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PBS Launches New Program for Preschoolers



BY MONICA OLIVERA

Last week I had the pleasure of attending the PBS annual meeting as a recently named PBS Ambassador. But I became even more enthusiastic after hearing about the work that PBS is doing in children's programming in this new digital world we live in.

Since they first aired Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood over 40 years ago, PBS has grown into a leading producer of quality, educational children's programming in the country. And along the way, PBS seems to be continuing Fred Rogers' legacy of presenting children relevant information through innovative ways. From television shows to interactive websites to apps, PBS is creating curriculum-based programs to provide children with the tools they need to succeed academically. Concerned about the Whole Child, the company has launched a multiplatform of games and shows that concentrate on subjects like reading, math, and science.

This fall, they will be adding another aspect to their programming when they launch what they consider will be their signature series. *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* is a show created specifically for preschoolers that focuses on their emotional development.

Angela Santomero, owner of Out of the Blue Enterprises, is the producer of *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* and has drawn heavily on the original series by Fred Rogers. Not only did she grow up watching the show, but she claims to be its number one fan. "I wanted to climb into the television and be a part of his world," Santomero said at the recent PBS annual meeting.

In *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, parents will recognize many of the puppet characters from Rogers' beloved Neighborhood of Make Believe... but now they are all grown up with preschool-aged children of their own! Your children will fall in love with Daniel Tiger (Jr.), the adorably cute main character who, like Fred Rogers, enjoys wearing a comfy, red sweater and sneakers. Santomero has also included other familiar elements such as the trolley, King Friday's castle, and additional little touches that parents will nostalgically appreciate and children will grow to love.

"When you get so angry that you want to roar, take a deep breath and count to four!"

Each episode is composed of two, 11-minute segments based on the same curriculum theme and weaves practical strategies into each lesson, teaching children how to deal with a changing world. It provides the children with the tools they need to manage their feelings. And it is done in an engaging manner. For every theme, a coping strategy is set to catchy music that can be easily remembered by parents and children alike.

Production of the show began five years ago. And over the last few years, endless hours of collaboration between the Fred Rogers Corporation, Out of the Blue Enterprises, and PBS have resulted in a new program geared specifically for preschool students.

"We knew that we could never find a person to replace Fred Rogers," Santomero said. "So we knew right away that the only way to continue his legacy would be through an animated show."

PBS officials decided to create the program for preschoolers at the suggestion of their advisors. Research has shown that more and more children are beginning school emotionally and socially unprepared, and that early social intervention can prevent later socio-economic problems that surface in teenage children and young adults. **Dr. Aisha White** is a high school teacher and one of PBS's advisors. She says that some of the skills she most frequently sees teenagers struggling with today are one like cooperation, self-control, handling disappointment, and anger management. "I also see a real need for children to learn persistence," Dr. White said in an interview with Santomero. She thinks that many middle- and high-school students seem to give up too easily when they have difficulty completing a task.

PBS hopes that their new series will help parents teach their children these and other skills that improve their academic performance. You can get a preview at PBSKids.org/Daniel. *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* will premiere with a one-hour special right after Sesame Street on Monday, September 3rd.



Monica Olivera Hazelton, NBC Latino contributor and the founder and publisher of *MommyMaestra.com*, a site for Latino families that homeschool, as well as families with children in a traditional school setting who want to take a more active role in their children's education. She is the 2011 winner of the "Best Latina Education Blogger" award by LATISM.

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