

Courage: Being brave enough to do what you should do, even when you are afraid

PARENTING WITH COURAGE:

What does it look like to parent with courage?

Let's take a moment to distinguish between fear and danger. In the film *After Earth* (2013), there is a great line where Will Smith's character clearly delineates between fear and danger. He says, "Fear is not real. The only place that fear can exist is in our thoughts of the future. It is a product of our imagination, causing us to fear things that do not at present and may not ever exist... Do not misunderstand me, danger is very real, but fear is a choice." In short, fear is something we create in our mind. It is driven by anxiety. Danger is something entirely different. It involves a real and immediate threat.

I believe that parents often forget the differentiation between these two things, as they parent their kids.

We tell our kids that they can't do a certain thing or engage in a certain behavior because we are worried they "might" get hurt or sick. If you are a parent who makes decisions based on what "might happen", I challenge you to think about the flip side. They might NOT get hurt or sick. They MIGHT have joy. They MIGHT make a new friend. They MIGHT learn something new about themselves.

If you lived your entire life not doing anything because of what MIGHT happen, you would be living a very boring, non-existent life:

"I'm sorry boss, I can't come into work today because I might hurt myself on the stairs walking to my desk."

"I can't make it to lunch today because I might get into a car accident on the way."

"I can't use my flat iron on my hair because I might burn my hand."

When I put this into perspective, it seems ridiculous to live your life in a way that you refuse to participate in something if there is any likelihood of physical or emotional danger. But this is exactly how some parents force their children to live. They don't allow them to play organized sports because they are afraid their kids will get hurt. They don't allow them to paint or help in the kitchen because it might get messy or they could cut their finger with a knife. Hear me: I am not suggesting that we put children in danger on purpose. Small children should not use knives in the kitchen!

The point is, we are keeping our children from joyous things, even if they are more inconvenient for us, by saying, "No, you might hurt yourself."

We project that a child might be in danger, so we do not allow them to do certain things. But this really isn't danger. It is fear. And fear-based parenting is the quickest route to losing out on joy and possibly even developing a child who has anxiety later in life.

—Excerpt from *Make Words Matter*, by Dr. Beth Trammel

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COURAGE:

For parent reflection:

- Where in your life do you mix up fear and danger?
- Have you ever caught yourself starting a sentence with “You might...”
- Where have you seen your child mix up fear and danger? Based on this reading, how might you help him or her see the difference and have courage in the face of fear?

For discussion with your child:

- What things scare you? Why do you find those things scary?
- Do you ever fear messing up or doing something wrong? If so, why do you think you fear that?
- What do you think of when you hear the word “fail”? What emotions do you feel when you think about that word?
- When have you “failed” at something (parents should answer, too)? What was the outcome? Were there any “silver linings”?
- What does “failing” (or messing up, or being unsuccessful by whatever definition) say about who you are as a person?
- Who are some people you know who have messed up before? How have you seen them recover?
- How do you know when you need courage?
- What do you do when you are scared?
- What do you need from me to help you have courage?

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For parents to read:

<https://makewordsmatterforgood.com/2019/09/08/being-allowed-to-fail/>

For families to watch together:

Brave (2012), *Soul Surfer* (2011), *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010)

For kids to read:

Hush by Jacqueline Woodson (grades 7+)

For families to watch together:

TedEd Talk about Harriett Tubman: <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-courage-of-harriett-tubman-janell-hobson>