

Model Courage

The best way to “teach” courage is to model it for your child. There are four things you can do to make this most effective.

- **Admit when you are afraid.** When you are afraid of something, admit it, even to your child. Being open and honest about your fears will help your child to understand you. It will also allow them to understand your courage when you do the very thing that you are afraid of.
- **Talk about *being* courageous.** Ask them, “How can I be courageous even though I am afraid?” If you have younger children, you might ask, “What should mommy do in order to be strong?” or “How can I be brave?” This will help your child think about what courage looks like. You will likely have to give ideas and guide them, but every moment is an opportunity.
- **Follow through.** This is, by definition, scary. You didn’t want to do it, but you knew it was the right thing to do. Be careful though! Sometimes when we’re afraid we act angry. Make a decision that you will be strong but not with angry words or actions. Then go and do that thing that is both scary and courageous!
- **Talk to your child about it afterwards.** This is the most powerful lesson you can teach. You get to say, “I was really afraid, but I wanted to do the right thing, so I was courageous, and I did it.” You are your child’s hero already, and your actions have a lifelong impact!

Encourage Courage

Another way to teach courage is by guiding your child through the situations when they are afraid. The steps are exactly the same as modeling courage, just from a slightly different *perspective*.

- **Recognize when your child is afraid and then talk to them about it.**
- **Ask your child what they should do in order to be courageous in this situation.**
- **Help your child follow through and do the right thing.**
- **Afterwards, talk with them about what happened.** Help them remember their fear, then point out their courage, and then talk about the results. Not every situation that requires courage turns out great. If they broke a window and have to admit to it, then they may have to spend the next few weekends working to pay for it. The point of courage is not to avoid consequences, it is to conquer your *fears*.

Choosing courage is choosing to grow into a better person which is something that doesn’t happen if we always only play it safe. Courage is something you can *pass down* to your children. All it takes is facing your own fears and helping your children face theirs. When you teach courage, you leave a legacy of strong and brave children in a world that needs courageous people. You can start today. Just find one thing you don’t want to do because you are scared or worried, then grab your kid, and start showing them what it means to have courage!

Resources include:

1. Goud, Nelson H. “Courage: Its nature and development.” *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development* 44.1 (2005): 102-116. Nelson explores the movement from fear, to courage, to growth as something humans can choose.