

Courage Retreat[®]



Conversation Starters

The following questions or tasks correlate to the activity portion of Morning Meetings as described by The Responsive Classroom[®] protocols.* These questions and tasks seek to reinforce the areas of core learning from the Youth Frontiers Courage Retreat, which are for students to:

- Identify social fears that impede responsible decision-making and prosocial behavior.
- Gain perspective that everyone has social fears and they are not alone in their feelings.
- Understand courage.
- Understand how acting with courage can make a positive difference for oneself and for one's school.
- Gain confidence to resist unhealthy social pressure.
- Deepen relationships with classmates.

The Social-Emotional Learning competencies enhanced by the retreat are:

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-making

Directions for Classroom Teachers, Social Workers or Counselors:

The following activities are designed for students to write in their notebooks or journals. Students can share in small groups or with the whole group as they feel comfortable. Some activities have recommended facilitation instructions (listed in italics). The questions are grouped and ordered below. Feel free to engage in activities that best address your students' needs and issues as they arise.

*For information on Responsive Classroom, visit responsiveclassroom.org.



Courage



- 1 Write your definition of courage.

- 2 Are having courage and being brave the same or different? How?

- 3 On a scale of one to 10 (one being “not confident at all” and 10 being “very confident”) how confident do you feel about standing up to others when you know they are doing wrong? What role does fear play in your level of confidence?
Instruction option: Have students close their eyes and put their heads on the desks. Ask them to raise their hands when you call out the number they chose from one to 10. Keep a tally under each number. Have kids open their eyes again and discuss the results of the poll.

- 4 Do you ever feel like you need courage when using social media? If so, how can you act with courage? Does what you think are the right and wrong ways to treat people change when you are online instead of in person?

Fear



- 1 Write two or three fears that you have brought to school with you this week.

Instruction option: Ask if students are willing to share their fears. Try to bring some of those fears into the discussion. Use “powerful reflective listening” to see if you can get to the reasons for the fear. Encourage students to think of ways that you can work as a community to diminish the power of fear.
- 2 On a sticky note, write down your greatest social fear like those we talked about on the Courage Retreat. Attach your sticky note to a wall in your classroom with the rest of your class. Do you see common fears (or themes of fears)? Why do we feel alone in our fears when others often feel the same way?
- 3 Choose one of the fears identified above. How do you see your classmates responding to this fear? How do you respond? What steps can you take to overcome this fear with courage?

Self-awareness



1 Who is responsible for your choices?

Instruction option: This is an effective question for students who still do not realize that they have the power to choose. Ask students if they will take that power and use it to do something productive or something destructive.

2 What are you really good at? How do you know that you are good at it? Who else knows that you are good at it? Who would you like to know it? How could you let them know?

Instruction option: Have students share their talents in pairs or trios. Invite large-group sharing. Perhaps a student recognizes a gift or talent in someone who was not mentioned.

3 What talents, gifts or interests do you bring to this classroom? Why might it be important for others to know your strengths?

Relationships



Part 1

- 1 Write in a journal about one or two significant adults you trust. What have they done to earn your trust? How do they support you?
- 2 Who are your peers? Are your peers also your friends? If not, how do they differ?
- 3 Now, think about your friends. What do you have in common with them? What are some of your differences?
- 4 When is teasing fun and appropriate? When does teasing turn into bullying or harassment?
- 5 What healthy risks can you take when you find yourself in a bullying or harassment situation?

Relationships

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Part 2

- 6 Make a list of the social groups in your school and describe them. How does one join those groups? What is positive about being able to identify with one of those groups? What is negative about it?

- 7 Developing everyday courage often requires first having a strong understanding of respect and having trustworthy relationships. What do respect and relational trust mean to you? What can you do to encourage respect and relational trust in your school? What do you think your peers can do?

- 8 What do you think your school as a whole could do to build a community of understanding and respect?

Responsible Decision-making



Part 1

- 1 How have you learned the difference between right and wrong? Where and from whom did you learn about it?

- 2 When you make a choice, you will experience natural consequences, good or bad. What are some examples of natural consequences?

- 3 What do you do when you feel remorse or regret? Do you think it's possible to "right a wrong"? If so, what are some ways you can?

- 4 Give a real-life example of a "moment of choice" when you had to choose between following the crowd and following your heart. Which did you choose at that moment and why?

- 5 How does having trusting relationships with classmates and friends help you to have "moments of choice" that lead to courage rather than fear?

- 6 What is compassion? When you are faced with a "moment of choice," how does compassion, for others or for yourself, influence your choice?

Responsible Decision-making

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Part 2

- 7 What role does empathy play in the choices you make? Does understanding another student's perspective make it easier or harder to act with courage?
- 8 Why do you think your body reacts so strangely (heart beats faster, palms get sweaty, mouth gets dry, etc.) in a "moment of choice"?
- 9 What is the difference between responsible and irresponsible decision-making?
- 10 If everyone is doing something, is it automatically right? How do you know? When is "following the crowd" wrong? When is "following the crowd" okay?
- 11 Not every decision has a clear right or wrong answer. Sometimes, we have to make decisions in the "gray area." What does this mean? How do you approach this kind of choice?