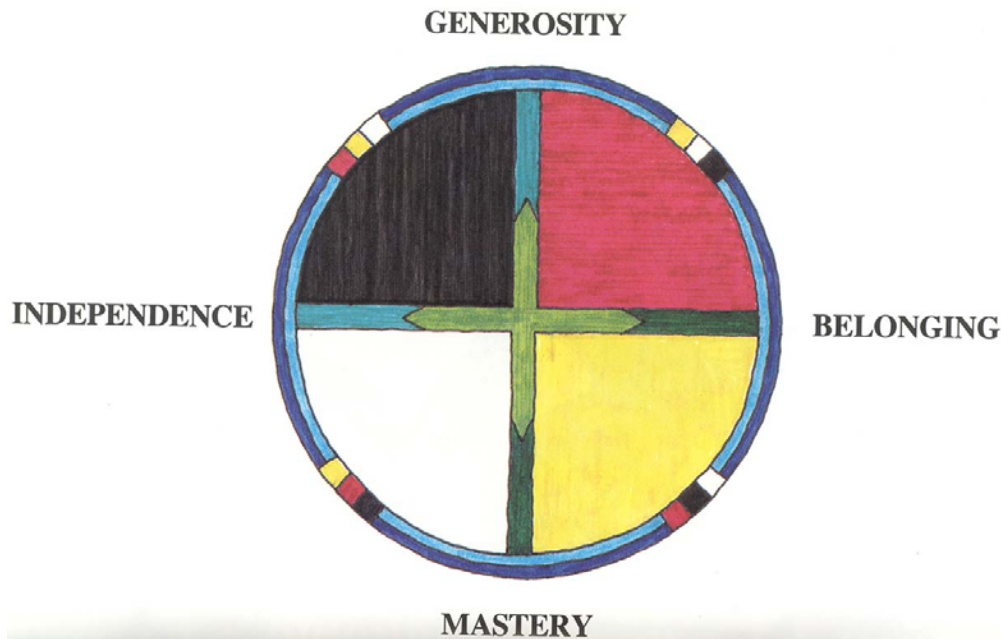


The Circle of Courage

The "**Circle of Courage**" developed by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steven Van Bockern is just one of hundreds of models for explaining why people do what they do and how we should treat others and educate students (especially those with emotional and behavioral problems). It is based on a Native American/American Indian orientation toward life (specifically how the Sioux Nation might view life), but agrees with the models of other cultural groups. It matches up nicely with the views of Western psychology (as promoted by William Glasser and Rudolph Dreikers, among others), East Asian views (the Ying-Yang, all things in balance and harmony orientation), and the African-American belief system as espoused by writers such as Ogbu, DuBois, Kunjufu, and Hilliard.

The Circle of Courage model can be used to identify the source of the behavioral problem, and guide our rehabilitation or "**reclaiming**" efforts. The model is presented visually as a wheel with four spokes or supports that keep the wheel "true" and strong..



It is believed that all four parts of an individual's "circle" must be intact to have a self-secure, prosocial approach to life. A lack of strength in any of the four areas of development can result in emotional and behavioral difficulties.

The most important component, upon which the other three are based is a well developed sense of "**Belonging**". Humans have a need to feel valued, important and protected by others...to feel comfortable and welcomed within a group: family, friends, colleagues, etc. Of course the family and close community are the most important influences on the original development of this area of self esteem. Those who have weak senses of belonging due to a disrupted or non-supportive upbringing are often able to rebuild or strengthen that area by developing close allegiances, friendships, and relationships later in their lives with positive people and groups. However, those who do not repair that broken area of self concept may show one or more of many problems in relating to others. They may join into or identify with negative groups that promote crime or religious hatred or some other distorted views. This connection with negative influences is done in an attempt to feel important and be accepted within a social structure. They may become non-responsive or resistant to the efforts of good people and groups (including counselors and teachers) because they do not feel worthy of inclusion, or for fear of being rejected by positive people at some point in the future. In essence, they scare off those with whom they most want to be connected.

If one has an impaired, distorted, or absent sense of belonging, it will probably effect one or more of the other areas. For example, those who have a strong sense of "**Generosity**" (because those in the groups to which they belonged when they were young shared time, work, play, resources, and knowledge) are empathetic toward others and want to help others. They give of themselves or their possessions in some way. They truly have the "joy of giving", receiving pleasure from helping others in need. Folks who have a distorted or absent sense of generosity will be "stingy", lack concern for the welfare of others, be callous in their interactions with others, and "take" rather than "give".

Those who are strong in the quadrant of "**Mastery**" feel competent in their abilities, seek more skills and knowledge, and are willing to fail or look unskilled when they try new things. Those with an impaired sense of mastery have a low self concept, fear failure, may refuse to try a task for fear of failure, give up easily, are dependent on others, and/or may devalue and ridicule schooling or the efforts of others.

Persons with a strong sense of "**Independence**" feel in control of themselves, their behavior, and their lives. They have a well-developed sense of autonomy, and accept responsibility for themselves and their actions. On the other hand, those who have a lessened or absent sense of independence are likely to engage in "scatter-brained" behavior, be easily swayed by others, and blame circumstances/others for their actions.