

The Circle of Courage

Educating the Mind & Teaching the Heart

The Circle of Courage is a philosophy developed by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern that was published in their book *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*. The Circle of Courage is a model of positive youth development based on medicine wheel teachings that integrate traditional Indigenous child-rearing practices with modern youth-development and resilience research.

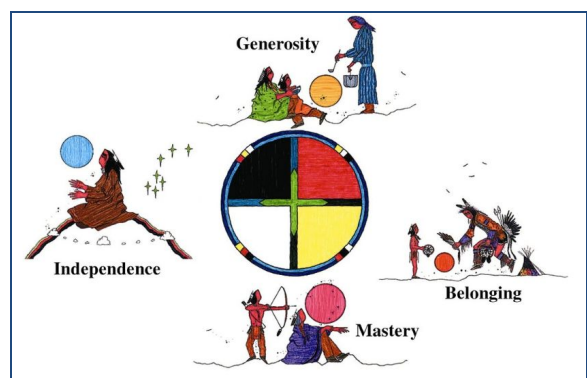
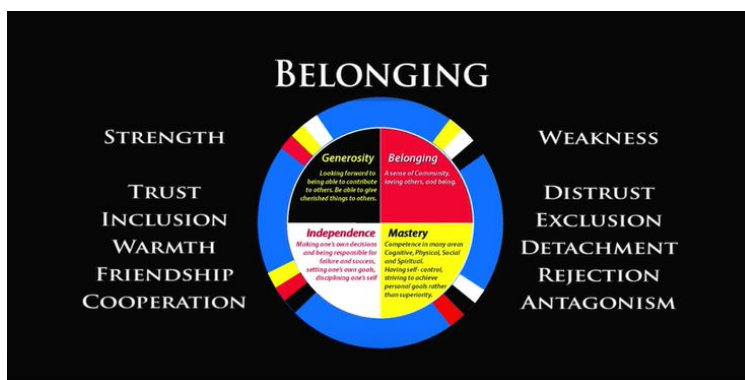
There are four universal needs essential for the growth and development of all children: significance, competence, power, and virtue. For children to develop a strong sense of self-worth they must know that they are: significant (possessing a healthy spirit of belonging), competent (possessing a healthy spirit of mastery), powerful (possessing a healthy spirit of independence), and virtuous (possessing a healthy spirit of generosity). The medicine wheel in which the Circle of Courage is placed, is a foundational teaching tool used in most Indigenous groups as a system of knowledge to teach and describe wisdom about life, knowledge and being.

Placing the the Circle of Courage within the medicine wheel symbolizes the holistic lifelong learning evident in developing each principle of Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity throughout each stage of life. The Circle of Courage is a holistic and lifelong learning model to create a balanced, harmonious and resilient individual.

Belonging

I am significant

The spirit of belonging is the universal longing for human connection cultivated by relationships of trust, so that a child can say, “I am loved.” Belonging is the first and most important principle of The Circle of Courage that emphasizes the importance children have to belong and connect with others and the world around them. To belong is our most basic need as identified in Maslow’s hierarchy; it is recognized that a child must establish a sense of belonging before they can move towards building self-actualization and self-confidence. Belonging comes through building relationships with others and with the world one lives in. We can cultivate belonging through our relationships with family, friends, school, work, community groups, church groups, clubs and sports, etc. Having strong and healthy relationships (sense of belonging) nurtures a child’s self-worth, self-esteem and equips them with the qualities necessary to develop healthy relationships. A child with a strong sense of belonging will demonstrate: trust, inclusion, warmth, friendship, and cooperation. On the other hand, a child with a weakened sense of belonging will demonstrate: distrust, exclusion, detachment, rejection, and antagonistic behaviour.



Belonging is the place where children begin to form healthy relationships. Connecting with the environment, with nature, and with others teaches children the foundations to building healthy relationships and developing a strong sense of self-worth. In Indigenous 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 builds powerful social bonds that draw all into relationships of respect.

What communities, and places do you belong to? How can you contribute to belonging in your community?

For instructional practices that cultivate Belonging in the classroom visit The Indigenous Student Success Toolkit.