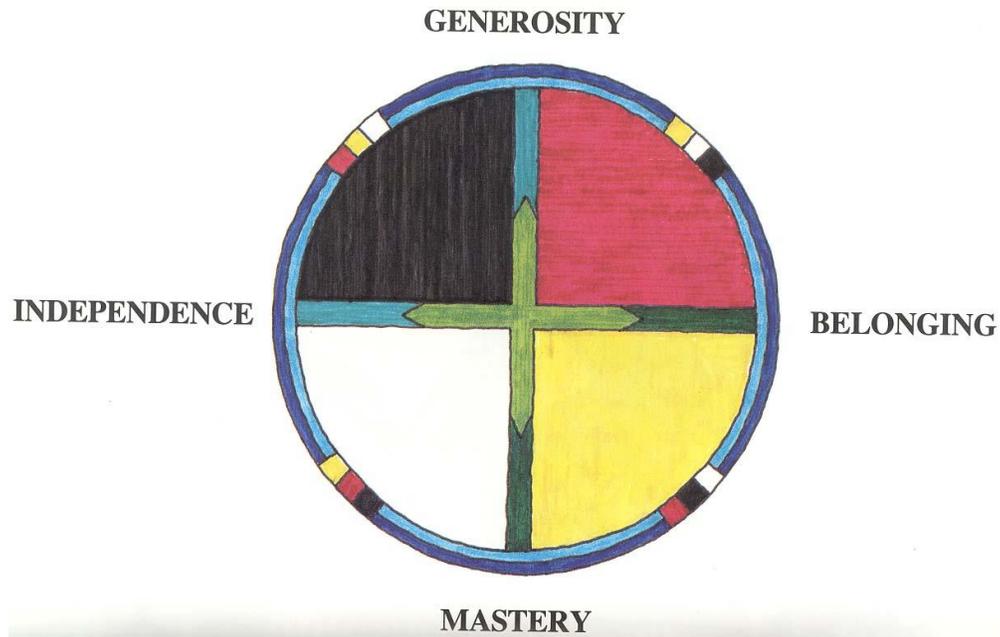


# THE CIRCLE OF COURAGE PHILOSOPHY



Click below for a short video about the Circle of Courage:



# ABOUT THE CIRCLE OF COURAGE

In their book, Reclaiming Youth at Risk, Augustana College Professors, Dr. Larry Brendtro, Dr. Martin Brokenleg and Dr. Steve Van Bockern proposed a model of youth empowerment called the **Circle of Courage**. The model is based on contemporary developmental research, the heritage of early youth pioneers and Native American philosophies of childcare. The model encompasses four core values: **Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity**.

Anthropologists have long known that Indians reared courageous, respectful children without using aversive control based on these 4 core values. Nevertheless, Europeans coming to North America attempted to “civilize” indigenous children in punitive boarding schools, unaware that their tribes possessed a sophisticated philosophy that empowered children. These values are validated by contemporary child research, and compare favorably with Dr. Stanley Coopersmith's extensive research on the development and maintenance of self-esteem. Dr. Coopersmith's work identified four, very similar, key components essential for a positive self-esteem: significance, competence, power and virtue.

## BELONGING

In Native American culture, significance is nurtured in a community that celebrates the universal need for belonging. Native American anthropologist Ella Cara Deloria described the core value of belonging in Indian culture in these simple words: "Be related, somehow, to everyone you know." Treating others as kin forges powerful social bonds of community that draws all into relationships of respect. Throughout history, the tribe, not the nuclear family, always ensured the survival of the culture. Though individual parents might struggle, the tribe is always there to support the growth of the next generation.

## MASTERY

Competence is ensured by guaranteed opportunities for mastery. The first lesson in traditional Native American culture is that one should always observe those with more life experience in order to learn from them. Children are taught to see someone with more skill as a model for learning, not as a rival or a threat. One must strive for mastery for personal reasons to build feelings of confidence and competence, not to be superior to someone else. Humans have an innate drive to master their environments. When success is achieved, the desire to achieve more is strengthened.

## INDEPENDENCE

Power is fostered by deep respect for each person's independence. In contrast to obedience-based models of discipline, Native American teaching is designed to build respect and teach inner discipline. From early childhood, children are encouraged to make decisions, solve problems and show personal responsibility. Adults modeled, nurtured, taught values and gave feedback, but children are given abundant opportunities to make choices without coercion.

## GENEROSITY

Finally, virtue is reflected in the preeminent value of generosity. The central goal in Native American child rearing is to teach the importance of being generous and unselfish. In *The Education of Little Tree*, Forrest Carter recounted his grandmother's overriding principle: "When you discover something good, the first thing to do is share it with whoever you can. That way, the good spreads out and there's no telling where it will go." In helping others, young people create their own proof of worthiness; they have the power to make a positive contribution to another human life.

## The Spirit of Belonging

Abraham Maslow's theory of human needs postulates that a sense of belonging must be attained before self-esteem and self-actualization can be realized. As a student is drawn into the circle in the Spirit of Belonging, a relationship is established which is based upon mutual trust and respect. This provides the motivation to live with "a minimum of friction and maximum of goodwill" (Bendtro et al, 1990). The ultimate test of this kinship is behavior. You really belong when you act as if you belong!

<b>Spirit of Belonging</b>	<b>Distorted Spirit of Belonging</b>	<b>Broken Spirit of Belonging</b>
Attached	Gang Loyalty	Unattached
Loving	Craves Affection	Guarded
Friendly	Craves Acceptance	Rejected
Intimate	Promiscuous	Lonely
Gregarious	Cult Vulnerable	Isolated
Trusting	Overly Dependent	Distrustful

## **Mending a Broken Spirit**

- Create a cohesive classroom environment where each student can feel like an important member.
- Give positive encouragement.
- Recognize individuality and creative talents.
- Make sure teacher expectations are very clear so students understand classroom expectations and task assignments.
- Be specific when reinforcing a student's positive behavior.
- With discipline and behavior, focus on the deed and not the doer.

## The Spirit of Mastery

Native American education strives to develop cognitive, physical, social and spiritual competence. This holistic view of learning recognizes that all students can learn and each student must be given the opportunity to demonstrate competence in some area. Without opportunities for success, students will tend to express their frustration and lack of self-worth through inappropriate behaviors. Learning that is somehow connected to the everyday life of the student and the opportunity for student collaboration provides very powerful intrinsic motivators. In the Spirit of Mastery, success becomes “a possession of the many, not of the privileged few” (Bendtro et al, 1990).

<b>Spirit of Mastery</b>	<b>Distorted Spirit of Mastery</b>	<b>Broken Spirit of Mastery</b>
Achiever	Overachiever	Non-achiever
Successful	Arrogant	Failure Oriented
Creative	Risk Seeker	Avoids Risks
Problem Solver	Cheater	Fears Challenges
Motivated	Workaholic	Unmotivated
Persistent	Perseverative	Gives Up Easily
Competent	Delinquent Skill	Inadequate

## **Mending a Broken Spirit**

- Connect classroom learning with student's personal lives.
- Make sure each student experiences success in something.
- Help student to set realistic goals.
- Teach student problem solving strategies.
- Teach student to solve problems through collaboration.
- Encourage student to take on challenging tasks.
- Consider alternative assessments to recognize the many facets to evaluate learning.

## **The Spirit of Independence**

Native American child rearing philosophies place great emphasis on "guidance without interference" (Bendtro et al, 1990). Learning then becomes the responsibility of the student who can be held accountable through appropriate assessment procedures. Student empowerment is required to foster the belief that a student is in control of the learning process. This sense of autonomy is a powerful intrinsic motivator. In Native American culture, the internal locus of control must be balanced by social controls. Students first need to be dependent, learning to respect and value the wisdom of "elders". Modeling provides a basic framework that can be adjusted for each student to adapt to his/her particular learning style and multiple intelligences.

<b>Spirit of Independence</b>	<b>Distorted Spirit of Independence</b>	<b>Broken Spirit of Independence</b>
Autonomous	Dictatorial	Submissive
Confident	Reckless/Macho	Lacks Confidence
Responsible	Sexual Prowess	Irresponsible
Inner Control	Manipulative	Helplessness
Self-Discipline	Rebellious	Undisciplined
Leadership	Defies Authority	Easily Led

## **Mending a Broken Spirit**

- Model decision-making and assist students in developing their own framework.
- Give choices for activities to recognize multiple intelligence development.
- Involve students in participatory decision-making.
- Train students how to study and to learn.
- Help students develop internal controls - an inner self-discipline for student empowerment.
- Teach alternative behaviors to improve personal control.
- Confront students with issues of personal responsibility.
- Let students face the consequences of their behavior.

## **The Spirit of Generosity**

The highest virtues in Native American culture are generosity and unselfishness. Self-esteem and self-worth are greatly increased by learning to help others. There is a responsibility to consider the welfare of everyone in the community. In a classroom, peer tutoring and cooperative learning groups allow students to share their talents with others. There is a feeling

of pride and joy that is experienced by helping others. Without opportunities to share their talents, students cannot become caring, responsible adults. The help given must be genuine and not equated with personal gain. Students should be encouraged to get involved in the school community through a variety of service projects.

<b>Spirit of Generosity</b>	<b>Distorted Spirit of Generosity</b>	<b>Broken Spirit of Generosity</b>
Altruistic	Obligatory Generosity	Selfish
Caring	Over-involved	Affectionless
Sharing	Plays Martyr	Narcissistic
Loyal	Co-dependency	Disloyal
Empathic	Over-involvement	Hardened
Pro-social	Servitude	Anti-social
Supportive	Bondage	Exploitative

## **Mending a Broken Spirit**

- Foster cooperative interpersonal relationships.
- Encourage student to be a good listener and a good communicator.
- Encourage students to express their opinions.
- Understand that students may express themselves in ways that may help or hurt themselves or others.

### **REFERENCES**

**Drs. Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, & Steve Van Bockern (1992).** “Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future”. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Drs. Lynn Moore, Diane Schon & Alicia Thornton – professors at The University of Calgary, who developed the website: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dmjacobs/edts325/circle/index.htm>