



IN BECOMING
FEARLESS

... in Love, Work, and Life

by Arianna Huffington

A Reading Group Guide

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR OF
ON BECOMING FEARLESS

*Arianna Huffington talks with her daughters,
Christina and Isabella, about their fears—and about
the importance of spreading an epidemic of fearlessness.*

CHRISTINA: One of the things people ask me is, Isn't your mother afraid of anything? And I always say, Of course she is! Being fearless doesn't mean turning into Wonder Woman or some kind of superhero.

ARIANNA: Exactly. I always tell people that fearlessness is not the absence of fear, it's the mastery of fear. Fearlessness is about getting up one more time than we fall down—or are tripped by our critics!

One of the big messages I want women to take away from the book is that being fearless doesn't mean they are living a life devoid of fear but rather that they are living a life in which they don't allow their fears to hold them back and stop them from having what they want in their personal lives, in their work, and even in creating the world that we want to live in.

ISABELLA: But isn't that easier said than done?

ARIANNA: Well, fearlessness is like a muscle. I know from my own life that the more I exercise it the more natural it becomes to not let my fears run me. The first time we take that first fearless step, we begin to change our lives. And the more we act on our dreams and our desires, the more fearless we become and the easier it is the next time.

Being fearless has been the foundation of any success I have en-

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joyed—both personally and professionally. It's what's allowed me to persevere through the hard times—and as you know there have been plenty of those—and come out on the other side stronger and ready for the next challenge.

CHRISTINA: This is a different kind of book for you—less political, more personal. How did fearlessness play into the writing of it?

ARIANNA: It didn't make sense to write this kind of book without being willing to be vulnerable about my own battles with fear—and with some of the issues we've dealt with as a family. The personal aspect is part of what most appealed to me.

One of the things I've learned from my new life as a blogger is that there is nothing that people respond to more than writing that is raw, intimate, unfiltered. So that is the approach I took with this book. It was challenging at first, but ultimately very freeing. What's more, this approach ended up changing the way that I wrote the book. I actually posted parts of the book on the Huffington Post as I was working on them—and the feedback I got from people (often very personal and moving) proved invaluable. It shaped what I was writing and helped make the book what it eventually became.

Okay, my turn. I know I asked you before I did it, but when all was said and done, how did you feel about seeing aspects of your lives in the book?

ISABELLA: What made it all okay was that we saw your first draft and could change anything we wanted so that it reflected how we felt about those moments in our lives.

CHRISTINA: One of my favorite parts of the book is where you talk about how if we could TiVo our innermost thoughts we would see

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that not even our worst enemies talk about us the way we talk about ourselves. Do you still hear that inner critic?

ARIANNA: Look, it's an ongoing battle, and some days the inner critic—what I call the obnoxious roommate in our head—gets the upper hand. But by and large I have learned to turn down the volume and not listen. I've given my critical roomie an eviction notice . . . and when she does show up, I have learned that I can just walk out of the room.

CHRISTINA: What if she tries to follow you?

ARIANNA: Oh, she will . . . believe me! You just have to train yourself to stand up to her. And you do this by repetition. It's back to the idea that fearlessness is like a muscle. The more we refuse to buy into our inner critics—and our external ones too—the easier it will get to have confidence in our choices, and to feel comfortable with who we are.

ISABELLA: I know you've joked that your biggest fear is me getting my driver's license . . . but what would you say is really your biggest fear?

ARIANNA: My biggest fears revolve around the two of you—fear for your well-being, fear that I might be doing the wrong thing or making the wrong decision. There is nothing like becoming a mom to fill you with fear. I often think that when the doctors help take the baby out, they replace it with a combination of fear and guilt.

CHRISTINA: You make motherhood sound so appealing!

ARIANNA: I'm getting to the good part. . . . At the same time, there is nothing that can bring you closer to fearlessness about everything

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else in the world than being a parent—because everyday fears like not being approved of pale by comparison to the fears you have about your children.

What about you? What would say your biggest fears are?

CHRISTINA: My biggest fears come from the bad things in my head, but I know that when I say or think something bad about myself I have the power to put it aside and not let it determine my behavior—or even my feelings.

ISABELLA: My biggest fear is the fear of failing—the fear of trying something new and not being able to do it or not being good at it. I also have a fear of making the wrong choices when I’m young—which will have a negative impact later in my life.

CHRISTINA: Before, you asked us how we felt about having some of the more private parts of our lives talked about in the book . . . specifically some of the issues we’ve dealt with surrounding food. Given what you just said about your biggest fears being about us, did dealing with these kinds of things help you become more fearless or did it make you more afraid?

ARIANNA: Great question. It did both. When I saw what was going on first with Isabella and then later with you . . . it scared the living daylights out of me. But then, rather quickly, I got out of fear mode and into protective mother mode. I had to push the fear aside and take action. The need to help—to do something now—filled me with strength and a fearlessness that surprised even me.

Seeing you dealing with so many of the same fears I was burdened with made me want to figure out why this was, and what we could do

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to stop it. And, in the end, dealing with those issues was one of the main reasons I decided to write a book exploring fearlessness.

ISABELLA: Well, if you wrote this book for us, what is it that you'd most like Christina and me—and the other mothers and daughters out there—to take away from it?

ARIANNA: The single most important thing I hope you—and everyone else—take away is the notion that a fear-driven life is a life not fully lived. And that by living in fearlessness we can change ourselves and change the world for the better.

I'm convinced that the more fearless we are in our personal lives, the more of that spirit we'll bring to changing our world. And it desperately needs changing. Really, what's the point of being fearless if you're not going to use it to try and achieve big things?

All right, before we wrap this up, what do you think other mothers and daughters would get out of reading *On Becoming Fearless*?

CHRISTINA: I think it comes down to what you say in the book about how important it is to build a “fearless tribe”—surrounding ourselves with those people who will always be in our corner, always there for us, whether we succeed or fail. And hopefully that starts with those closest to us . . . mothers and daughters, sisters and cousins . . . and friends.

ISABELLA: I think discussing the ideas in the book will definitely help bring mothers and their daughters closer together. Seeing all the things they have in common—both good and bad—and figuring out together how to make the move from fear to fearlessness.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. For the person in your group who chose *On Becoming Fearless*, what prompted this choice? If you were not the one who selected the book, are you pleased to have read it? Why or why not?
2. Arianna Huffington shares many personal stories and anecdotes in this book. Were you surprised at her level of honesty? Did learning about her struggles and triumphs change your view of how fearlessness can be achieved? How so?
3. Discuss the ways in which the media influence society's ideas about physical appearance, aging, motherhood, and professional development as it pertains to women.
4. Share one positive influence or role model, either from *On Becoming Fearless* or of your own choosing.
5. "Intelligent, smart, talented, hardworking women allow themselves to be lost in the quest for one man's approval," writes Huffington (page 43). Why is women's self-image so often tied in to what men—in many instances one particular man—think of them? Why do you suppose some women (even "fearless" ones) act weak in order to appear more attractive to men?
6. Huffington, the mother of two daughters, writes that in the modern era "all of our traditional fears about our children's safety and well-being are multiplied and magnified" (page 59). How is parenting in today's world different from what it was a generation ago? Do you find

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it helpful to talk to other parents and share advice? What are some things parents can do to foster fearlessness in their children?

7. Each chapter begins with a different woman's story about fearlessness, from writer Nora Ephron to actress Diane Keaton to Kathy Eldon, a documentary producer whose photographer son was murdered by a mob in Somalia. In what ways did these stories add to the experience of reading this book? Which story affected you the most?

8. "There is a professional double standard so that the same behaviors that help men get ahead and prove their worth on the job are discouraged in women" (page 90). What are these double standards, and why do they persist? Do you agree with the author that the responsibility for double standards in the workplace lies with both men and women? How so?

9. Fearlessness in a sense starts with our physical well-being. "When we feel strong, when our bodies are healthy, we don't feel as vulnerable as when we are weak and out of shape," says Huffington. "It's harder to feel fearless when we become breathless climbing up a flight of stairs" (page 28). Has reading this book inspired you to improve your physical health as a step toward becoming fearless?

10. In some instances women are held back not only by their own self-censors but by the fear of society's censure, leading to "the primal fear of being shunned by the tribe" (page 47). How much influence does the fear of nonconformity have on women's decision making?

11. How important is it to have a fearless role model in one's life? What is your opinion of Huffington's mother, whom the author talks

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about throughout the book? In what ways did she contribute to her daughter's fearlessness?

12. When you were a child, unaware of the idea of "fearlessness," were you naturally fearless? If so, what memories do you have of acting fearless as a child?

13. What is your overall impression of *On Becoming Fearless*? Of the areas explored in the book—body and looks, love, parenting, work, money, aging and illness, death, and leadership—which one resonated with you the most? Why?

14. Do you have a group of women whom you rely upon for support? Do these women make you fearless? Share stories of how these women have inspired you.

15. Did you come away with any concrete advice to apply to your own life after reading *On Becoming Fearless*? If so, share with the group what you'd most like to accomplish.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON'S SUGGESTIONS
FOR FURTHER READING

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott

The Female Brain by Louann Brizendine, MD

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë

Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert

The Second Stage by Betty Friedan

Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes by Edith Hamilton

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne

A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls by Mary Pipher

The Tempest by William Shakespeare

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan

The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women by Naomi Wolf

A Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf

**ARIANNA HUFFINGTON'S
TOP 10 TIPS
TO BECOMING FEARLESS**

1. Be true to yourself. Constantly looking over your shoulder for approval means you'll never find it. What's more, you greatly increase your chances of walking into a wall or falling into a ditch—not to mention losing yourself in the process.
2. Turn down the volume of your inner critic. Everyone has one: the obnoxious roommate in your head, always there with the critical, self-doubting comment. But that doesn't mean you have to listen. When the negative judgments start to blare, hit the off switch or drown them out with your iPod.
3. Look past the glass ceiling to endless opportunity. Preoccupation with impediments allows us to climb only so high. Keep your mind open to new adventures and you'll surpass every expectation.
4. Use the mirror to make sure your lipstick isn't smudged, not to judge your value as a person.
5. Stop comparing yourself to others—it's a no-win game. And especially stop comparing yourself to supermodels, who don't even look like the perfectly lit and airbrushed supermodels we usually see in magazines.
6. Get enough sleep. It's next to impossible to be fearless—or to be your best self—if you are sleep deprived. A good pillow is a vital addition to any beauty regime.

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7. Slip into an air of self-assurance. Fearlessness is sexy. So is confidence.
8. Run, swim, bike, hike, do yoga, or hit the gym. And fill your lungs with fresh air. Never forget—you can go weeks without food, days without water, but only mere minutes without breathing.
9. Be assertive in love. Know what you want out of a relationship and have the courage to express yourself to get it. And if you don't get it—and if the other person can't even handle the mere expression of your needs—be strong enough to walk away.
10. Always remember: True fearlessness comes from a deep and complete acceptance of ourselves—not from what we wear, or how we look, or what we do, or what we accomplish.