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Session: 'Courage'

Pre-session Preparation

PowerPoint Slides (optional)
Copies of worksheets
Articles about Courage

Learning Objective

Group discussion that will develop a personal understanding and appreciation for the value of Courage.

Two minute recap of last session.

Hand out 'Courage' Session worksheet

Ask children to write their name, date, and session number on the top of the sheet

Start the Session.

Ask participants to consider the following questions;

What does Courage mean to you?

Dictionary definition: "ability to control fear when facing danger or pain"

Other suggestions may include; being brave, confident, not scared, beliefs

Courage in your opinions, beliefs, abilities and potential, personal skills, ability to be personally responsible

Do you answer "True" or "False" to these questions?

1. I stand up for what is right, even if I stand alone.
2. I don't cave in to negative peer pressure.
3. Fear of failure does not prevent me from trying things.
4. I am not afraid to express myself just because some people might disapprove.

I think I am/am not a courageous person because:

What examples can you give of people showing courage?

You may want to think of jobs that need courage, things you may have to do in life, things other people have done throughout history that needed courage.

For example; Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Emergency Services, Armed Forces

Discuss how showing courage may feel.

"It takes a lot of **courage** to stand up for what's right when we stand alone. Or to do what's right despite disapproval and negative peer pressure. Or even to take risks that are for our own good. In this program we learn what it means to be morally courageous and how that empowers our lives."

Relaxation – Last 5 minutes

Close session and thank participants for their time and contribution.

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Name:	Date:
Session Number:	Session Name: COURAGE

Developing a personal understanding and appreciation for the value of COURAGE.

What does Courage mean to you?

Do you answer "True" or "False" to these questions?

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What examples can you give of people showing courage?

You may want to think of jobs that need courage, things you may have to do in life, things other people have done throughout history that needed courage.

I think I am a courageous person because:

"It takes a lot of courage to stand up for what's right when we stand alone. Or to do what's right despite disapproval and negative peer pressure. Or even to take risks that are for our own good. In this program we learn what it means to be morally courageous and how that empowers our lives."

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'Courage' can be a perfect word

By Chet Mottershead

Years ago, The Disability Rag ran a short article called, "Courage is for when the other options are easy." Using "courageous" to describe disabled people, it said, was a hackneyed stereotype applied willy-nilly by the media; it caused more harm than good. What was really courageous was "deciding to fight for our rights when society is always telling us to be good cripples" -- but reporters never got that.

Today reporters are still using "courageous" and "brave" to describe disabled people. But what of it? says Chet Mottershead. "I am not going to discard the concept of courage for persons with disabilities just because a nondisabled person misuses the word."

Why are some disabled folks infuriated or frustrated by the word "courage"? What is wrong with having courage or being perceived as courageous? I think "courage" is a magnificent word.

My first awareness of the word "courage" was in the late 1940s when I watched movies about World War II. The plot would have one soldier defending the pass or the bridge against the oncoming enemy, while the rest of his comrades would escape the attack to fight another day. For me, risking or giving one's life for others was probably the highest example of courage.

As I grew older, however, I saw other examples of courage by people who gave of their life but did not physically end their life. The most poignant were mothers who would get a full- or part-time job to help pay the bills, or to save money for that much respected college education. And even more courageous was the mother who tried to maintain stability within the family as she shielded the children from an alcoholic father.

Today, two other examples readily come to mind. These are the parents who have a disabled child and in most cases have to give extraordinary physical, emotional, and economic resources to help that child develop in the early stages of his or her life. The other example is the courage it takes to reconcile an untimely or unexplained death of a family member. There are as many examples of courage as there are individuals, disabled or not.

Courage is not only making the choice to risk one's life so that others may live; it is also making the choice to live (with certain "unfavorable" or "tragic" restrictions) so that others may live or that you, yourself, can live. Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber best describes these two aspects as "essential courage" and "everyday courage," and an easy way to define them are the "courage to die" and the "courage to get up in the morning."

For whatever reason, some of us disabled folks have developed a resentment toward this word that has inspired individuals and civilizations through the ages. Many of us resent it when a nondisabled person who observes our living (and working) patterns calls us "courageous." Well, I think many of us -- just as the nondisabled people cited above -- are examples of courage.

I have had people tell me they admire my "courage." When they said it because of their understanding of efforts I had spent to achieve a certain goal in spite of many complications, I appreciated their comments very much. One time however, when I was at a park pushing my young son in a swing from my wheelchair, a person came by, put his hand on my shoulder and said how "courageous" I was. I smiled and thought that it doesn't take much effort to be courageous nowadays. Should everyone swinging a child receive a medal for

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courage? When I told my wife, she said that the person may have meant he admired or felt good by what he saw. Or, as my cynicism emerged, I figured he may have meant "better you than me, pal."

Even if the latter was the case, I am not going to discard the concept of courage for persons with disabilities just because a nondisabled person misuses the word. We deserve ownership of that word too.

Many of us disability advocates have labored hard over the years to eliminate stereotyping and to promote our activity in the mainstream of society. By criticizing the word, we support the stereotyping of "courage". I would argue we should be critiquing the people who use the word incorrectly. Why are we giving up the use of a powerful word by allowing them to control the interpretation (the "spin") of that word when they describe disabled folks?

I would argue that we have an opportunity to help people understand their emotions and their definition of the word "courage". Some nondisabled people may talk of "courage" because it is the first word that comes to mind. I chalk that up to an inappropriate comment - something we all do when we are at a loss for words but want to say something.

In other instances nondisabled people are truly moved or inspired by actions or living patterns of people with disabilities. It is this "everyday courage" that many nondisabled people recognize and admire. But they do not know how to talk about it. What they may be saying is, "I'm glad to see you are making it, and if I have a similar situation, I now know that maybe I can make it also. Thanks for being a positive example of how the human spirit triumphs."

Others may use the word "courage" as a way to thank their god that they are not "crippled." Such people are in no way inspired by what we are calling "everyday courage". Here the word and intent is being misused-just as the words "liberal", "conservative" and "Christian" are misused.

We, and most other people, know the true meaning of "courage". We should not allow these degrading nuances to keep us from recognizing and using such a powerful and inspiring word to define someone's actions or character. Both disabled and nondisabled people exemplify "essential courage" and "everyday courage"; I do not want to be excluded from this aspect of humankind.

Chet Mottershead uses a wheelchair as a result of an injury when he was a Marine. He has worked in rehabilitation and advocacy for 25 years.

Source: <http://www.ragged-edge-mag.com/archive/courage.htm>

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In Search of Courage

By: John McCain

Finding the courage within you.

Over the past 30 years, American culture has defined courage down. We have attributed courage to all manner of actions that may indeed be admirable but hardly compare to the conscious self-sacrifice on behalf of something greater than one's own self-interest. Today, in our excessively psychoanalyzed society, sharing one's secret fears with others takes courage. So does escaping a failing marriage. These are absurd examples of our profligate misidentification of the virtue of courage. There are many other closer calls. Is the athlete's prowess and guts on the playing field an example of courage? Is suffering illness or injury without complaint courageous? Not always. They may be everyday behaviour typical of courageous people. They may be evidence of virtuousness. But of themselves, these acts, admirable though they are, are not sufficient proof of courage.

Courage is like a muscle. The more we exercise it, the stronger it gets. I sometimes worry that our collective courage is growing weaker from disuse. We don't demand it from our leaders, and our leaders don't demand it from us. The courage deficit is both our problem and our fault. As a result, too many leaders in the public and private sectors lack the courage necessary to honor their obligations to others and to uphold the essential values of leadership. Often, they display a startling lack of accountability for their mistakes and a desire to put their own self-interest above the common good.

That means trouble for us all, because courage is the enforcing virtue, the one that makes possible all the other virtues common to exceptional leaders: honesty, integrity, confidence, compassion, and humility. In short, leaders who lack courage aren't leaders.

Lack of courage is not the exclusive failing of political leaders, but our failings as well as our virtues set a national example. We may have learned important lessons from the intelligence failures that preceded the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the fruitless search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. But I'm not sure we set a reassuring example to the rest of the country by declining to punish anyone involved in those failures. Not one person was fired or was moved by his or her conscience to resign. Similarly, the prisoner abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib has occasioned much soul-searching but little in the way of personal accountability. The enlisted people responsible for the abuses are facing courts-martial, as they should. But others higher in the chain of command have yet to face serious disciplinary action or offer their resignations. No one has had the courage to stand up and say, "It's my fault, I'm going to resign."

When no one takes responsibility for failure, or when responsibility is so broadly shared that individual accountability is ignored, then failure in public office becomes acceptable. It's hard to see how that serves the country.

The same holds true for the business world. Corporate America has taken significant blows to its reputation, because too many executives don't have the courage to stand up for what they know is right. The perception among many is that corporate leaders are committed only to their own self-enrichment. In 2002, Leo Mullin, the former CEO of Delta Air Lines, received a bonus of \$1.4 million plus \$2 million in free stock, even as the airline laid off thousands of employees. He left Delta with a huge severance package that was in no way justified by his performance. More recently, we've learned how Enron's traders bragged about gouging

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California ratepayers during that state's energy crisis. Those traders weren't executives, but they were inspired to behave the way they did by the "me first" climate of self-aggrandizement that Enron's leaders had created. When there's an absence of courage, greed and selfishness take over. And it's not without consequences. There's a growing disdain -- if not contempt -- for much of corporate America. And that's not healthy for the country's future.

If courage is in scarce supply, then demand is down as well. We are a strong, mostly lawful, prosperous country. We don't have as much to fear as we did in the past -- despite the events of September 11 and despite the ongoing war in Iraq. Approximately 200,000 Americans went to Iraq to destroy the regime of Saddam Hussein. From a country of 270 million people, that's less than 1% of the population. Very few of us are called upon to test our courage in the crucible of fear and hard moral choices. And yet, courage still matters -- more than we think.

Without courage, all virtue is fragile: admired, sought after, professed, but held cheaply and surrendered without a fight. Winston Churchill called courage "the first of human qualities . . . because it guarantees all the others." That's what we mean by the courage of our convictions. If we lack the courage to hold on to our beliefs in the moment of their testing, not just when they accord with those of others but also when they go against threatening opposition, then they're superficial, vain things that add nothing to our self-respect or our society's respect for the virtues we profess. We can admire virtue and abhor corruption sincerely, but without courage we are corruptible.

Courage is not always certain, and it is not always comprehensible. As courage demands great sacrifice, so does it demand great economy in its definition. General William Tecumseh Sherman defined courage as a "perfect sensibility of the measure of danger and a mental willingness to endure it." That seems to me as apt a definition as any. Courage is that rare moment of unity between conscience, fear, and action, when something deep within us strikes the flint of love, of honor, of duty, to make the spark that fires our resolve. Courage is the highest quality of life attainable by human beings. It's the moment -- however brief or singular -- when we are our complete, best self, when we know with an almost metaphysical certainty that we are right.

One thing we can claim with complete confidence is that fear is indispensable to courage, that it must always be present for courage to exist. You must be afraid to have courage. Suffering is not, by itself, courage; choosing to suffer what we fear is. And yet, too great a distinction is made between moral courage and physical courage. They are in many instances the same. For either to be authentic, it must encounter fear and prove itself superior to that fear. By fear, I mean the kind that entails serious harm to ourselves, physical or otherwise, the kind that wars with our need to take action but which we overcome because we value something or someone more than our own well-being. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the capacity to act despite our fears.

"You can live with *pain*. You can live with *embarrassment*. Remorse is an awful companion."

In the past, I've been able to overcome my own fears because of an acute sense of an even greater fear -- that of feeling remorse. You can live with pain. You can live with embarrassment. Remorse is an awful companion. And whatever the unwelcome consequences of courage, they are unlikely to be worse than the discovery that you are less than you pretend to be. I can recall all too well those times I've avoided the risk of injury or disappointment by overruling the demands of my conscience.

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One such time came during the 2000 campaign for president, when I failed to say that the Confederate flag that flew over the state capitol of South Carolina should be taken down. I rationalized, in a moment of cowardice, that that decision should be left to the people of South Carolina. After the campaign, I returned to South Carolina and apologized, which didn't mean much since the apology came after the fact. The lesson that I took from that experience was this: In the long run, you're far better off taking the courageous path. I don't know if I would have won South Carolina, but taking the position I did, I lost. Maybe I would have lost by more if I had spoken out -- so what? At least my conscience wouldn't have bothered me long after the disappointment of a lost election had worn off.

If fear is a condition of courage, so too is love. It is love that makes us willing to sacrifice, love that gives us courage. And it was love that helped me endure five years of captivity in a Hanoi prisoner-of-war camp, the love and compassion that came from my comrades. Whenever I was down, my fellow prisoners picked me up, many times at risk to themselves. I learned what I didn't want to learn: that I had failings that required the assistance of others. The great privilege of my life is to be associated with men of courage who tried to impart their own courage to me.

"Don't let fear convince you that you're too *weak* to have courage. Fear is the opportunity for courage, not proof of *cowardice*."

Love makes courage necessary. And it's love that makes courage possible for all of us to possess. You get courage by loving something more than your own well-being. When you love virtue, when you love freedom, when you love other people, you find the strength to demand courage of yourself and of those who aspire to lead you. Only then will you find the courage, as Eleanor Roosevelt put it, "to do the thing you think you cannot do."

If you do the thing you think you cannot do, you'll feel your resistance, your hope, your dignity, and your courage grow stronger. You will someday face harder choices that very well might require more courage. And when those moments come and you choose well, your courage will be recognized by those who matter most to you. When your children see you choose, without hesitation, without remark, to value virtue more than security, to love more than you fear, they will learn what courage looks like and what love serves, and they will dread its absence.

We're all afraid of something. The one fear we must all guard against is the fear of ourselves. Don't let the sensation of fear convince you that you're too weak to have courage. Fear is the opportunity for courage, not proof of cowardice. No one is born a coward. We were meant to love. And we were meant to have the courage for it.

U.S. Senator John McCain is the author, along with Mark Salter, of *Faith of My Fathers*, *Worth the Fighting For*, and *Why Courage Matters*, from which portions of this essay were adapted.

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