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# Building Courage In Our Youth

with

Dr. Karin Maria Hodges

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**THANK YOU  
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*Karin Maria Hodges*



May 19 · 1 hr 23 min left

### The Teen Mental Health Crisis, Part 1

The Ezra Klein Show >

|| Pause

We're in the midst of a serious teen mental health crisis. The number of teenagers and young adults with clinical depression more than doubled between 2011 and 2021. The suicide rate for teenagers nearly doubled from 2007 to 2019, and tripled for 10- to 14-year-olds in particular. According to the C.D.C., nearly 25 percent of teenage girls made a suicide plan in 2021. What's going on

## Teens Turn to TikTok in Search of a Mental Health Diagnosis

While social media can help people feel less alone, using it to evaluate symptoms has several downsides.



Nathalie Lees



By [Christina Caron](#)

Oct. 29, 2022

## Even a Mother Can't Body-Block Mental Illness

In her memoir, "Zig-Zag Boy," Tanya Frank looks back on her son's epic struggle with schizoaffective disorder.



Ard Su

By [Beth Macy](#)

Published Feb. 18, 2023 Updated Feb. 23, 2023



Rena Smith exemplified a medical practice common among her generation: the simultaneous use of multiple heavy-duty psychiatric drugs.

## This Teen Was Prescribed 10 Psychiatric Drugs. She's Not Alone.

Increasingly, anxious and depressed teens are using multiple, powerful psychiatric drugs, many of them untested in adolescents or for use in tandem.

By [Matt Richtel](#) Photographs by [Annie Flanagan](#)  
Published Aug. 27, 2022 Updated Dec. 14, 2022

## Parents Often Bring Children to Psychiatric E.R.s to Subdue Them, Study Finds

Many parents bring children to emergency rooms to manage aggressive behaviors. But the visits offer little long-term benefit, doctors said.



Patients who required medications to subdue them were 22 percent more likely to revisit an emergency room than patients who did not, the study found. [Tim Gruber for The New York Times](#)



By [Ellen Barry](#)

Dec. 27, 2022

# In the headlines



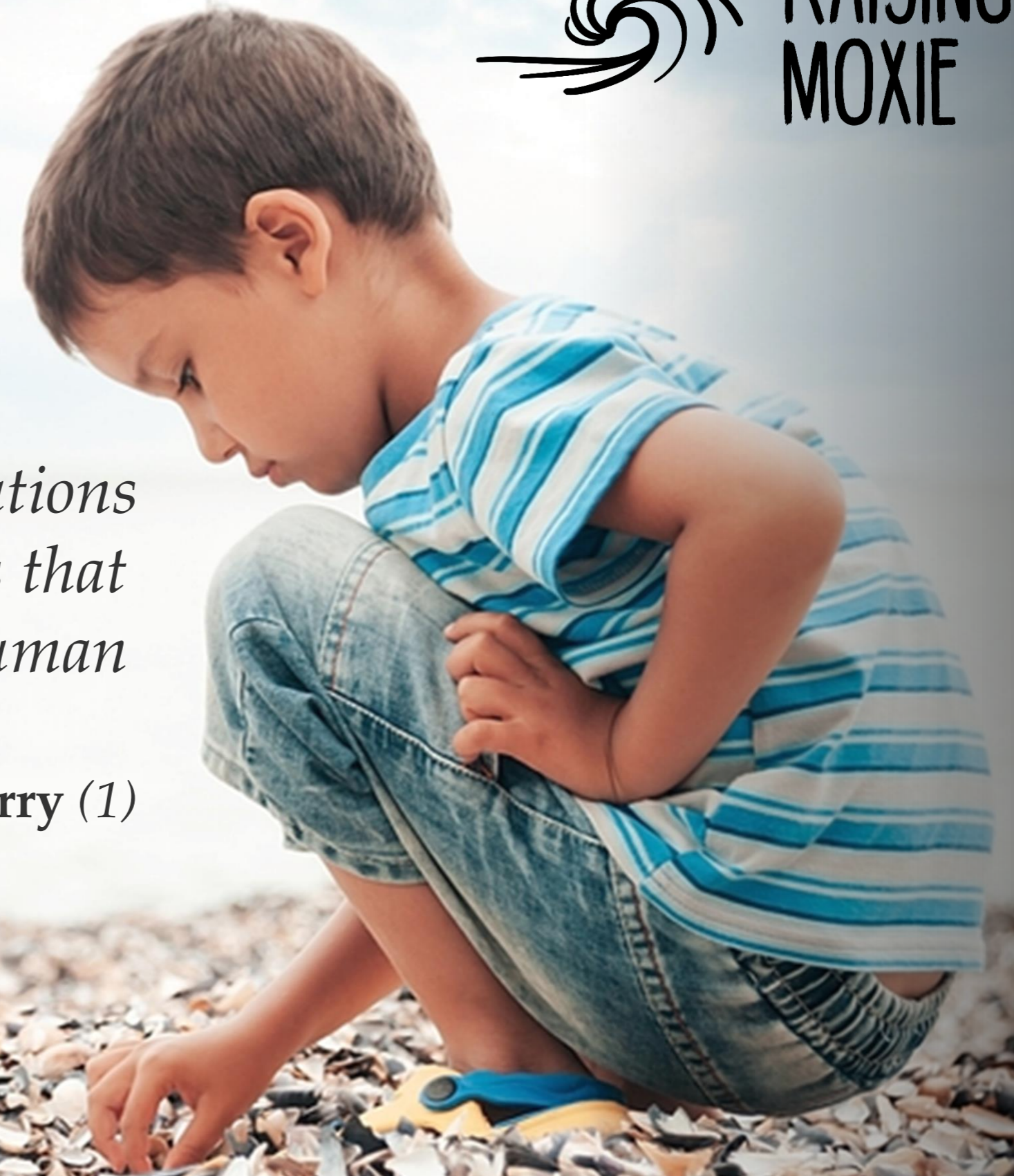
# The problem didn't start with our kids!



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*“The infant begins on a firm footing in her explorations of the social world and in those learning endeavors that will make her a fully functioning member of the human community.”*

**Philip Kellman & Dr. Martha E. Arterberry (1)**



Society has lost  
touch with  
childhood<sup>(2, 3, 4)</sup>.

(Hint: It doesn't look like  
this...)



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Skilled child  
psychologists  
aren't where we  
need to be.

Without psychological training or oversight, courageous and sometimes well-intended entrepreneurs are scurrying to design and promote psychological interventions related to cognition, mood, and behavior. Some are creating strong riptides of pseudoscience (5, 6).



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Most parents  
don't know  
there is a  
problem until a  
crisis strikes.

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*But kids are waiting  
for us all to do  
better.*



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Go Upstream



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Through, Raising Moxie, LLC, I want to infuse society with the wisdom to watch the tides and to help young people become adept at diving into the ocean of life!<sup>(2)</sup>



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Building Courage Everywhere

# Courage

1. Choosing some potentially painful experience such as fear, anxiety, grief, humiliation, failure, or physical pain (7).

2. Trying to reach some greater outcome for ourselves or others (7).



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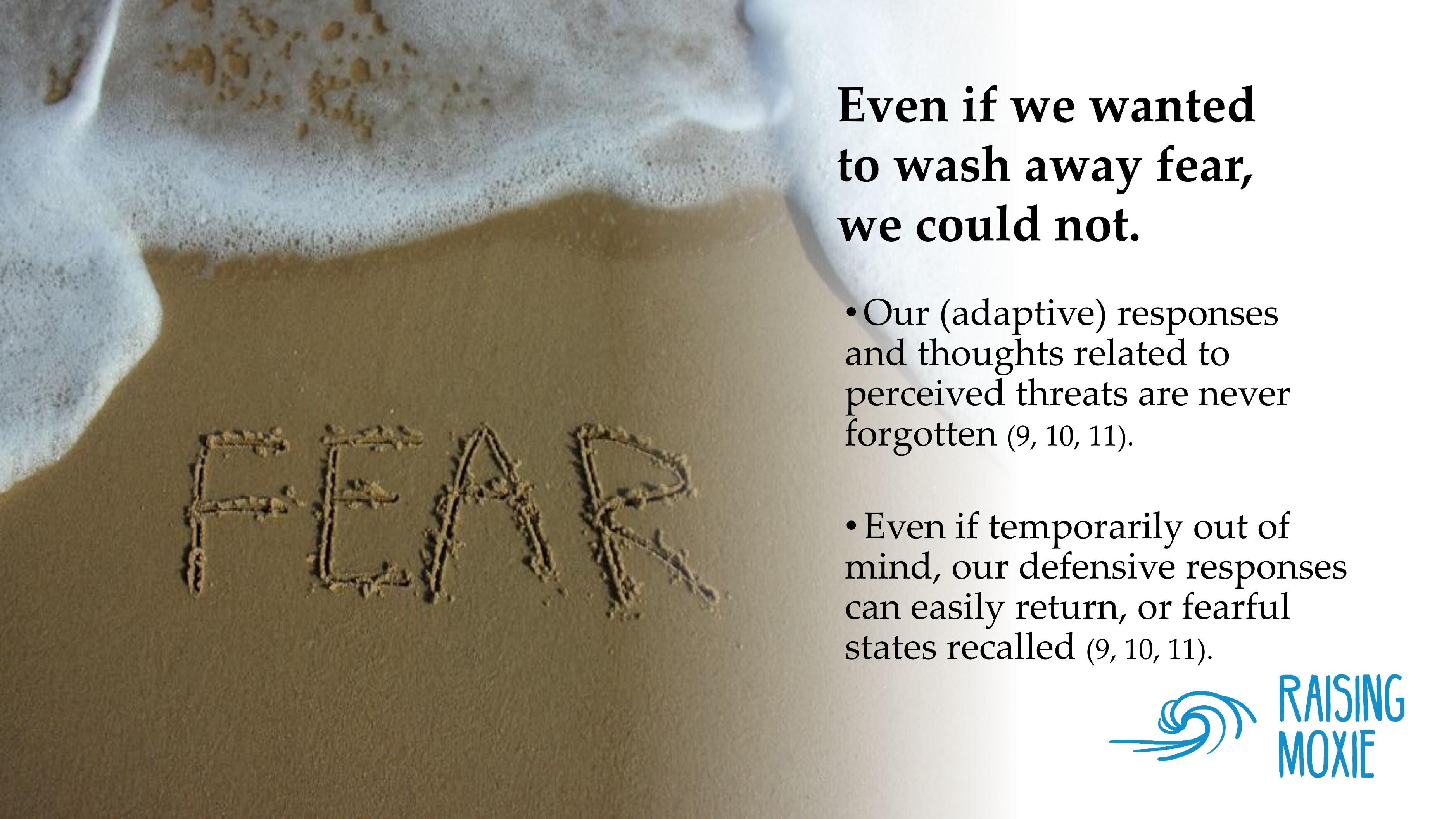
Courage is not the  
absence of fear.

These are not  
separate paths.

Courage **requires**  
fear (8).



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**Even if we wanted  
to wash away fear,  
we could not.**

- Our (adaptive) responses and thoughts related to perceived threats are never forgotten (9, 10, 11).
- Even if temporarily out of mind, our defensive responses can easily return, or fearful states recalled (9, 10, 11).

Being courageous includes holding risks...but it doesn't need to include danger or threats to our physical health.



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# If courage were a person, what is your relationship to courage?

- Estrangement from courage / complete avoidance.
- Ambivalent engagement / engage & retreat (fight / flight).
- Embrace courage: Tenacity, bravery, or **SISU!**



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Courage  
may look  
like this.





Courage could  
look like this.



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Courage is protective  
of psychological  
wellness.

Even if someone has low  
self worth and excessive  
fear, anger, shame, and  
guilt...

If they are also  
courageous, they are less  
likely to suffer from social  
anxiety(12).



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# Evidence-based mental health treatments are an exercise in **COURAGE**

Such treatment includes exposing oneself to scary, painful, fear inducing experiences and not running away (10, 13).

# We inspire courage in clinical practice

Eight years ago, I took a pragmatic, evidence-based behavioral approach to patient care. I encouraged patients to engage courageous acts (10, 13).

Often, others' treatment failures were my treatment successes - largely credited to this pragmatic behavioral approach.



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# Courageous kids

For years, I have compelled kids suffering from panic and anxiety to approach situations that elicited their fear response.

The patients I saw – such brave souls - would eat stinky cheese, order at restaurants, engage in a day passively, choose to stay in their bed at night, compete in sports, stand in a dark closet, refrain from OCD rituals, and talk about traumas.



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# Sometimes exposure wasn't feasible

1. Some families were in survival mode.
2. Some parents or kids wanted instant relief. (I cannot delete adaptive brain circuitry, 15)
3. Some parents or kids were too practiced in aggression. I could not compel a few families to **kindly invite** their children to do difficult things.

I began to think more about the way courage develops  
in children over time and in context.

And I kept thinking...



What are the basic prerequisites for courage?



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## 1. Freedom to choose.

- Courage includes a cost-benefit analysis & choice.
- Thus, for courage to happen, people need opportunities to volunteer to do difficult things.
- Not all people have the freedom and power to choose courage. Some people may be over-controlled.
- People may have the capacity to be courageous but it doesn't mean they have the opportunity to be courageous.



## 2. Time

Courage is often thought of as a split-second decision. But nothing comes from nothing. Courage doesn't emerge out of nowhere. I have come to appreciate that the capacity to engage courageous acts builds over time. Because the development of courage is a process, we must be patient with ourselves and others.

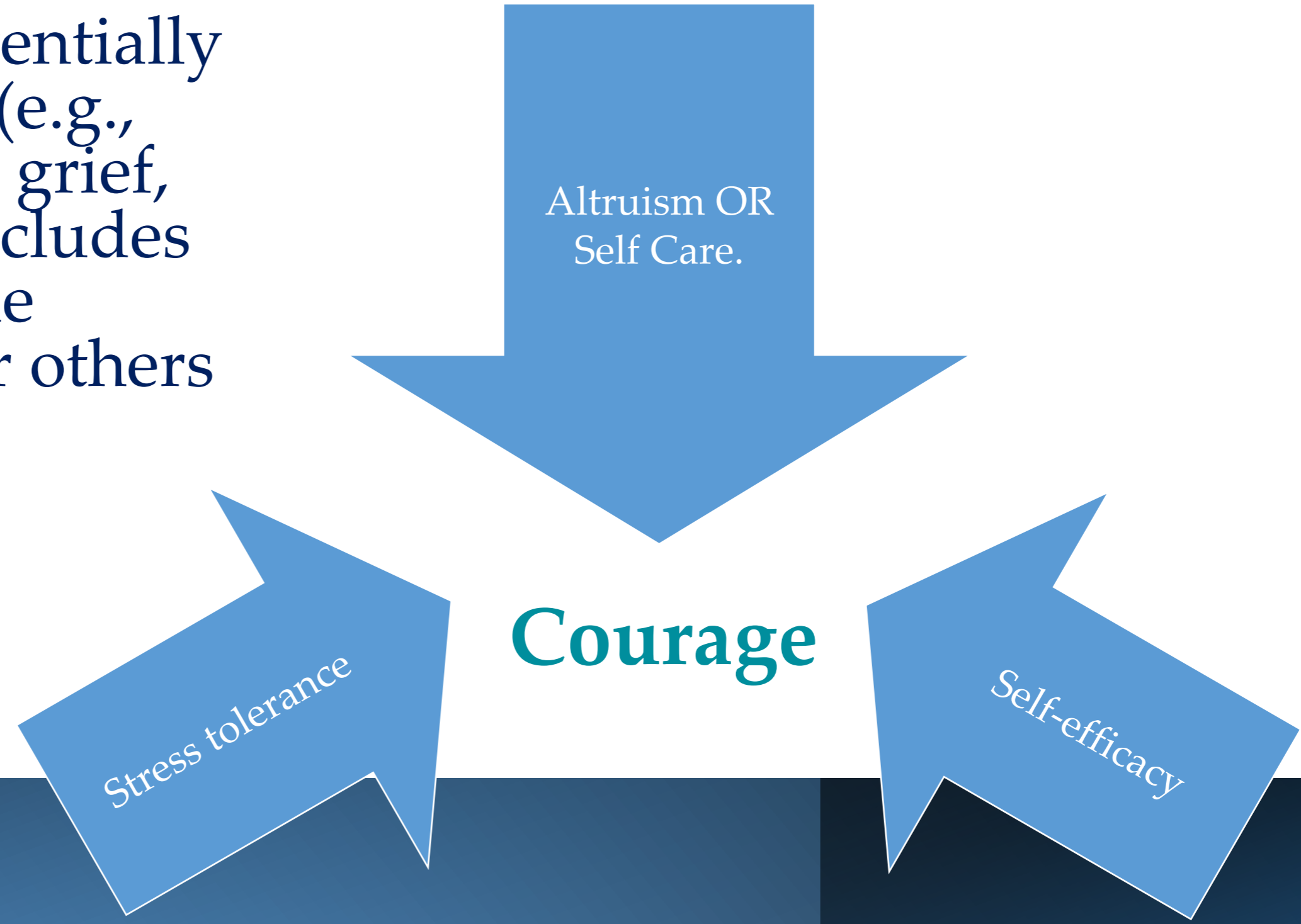
What are the necessary  
components in courage?



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Recall, courage is

Choosing some potentially painful experience (e.g., stress, fear, anxiety, grief, physical pain). It includes trying to reach some greater outcome for others or oneself (16, 17).



# Altruism

Being courageous for someone else's gain would be highly prosocial (18), and perhaps altruistic.

Altruism elicits reward regions of the brain and increases well-being and happiness. This is one more way courage could serve kids (19).



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# Self Care

One may be courageous while seeking personal growth, learning, life satisfaction, self-protection, or more.

Learning to courageously care for oneself could have huge, lasting impact into adulthood.



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# Self Efficacy

Self efficacy is one's belief that they embody what is needed to reach their goals (20, 21, 22).

To engage courageously, one would need to think they may have the capacity to be successful.



# Stress Tolerance

In order to choose something potentially painful, one would require stress tolerance.

They'd need to have some level of acceptance of stress and challenge.



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What are the environmental conditions that foster the ability to be courageous?



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# Courageous Adults

Avoidant parents, educators, physicians, and therapists instill avoidance in children.

Courage must be modeled (23). We, the adults, must lead with courage.



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# Warmth

Kids with emotionally warm parents may feel guilty when unkind towards others, and therefore be more altruistic, or generous towards others. (26).



# Reciprocal Relationships

Mutually satisfying relationships with parents, and additional role models outside of the home can result in kind engagement with peers; affiliation with other kids involved in civility rather than deviant act; strong connections to school; and caring, prosocial behavior. (24, 25).





# Expectations

Caregivers are ideally warm but expect a lot of their kids and they monitor and direct them in ways that foster success in life (33), which fuels confidence.



# Developmentally Sensitive Guidance



When scaffolded and supported in developmentally appropriate ways, youth are more able to meet expectations. It becomes easier in this circumstance for adults to develop positive feelings and views of the child or teen. Such positive views from parents, teachers, and eventually peers have a huge impact on kids' self-esteem and self worth (27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32), which could impact their desire to engage courage for their own benefit.



# Opportunities to Acclimate to Stress

Adults have boundaries and hold kids in line so that kids learn to endure. This allows them to experience stress and to develop stress tolerance (34).

*Stress is the training ground  
for courage.*



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## Final Remarks

Nature evolves over time. So do we. Courage isn't something that we just choose one day out of nowhere. It comes when the right circumstances are set. It arrives after societal values are respectfully modeled, instilled, and practiced; warm acceptance is offered allowing for self-acceptance and self care; expectations are high; and boundaries are set so that stress tolerance can be built up over time. When all of the stage is set – we can reap the benefits of our labors and enjoy our courageous kids.



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Questions?



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