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To help children as they settle into September and the routines of school, the Neighborhood offers a month of programs about LEARNING, MAKING & CREATING, CELEBRATING, and PLAYTHINGS.

Many of those themes that sound like "play" are, in fact, closely related to learning. That's because children don't "just play." When they play, they are learning -- about themselves, about other people, and about how the world works. The kind of play that is most closely connected to learning is open-ended, creative play.

Here are some ways to stimulate creative play:

*Offer playthings that help your child play in different ways -- like crayons, stuffed animals, dress-up clothes, and blocks. That way, your child can play about whatever is important to him or her at that moment.

*Suggest that your child make a collage from "throw-away" things you have collected, like:

- used greeting cards,
- stickers from junk mail
- mail order catalogs
- old calendar pages

* Start a story and ask your child to continue it, taking turns with you, adding a little as the story goes along.

* Keep a few things in an easy-to-carry bag to help your child manage waiting time creatively:

- small notebook and pen or pencil
- handkerchief and yarn or string
- pipecleaners
- bag of plastic zoo or farm animals

Photo caption:

Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis visits MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD on program #1563, scheduled for September 18 during the week about CELEBRATIONS.

Ask open questions, like:

- what if...everything was purple!
- what if...you were a giant...
- what if...

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As children settle into the routines of school, the Neighborhood offers themes about learning. Many of the programs center around themes about play. Playing and learning go hand in hand.

Here are some ways to encourage your child to play:

As children settle into the routines of school,

Because August is the month when families help their children make the transition from summer into school, MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD schedules its classic programs about STARTING SCHOOL August 19-23. During the week, Mister Rogers rides on a school bus and visits a kindergarten and a first grade.

Here are some ways families can make the first days of school more comfortable for their children:

If your child has friends in the neighborhood who will be going to the same school, arrange with parents for the children to get together and play -- maybe even about what they think school will be like.

Call the school to arrange for your child to tour the school building and meet the new teacher. It helps when a child knows more about a new experience beforehand.

Put a family photograph in your child's lunchbox. That's a caring reminder about being together at the end of the day.

For more ideas, including a message from Mister Rogers for children, send for a free booklet "When Your Child Goes to School," with a self-addressed business size envelope to Family Communications, Inc., Department M, 4802 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213.

Photo caption:

For many children, going to the doctor for an immunization is part of getting ready for school. Helping children deal with their feelings about injections, Mister Rogers gets an immunization from Registered Nurse Joyce Sadik on program #1709, scheduled on PBS August 29 in the new week of MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD programs about BRAVE & STRONG. (Photo: Richard Kelly)