

Raising Courageous Kids Reading Group Guide for Grandparents

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*If you wait until you're really sure, you'll never take
off the training wheels.*

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Introduction



The introduction, discussion questions, suggested reading list, and author biography that follow are intended to enhance your group's reading of Charles A. Smith's *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism*. Additional guides are available for teachers, professionals, and other groups from the author's website at www.raisingcourageouskids.com.

This document is likely to be updated so check the version date at the bottom of each page.

Each participant in the reading group should have read Raising Courageous Kids. This guide is intended for informal use, possibly by one or more of the grandparents or elders in the group. The discussion may occur at one session or over a series of meetings. In all cases, the discussion leader can choose which questions to emphasize for his or her group. Leaders are also encouraged to form their own questions that relate to the book.

For discussion

1. Is the world a more dangerous place than when you were growing up? If so, can you describe the difference? How do we prepare our children to live in a dangerous world?
2. As you look back in history for your generation, what was the greatest threat or danger your generation faced?
3. The author found that when he asked elementary children to describe what they thought courage means, the first response he always heard emphasized that courage meant not being afraid. Why do you think children have this point of view? How would you respond to them?

4. How do you define *courage*? Is your definition similar or different from the view provided in *Raising Courageous Kids*?
5. Why is fear a valuable emotion? What function does it serve? How does fear contribute to courage?
6. Is courage innate or learned? Are courageous people born that way or is this something they learned?
7. Recall a time in your childhood or adolescence when you were afraid. What were you afraid of and how did you respond?
8. Is courage an important quality for a person to develop? Why? In “Children: Our Heart Work,” the first chapter of *Raising Courageous Kids*, the author suggests four reasons that courage is a fundamental capacity. Contrast your view with that of the author.

These questions originated in a discussion I had with a parent participating in a workshop on courage in San Antonio, Texas. Although she agreed that nurturing courage in children is important, she found the idea and its implications frightening. “You need to convince your reader that reading through the book is worth working through the fear about this issue,” she told me. Most of the first chapter is my effort to respond to her challenge.

9. What is the single most important thing a parent can do today to nurture courage in their children?
10. What is your role in nurturing courage in children? How can you contribute?
11. The author of *Raising Courageous Kids* describes eight steps to courage that begins with power in infancy and progresses to valor in the early adolescence. Does this eight step sequence make sense to you?
12. Which of the eight steps did you find the most interesting or significant?
13. Which of the *Mighty Heart* stories touched you the most?
14. Have you witnessed courage in young people, possibly your own children when they were young or your grandchildren? What did they do?

For further reading

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).

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).