

COURAGE BEADS

This is an activity adapted from Outward Bound's Connecting With Courage Program for 12 and 13 year old girls. In the context of this course, courage is defined as more than moments of physical courage. Rather, courage is expanded to include 'moral courage.' Annie Rogers, a leading researcher on adolescent girls, rediscovered an ancient definition of courage that aptly applies to girls' needs today. She shares her discovery of the meaning of courage as "to speak one's mind while telling all one's heart."

This definition is lived during Connecting With Courage. One way it's done is through Courage Beads.

While on their 14-day course, girls are presented with a lanyard with one bead on it. Staff model receiving a courage bead by describing a moment when they felt courageous. It is important for staff to set a tone here by selecting rather ordinary moments where one "told one's heart" rather than selecting some extraordinary moment of illness or sadness. It's okay if those moments are shared. But to get started it is better to begin with more ordinary, day-to-day acts of courage. Over the next two weeks there are several times when the group (of about 12) gathers to share moments when each girl felt she was courageous. She shares her story with the group and takes a bead. This ritual becomes an important way for girls to express their thoughts and feelings and they come to rely on the safety and trust of the group to share intimate and important moments. After a short time, girls can bring the group through this ritual with no help from adults.

The course goals for this activity are: 1) for girls to acknowledge their strengths and abilities to each other and develop peer encouragement to build on those strengths; 2) to develop positive ways for girls to acknowledge each other's skills, strengths and talents; and 3) to practice speaking and saying things that are difficult for girls (truth about friendships, conflict, etc.)

Materials: A lanyard (necklace size) and various types of beads.

A suggested framing for camp staff:

Have girls sit in a circle and create a quiet discussion tone. Review your agreements around meeting: (1) one person speaks at a time; (2) everyone speaks for herself; (3) No put downs— everyone is respected here.

Ask them, "What does courage mean to you?" Elicit some responses. . . . Why is courage important? How does it help you become a better person? Ask if anyone has any good courage stories. Make sure that courage is not just defined as physical courage, but that the girls are thinking about moments of 'moral' courage – moments where they have spoken up in defense of a friend, for example, and gone against the expected norms to defend something they believed in.

Tell the girls that you want them to be courageous at camp and that you want to take time every few days to let them reflect on moments when they've been courageous at camp. Ask for some examples of times when courage might be important at camp. These examples will hopefully include reflections of the rules and norms you have already laid out for girls. If not, you give concrete examples for them and ask for other examples.

Explain that every week, your bunk will have a girls' circle and that's when you can describe your moment of courage to the group and take a bead for your necklace. Ask girls if they want to create any rules for the girls' circle meeting. (See the 8 fundamental principles of a girls' circle for some good examples for adult guidelines.) The 'rule' discussion should be taken seriously— take notes, write on flip chart paper so everyone knows and agrees on the rules and make sure you are specific and (as the grownup) know how to help girls enforce them. The adult role is to make the rules work! Make the ceremony as simple or as elaborate as you like, but most importantly, it should reflect your values, your camp culture and thus, be authentic for the girls.

At that point you can present a cup or bowl of beads and tell the girls that they can take their first bead, if they feel ready. Can they describe a moment of courage that they experienced in coming to camp this summer?

Encourage journal writing about courage moments. Girls can read from their journals to share a courage story.

The ritual should be made to feel special. Remember, this is to encourage talking and sharing of feelings and emotions. This is not necklace-making! Beads should be simple enough to discourage sharing just to get a favorite bead. And beads should be similar so there's no fighting over a special one.