



# “Hearing” Mr. Rogers:

## PRACTICING RESILIENCE AND SELF-CARE IN THE DAYS AHEAD

By Ashley E. Hart, Esq., L.S.W.



**Ashley Hart** is an attorney and licensed social worker in Indiana. She serves as a committee member and volunteer of the Indiana Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program (JLAP). She and the Honorable K9 Judge – a certified therapy dog and canine good citizen—enjoy working with JLAP to provide emotional and stress management support in the form of pet therapy to the legal community.

A year ago, “beautiful” neighborhoods of the legal and mental health community seemed vastly different. Then, COVID-19 felt like a distant monster; not the kind we as children feared was hiding under our beds, but the mysterious invisible kind we as adults know little about. One that robs us of certainty, blurs lines between real and perceived fear, and divides us with isolation.

Now more than ever, I think about Mr. (Fred) Rogers. He was a comforting teacher in uncertainty and taught us how to sit with emotions to achieve well-being. He understood that neighbors, in good and bad times, need each other. “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”



Legal professionals are “helpers.” Clients come to us in their most vulnerable moments and look to us for consultation, guidance, and advocacy. This can be overwhelming, stressful, and emotionally taxing. But just as we are reminded on every airplane, we must first put on our oxygen masks before we aid others. To help you practice resilience and self-care in the months ahead, here are some suggestions:

**Check-Up:** Crisis intervention first looks to basic needs. Increase self-care: exercise, get adequate sleep, practice mindfulness, listen to music, draw, and get creative! How does your body feel today?

**Anxiety?** Center yourself, take a deep breath, and name five things in the present that alert your senses: What can you see, smell, taste, hear, and touch? Emotions oscillate quickly; make space for, embrace, and feel them, then let them pass. Calm amidst crisis is not avoidant and doesn't diminish severity of the situation; it is the fabric of leadership.

**Check-In:** Human beings are hard-wired for connection. We are not meant for isolation. Practice social distancing; stay emotionally plugged in. It is crucial to check on your team, family, and friends. Use social media, teleconference, or video. Better yet, be like Mr. Rogers, and call your neighbor!

**Check-Out:** Take breaks to clear your heart and mind. As the “new normal” shifts to many of us working remotely and sharing space with family, set boundaries for sanity! Create a workable space where you can shut the door when finished. Eat lunch away from your work area. Get fresh air or sunlight. Come back to your project rejuvenated. Build a playlist of your favorite hits to listen to as you work.

**Reality-Check:** Many elements of crisis are beyond our control, including decision-making and other's reactions. Practice micro-resilience by controlling the small things. Lower expectations of speed and productivity through growing pains. Be patient and kind with yourself and others.

**Gratitude-Check:** Resilient people practice gratitude daily. Gratitude is two-fold: what you can be grateful for and how you can show gratitude. Write down your daily gratitude. Give gratitude by showing appreciation to someone or supporting a local business. You'll be helping someone pay their rent!

It hit close to home when beloved actor Tom Hanks, who plays Mr. Rogers in the biopic “A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,” contracted COVID-19. Mr. Hanks said, “We are taking it one day at a time. There are things we can all do to get through this by following the advice of experts and taking care of ourselves and each other, no?” I am amazed at how resilient our communities have been despite many curveballs and unknowns. In one of his most famous on-screen lines, Mr. Hanks eloquently reminds us to keep going. “There is no crying in baseball.”

We will have beautiful days in the neighborhood again. Listen to the wisdom of Mr. Rogers: “In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers.” Take time to check-in and be a “helper” for family, friends, and colleagues, but do not forget the need to put your mask on first.

