

# 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.

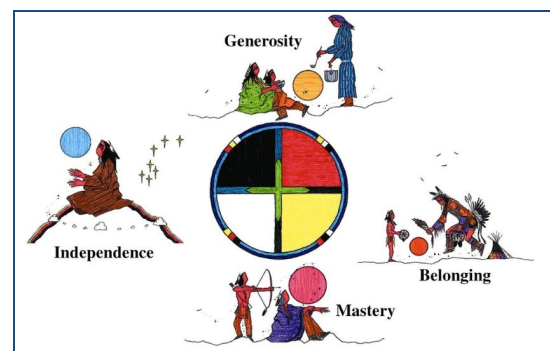
Placing the the Circle of Courage within the medicine wheel symbolizes the holistic lifelong learning evident in developing each principle of Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity throughout each stage of life. The Circle of Courage is a holistic and lifelong learning model to create a balanced,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

## Mastery

### *I can do ...*

The spirit of mastery is the inborn thirst for learning that is cultivated through developing a child’s competence. By learning to cope with the world, a child can say, “I can succeed.” Mastery is not simply cognitive or academic. It is holistic in nature and includes learning through physical, social, and spiritual competencies. In its holistic nature, Mastery provides children with the opportunity to develop all parts of themselves and grow into a strong sense of competence.

Once children face challenges and persevere beyond those challenges they will gain a sense of competence that encourages them to achieve more. Progressing beyond life’s challenges is the goal of mastery. In *Reclaiming Youth at Risk* the authors state, "when the child's need to be competent is satisfied, motivation for further achievement is enhanced; deprived of opportunities for success, young people express their frustration through troubled behaviour or by retreating in helplessness and inferiority" (Brendtro, Brokenleg, Van Bockern, 1990, p. 49). Every child wants to succeed, and Mastery is discovering what you can do.



In traditional Indigenous cultures, children were taught to carefully observe and listen to those with more experience who modelled learning. Mastery was a journey of personal growth and not a competition to become superior to another. Humans have an innate drive to become competent and solve problems. When children succeed in surmounting challenges and coping with the world, their desire to achieve is strengthened.

We are all competent in different ways (physical, cognitive, and spiritual). How do you strive towards your goals and develop your skills? Who supports you to persevere through life’s challenges? How can you support others to reach their goals?

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