Corridors" showcase the community's collective humanity.

Start with respect.

Fred Rogers Productions creates programming that starts with respect for children, parents, teachers, caregivers, and communities. That respect means rooting its programs in scholarship, research, and the highest creative and educational standards—just like Fred Rogers did.

Conclusion

Fred Rogers' remarkable career spanned five decades. In addition to producing nearly 900 episodes of television, he wrote more than 30 books and more than 200 songs. His work was grounded in his lifelong study of child development and early education. He learned from and collaborated with a neighborhood of experts and professionals who shared his commitment to children. Today, his spirit and sensibility are carried on by two institutions that bear his name.

Fred Rogers Productions, the media company founded by Fred Rogers, continues to produce children's programming that combines expertise in early childhood development with Fred's spirit of wonder and commitment to caring.

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

Just as important, of course, are the countless parents and grandparents, teachers and artists, aunts and uncles, crossing guards and bus drivers, and neighbors of all descriptions who find deep and simple ways of helping children learn and grow every day.

In Fred Rogers' hometown of Pittsburgh, **Remake Learning** is building a modern-day "neighborhood" where these everyday heroes learn from each other and collaborate on bold ideas to spark more engaging, relevant, and equitable learning opportunities that enrich the lives of Pittsburgh's children, youth, and families.

Fred Said

"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."



Learn more about Fred Rogers and his neighbors



FRED ROGERS
— INSTITUTE —
Saint Vincent College

Fred Rogers Institute

Opportunities and resources for educators and caregivers, and home of the Fred Rogers Archive with over 22,000 items from Fred Rogers' personal and professional life

fredrogersinstitute.org



Fred Rogers Productions

Creating quality children's media that models an enthusiasm for learning and earns the trust of parents and caregivers

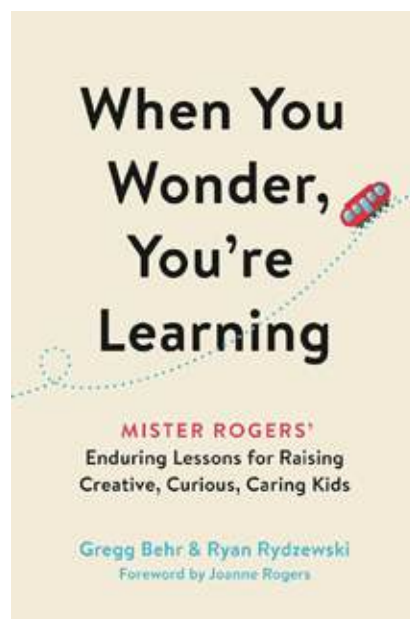
fredrogers.org



Simple Interactions

Everyday practices to encourage, enrich, and empower adult-child interactions

simpleinteractions.org



When You Wonder, You're Learning

Exploring Fred Rogers' enduring lessons for raising creative, curious, caring kids

whenyowonder.org



Mister Rogers' Neighborhood

Treasured videos plus full episodes of the classic program and stories about Fred Rogers' life and work

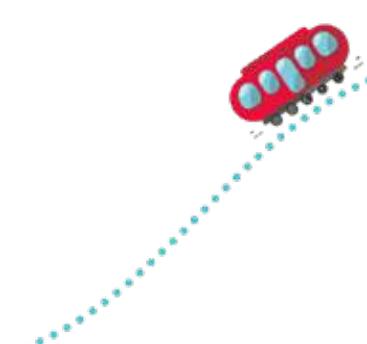
misterrogers.org



Resources For Caring Adults

Resources for caring adults, grounded in the Fred Rogers Archive and educator experience

fredrogersinstitute.org/resources



The When You Wonder Newsletter

A newsletter from the authors of When You Wonder, You're Learning spotlighting educators and neighbors inspired by Fred Rogers

whenyowonder.substack.com



Remake Learning

A network of educators and innovators working to enrich Pittsburgh's learning ecosystem

remakelearning.org

Exploring how the work of Fred Rogers can inspire educators, families, and neighbors.

Credits

A Root + All project

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