

Restoring Bonds of Respect

Martin Brokenleg

Response Ability Pathways (RAP) training puts the Circle of Courage into practice, providing skills to respond to the needs of children instead of reacting to their problems.



Let us put our minds together and see what kind of life we can make for our children.

~Sitting Bull

In writing about the Circle of Courage, my co-authors and I brought together different professions, racial backgrounds, and upbringing (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002).

While the Circle of Courage philosophy transcends culture, we initially used Native American images and stories to express these ideas. Because Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity are universal needs and values, we have found broad acceptance from those who care deeply about children and youth in many parts of the world.

In my own childhood, I knew Lakota elders who were at the Battle of the Little Big Horn when Custer was killed. My grandfather was 50 years old when he first saw white people. He was a medicine man and a horse trainer who gave us our family name—Brokenleg.

My mother and father both were stolen from the embrace of their family and sent to residential schools. There they were treated as inferiors to be trained rather than sacred ones to be loved. Because they were so repulsed by these experiences, Mother and Father made certain we were raised according to our traditional tribal ways.

My earliest memories are joyful ones, full of warmth, laughter, emotional connectedness, and many, many people—all of whom deeply cared about me. Although we were poor in possessions, we were rich in personal relationships because of love and constant support. My many uncles were my fathers and my aunts were my mothers. Dozens of grandmothers and grandfathers told me of our traditions and kindly scolded me if I strayed from these cultural teachings. I experienced my many relatives and felt Belonging with them all. My relatives included not only people but animals, plants, stars, the wind, and those from the spirit world. I was to walk gently and, by learning well, would know Mastery over my life. Frequently, I was cautioned to use wisely the power which made me Independent. I could be a blessing or a problem, just by my behavior. Under all circumstances, I was to know that Generosity would require work and selflessness, but it was always the right response.

Today, I live more with the memory of my relatives and ancestors than their presence. I am now a man who sees old age on the horizon. I can also see the great and frequent pain our children live with, no matter where they are in the world.

Families today have many distractions that take attention away from our children. The struggle to earn a living and provide for children may require parents to spend less time with those they love. An increasing proportion of young people know the hollow emptiness of loneliness, the searing suffering of loss, the icy silence of abandonment, whether physical or emotional. These children in pain are blessed if they have caring adults in their lives.

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One of the most difficult transitions to achieve is the shift from an idea to the implementation of that idea. However important a goal might be, getting that goal to happen is the problem. As one who has spent at least half of my life on diets, I know how difficult lasting change can be. Something in us resists change, even if we need that change.

All children need loving, committed, and consistent adults around them if they are to bloom fully. We must become the extended family of elders and parents who

once surrounded each child. We may not be related by blood, but we can be a child's parent by love, caring, and dedication.

RAP training applies the Circle of Courage principles to the lives of children (Brendtro & du Toit, 2005). We awaken to the strength of spirit that is the birthright of every child. We see the promises of successful and joyous living that we can inspire in children. We will know the deep satisfaction of trusting connections with young persons as they discover a new life pathway. So in the wisdom of Sitting Bull, "Let us put our minds together" to encourage our children on pathways to responsibility.

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This article is adapted from the author's foreword to the text for the course Response Ability Pathways (Brendtro & du Toit, 2005). For information on RAP training by certified instructors, see www.reclaiming.com or contact courage@reclaiming.com

References

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- Brendtro, L., & du Toit, L. (2005). *Response Ability Pathways: Restoring bonds of respect*. Cape Town, South Africa: Pre-Text.

