

Raising Courageous Kids Media Guide

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*This is no time for ease and comfort.
It is the time to dare and endure.*

Winston Churchill

Introduction



Too often in this perilous world we hear the faint drumbeats of approaching danger, a call beckoning those whose hearts are filled with hate. Yet at the moment when these merchants of misery release inexplicable pain in the world, men and women with courageous hearts appear. Their heroism rekindles hope and reminds us that good will and decency remain alive.

Alana Franklin rescues a six-year-old boy from a gunman who invaded his home. *Fallon Richards* pulls a bed-ridden elderly man from his bed to safety during a fire in his mobile home. *Terreatha Barnes* leaps into a runaway vehicle containing two preschool children and brings it to a halt by pushing on the brake with her hands (breaking her jaw as she does so). What do these three individuals have in common? Other than being courageous females, Alana, Fallon, and Terreatha were all eleven or twelve years old. Their example shows us that the same heart that prompted passengers on Flight 93 to rise up against their captors, firefighters to march up the steps of World Trade Center, and two men to bring a woman in a wheelchair down 70 floors at the WTC to safety, beats inside young people as well.

We are not born with courage. Threads of power, devotion, integrity, honor, and valor were combined and woven into the tapestry of our lives from the moment we were born. *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism* answers the question, “What are the origins of courage and heroism?” by revealing how it flourishes in eight steps, beginning in infancy and continuing in the years before adolescence.

In the first chapter of *Raising Courageous Kids*, Dr. Smith concludes,

“Our greatest monuments to those who take risks and make sacrifices on behalf of others are not made of stone, steel, and glass. They are not found in parks, on city streets, or in public buildings. The greatest monument is an enduring shift in the human spirit, a transformation made possible by the caring of others. The gift of courage is a celebration of the power of the human spirit. The care we provide from the moment children enter our lives makes such character possible. Because of us, our children may say, “I too am one of these” in the difficult days to come. Every child who finds the courage to stand up to fear and the heroism to care about others is a gift to humanity. We need true heroes in an age that requires noble deeds.”

Book chapters

Children, Our Heart Work
 From Power to Willpower
 From Community to Caring
 From Danger to Vigilance
 From Fear to Composure
 From Self to Empathy
 From Morality to Integrity
 From Justice to Honor
 From Responsibility to Valor
 Developmental Milestones in Courage

About the author



Dr. Smith's father was an Army Air Force fighter pilot who was killed when his aircraft crashed while on maneuvers in Oklahoma shortly after WWII. He was thirteen months old when his father died. His severe asthma as a child and his work as a play therapist with severely ill children contributed to an interest in recognizing and honoring the risks and sacrifices of others. He is a former medical social worker, preschool teacher, and child development center director. He is a writer, public speaker, storyteller, puppeteer and professor at Kansas State University. *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).

Ten potential questions

1. Why did you write this book?

I wrote the book to honor those who displayed great courage and heroism on 9-11. I wanted to understand the origins and evolution of that courage. Furthermore, I believe that acts of courage should inspire us to make a national reevaluation of the meaning of true heroism.

2. What is courage?

Courage is overcoming fear to persevere. Courage is a choice to act decisively instead of retreating. Courage is an essential ingredient, a keystone virtue, for such positive human qualities as faith, love, hope, sacrifice, honesty, and integrity.

3. What do you mean by true heroism?

Heroism is courage elevated by nobility. A person makes a decision to take a risk or make a sacrifice on behalf of oneself or another. Heroism is not necessarily achievement. Nor are all forms of kindness heroic. Heroism means facing and overcoming fear. Where there is no fear, there can be no heroism.

4. Can you give me an example of how courage and heroism are different?

You hear about an experienced mountain climber struggling to reach a summit in horrible weather. Success depends on her courage. Then you discover that the climber is facing her ordeal in order to rescue a stranger with a broken leg at the summit. The presence of an admirable goal makes a difference. A child who is terrified of public speaking needs courage to stand up to give a speech. A child with a severe facial disfigurement who tries out for a school play elevates her courage by the nobility of her effort.

5. Isn't courage something that only adults show? I don't think of children as "courageous."

Since courage is facing fear to persevere, even preschoolers will have moments of courage. Imagine a preschooler climbing up a slide for the first time or a first grader jumping off a diving board. A four-year-old who wakes up in the middle of the night with a nightmare and manages to calm herself enough to go back to sleep shows courage. These little victories are stepping stones to greater accomplishments as children grow older.

6. Aren't people born heroic?

There are two common misconceptions about heroism. The first is that heroism is innate. Children do have genetic qualities that affect heroic behavior: a bold temperament, sensory acuity, and intelligence. But none of these qualities matter unless they are shaped and elevated by a child's life experience.

7. But people who act heroically don't really stop and think do they? Don't they just act?

The second misconception underestimates the decision making elements in heroism. The mind can process information and act according to priorities without stopping to consciously reflect on the circumstances. When under great pressure in managing risk, a large number of computations and decisions are made. The mind may be on autopilot, but the instructions were written into the mind's plan well before the event occurred.

8. Does all heroism involve rescue?

Some courage is similar to the effort of a sprinter. Speed is critical. Other forms of courage are similar to the effort of the long-distance runner. Endurance is critical. This form of courage, in facing a persistent and relentless danger, is no less admirable than the more dramatic form of courage in sudden emergencies. Consider the courage of a child with a severe facial burn or a single mother who works two jobs to keep her family intact.

9. Isn't it risky for parents to encourage their children to be courageous?

All great accomplishments require courage. Risk is an inevitable part of life. We have to prepare children to face risk with a stout heart and make intelligent decisions. Children need to be "smart with their hearts," not reckless.

10. What is the most important idea parents should take away from reading the book?

That courage is a critical quality that starts a very young age and unfolds over time because of the contributions of loving relationships.

Radio opportunities

Because of his extensive background in radio, Dr. Smith is interested in promoting a national debate about the nature of true courage and heroism by participating in radio interviews. He is especially interested in participating in radio talk shows and responding to the questions of listeners. To schedule an interview or talk show participation, contact the author by email at casmith@ksu.edu.