

# Developing courage in children

One morning several years ago, I discovered that my four year old had developed an abscess on her gum and required serious dental treatment. Taking her to sit on the dentist's chair was easy, but getting her to consent to the treatment and cooperate with the dentist was an ordeal.

One thing we talked a lot about during that difficult hour at the dentist's was the need for courage. We even chanted "courage, courage, courage" together. Eventually, she overcame her fear and consented to open her mouth for the treatment. On the way home, we talked briefly about how wonderful it was that she had shown courage. She went to her follow-up visit with her father. When I joined them afterwards, I asked her about the treatment. With an obvious joy and pride in her eyes, my daughter's first sentence was: "Mommy, I had so much courage! I sat in the chair and kept my mouth open for the dentist. Now my tooth is all well!"

We have all witnessed moments of nervous hesitation in our children before taking a brave new step. Coming down a big slide for the first time, taking a piano examination and trying a new sport are all instances a child may feel great fear. At these times, don't belittle his fear by saying "It is easy," "No big deal," or "Don't be a little baby." Instead recognize these occasions as opportunities for children to learn about courage. Courage is not the absence of fear but the quality that helps us rise above it. Once the child has overcome his fear, we can further nurture his courage by acknowledging it:

"It took a lot of courage to slide down. Good for you!" Acknowledgement of a virtue helps the child realize her own strength of character and builds her self-esteem. The next time she is faced with fear, she can draw upon this inner strength to overcome her fear. The same virtue of courage that helped her come down the slide or go on the stage will help her tell the truth or take

for opportunities to talk about courage to children. Help the child notice the courage of an Olympic diver or the need for courage when someone in the movie continues to lie out of fear.

The following is a simple story about courage taken from the "Virtues in Us" Character Education Curriculum.

Julia and her parents were invited to her Aunt Christina's birthday party.



responsibility for her mistake even when she fears the consequence.

**Practical ideas to develop courage:**

Together with your child search for pictures of people showing courage and make a collage to put up in his room.

Help children learn simple songs or quotations about courage.

Tell true stories of the courage shown by the child himself at a younger age or by a family member (Grandma, uncle or aunt). These are very motivating and build self-esteem. Knights and dragon stories, while exciting and useful in describing courage, do not give a child a situation he/she can identify with. Simple stories about real life scenarios a child may come across are more effective.

While reading a book, watching a TV program or other daily activities, look

There were many guests there. After dinner, her aunt came over to Julia, held her hand gently and said: "Your mom told me you are learning piano. Would you play a piece for us please?" Julia looked anxiously at her parents. She had never played the piano in front of so many people. When she saw her parents' encouraging eyes, she gathered all her courage and replied politely: "Sure, I will try my best." At first Julia's hands were shaking, but soon they moved smoothly on the piano keys. When she finished everyone clapped for her. Her courage had helped her overcome her fear and she felt very happy inside.

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