

The Circle of Courage

The Circle of Courage is a model of youth empowerment supported by contemporary research, the heritage of early youth work pioneers and Native philosophies of child care. The model is encompassed in four core values: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. The central theme of this model is that a set of shared values must exist in any community to create environments that ultimately benefit all.

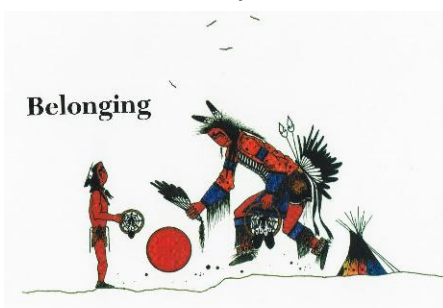


The model is represented by a circle - the medicine wheel - that is divided into quadrants. The circle is sacred and suggests the interconnectedness of life. Likewise, it expresses the sacredness of the number four - the four directions, the four elements of the universe, and the four races. Each quadrant of the CIRCLE OF COURAGE stands for a central value - belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity - of an environment that can claim and reclaim all youth. It represents the "cultural birthright for all the world's children."

The Circle of Courage is a philosophy that integrates the best of Western educational thought with the wisdom of indigenous cultures and emerging research on positive youth development. The circle suggests the importance of the shared values of belonging, generosity, independence, and mastery. While the four dimensions of the Circle of Courage can be described individually, they must be viewed as one. Ideas from the book *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future* offer insight on understanding the four values:

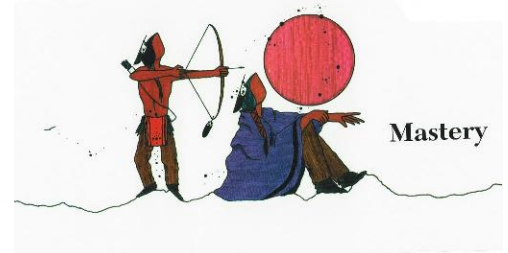
Belonging:

In Native American and First Nations cultures, significance was nurtured in communities of belonging. Lakota anthropologist Ella Deloria described the core value of belonging in these simple words: "Be related, somehow, to everyone you know." Treating others as kin forges powerful social bonds that draw all into relationships of respect. Theologian Martin Marty observed that throughout history the tribe, not the nuclear family, always ensured the survival of the culture. Even if parents died or were not responsible, the tribe was always there to nourish the next generation.



Mastery:

Competence in traditional cultures is ensured by guaranteed opportunity for mastery. Children were taught to carefully observe and listen to those with more experience. A person with greater ability was seen as a model for learning, not as a rival. Each person strives for mastery for personal growth, but not to be superior to someone else. Humans have an innate drive to become competent and solve problems. With success in surmounting challenges, the desire to achieve is strengthened.

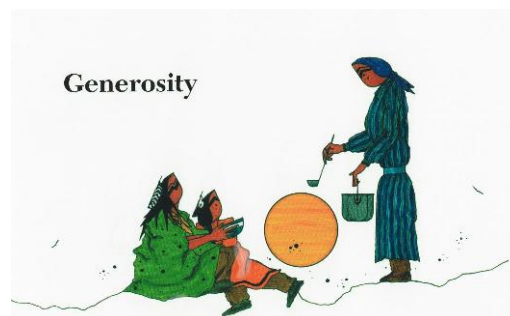
**Independence:**

Power in Western culture was based on dominance, but in tribal traditions it meant respecting the right for independence. In contrast to obedience models of discipline, Native teaching was designed to build respect and teach inner discipline. From earliest childhood, children were encouraged to make decisions, solve problems, and show personal responsibility. Adults modeled, nurtured, taught

values, and gave feedback, but children were given abundant opportunities to make choices without coercion.

Generosity:

Finally, virtue was reflected in the preeminent value of generosity. The central goal in Native American child-rearing is to teach the importance of being generous and unselfish. In the words of a Lakota Elder, "You should be able to give away your most cherished possession without your heart beating faster." In helping others, youth create their own proof of worthiness: they make a positive contribution to another human life.



Model and information from Reclaiming Youth International – www.reclaiming.com

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