



Companion Worksheet

BRAVING THE WILDERNESS AT HOME CONVERSATION STARTERS AND QUESTIONS

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CHAPTER ONE: EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE

“We all experience moments that, when left unspoken and unresolved, send us searching desperately for belonging and settling for fitting in.”

When we think about our families, are we creating a culture where everyone feels safe enough to reality-check the stories we make up when we're in struggle?

Are we intentionally learning about courage, vulnerability, and true belonging together?

Not belonging in our families is still one of the most dangerous hurts. It has the power to break our heart, our spirit, and our sense of self-worth. Are we talking to one another about what it means to build a belonging family verses a “fitting-in” family?

Are there permission slips that we can encourage each other to write and can we support each other in showing up in more courageous ways?

CHAPTER TWO: THE QUEST FOR TRUE BELONGING

“Belonging so fully to yourself that you’re willing to stand alone is a wilderness – an untamed, unpredictable place of solitude and searching. It is a place as dangerous as it is breathtaking, a place as sought after as it is feared. The wilderness can often feel unholy because we can’t control it, or what people think about our choice of whether to venture into that vastness or not. But it turns out to be the place of true belonging, and it’s the bravest and most sacred place you will ever stand.”

Are we rewarding authenticity in our families? Or are our own fears and pain about not belonging driving us to teach our kids to “fit in?”

Are we modeling belonging to and believing in ourselves? Are our children seeing us take unpopular stands and are we talking honestly about how hard and scary that can be?



BRAVING (the seven elements of trust) is a powerful wilderness checklist because it allows us to talk about trust in a specific, behavioral way, and it reminds us that trusting ourselves and other people is a vulnerable and courageous process. Are we using this or some other shared language to talk about trust? Is our family putting high value on self-trust as a prerequisite for courageous behavior?

Carl Jung argued that a paradox is one of our most valued spiritual possessions and a great witness to the truth. Are we normalizing the difficulty and importance of holding and thinking through competing thoughts when it becomes stressful? Are we teaching critical thinking versus linear, take-a-side thinking?

CHAPTER THREE: HIGH LONESOME: A SPIRITUAL CRISIS

“The world feels high lonesome and heartbroken to me right now. We’ve sorted ourselves into factions based on our politics and ideology. We’ve turned away from one another and toward blame and rage. We’re lonely and untethered. And scared. So damn scared.”

Are we teaching and modeling sorting and closed-mindedness? Or, is our family culture built on clearly knowing our own values while staying curious and open to the opinions of others?

When hard things happen to us, our community, or in the world, is our family culture based on criticism or contribution? Are we modeling cynicism or hopefulness?



Are we teaching our children the power of inextricable human connection – the belief that we are all connected to each other by something greater than us and something rooted in love and compassion?

CHAPTER FOUR: PEOPLE ARE HARD TO HATE CLOSE UP. MOVE IN.

Is our family committed to assessing our lives and forming our opinions of people based on our actual, in-person experiences? Or do we fall into the trap of hating large groups of strangers, because the members of those groups who we happen to know and like are the rare exceptions?

It's much easier to be angry than it is to be hurt or scared. It's easier to inflict pain than feel it. Have we created a family culture where we talk about pain and practice being in it and working through it or is anger and shutting down modeled?

What are we practicing and/or modeling in our families when it comes to dehumanizing behaviors? Have we drawn a line that can't be crossed when it comes to how we talk about people? Have we taught and modeled the importance of boundaries when it comes to how people talk about us and how we talk about others?



Are we having conversations in our family about “conflict transformation” skills?

CHAPTER FIVE: SPEAK TRUTH TO BULLSHIT. BE CIVIL.

The proliferation of BS in our culture today is primarily driven by three factors:

- 01. People feeling compelled to know everything,
- 02. The growing dismissal of trust in objective inquiry, and
- 03. The overuse of false dichotomies during emotional arguments (you’re either with us or against us)

How are we approaching these issues in our families? Are we rewarding curiosity and the courage to say, “I don’t know” when we really don’t know?

Are we holding ourselves and our children accountable for backing up their opinions with facts? Do we value researching topics that are important to us and understanding all sides?

Are we modeling false dichotomies or critical thinking?



Cassandra Dahnke and Tomas Spath define civility as, “Claiming and caring for one’s identity, needs, and beliefs without degrading someone else’s in the process. . . . [Civility] is about disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening past one’s preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same. Civility is the hard work of staying present even with those with whom we have deep-rooted and fierce disagreements. It is political in the sense that it is a necessary prerequisite for civic action. But it is political, too, in the sense that it is about negotiating interpersonal power such that everyone’s voice is heard, and nobody’s is ignored.”

Are we teaching and modeling civility?

CHAPTER SIX: HOLD HANDS. WITH STRANGERS.

“In the midst of this spiritual crisis, the key to building a true belonging practice is maintaining our belief in inextricable human connection. That connection – the spirit that flows between us and every other human in the world – is not something that can be broken; however, our belief in the connection is constantly tested and repeatedly severed. When our belief that there’s something greater than us, something rooted in love and compassion, breaks, we are more likely to retreat to our bunkers, to hate from afar, to tolerate bullshit, to dehumanize others, and, ironically, to stay out of the wilderness. It’s counterintuitive, but our belief in inextricable human connection is one of our most renewable sources of courage in the wilderness. I can stand up for what I believe is right when I know that regardless of the pushback and criticism, I’m connected to myself and others in a way that can’t be severed.”

How are we ensuring that our family has regular experiences of collective joy and pain?

In addition to experiencing those collective moments, are we explaining why they’re important and what they mean for us? How are we using these opportunities to explain the power of what is possible and true between humans?

The ministry of presence is a skill set. It's hard to sit with people in struggle. How are we teaching and modeling showing up in those moments?

CHAPTER SEVEN: STRONG BACK. SOFT FRONT. WILD HEART.

A strong back is courage and a soft front is vulnerability. How does our family value those experiences and emotions? How are we normalizing discomfort as a part of being brave?

Is there a shared family belief that we can't get to courage without vulnerability (uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure)?

“A wild heart is awake to the pain in the world, but does not diminish its own pain. A wild heart can beat with gratitude and lean into pure joy without denying the struggle in the world. We hold that tension with the spirit of the wilderness. It's not always easy or comfortable – sometimes we struggle with the weight of the pull – but what makes it possible is a front made of love and a back built of courage.”

Are we teaching and modeling how to stay awake to the pain and to contribute to healing, and at the same time take good care of ourselves?



"STOP WALKING THROUGH THE WORLD LOOKING FOR CONFIRMATION THAT YOU DON'T BELONG. YOU WILL ALWAYS FIND IT BECAUSE YOU'VE MADE THAT YOUR MISSION. STOP SCOURING PEOPLE'S FACES FOR EVIDENCE THAT YOU'RE NOT ENOUGH. YOU WILL ALWAYS FIND IT BECAUSE YOU'VE MADE THAT YOUR GOAL. TRUE BELONGING AND SELF-WORTH ARE NOT GOODS; WE DON'T NEGOTIATE THEIR VALUE WITH THE WORLD. THE TRUTH ABOUT WHO WE ARE LIVES IN OUR HEARTS. OUR CALL TO COURAGE IS TO PROTECT OUR WILD HEART AGAINST CONSTANT EVALUATION, ESPECIALLY OUR OWN. NO ONE BELONGS HERE MORE THAN YOU."

How are we teaching and modeling true belonging for our children?

When our children wrestle with feeling on the outside with their peers and friends, how are we teaching them to believe in and belong to themselves? Above all else?

