Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in Everyday Spaces



October 2022

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Courage

By its ubiquity, courage seems to be one of our favorite values to place before our young people. Children's literature, from picture books to YAL series, is full of courageous protagonists; to be a leading character, defeat the evil wizard, take down the land-grabbing tycoon, face down the dragon, and outsmart the pirate-robbers.

Most often in these stories, the time for courage is easy to spot (it's often about 90% through the story, when the tyrant/villain/bully/monster finally goes too far). But in real life, the moment for courage is rarely so simplistic.

Sometimes one calls up courage for a singular, bold action. But more often, we build ourselves up for consistent effort over time. Sometimes, courage looks like loudly speaking truth to power. But at least as frequently, courage is lovingly speaking truth to peers and then building power *together*.

Sometimes, acts of courage are followed by cheers and happy endings. They can also lead one to harder, more uncomfortable questions, and a need to recharge and reassess.

In short, courage is complex. But time and experience–as well as the opportunity to reflect with trusted family and friends–can help us to get more effective at embodying courage as we move through the stages of life. And, as we learn in our bedtime story, *Sophie Learns to Be Brave*, all the courage we possess along the way can help prepare us for the courage we will also need to let go of the people, places, and things we love, when the time comes.

Each of our sections this month aim to explore these and other complexities of courage. As you read through your packet, earmark where you want to go big and bold, and where spirit guides you to be slow and steady. We may each be the hero of our own vignette, but it's really just the one story we're all in together, and we have many, many pages–and challenges–ahead.

Teresa, *on behalf of the Soul Matters team*

At the Table

Exploring Courage Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night. New this year, we are increasing the number of questions we include, giving families the chance to engage in this take-anywhere and popular activity more often!

Introducing the Activity

Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

Discussion Questions

1. Which cartoon characters do you think of when you hear the word "courage"?
2. Where in your home do you go when you're feeling afraid?
3. Where does courage live in your body?

4. For people whose jobs put them in danger on a regular basis–fire fighters, journalists in warn-torn regions, deep-sea divers, etc.--where do you think their courage comes from?

5. What is the opposite of courageous? (Hint: Your family will likely have more than one answer here; in our Soul Matters community, folx said “fearful,” “comfortable,” “apathetic,” “cautious,” and “cowardly.”)

6. Has there ever been a time when being with other people who are being brave helped you to feel brave?

7. Have you ever seen an animal act courageously? What happened?

8. Tell about a time that you saw–in video or in real life–someone being really brave in a way that stuck with you.

9. Who do you know who seems never to be afraid?

10. What’s a good thing about being afraid?

11. Have you ever faked being courageous, only to discover that doing so actually helped you to do the brave thing?

12. What is one fear you’ve had for a long time? What is one that you’ve recently gotten over?

13. Is anyone in your family afraid of the dark? How has your family found ways to courageously deal with that fear?

14. Do you feel it sometimes takes courage to be yourself? When you’re at this place, how do you encourage yourself?

15. Some memories we carry are painful, and it’s hard to bring them to mind. What would it take for you to be present with that memory without wanting to flee?

16. Telling people what we truly think, and feel can take courage. What is one truth you might be ready to share?

Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child into bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice together how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.

From the Mailbox

Our literal mailboxes connect us to the wide world outside, sometimes with messages asking things from us (a donation letter or flyer encouraging us to vote), sometimes with messages offering us gifts (a letter from a friend or a special delivery). Our "From the Mailbox" section applies this metaphor to today's call for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture within the context of climate crisis. And so, we open and accept these "invitations" to join those wise leaders and organizations who are co-creating an anti-racist and environmentally responsible future.

Start small, build courage: neighborhood environmental watch groups

Maybe you saw the TED talk by environmental justice advocate and WE ACT founder Peggy Shepard? In that talk, Shepard tells the story of how she started a West Harlem environmental group in 1988 that went on to make big improvements to the air and water quality in her neighborhood. Noting that industrial polluters were granted more permits to emit waste in neighborhoods comprised predominantly of people of color, she and a few neighbors went door to door to educate people on how and why to advocate for themselves and their families at planning commission meetings. The group grew, and went on to have many successes, including transforming the NYC buses to hybrid vehicles in 2008 to improve air quality.

"So much is possible when we have the right political moment," Shepard says, "but to capitalize, we must mobilize a critical mass of people to create real change and to monitor that our politics are implemented in the way was intend."

Invitation:

- Watch Shephard's talk for inspiration and for immediately practicable ideas
- Share it on your social media with your own take-aways
- Make a direct ask to at least two neighbors or fellow congregants to see what it would take to create a hyper-local environmental watch group along the lines of WE ACT
- If you live in a predominantly white area, and you don't already have relationships with churches in more diverse, neighboring communities, then begin by 1) inquiring about possible actions already in place that you might join, and if not, 2) hosting local park and roadside clean-up efforts and invite other churches or community groups to join you. Build relationships first, and see if that could turn into a collaborative environmental group that seeks to address your communities' mutual need for environmental justice
- You can donate directly to WE ACT here: https://www.weact.org/home-3-2/getinvolved/donate/

At Play

Playing Games with Courage

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme.

Option A: Making a Family "List Poem" about Courage

Not many of us may think of poetry as a game, nor particularly courageous, but throughout the history of the genre, it has often been both. In many cultures and languages, song and verse has been used to powerfully describe alternatives to the status quo in ways that were subversive and even dangerous. And because clever turns of phrase, rhymes, and sing-song rhythms are often received as amusing, poetry is a natural choice for tongue-in-cheek assertions, humor, and play.

This month, we'll be creating "list poems" as a family. List poems can be a literal list of items that all start with the same few words, such as, "Courage is… Courage is… Courage is…." Or you can name the poem something like, "Where to Find Courage," and then the poem itself is your list of places, circumstances, etc. that build courage. You could string together several vignettes that all start with the phrase, "Courage is like the time…"

In the spirit of this section of our Soulful Home packets, approach this task playfully. Create one poem as a whole family, with everyone contributing ideas. Try your hands at rhyming, if that seems fun. Be silly and unexpected with your turns of phrase. If individuals in the family like the activity, they can riff on it to do singular poems afterward.

Here are several good examples of list poems of all sorts; it's the list at the bottom of the post.

And here is a short description to get you started.

Option B: Secret Message Night Hike

When night falls, and our senses heighten, even our most familiar places can take on an eerie quality. Grab a few flashlights and head to a well-known walking path, mild hiking trail, or even just a walk around the neighborhood.

This activity alone might be exciting enough for some children and youth. But you could go a little further with it by preparing a secret message ahead of time, cutting that secret message into pieces, and putting each piece in a clear container that also has a glow

stick or electric candle inside. Stash these containers along the trail for your child to discover as you go along.

Your message might be an encouragement: “Good on you / for trying / something new!”

It might be an invitation to a treat after the hike: “Let’s go / get some / ice cream!”

And it might be the letters in the sentence “I love you,” a simple and encouraging message that applies to all situations!

On the Message Board

A Monthly Reminder

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra, graphic, quote, or gesture for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” or “family signs” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us refocus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities. Each month, write this mantra on your family message board, or on a sticky note to put on your bathroom mirror, or the fridge. Make it part of your routine to share the mantra each morning so that it becomes something you all carry with you throughout the day.

October’s Image

https://time.com/4733122/saffiyah-khan-birmingham-protestor-edl/

Do you remember seeing this image when it was first published, back in 2017? The look on Muslim-British woman Saffiya Khan’s face is the image we’re holding this month as we explore courage together. Khan heard that a British far-right, anti-Islamic group, EDL–the English Defense League–was going to be having a public event in her city that day and attended the event as an act of protest. When she saw an impending confrontation between a woman wearing hijab and a member of the hate group, she engaged. That’s when the photo was taken.

The photo went viral, and many, many people expressed admiration for the look on her face. How would you describe it? There is calm. There is confidence. There is defiance. In interviews afterward, she says she did not feel threatened or intimidated at all by the EDL member. So it might be tempting to think that what she and other powerful people like her do doesn’t take courage, since there’s no fear to overcome in the moment. However, some earlier point in her life led her to be able to embody her power in the face of danger. Certainly, it was cultivating courage that got her to this point. That is the kind of groundwork we’re hoping to lay for and alongside our children.

So this month, as we encounter or imagine moments that DO evoke feelings of intimidation or being threatened, when we can feel ourselves inching toward the fight-flight-freeze parts of our psyche, call to mind Saffiyah Khan's face, and allow her expression to help you visualize yourself equally powerfully meeting the moment.

At the Bedside

At The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

Sophie Learns to Be Brave: Courage in Letting Go

This month's story is available for purchase as a picture book, but we're linking the video below of the author–renowned American Buddhist Joan Hallifax–reading the story to a most loving, furry listener.

https://vimeo.com/692881361/743cee56fd

In this story, a girl who lives in the American Southwest becomes afraid of loud thunderstorms and meets that fear in part through the companionship of an unexpected friend. However, the friend must leave, and it take a different kind of courage to let the friend go.

Stretching the Story:

- What is your first memory of being afraid? Do you remember how you returned to calm afterward?
- Sometimes, when we are afraid, we don't want to be around other people, and sometimes, we do. Which helps you better?
- There is a big, sudden kind of courage, like when you would rush to grab a toddler's hand before they wander out into the street. And there is a smaller, quieter kind of courage in releasing people, pets, and places we love, such as when we move homes or a beloved relative dies. Parents, tell about a time you experienced each, or when you remember your child showing each.

On the Porch

Raising a Child of Courage Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk (online or in person) about soulful parenting. The "A Sip of Something New" section invites you to engage a new idea shared by someone else. The "Spiritual Snacks" section stimulates personal storytelling and the sharing of your own wisdom and experience.

A Sip of Something New

The Courage to Be Rejected, and to Risk Connection

Entrepreneur Jia Jiang became Internet famous a few years back for documenting his project in rejection therapy. Watch (or rewatch) his 15-minute TED talk with your conversation partner.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vZXgApsPCQ

Afterward, name to each other a few things that you've always wanted to do, say, have, experience, etc., but that you haven't had the courage for.

There's no pressure here–the goal isn't to embark on your own rejection therapy journey, or to challenge one another to finally achieve that difficult thing. Rather, use the safe space of your conversation partner's trust to give voice to that which we most often hide away, and then to wonder together what it would take for us to gin up the gumption to meet our closest-held desires, or our elusive curiosities?

Spiritual Snacks to Share

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don't treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of storytelling and memory.

Questions

1. What act of parenting thus far has called for the most courage from you?
2. When was a time that you thought you were acting courageous, but it turns out your assumption about the situation was wrong?
3. Sometimes, courage isn't something that inspires us to "do," but rather to "not do." When was the last time you let a challenging situation play out rather than intervening to "rescue" your child or another loved one?
4. How were your own parents or guardians courageous in raising you?
5. When is courage easy for you to call up, and when is it difficult?
6. Generations are often described in terms of what shared event called the most courage from them. (Think wars, plagues, catastrophes, etc.) When has your generation, broadly speaking, risen up to meet the moment with courage, and when has it fallen short?

7. Which takes more courage, building a bridge, or burning one? Which do you tend toward in tough situations?
8. It takes courage to break old patterns and raise our children in ways that are different from how we were raised. What does that look like in your family?

The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. The Extra Mile suggestions often surpass what is considered an "everyday moment" in a family, and may involve more preparation, planning, or time to accomplish. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

Monstrous Focaccia Faces

Find a good focaccia recipe that suits your family's dietary needs. Here's is wheat-based one we've tried, and here is a gluten-free option. The bread tastes something like an especially rich pizza crust. Next, gather an assortment of interesting vegetables. Purple onions and scallions, colorful bell peppers, black and green olives, tomatoes (jars of sun-dried are good, if you no longer have seasonal ones where you live), and herbs are all traditional. Cut your veggies into a variety of shapes and sizes so you have a lot to work with. A good tip is that feta cheese (or soy cheese) cuts well for teeth shapes.

At the stage in your recipe where your dough is risen and ready to be baked, before drizzling the olive oil on top, arrange your veggies into fun monster faces, scary scenes, or other weirdly wonderful compositions.

This activity is done in three stages–the mixing of the dough, the decorating, and then the eating, with periods of inactivity in the middle (the rising and the baking stages). So plan for an open afternoon, or else do the dough mixing and rising ahead of time and leave just the decorating and eating part to do together in an evening.

Blessing of Courage

> *A blessing on those who keep showing up in their authentic, evolving selves, even though it seems like an overwhelming ask of one's spirit. May their courage help us, too, to come back again and again, and keep faith in our fellow humans.*
>
> *A blessing on those who know their own limits, and by whose example we understand what self-compassion truly looks like. May their courage to say a loving "no" be the sound that brings our culture back into integrity with the life force in each of us.*
>
> *A blessing on those who do the hard work of deep listening and then finding connections among seemingly disparate interests. May their graceful leadership be our example of true collectivism and coalition building, our best hope for an inclusive future.*

A blessing on those who question conventional wisdom, the ways things have always been done, and the patterns of power that have prevailed for centuries. May their brave wonderings lead us all toward deeper understanding and a fearless curiosity.

A blessing on those who risk the messes and mistakes that must be made in order for one to arrive at real understanding, at deeper truths, and more authentic expressions. May their precious vulnerability lead the many to the wisdom our age so desperately needs.

A blessing to those who choose the lightest ways available to them to live on the earth, our mother, even though those ways may be less convenient or fashionable–those who buy less, reuse more, repair what can be fixed, and share with others. May their efforts to care for our planet ripple out and may we all thrive together one day.

Connect with more Inspiration for your family, and for you!

Parents can Join our Facebook and Instagram pages for daily inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/

Parents and youth will want to check out our YouTube music playlist on the monthly theme.

Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by Teresa Youngblood,
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