

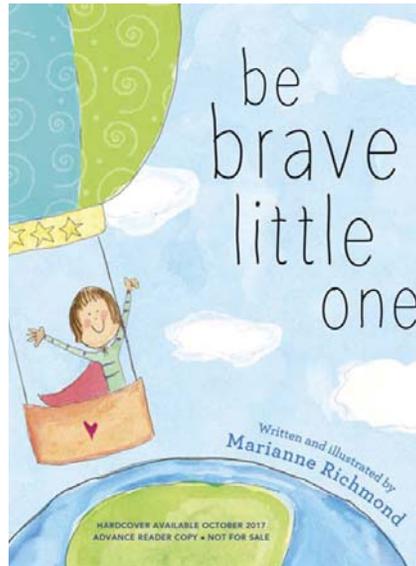
Be Brave to Teach Brave

By Lynn Mendelsohn

Some concepts we want to teach young children seem much more elusive than others; the concept of bravery may be one of these. For instance, when we want to teach young children nice manners, as parents and caregivers, we monitor ourselves, making sure we intentionally use and model the appropriate “please, thank you and may I” messages. Young children in our home and classroom environments will pick up on these skills quickly and mirror them back quite easily. But teaching the concept of bravery seems...well...scary! How many of us feel brave enough to tackle the job of instilling bravery in our children and preschool students? And what does bravery look like? Undoubtedly bravery looks different for each person. It may be because teaching bravery and ultimately being brave is hard, even for us, and may not come along until children and adults have mastered other important cognitive and social-emotional skills like self-control, perspective-taking and task completion which becomes goal setting and goal achievement with maturity. Our uniqueness as people also means that the process we undergo and the decisions each of us begins to make regarding “becoming brave” will probably look different and be a reflection of us as individuals.

So where do we begin this difficult journey toward “bravery” with our young children at home and in the early childhood classroom? Naturally, we continue to talk with our children at home and at school about different scenarios we are likely to face in life and how we’ve handled each situation, including positive and negative outcomes. Children can learn the basics of informed decision-making from each of us—that striving for the best decision requires drawing on prior knowledge and experience with family, friends, teachers and themselves. As our children’s initial teachers, at home and at school, we can also rely on good books to broaden our own perspectives and provide opportunities for expanded discussion. *be brave little one*, written and illustrated by Marianne Richmond, is a book of soaring self-discovery through everyday experiences and encourages time for mindful reflection along the way. It is a book for all ages, depicting diverse children making decisions in a variety of typically dangerous, frightening or difficult situations. Its universal appeal is validated by the author’s book dedication to “me and you.” As parents and teachers we must remember that although we are facilitating the learning process, we are also personally engaged in that process and, if open, can be enlightened too.

Be brave to **begin**
to listen inside
to the voice of your heart,
so truthful and wise.



The story, *be brave little one*, begins with a simple premise—that we, as parents and caregivers, have a common wish for our children, which is for them to develop bravery going forth into the world. The author continues, “Be brave to begin to listen inside to the voice of your heart, so truthful and wise.” She immediately indicates that becoming brave will be a journey that starts inside with a little mindfulness and introspection—“How far will I go? What things can I be? When I get to choose what brave is to me.” She writes that each of us will be able to choose what “brave” means to us. Ms. Richmond’s rhyming verses also include a very clever and delightful romp of oppositional words and phrases in the middle of the story when she describes many opportunities to be brave. She says there will be times to step up to meet challenges or step out if it’s not right; to stand up to tell what you know or sit down to get to know someone. Bravery is to explore the unknown but also to return home. Brave is to keep going and brave is to be still.

The story has an exciting energy and cadence, like going on an adventure throughout, as each situation unfolds. There are opportunities to introduce new vocabulary words too. This is a particularly good read for pre-k through first grade. It outlines ordinary situations we’ve all encountered or are encountering and is a wonderful tool for prompting deep and meaningful discussions with young students. In addition to *be brave little one*, Marianne Richmond has written other stories which explore feelings.

As with all stages of human development, the mastery of bravery for each of us as children and adults happens along a continuum of quiet and reflective self-discovery—knowing what’s in our hearts, some of which happens early in life and some of which takes place years into adulthood. Since we are products of our environments, it clearly becomes our jobs as teachers and caregivers to lead by Ms. Richmond’s examples—providing a safe, mindful environment in which we and our children can step up or step out, explore or retreat, keep going or be still. If we include meaningful literature, lead with our hearts and are brave to let our children develop their own hearts, we will esteem them individually and help them become their own people who will be “brave” on their own terms.