

Life's Building Blocks, Inc.  
Making Character Development Fun



**Virtue of the Month – Courage**

*Courage is not simply one of the virtues,  
but the form of every virtue at the testing point.*

—C. S. Lewis

*Courage is reckoned the greatest of all virtues;  
because, unless a man has that virtue, he has  
no security for preserving any other.*

—Samuel Johnson

As adults, we know it is not always easy to do the right thing. Even when we know exactly what we ought to do, it can still take great strength of character to do it. Sometimes what we struggle with is temptation: in order to do the right thing, we must resist an attractive alternative. At other times, we have trouble doing the right thing not because we want to do something else, but because we are afraid to do what we know is right. To overcome that fear, we need the virtue of courage.

**The highlighted virtue for this month is courage.**

**What is courage?**

There are two basic forms of courage—physical courage and moral courage. These virtues can be displayed together or separately. Both involve taking risks. It takes physical courage to face physical dangers. For example, a mountain climber may display physical courage. Moral courage, however, requires something else: it must serve some morally desirable end. In other words, morally courageous people take risks not just for fun or to prove that they can do something difficult, but in order to do their moral duty. A whistleblower who risks her career and reputation to expose corruption embodies the virtue of moral courage.

### **Why do people lack courage?**

People often fail to show courage when they should because they are focused on the short-term consequences for themselves. For example, if a man works at a factory and observes a safety violation that exposes other factory workers to danger, he may not speak up for fear of being seen as a “troublemaker” by his supervisors (especially if he knows that his supervisors are intentionally turning a blind eye to the safety violation). He may be right to assume that speaking up will result in negative consequences for him. However, if he took a wider view of the situation, he would realize that the risk of his fellow workers suffering serious, perhaps even permanent, injury far outweighs the risk to his job or reputation. True courage frequently requires us to be selfless and place the interests of others before our own interests.

### **The joys of courage**

The long-term consequences of acting courageously are often very positive. For one thing, there is the satisfaction and inner peace that comes from knowing you did the right thing. Consider our factory worker again. Suppose he finds the courage to speak up, and his drawing attention to the safety violation forces the company to correct the problem. He will always know that his actions protected his fellow workers from harm. And he will not have to suffer the lasting pain of guilt and regret that might have come to him if he had failed to speak up and then had witnessed someone suffer a serious injury.

Another benefit of showing courage is that you can inspire the same virtue in others. When people see someone else do a brave thing, it reminds them that we all have the capacity for courage inside us. That is one reason why we all love heroes: they show us what we can be. Real heroes do not only care about what is easiest for them. They put helping others and doing the right thing first, even if it means taking personal risks.

Courage can help us reach our full potential in every part of our lives. Developing moral courage helps us do the right thing and encourage others to do the right thing when we are confronted with difficult situations. Courage also gives us the strength to pursue our dreams and to challenge ourselves to new heights of achievement. Courage comes from controlling your fears and building your confidence. Thus, the braver we are, the louder is the voice inside us that shouts, “Yes, I can!”

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle had many insights about the nature of courage that we still find helpful today. One such insight that children in particular should understand is that true courage falls between two extremes: cowardice (fearing everything) and recklessness (fearing nothing). We want our children to be willing to stand up for what is right; we do not want them to be overly timid, frightened of every shadow. But at the same time, we do not want them taking unnecessary risks or charging foolishly into danger.

Aristotle also said that bravery can come by doing brave acts. In other words, courage, like all other virtues, can be strengthened by practice—by forming virtuous habits. When we encourage our children to perform small but meaningful acts of courage—such as inviting an unpopular classmate to eat lunch with them (moral courage) or riding a bike without training wheels (physical courage)—we will help them to develop their character and their capacity for greater acts of courage later in life.

To help you in this process, this month you’ll receive several items that highlight courage: a chapter book on “Jessica the Brave” from the Spruce Street Six book series, an activity book, and some new cards for the What Would Zaki Do? board game. You’ll also receive a courage-based family activity/challenge card and new thank you cards that your children can send to those people in their lives that model courage.

In the Jessica Activity Book, Jessica has a short dialogue with Mr. Lacey in which they discuss a new kid in Jessica’s neighborhood named Harold. Harold’s speech is a little slow and unusual, and Jessica has heard some of her peers making fun of him. Mr. Lacey is proud of Jessica for not making fun of Harold herself, but he asks her why she has never intervened when others were teasing Harold. Jessica realizes that it is not always enough simply not to participate in something you know is wrong. She decides that she ought to show moral courage and stand up for Harold when other children give him a hard time. Then Jessica and Mr. Lacey talk about how being brave is not the same as being fearless, and how it is very important not to be reckless or seek out dangerous situations just to prove how brave you are.

At the end of this month’s chapter book, *Spider Cave*, your child will read a short piece called “Something to think about,” written in the voice of Zaki, the character

chameleon. Here Zaki points out the various moments in the book when Jessica had to show physical or moral courage (or both). Zaki focuses on how Jessica overcame her fears in each instance and helps make Jessica's experiences relatable. Reading this along with the adult guide for *Spider Cave* can give you some ideas of questions to ask your child about the importance of developing the virtue of courage. You may soon find yourself having a dialogue with your child much like Mr. Lacey's discussion with Jessica in the activity book!

**Questions to ask your children this month:**

- What does courage mean to you?
- Can you name some brave people?
- Have you ever seen an adult do something courageous?
- Have you ever seen someone your age do something courageous?
- What is the bravest thing you have ever done?
- What is something you are scared to do that you would like to develop the courage to do one day?
- What specific steps can you take to conquer your fears?
- Should you try to be completely fearless?
- What is the difference between courage and recklessness?
- Why does it take courage to stand up to your friends when they want to do something you know is wrong?
- Where does courage come from?
- How can you help other people (like your friends or siblings) to be braver?
- What can you do to become more courageous?