

Early Childhood Application Guide

First Steps to Mighty Hearts: The Origins of Courage

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I created this *Guide* to accompany my article on courage published in the January 2005 issue of the NAEYC journal *Young Children*. You can find the online version of the original article at the NAEYC website:

<http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200501/smith.pdf>

Audience and context

Early childhood administrators and collegiate teachers who want to introduce the article and its concept of courage to early childhood and primary teachers and college students are primary audience for this *Guide*. Parent educators may also find the questions listed in this *Guide* useful in their workshops. If you find this *Early Childhood Application Guide* useful and/or have used it creatively in other ways, please let me know at casmith@ksu.edu.

Procedure

1. Ask your teachers or students (participants) to visit the above website to read the article and take notes of the ideas they think are the most important. Optionally, invite participants to visit the author's website at:

<http://www.raisingcourageouskids.com>

There are many resources here participants can examine including PDF files you can download and distribute at the meeting.



2. Meet in an environment that allows for comfortable discussion and set aside approximately one hour for discussion.

3. Examine the questions in this guide and choose a sequence that fits the time frame you have. The questions are in an order that makes sense to me, but you are free, of course, to choose, order, and add as you wish.

4. Remain flexible in the discussion and allow the conversation to evolve naturally. Bring the group back to the primary question if necessary.

5. Many of the questions involve recording comments. Use a chalkboard, sheets of paper on a tripod, or on a small legal pad if these are not available.

6. Bring as many of the references found at the conclusion of the article that you can obtain. Make them available for review by participants prior to the meeting. *Raising*

Courageous Kids would be especially helpful (especially for you as the leader) but reading it is not necessary for participation in this discussion.

Questions

- What fears do children experience? What evidence of these fears do you see in your ECE program? Are children more afraid than what adults generally believe? What effect does fear have on children's lives?

Make a list of childhood fears, how they are revealed, and their consequences. You might want to encourage participants to identify fears they experienced as children. You could introduce the idea of reasonable and unreasonable fear.



- Fear is often misunderstood and unappreciated. Do you want children to be fearless? Is having too little fear a problem for some children?
- What are the dangers of fear? What happens to a child whose life is controlled by fear.
- Chuck Smith, the author of *First Steps to Mighty Hearts*, suggests that the antidote to fear involves more than protection by adults. The true solution is to strengthen the capacity of children to understand and manage fear. What do you think? Do you agree?
- In the article he writes, "Protection and reassurance are essential but insufficient." What do you think? Can you explain what this statement means and its implications for our early childhood practices? Is this statement a challenge to traditional thinking about how we as teachers typically respond to children's fears? If so, do you think the challenge is appropriate?
- Define "courage" in young children. If we think of courage as a developmental thread, when does it begin? What is the earliest example of courage?

In Raising Courageous Kids, I suggest that courage is born in the emergence of willpower during infancy. The baby struggles against the forces of gravity to roll over, to stand up, to walk and then get up after falling. Willpower is a critical part of persevering in the face of adversity.

- Chuck suggests that persevering in the face of adversity is the first primary skill underlying courage that emerges during early childhood. How would you define *willpower*? How do early childhood teachers strengthen this capacity?
- How do we reconcile proper child guidance and effective discipline with respecting and nurturing the child's emerging willpower?

Children need to understand that willpower has to be exercised within limits. Learning self-restraint and respect for others are important too. The greatest energy is created within borders. Unrestrained willpower creates anxiety in children. Both excessive indulgence and over-protection are ineffective.

- Chuck suggests that the capacity for heroism begins with learning to care about oneself and others during early childhood. What do you think? What is the rationale for this relationship? How are courage, fear, and heroism related?
- How can we strengthen children's capacity to care? Describe program strategies to achieve this goal. How do we show that our efforts are successful?
- What is "compassion" and what relationship does it have to courage? How do we nurture compassion in young children?

Compassion is from the Latin (cum-pati) which means "suffering with." A child with compassion is more likely to intervene on behalf of someone who is suffering. This is a significant component of heroism.

- Near the conclusion of the article, Chuck writes, "As a preschool teacher for eight years, I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of children in my classes who had lost this emotional synchrony." Have you ever taught a child who appeared to be incapable of compassion, a child who was indifferent to the suffering of others?
- What is the role of teachers in helping parents understand fear and how to nurture courage in their children? Which problem do you think is more prevalent in childrearing today: excessive protectiveness or permissiveness? What is an effective response to these two extremes?

