

# 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.

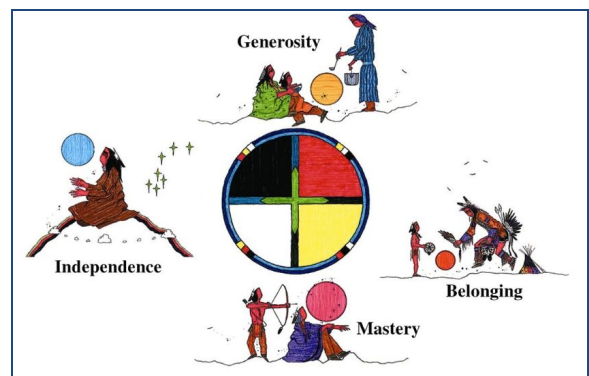
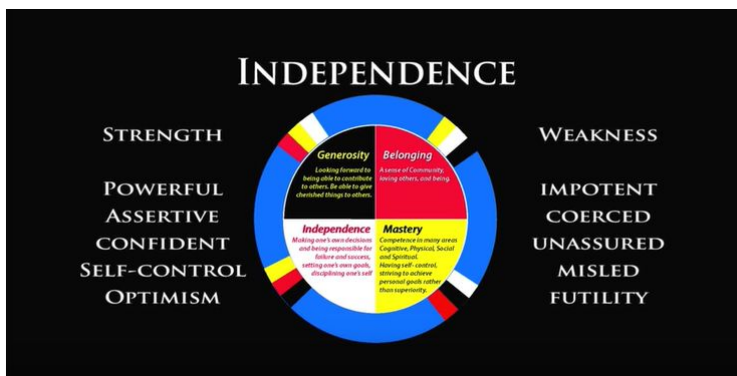
There are four universal needs essential for the growth and development of all children: significance, competence, power, and virtue. For children to develop a strong sense of self-worth they must know that they are: significant (possessing a healthy spirit of belonging), competent (possessing a healthy 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.

## Independence

*I am powerful*

The spirit of independence is the free will cultivated by responsibility so that a child can say, “I have the power to make decisions.” Independence builds a child’s sense of empowerment and intrinsic motivation, which ultimately builds one’s confidence. When children are empowered with confidence they can persevere and persist through challenges in life and learning. Independence is best described as taking responsibility for oneself. Parents can gradually and appropriately empower children to become contributing members of their community by taking the role of a coach and cheerleader and using discipline appropriately. When empowered children can begin to make decisions because they are the right decision, and not because anyone is watching. Responsibility comes naturally when a child is supported in becoming independent.



Fostering Independence in children is a system of empowerment and not a system of control. In contrast to obedience models of discipline, Indigenous 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 modelled, nurtured, taught values, and gave feedback, but children were given abundant opportunities to make choices without coercion. Children are best supported in developing independence through modelled behaviour and positive examples by trusted adults and role models.

Independence supports your own decisions and being responsible for your personal choices (both failures and successes). How are you responsible and how do you show independence in your life?

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