Raising Courageous Kids
Teen Discussion Guide

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*Progress involves risks. You can't steal second and
keep your foot on first.*

<div align="right">Frederick Wilcox</div>

Introduction

The introduction, discussion questions, suggested reading list, and author biography that follow are intended to enhance a discussion among a group of teens or between a parent and teen about the significance of courage. Although based on *Raising Kids with Courage: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism* by Charles A. Smith, participants will not need a copy of the book to participate. On the other hand, reading the book will prepare you to lead the discussion. This *Guide* is likely to be updated so check the version date at the bottom of each page.

This discussion group will be a little more structured than the Parent Discussion Guide. In most cases, the group will be guided by a parent, a youth leader, or a teacher. This guide could also be used by a parent who wants to discuss what his or her teen think about courage and heroism. It is very important to focus on understanding what the young person thinks instead of being critical or correcting what you think is a mistaken view.

You can choose which questions to emphasize and may form your own questions related to courage. If you have any ideas for additional questions that would serve as a basis for a dialogue with young people, I would appreciate hearing about them. You can contact me at casmith@ksu.edu.

For discussion

1. What is courage? Can you give me an example?

2. The author of *Raising Kids with Courage* 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*. What do you think? Is this true?

3. Do you think fear is a useful emotion? Would we be better off if we were not capable of feeling fear? What might happen?

4. Some people feel embarrassed about talking about their own courage. Why do you think they might feel that way?

5. When you were growing up, can you think of a time when you saw someone acting courageously? What happened?

6. Can you recall a time when you overcame fear to persevere toward a goal that was important to you?

7. Here are four situations. After I read each one, I would like you to tell me how you would score the individual's courage, from five (incredible courage) to one (mildly courageous).

> *Poll each teen in your group as to how they would score. Give them time to describe why they rate it the way they do. There is no right or wrong answer here. Don't press for an explanation if the young person is not able or willing to share.*

- A group of teens driving around town decide to go out drinking in a local park. Ernie, a teen who thinks this is wrong, asks to be taken home. (keyword = *home*)

- Tonya, a high school freshman who has no experience in public speaking agrees to give a speech to an assembly of all students. (keyword = *speaking*)

- Janetta, a high school sophomore with a disfiguring facial burn attends the first day of class in a new school. (keyword = *burn*)

- A senior boy is taunting and ridiculing another student who is mildly retarded. Manuel, a sophomore, steps in and tells the upperclassman to stop. (keyword = *bully*)

> *Put the keyword on a chalkboard or paper pad before voting takes place. Average the scores for each rating. Then indicate the rank for each circumstance.*

8. Can you explain why you consider this situation (point to keyword) to require the most courage?

> *You may also want to discuss the diversity in scores where they exist.*

9. What do you think *heroism* means? Is courage a requirement for heroism? Is everyone called "a hero" in society actually been heroic?

> *You might want to point out that not everyone we admire has done something courageous. We might admire an athlete for his talent and success. But is this heroism?*

10. *In Raising Courageous Kids*, Chuck Smith defines heroism as courage in the service of nobility. Do you know of anyone who has done something heroic?

> *For example, an experienced climber on a mountain slope in a fierce storm needs courage to successfully reach to peak. Would it make a difference if the climber was on the mountain to rescue an injured climber at the top?*
>
> *Don't correct the teen if you think the example he or she gives is not a good illustration of heroism. Ask more questions to better understand why your teen thinks that way.*

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).*