

The Circle of Courage

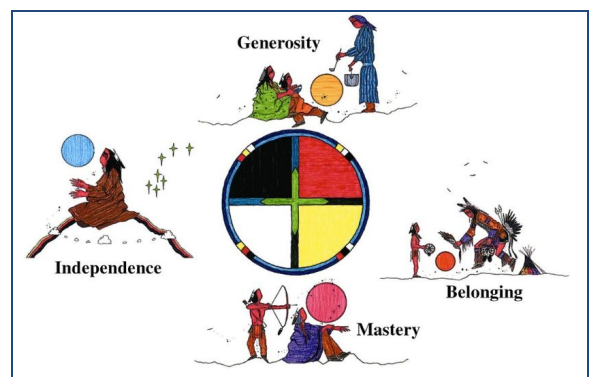
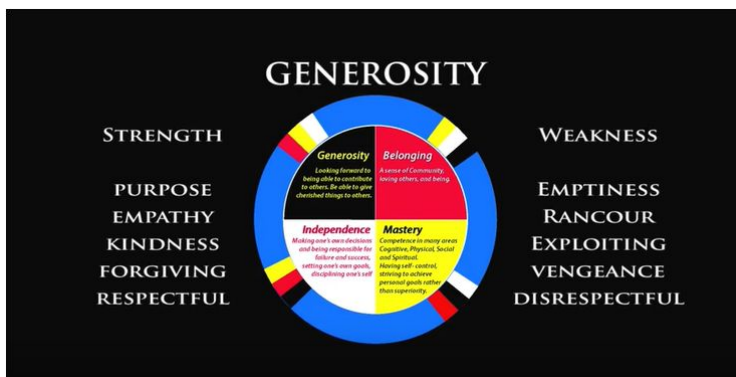
Educating the Mind & Teaching the Heart

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.

Generosity

I am a good person

The Spirit of Generosity is cultivating character by showing concern for others so that a child can say, “I have a purpose for my life.” Generosity is one of the most valued virtues in Indigenous culture and communities. There is a shared responsibility to care for others, extended family, and community members. Giving children opportunities for generosity builds purpose, empathy, kindness, respect, and forgiveness in a child’s character. Traditions such as the Potlatch are used to mark significant events in life, where the host celebrates and shows appreciation through generous acts like giving gifts, sharing songs and stories, and feeding all who celebrate with them. Generosity means contributing positively to others and being able to give time to others without expecting things in return.



Virtue is reflected in the value of generosity. The central goal in traditional 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 and positively contributing to another person’s life, children create their own proof of worthiness. Helping others and giving to others supports a child in developing their personal sense of purpose and self-respect.

How have others helped you and shown you generosity? How can you give to others (without expecting anything in return)?

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