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# The Ring of Valor: No Bullying

*A Handbook for Teachers, Administrators,  
and other Program Leaders*

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## Overview

The *Ring of Valor: No Bullying* applies concepts from the book *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism* by Charles A. Smith (Sorin Books, 2004) to the challenge of bullying. The program began when I was asked by Iowa State Extension Specialist Kimberly Greder to be the primary speaker for Iowa State University's national parenting satellite teleconference titled *Finding a Mighty Heart: Acquiring the Courage to Stand Up for Oneself and Others* on December 7, 2004. This live program was broadcast to more than 250 sites across the country.<sup>1</sup> The response in the call-in Q&A was overwhelming. Several months later I was asked by Alaska Public Radio to respond to questions from listeners on an hour program. Again, the response was greater than anticipated. The bullying issue is a natural progression from examining the origins of courage in children and allows a down-to-earth application of the insights in the book.

The program is divided into two related parts: the *core* and *application*.

### The core program

*The Ring of Valor* refers to a circular sequence of courage and perseverance that begins with awareness of adversity and concludes with taking action.

This program simplifies the *Ring* found in the book and applies it to working with older elementary school children. Animal metaphors are used to represent five key elements: *Awareness, Intelligence, Caring, and Strength*. Each of these issues draws on the eight step skills found in *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism*. Classroom activities for use with fifth and sixth grade teachers teach the fundamental skills of the *Ring*.

<i>Animal</i>	<i>Represents</i>	<i>Raising Courageous Kids steps</i>
The Owl	Awareness	Vigilance, Composure
The Fox	Intelligence	Composure, Empathy, Integrity
The Dog	Caring	Caring, Empathy
The Bear	Strength	Willpower, Caring Honor
The Ram	Action	Willpower, Composure, Honor, Valor

<sup>1</sup> A video of the broadcast is available at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/parent/pages/purchasing.html>.

The *Ring of Valor* core program can be found at:

<http://www.theringofvalor.com>.

This site includes an extensive rationale for the five elements of the *Ring* and many classroom activities for use with fifth and sixth graders. The entire resource is online and is available at no cost.

If you would like to read more about how courage originates across childhood, visit the support site for *Raising Courageous Kids*:

<http://www.raisingcourageouskids.com>

### *The Ring of Valor: No Bullying application*

*The Ring of Valor: No Bullying* extends and builds upon the core program to apply *The Ring of Valor* to bullying. This *application* program builds on the experiences children gain from the core program.

**Important!** Teachers are urged to introduce the activities in the core program before implementing the bullying application program.

### **Cost**

*The Ring of Valor: No Bullying* application program is available entirely online. As author I retain copyright of all materials at the site. I give visitors permission to download and print any resources they need from the website, as long as they do not change or revise the material and use the material not-for-profit. You can reach the *Ring of Valor: No Bullying* by visiting [theringofvalor.com](http://theringofvalor.com).

### **Audience**

This handbook is for use by teachers, school counselors, and administrators in applying the *Ring of Valor* approach to the prevention and management of bullying in their school.

Because bullying reaches its peak during the middle school years, our focus is primarily on fifth and sixth graders to prepare them for managing this conflict when they leave elementary school.

## **Core Principles**

Our approach to meeting the challenge of bullying is based on twelve core principles.<sup>2</sup>

### **1. Focus on behavior not the labels**

Words like “bully” and “victim” are convenient shorthand when discussing behavior. These labels should never be used to identify a child as a person. To tell a child, “You are a *bully*” can be devastating. A label defines who a child is, not what a child does. Once children define themselves in this way, they may become blind to opportunities to change. How can you change if you *are* someone? A focus on behavior (e.g., “You chose to pick on her, call her names, and laugh at her.”) sets the stage for the possibility of learning a different way to act.

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<sup>2</sup> The *Core Principles* were written in collaboration with Judy Leyerzapf, Associate Education Coordinator, Eisenhower Foundation, The Eisenhower Library. Email: [jleyerzapf@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jleyerzapf@sbcglobal.net)

The same is true when we label someone as a “victim.” A child can change what he or she does, but not who he or she is.

## **2. Bullying is repeated intentional cruelty**

Not all conflict is bullying. We have to understand that social control forces are at work within all peer groups. Leaders emerge and attempt to influence behavior. Children tease and make demands of each other. If we intervened every time there is an argument between children, we would deprive them of the opportunity to deal with conflict. When the normal process of peer control turns ugly with predatory brutality, we have to intervene in such a way to avoid making matters worse.

## **3. Not all discomfort among peers is a result of true bullying**

True bullying must be differentiated from normal conflict and peer group preservation. Children argue, call each other names, and reject each other. This conflict can elicit sadness and complaints to adults. It's not bullying if the purpose of the behavior is to change another child's behavior to make that child more attractive as a friend or playmate. The goal of bullying is isolation and humiliation. Bullying is predatory.

## **4. Cruelty is unnatural**

Positive human qualities such as tenderness, encouragement, and happiness are life affirming and synergistic because they propel life forward and add value to human experience. Cruelty, discouragement, and a malevolent harvest of misery are life diminishing and entropic. They take away from life and diminish the quality of human experience.

The term “synergy” refers to a phenomenon of two or more discrete influences or agents acting in common to create an effect which is greater than the sum of the effects each is able to create independently. The term “entropy” is a measure of the disorder or randomness in a closed system, a measure of the loss of information in a transmitted message, or an inevitable and steady deterioration of a system or society.

An Egyptian cab driver and I talked at considerable length about his grandfather as we drove along a London street. He felt a great debt to a grandfather that always had time for him. At one point, I asked him, “What did you learn from your grandfather?” He responded, “To respect someone... a mother like your mother, a sister like your sister.... *Leave something good behind in every person you meet.*” That is synergy.

I believe human beings are *primarily* oriented toward synergy. Healthy babies want to smile and make others smile. They want to be touched gently and hugged. They want their parents to react with joy toward them. Simone Weil wrote in Waiting for God (Harper, 2001, p. 51), “At the bottom of the heart of every human being, from earliest infancy until the tomb, there is something that goes on indomitably expecting, in the teeth of all experience of crimes committed, suffered and witnessed, that good and not evil will be done to him. It is this above all that is sacred in every human being.”

A life gravitating toward entropy is an aberration caused by trauma. Bullying, as an enduring feature of a person’s life, is unnatural.

## **5. Every person deserves respect**

Respect must be a fundamental guiding principle for any program for the prevention of bullying. This includes the child who bullies as well as the victim and the witness.

See <http://www.ksu.edu/wwparent/courses/ip/>

## **6. Injustice requires intervention**

Cruelty should not be ignored. Children (and teachers) who are indifferent to suffering or too afraid to intervene when necessary should be held accountable for their choice.

*"I know it isn't easy for a youngster to stand up to a group of companions who are starting out for a night of troublemaking and tell them they are wrong. Nobody likes to be called 'chicken.' This is a personal problem youth has always faced and always will. But I can say to you from my years of experience that moral courage does have its rewards. It is essential to self-respect, and its practice brings satisfactions which will continue through all the years that lie ahead of you."* Dwight D. Eisenhower

## **7. Moral courage is imperative**

Refusing to be a victim of bullying and intervening as a witness to bullying requires moral courage.

*"I can say to you from my years of experience that moral courage does have its rewards. It is essential to self-respect, and its practice brings satisfactions which will continue through all the years that lie ahead of you."* Dwight D. Eisenhower

Courage is the keystone quality necessary to achieve a solution to bullying. Courage is a central cohesive force of support and stability that will give children (or anyone) the strength to face cruelty by choosing resistance or endurance depending on circumstances. For more information on courage, visit <http://www.raisingcourageouskids.com> based on the book *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism* (Sorin Books, 2004).

## **8. Children are capable of early forms of gallantry and idealism**

This idealism embraces values of decency, dignity, and maturity of thought.

*"Once again American youth has reacted to a national crisis in a typical American way. Morale on the fighting front is sky-high; and despite the fact that our young men and women in Vietnam feel a deep revulsion against the war, they believe in the fundamental rightness and the necessity of mankind's long struggle against despotism and slavery."* Dwight D. Eisenhower

## **9. Shift focus away from the bully to the target and audience**

To deprive "bullies" of what they want, the target must refuse to be a victim and onlookers must be ready to intervene when necessary. Children who cry, run away, depend on adults for help, lose their temper, or succumb to panic or rage provide the oxygen that sustains bullying. So do onlookers who remain passive in the face of cruelty. We should not treat bullying as a spectator sport. Just as a match cannot ignite without oxygen, bullying cannot exist without victims and the intimidation or approval of an audience. Both the target and the witnesses must withdraw the oxygen that ignites bullying.

## **10. Integrity and honor are necessary to persevere against cruelty**

Integrity is a belief in what is right while honor involves acting with integrity in the face of risk. Refusing to become a bully or intervening on behalf of a potential victim

## 11. Bullying is a community challenge

The solution to bullying requires a commitment by parents, teachers, and community leaders. Although bullying is often associated with schools, the solution requires a collaboration of all relevant institutions in a community.

## 12. Children learn courage in *authoritative* communities

*Authoritative communities* can be families, schools, and neighborhoods. Nurturing attributes of courage like caring, integrity, and honor is the responsibility of everyone who touches the lives of children, from a parent to the crossing guard a child meets on the way to school. Parents are in the prime position of influence, but they cannot do it alone. Success requires cooperation. I suggest the focus on targets and onlookers because our chances of success are greater with those two groups than with the bullies themselves.

### Definition of Bullying

Bullying is a conscious, willful, and deliberately hostile (but not criminal) activity intended to harm, induce fear through the threat of further aggression, and create terror. (adapted from Barbara Coloroso, *The bully, the bullied, and the bystander*, Harper, 2003).

### The Bullying Triangle

The emphasis of our approach is courage within the “bullying triangle.” The program has three goals:

1. Strengthen potential targets of bullying so that they do not become victims;
2. Strengthen onlookers to make wise choices about intervention in bullying, and
3. Strengthen the self-respect and promote compassion in children who bully.

### Program Resources<sup>3</sup>

All resources are available as PDF modules from the website. This will allow new activities to be added as they are created. *The Circle of Valor: Bullying* is a dynamic, evolving program. With the exception of this handbook, users will have to register at our *The Ring of Valor* forum ([http://ringofvalor\\_bullying.myfreeforum.org/](http://ringofvalor_bullying.myfreeforum.org/)) to receive the password.

#### Teacher resources

*This Handbook*

*Program Assessment*

Activities for fifth and sixth-graders:

*The Bullying Triangle*

*Responses to Bullying*

*The Bullying Survey*

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<sup>3</sup> Program resources will be revised as needed and will be added as they are created. Check the website for updates of this handbook and for new resources.

## **Parent resources**

Eight one-page PDF fact sheets:

- Bullying fundamentals*
- From teasing to bullying*
- Bullying facts*
- Responding to bullying*
- From victim to target*
- From spectator to witness*
- The role of schools*
- Issues for parents*

The teacher resources currently in place are just the beginning of what could become a more extensive curriculum on bullying prevention and management in older elementary school children. If you have suggestions for new resources, please join our forum and share your thoughts with us.