Back to the Future: Lessons in App Design from Mister Rogers

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A few gentle nudges for children’s media developers

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What would Fred say? Lessons from the Fred Rogers Center & Fred Rogers Company

- Chip Donohue & Roberta Schomburg
- David Kleeman and Alice Wilder
- Brian Puerling
- Michael Robb
- Hedda Sharapan
At Dust or Magic...
- Warren Buckleitner & Kate Highfield

Begin and end with relationships

Computers can be useful machines, especially when they help people communicate in caring ways with each other...
Know your audience

What are the basic necessities for children to be ready to learn?

- a sense of worth
- a sense of trust
- curiosity
- the capacity to look and listen carefully
- the capacity to play
- times of solitude.

Respect the child’s pace

I know you’re under a great deal of pressure to “teach” children, but I think about what it can mean when you slow down the pace, letting children take the time to look and listen – to digest and integrate.
Understand the importance of routines

If children know what you expect, it’s easier for them to manage. With your help, they come to learn that routines have a beginning, middle, and an end.

Treat play seriously

It's the things we play with and the people who help us play that make a great difference in our lives.
Give children tools for learning

We have to help give children tools, building blocks for active play. And the computer is one of those building blocks. No computer will ever take the place of wooden toys or building blocks. But that doesn’t mean they have to be mutually exclusive.

Honor the space between

I’m not that interested in 'mass' communications. I’m much more interested in what happens between this person and the one person watching. The space between the television set and that person who’s watching is very holy ground.
Be “fearlessly authentic”

“The greatest gift you ever give is your honest self.”

Fred Rogers

Keep the child inside you alive

The child is in me still...and sometimes not so still.

I love whimsy, don't you? If you're going to be working for children, you need to do your best not to lose your childlikeness. It's wonderful to be able to just be yourself.
Nurture curiosity

I love hearing teachers ask open-ended questions, like “I wonder what would happen if...” Remember that you don’t need answers to all the questions. When you nurture children’s curiosity, they’ll be interested in learning – by noticing, predicting, exploring, experimenting. Their discoveries might open your eyes, too, to some fascinating things about our world!

Inspire cartwheels in hearts

My hunch is that if we allow ourselves to give who we really are to the children in our care, we will some way inspire cartwheels in their hearts.
Know what is essential

What is essential is invisible to the eye

The closer we get to know the truth of that sentence, the closer I feel we get to wisdom, That which has real value in life is very simple. Very deep and very simple! It happens inside of us – in the “essential invisible” part of us, and that is what allows everyone to be a potential neighbor.

Begin and end with relationships

...Let’s not get so fascinated by what the technology can do that we forget what it can’t do...It’s through relationships that we grow best and learn best.