



Comment

MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD AND A COMMUNITY OF PARENTS

By Robert J. Ackerman



Like many people I am saddened by the death of Mr. Fred Rogers. For those of us from Western Pennsylvania it touches home

even more. He was a part of our neighborhood and, if you watched his television show closely, you know that we were part of his. Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood was a children's show. He talked directly to children and he talked to them about their world. He was not afraid to be an adult who tried to understand children and to meet their needs. He had people on his staff who were educated in understanding human development, and he relied on them heavily for making his approach to children developmentally appropriate.

If you watched his show you learned how to better interact with children, but I always felt that he was teaching parents as well. Perhaps his secret message was always intended to reach parents to make a better world for their children. Maybe that is why I always liked his message. I always appreciated Fred because I knew that he was talking to all children, including those who were being raised in addicted families. I often thought, "I wonder how many children of alcoholics he talked to today?" His voice, soft and reassuring, told all children that they were special just for being themselves. That he liked them just for who they are.

During the past year we have seen

messages on television about reducing alcohol and drug abuse among our children. The message is directed towards parents and we are told "Parents, the Antidrug." I can imagine that Fred would agree and endorse this statement with enthusiasm. Research indicates that there are many factors that influence a young person's decision to use or not to use alcohol and other drugs. However, parental influence is at the top. Too often I hear from parents that their children used drugs because someone gave it to them, the school is not tough enough, we need better police,

or that there is nothing for young people to do in the community. Whether we like it or not, we as parents are involved and can influence our children's choices.

However, parents cannot do this alone. Fred Rogers created a community for children. If we as parents are going to be effective as the "Anti-drug" then we need to create a "Community of Parents." This may sound simple, but in today's world of hectic schedules and little time for face-to-face interactions among parents we may need to work on developing our community.

Kids who use drugs, just like all kids, create their own communities of friends. Parents need to do the same thing. We need to support each other in order to better support our children. In a study that I am conducting on parents' attitudes about raising children, when I asked, "What is the most difficult thing about raising children today?" the reply was

"other parents." In other words, many parents feel that they cannot count on other parents to monitor their own children, make good choices, or respect the wishes of their children's friends' parents. Obviously, we need to be more involved with each other about issues confronting our children and less challenging of each other.

A "Community of Parents" can develop when we are willing to act together. The following are some desired outcomes for creating our community.

1. Parents realize that they are in this together.
2. Parents expect and receive support from other parents.
3. Parents are willing to set a good example for all children in the community.
4. Parents support schools and other institutions that help raise their children.
5. Parents respect the values of other parents.
6. Parents stand up for what is right in and out of their homes.
7. Parents communicate with other parents.
8. Parents become involved in community activities.
9. Parents believe that they make a difference.

Thank you Mr. Rogers for everything, and let's make it a better day in the neighborhood.

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