

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Island Parenting: It Takes Courage To Raise Children

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Make No Apologies

“Perhaps it takes courage to raise children...” John Steinbeck

You sit off in the distance and watch them as they play and at times you wonder whether or not you are doing it right. You wonder whether you are giving it your all or your best. An alert lioness, that's who you are, you are ready to pounce at the sight of lurking danger to protect your cub. Like Helen Parr/Mrs Incredible, you are more than willing to stretch yourself to the limits. You have reached a point of selflessness. You have reached a point that you didn't even know existed before you had them. In that very same breath you also harbor emotions of fear because of the uncertainties of this world.

You remember that John Steinbeck line, "Perhaps it takes courage to raise children."

You then ask yourself several questions, the first, "Am I courageous?" You respond in the affirmative. You also question whether or not you are equipped to meet the challenges of parenting. You remember Muhammad Ali, a man who declared himself "The Greatest". You remember him saying that it is lack of faith that makes people afraid of meeting challenges. Most notably, you remember him saying that he was able to meet these challenges because he believed in himself. You dust yourself off, dig deep down for that rumble in the jungle called parenting, because in reality it is a jungle. You believe in yourself. You realize that you have no choice. You have to believe in yourself.

There are so many varying messages. There are so many studies. There are so many people who impart their views and seem to want to take the helm as opposed to help you navigate the journey. The thing is that everybody claims to know what is best. There are also so many things that may compete for your time and interest. You realize that you have to be guarded with your time. You realize that you have to set boundaries, and if your goal is to make your children a priority; you make them a priority and make no apologies for it.

There are those who will try to make you feel guilty for being a "present" or "involved" parent. You will hear, "Well my parents did not do this or that and I turned out just fine." You may also hear, "Why is there the need for you to do..." You may hear, "Why was there the need to blow me off to spend time with your children? Don't you see them all the time? I thought you would be glad to get a break from them man. I thought that I would be a welcome change from your life?"

You may also hear, "I can't believe you are passing up that opportunity just so you can spend more time with your children! You have to be crazy. Hire somebody to look after them. People do it every single day." Before you even consider a response, ask yourself whether or not you really owe the other person an explanation. Before you consider a response, make sure and I say make sure that it is not an apology because no one and I mean absolutely no one with you, your child or your family's best interest at heart will ever demand an explanation or even worse an apology from you for doing what you as a parent deem is best.

John Steinbeck was correct. It does take courage to raise children. Courage is required to face the daily challenges of parenting and courage is required when you decide to stand firm and go against the grain. Courage is required when you are trying to find the balance between what other people expect and need from you and what you expect and need from yourself. This applies to all aspects of your life, and your parenting journey is no different. What are your parenting expectations of yourself? What do your children expect from you? Whose expectations are you living up to?

I must note that the most challenging part of parenting for me has not been dealing with my children but rather the imposition of others who deem their way/brand of parenting to be the best. The challenge has been the intolerance and insensitivity that I see meted out to mothers by society and sadly to say by other mothers. The criticisms are plentiful, the praise and most importantly the support are few. As a mother you have to stand firm. You have to have faith. You have to trust your instincts. You have to realize and then accept that it does take courage to raise your children. Follow your own script; look for best

practices. Realize that what works for others may not work for you. Each person is different. Each child is different. Find what works for you.

The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both And be one traveler, long I stood And looked down one as far as I could To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim Because it was grassy and wanted wear, Though as for that the passing there Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black. Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference

Quotes on Courage

It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. J. K. Rowling

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. Steve Jobs

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear. Nelson Mandela

You will never do anything in this world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind next to honor. Aristotle

Recommended Reading for Children – Books on Courage

Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad by Ellen Levine, Illustrated by Kadir Nelson

Jack and the Beanstalk by Matt Faulkner

Stuart's Cape by Sara Pennypacker Illustrated by Martin Matje

The Story of Ruby Bridges: Special Anniversary Edition by Robert Coles Illustrated by George Ford

Courage by Bernard Waber

Sheila Rae, the Brave by Kevin Henkes

