



EXCLUSIVE: Chris Parsons: Teaching Kids About Leadership & Bravery

Chris Parsons, influential children's book author of 'A Little Spark,' offers advice and insight in raising our kids with leadership & bravery skills

[By Patricia Valdivieso](#) Published Oct 15, 2020

Bravery and [leadership](#) are two [important life skills](#) that are slowly being embedded in our personas through our daily experiences. We pick up traits and learn how to lead and be brave growing up, from school and our environment at home. So, it is very important that parents [nurture their children](#) and mold their abilities and talents as early as possible, for the kids to grow into compassionate and responsible young men and women.

And so you might ask - *how can we support our children? How can we effectively teach them these life skills while they are still young?* We are graced with an opportunity to discuss an influential children's book, [A Little Spark](#), with its author **Chris Parsons**. In this interview, he shares what inspires him to create such a lovely book, along with some tips as to how parents can help their kids exercise [leadership and bravery](#) at home and in school.

Hi Chris! Thank you so much for giving us the time to talk about your recently launched book, *A Little Spark*. For starters, please tell us what inspired you to write that book.

I was surrounded by storytellers growing up in my fishing community of Flatrock, Newfoundland. I wanted to learn more about the world, the places, the people they spoke of.

When our kids were small, we read the classics to them and I began adding my own stories to the mix. The audience for these stories grew to include a wider circle of kids. I truly enjoyed their reaction.

Every story had a lesson, and I felt good about sharing it with my audience. I decided back then I wanted to develop these stories and that one day I would become an author. But, of course, like with most dreams, life happened and took me down a totally different path.

Then years later I had the idea for a story about the tiniest of creatures – a lowly mouse – who, through his own self-confidence, steps up to the plate and saves the day. I expanded the story based on that one plot point, and as the words flowed, I saw more and more clearly a bigger concept: anyone can do amazing things. We all have the ability to lift ourselves up. Every single person can be a little spark!

Over the past few years, I decided to go all in. And with the help of some incredible people, here we are. I left my executive position at AT&T behind last year to focus full time on my true passion and life mission of creating these meaningful experiences for children, and hopefully making a difference along the way.

My kids, Maggie and Kealan, were front and center in my mind when I finally took that big step a few years ago to write the book. They kept telling me that I should write these stories down so others could enjoy them. Together with my wife, Kathleen, they were the Spark that lit the fire. They are now totally engaged in this effort from creating content for social media to designing our logos, proofreading everything, and musical support – a family effort! Of course, our family pets are personified in some of the characters: The Newfoundland dogs and cats.

This wonderful book teaches a lot of valuable lessons to young children, such as striving to make a change no matter how small your voice may seem. Did you have any personal experiences when you were young that you wanted to share through this book?

I was the middle child of 5 kids, and I had a bit of an illness as a child and had to learn to fit in. I struggled with a lack of self-confidence growing up, but with encouragement from my parents my confidence grew and one of the defining moments for me was when I was elected Student President of my high school.

I grew up and went to elementary school in a very small town so commuting to the city for high school with my siblings was a big deal for us. It was a huge school with lots of cool kids and we always felt a little out of place as we were considered “from the outports,” a less sophisticated bunch with a strong accent.

I remember sitting with my mother and father and telling them that I was thinking about running for Student Council - throwing my hat in the ring. That conversation changed my life. They not only told me that it was a wonderful idea but they were convinced that I would make a great Student President. That encouragement gave me the confidence I needed to step forward and to believe in myself. I won.

The whole process of my parents believing in me and my classmates standing with me had such a positive impact on my life.

I eventually left Flatrock, believing I could do anything if I put my mind to it. Now 40 years later, I am realizing one of my biggest dreams – to share my stories with the world.

The idea of believing in yourself is the core lesson from this book and it is so important that parents understand how significant it is for them to encourage their children to think bigger. Kids need to think out of the box and have confidence in their abilities to succeed in life. There is a lyric in the song *A Little Spark* that really hits this idea:

“When given a chance, a shot in the dark, go ahead and take it, it could be your Spark, we all have that Spark inside so get it out there, don’t let it hide.”

***A Little Spark* also encourages young children to exercise leadership and help those who need a hand. How do you think learning leadership at home affects the children’s upbringing?**

Children can start to learn leadership skills in many simple ways: Sports, dance, martial arts. If there are other people involved, there’s an opportunity to lead. People learn by watching, so it’s also useful to facilitate their growth by putting them in positions (like community service groups) where they’ll be able to see other leaders in action. At home, leadership can start with something as small as having them work with their siblings to clean their room.

As they succeed (or fail), talk over what happened: what worked, what didn’t, and why. Helping the child to see the bigger picture and what they did right or should have done better helps them to think bigger and to be more introspective.

As far as how it affects their upbringing, I think that if there’s a focus on cultivating leadership with a child, it greatly improves their life because it gives them a better set of tools to tackle life’s problems and they develop the ability to look beyond the obstacles that come up and see creative solutions instead. As they get better at making the most of opportunities, it boosts their self-esteem; they’ll develop organizational skills and often will have better public speaking skills. Their introspection will help them to identify their strengths and weaknesses and help them learn to work better with others. In general, they’ll be able to find opportunities that others don’t see and that has intangible benefits that grow and grow.

How can parents define the importance of leadership to their kids in a child-friendly way? What is your advice to parents as to how they can train their kids’ leadership potential at home?

There are a lot of different things parents can do to encourage their children to become leaders. You can set an example at home by showing leadership skills yourself. Don’t make your focus on being your kids’ friend at the expense of helping them become the adult they are meant to be. As I mentioned earlier, children learn by watching, so along these lines, you can expose them to strong role models. They’ll pick up what’s being taught, often a lot more than you realize.

It’s key to provide opportunities for the child to lead – take the kid gloves off, but also instill the idea of accountability – that actions have consequences. When kids are given the opportunity to

take charge in certain situations, they are often much more driven to see that situation through to the end – they have ownership over it. Part of teaching them success in leadership (and arguably the most important job we have as parents) is to help them learn the vital lesson that things they do have consequences – both good and bad.

One thing that will help them learn how to lead better is to encourage them to ask questions so that they can understand the situation. Asking questions is not a sign of weakness. Don't treat it as such. If your child is asking you something, even if you're frustrated or don't understand how they have such a simple question, take the time to answer them. Every question is a teaching moment. As they fail and learn why things didn't go as planned, this will help them learn empathy, which is an important character trait of exceptional leaders. Having empathy for others helps you to understand their situations. This is important as a leader because without it, no one will trust you. Obviously you can't know exactly what every person is going through every minute of the day, but you can make a concerted effort to pay attention and try. Teach your kids to do the same.

Show your children how reading can propel them forward in their journey by expanding their world and opening them up to new possibilities. The stories that our children are reading have the ability to shape who they will become. Do we want them to become good leaders? Then we need to focus on nurturing their minds to be such. In fact, I would even go so far as to say that many adult leaders today would benefit from rereading classic children's books which teach us about friendship, loyalty, and fun.

Finally, it's critical to help them understand the importance of Teamwork– encourage kids to join teams, play sports – play in a band. This helps them learn that leadership isn't always about "one above all." Being part of a team gives kids a chance to exercise both their muscles and their minds. They have to learn to pay attention to the people around them, and like empathy, this is vital to be able to lead effectively. Good leaders are also good team members.

Do you also think that practicing leadership amongst siblings can be a healthy practice for kids to be able to demonstrate leadership in school?

I think in general, the more practice that a child has, the better. Often the way that siblings interact and argue makes it harder for a child to lead them, so as they develop those skills with their siblings, they'll find it even easier to lead others.

Children have different [skills and interests](#), so one good strategy to help children practice leadership at home is to set parameters of what areas each child is leading in, and tailor the early opportunities to a child's skill/interest set. So one child might be the leader when it comes time for setting the table. Another might be in charge of tidying up the house. Another might manage pet care, or choose the bedtime story.

As children grow, it's good to make leadership roles grow with them, so the older children will eventually provide childcare and look after the group in a more focused way, with more authority. They might help with homework or manage chores. They might be tasked with researching restaurants in an area and making recommendations to the parents so that the parents

have information to make decisions. All of these steps will help them develop skills that will benefit them for their entire life.

What main takeaways would you want your audience to remember about your book?

The first thing I would like the audience to take away is that *A Little Spark* is more than a book. It is a platform for parents and children to engage around a great story with music, a fun audio experience, and a set of important life lessons that will stimulate discussion and understanding: **A Family Read (listen) Aloud and a Family Experience.**

To Believe in Ourselves: In the story, our main character, Spark, finds himself in a difficult situation where, because of how things are in the world of Zuron, he is trapped and forced to accept his lowly position in life. The one thing that helps him succeed is his belief in himself. He is confident that he can do more - even the smallest creature can make the biggest difference!

That is especially important for children to hear because they so badly want to be seen and heard. There is a line in the song “I Can Do More” (the amazing WT Greer) from the soundtrack that captures that point.

“Put me in, Coach, and give me the ball and I’ll make the play whatever you call. What if I can do more?”

We need to constantly work with our kids to help them build their confidence and to always encourage them to believe in their ability to do more. There will be failures, but children learn resilience from those failures. This is all part of growing up. Children need to think for themselves, and through discussion, learn about the importance of personal character and one's value in their community.

I hope children and parents are inspired by the story. I hope children sing and dance to the music. I hope children get to really know the characters and see themselves, or what they could become, in these characters.

Be that Spark. No matter how small you think you are, even you can make a positive difference. We never know what the smallest act of kindness will spark in others: it could be something as simple as a kind word to a classmate, a “good morning” to an elderly neighbor, giving books and toys to charity, helping a younger sibling - not all Sparks can be grand gestures. These seeds grow in children and prepare them for even bigger opportunities to be a spark.

After this powerful book, do you have any plans on crafting another literary masterpiece for children?

We have two additional *A Little Spark* books in the works with book #2 planned for release in Oct 2021. These books will follow the same formula – an illustrated chapter book positioned as a Family Read Aloud and for young readers age seven and above. We will continue to build on the lessons aspect of the book and plan to add more tools for parents to engage with kids about those

lessons. With this planned trilogy we will build on the *Be That Spark* movement and encourage kids to find ways to make a difference.

The books will include a soundtrack with original songs and an accompanying audiobook. We will continue to develop simple interactive capacities as part of the experience.

The good news moving forward is that we now have a platform and an amazing team to support our efforts – website and content development, publishing tools, social media platforms, book designer and editing partner, music production and talent, great illustrator, marketing and PR capabilities, a trusted printer, and global distribution partner. We have spent the past two years putting this team and capability together. They have become like family and are as excited about this journey as I am. And we have a lot of fun!

In addition to the book sequel, we will be building on the school pilot project we ran with a Grade 1 class last year. The teacher read the book, and the class listened to the music and discussed the lessons – the teacher, parents, and the kids loved it. Our goal is to develop an interactive program for schools focused on developing positive character traits based on the lessons from the book. We have been approached by several educators who want to help develop and test this program with their classes.

Thank you so much, Chris and team! If you would like to purchase this newly-released book, you may visit *A Little Spark* at [Amazon](#). For more information, updates, and inquiries, you may visit the [official website](#) of *A Little Spark*.