

# *Raising Courageous Kids* Workshop Guide for Professionals

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*The greatest test of courage on earth is to bear defeat  
without losing heart.*

Robert Green Ingersoll

## Introduction



This guide is intended for use by parent educators, teachers, and other professionals who would like to implement a two-hour workshop with parents on the topic of courage based on my book *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism*. Unlike the [Reading Group Guides](#), participants are not expected to have read *Raising Courageous Kids*. This guide contains all the information you will need and is likely to be updated so check the version date at the bottom of the page.

*Although you can use **Raising Courageous Kids** to prepare for the workshop, do not make photocopies of any portion of the book to distribute to parents.*

*If you want to offer a workshop series instead of one session, contact me at the website [www.raisingcourageouskids.com](http://www.raisingcourageouskids.com). If I receive enough requests for a series, I can prepare a lengthier workshop series guide.*

## Preparation

1. Read *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism* (see [www.raisingcourageouskids.com](http://www.raisingcourageouskids.com) for ordering information).
2. Contact your county or regional extension office of the Land Grant University of your state to see if they have resources you could distribute to your parents.
3. If possible, make arrangements for onsite child care by qualified early childhood professionals.
4. Print copies of *Books about courage* and the *Workshop evaluation*.
5. Set up a large pad of paper, magic markers, and tape.
6. Set out name tags on a table near the room entrance. Place a container on this table where participants can place their evaluations as they leave.
7. Set out light refreshments suitable to your group.

8. Obtain the books in *Books about courage* and display for participants to examine. Set out the copies of *Books about courage* near the books.
9. Arrange chairs in a circle.

## Workshop outline

1. Welcome parents to the workshop, introduce yourself and your organization, and give an overview of the session including time length and topics.

*If the group is small enough, you could start by asking parents to tell others their names and what interests them about the topic. Be careful about devoting more than ten-fifteen minutes to this activity since we have a lot to accomplish in this session.*

2. Ask the group, “What is *courage*?”

*List comments on the pad. Restate the points parents make and encourage them to give examples of what they say.*

3. After you have a list of comments, tell the group, “In *Raising Courageous Kids*, Chuck Smith wrote that children attending his storytelling concerts responded to this question by saying that ‘courage is not being afraid.’ Why do you think children would say this and how would you respond when they told you this?”

*Tear off the list of definitions and tape them to a nearby wall. Begin listing parents’ comments to the new page. As comments are made, relate them to the list you taped to the wall. You could also point out that children, especially young children, have a difficult time understanding that two things that appear contradictory can coexist. For example, it is just as difficult for them to understand that a person can both love and be angry with someone at that the same time. In addition, children have misconceptions about the nature of fear.*

4. After the group provided their comments and you listed them on the pad, tear off that sheet and tape next to the definitions while saying, “Let’s examine the issue of fear. What is *fear*?”

*Write ideas on the pad. At some point, you might emphasize that fear is an emotional response to perceived danger. Whether the danger is really present is less important than whether we believe it is. The tapping on our window in the middle of the night can arouse a sudden alarm of fear which fades when we realize the tapping is the result of a tree branch moved by the wind.*

5. “Smith suggests that reasonable fear has value. What would be an example of a reasonable fear and what good would come from being afraid in that circumstance?”

*You may or may not want to write ideas generated by this part of the discussion on the pad. Fear can do two things for us. First, it serves as an early warning of something we think is dangerous and alerts us to the presence of a threat. Second, the stress hormones generated by fear give us energy to respond to the danger, whether by flight or by confrontation. After encouraging and listening to ideas, remove and tape them to the wall.*

6. “How does this discussion of fear relate to our view of courage in children and youth? What is the relationship between fear and courage?”

*Write comments on the pad. Courage is a response to fear. Where there is no fear, there can be no courage. Fear can also help protect a courageous person, heightening senses and increasing awareness. The key, though, is to prevent fear from going out of control in a spiral called “emotional highjacking,” a problem examined in the book. Irrational, unbridled fear is dangerous.*

7. “When and how does courage originate? Are we born with courage? Do we learn to be courageous?”

*You may or may not want to write ideas generated by this part of the discussion on the pad. I think the answer is both, with an emphasis on learning. For example, I think we are born with a tendency to protect life, just like we were meant to smile or push ourselves up from the mattress in our cribs. But this tendency will come to nothing unless it is **activated** by loving people in the orbit of the child’s world.*

8. “Imagine courage as a thread in time. In *Raising Courageous Kids*, Smith suggests that this thread can be followed back all the way to infancy. He believes courage begins with the emergence of willpower during infancy. Do you think willpower is a reasonable starting point for courage? If so, why?”

9. “Smith believes that courage and the capacity for heroism progresses in eight steps, each step involving a talent that evolves from the talent that precedes it and makes the talent that follows possible. The eight talents are willpower, caring, vigilance, composure, empathy, integrity, honor, and valor.”

*You could refer to a few examples of the milestones to illustrate how these skills change over time. Tear off and tape the sheet on the pad to the wall next to the others.*

10. “Finally, let’s talk about how parents contribute to these skills. Can you identify a parent practice that contributes to courage?”

*The eight skills are probably too much for parents to consider who have not had the opportunity to read the book. You should have picked out three or four practices from the book that you could suggest. Ask parents to provide examples when possible of what they mean.*

11. Thank parents for attending and encourage them to examine the books you brought and to take a copy of *Books about Courage*. Distribute the *Workshop evaluation* forms.

The version date for this workshop guide is located at the bottom of each page and on the link for the guide found at [raisingcourageouskids.com](http://raisingcourageouskids.com). Compare these dates to determine whether a newer version is available.

I am interested in any suggestions you might have about this workshop. Please send your comments to me at [casmith@ksu.edu](mailto:casmith@ksu.edu).

## Author background

Charles A. Smith is a professor and extension specialist in the School of Family Studies and Human Services at Kansas State University. He is a former play therapist, medical social worker, preschool teacher, and child development center director. He is married and the father of two children. He began working on *Raising Courageous Kids* the day after the 9-11 tragedy to call attention to the heroism that day and better understand its origins and implications for children. *Raising Courageous Kids* is his fifth book, following *The Encyclopedia of parenting* (Greenwood Press), *The peaceful classroom: 162 easy activities to teach preschoolers compassion and cooperation* (Gryphon House), *From wonder to wisdom: Using stories to help children grow*(NAL/Penguin), and *Promoting the social development of young children* (Mayfield).

# Books about courage

## Books for adults



Kathleen Brehony, *Ordinary Grace: An Examination of the Roots of Compassion, Altruism, and Empathy, and the Ordinary Individuals Who Help Others in Extraordinary Ways* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999).

Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994).

John McCain, *Why Courage Matters: The Way to a Braver Life* (New York: Random House, 2004).

Samuel Oliner and Pearl Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

Charles A. Smith, *From Wonder to Wisdom: Using Stories to Help Children Grow* (New York: New American Library, 1989).

Charles A. Smith, *The Peaceful Classroom: 162 Easy Activities to Teach Preschoolers Compassion and Cooperation* (Mt. Rainier, MD: Gryphon House, 1993).

## Books to read to children

Courage is a common theme in children's literature. This is not surprising since fear is a significant issue in the lives of children. This list is only a fraction of the list of quality children's literature that I could recommend. Ask your librarian for additional suggestions.

Gertrude Crampton, *Scuffy the Tugboat* (Western Publishing, 1955).

David McPhail, *First Flight* (Little, Brown, 1987).

Mercer Mayer, *There's Something in My Attic* (Dial Books, 1988).

Watty Piper, *The Little Engine that Could* (Platt & Monk, 1976).

Cynthia Rylant, *Miss Maggie* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983).

Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are* (Harper and Row, 1963).

William Steig, *Brave Irene* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1986).

## Websites

*The WonderWise Parent*: <http://www.ksu.edu/wwparent/>

*Raising Courageous Kids*: <http://www.raisingcourageouskids.com/>

# Workshop evaluation

I am interested in your reaction to the workshop. Please complete this form anonymously and place it in the designated container on the way out. Thanks!

1. Did you *learn anything* by participating in this workshop?  
\_\_\_\_\_Yes/\_\_\_\_\_No

If yes, can you describe something you learned? Use the back of this page if you want to say more.

2. Do you think you will *do anything* different in how you relate to children as a result of participating in this workshop?  
\_\_\_\_\_Yes/\_\_\_\_\_No

If yes, can you describe what you might do different? Use the back of this page if you want to say more.

3. Are there any other topics that you would like to know more about? Please list. Would you be interested in attending a parent meeting about any of these topics? If so, please circle them.