



Talking Politics with your Children

By Thomas Haller and Chick Moorman

You are your child's first and most important teacher. You teach your children to walk, talk and ride a bike. You teach them about manners, respect, and the opposite sex. It is also your job to teach your children about the American way of life, our form of government, and the election process.

It is not the high school's government teacher's job to teach your child about a participatory democracy. It is your job. It is not that teacher's responsibility to teach your child the value of dissent and the strength that comes from diversity and honest, but differing viewpoints. That is your responsibility.

This year's Presidential election is a significant historical event. There is no better time than the present to include your entire family in the election process and learning about our government and how it works. Step up now and do your job. Teach your child valuable lessons in how and why you respect and love our democracy. Honor your role as your child's most important teacher by using the tips below to help you and your children be a part of history together.

1. **Share all sides of the political discussion.** Don't just share your opinion. If you are a Republican, Democrat, or other, your job is not to convince your child that your thinking is correct. It is to get them to do their own thinking. Read to them from the newspaper, magazines and promotional material. Yes, you can share your views, but encourage your children to ask questions and come to their own conclusions.
2. **Talk about our country's political process and its significance.** Talk about the democratic process and relate it to how you run your family. Show them the connections. Teach them what women and blacks had to endure to finally gain equal voting rights. Explain how some of us resisted those efforts and others worked to make it happen. Explain how not everyone agrees in our country, but that is one of our strengths.
3. **Watch the Presidential Debates together.** Make this a happening. Treat it as something special. Announce it head of time. Then count it down, "Only two more days until the next debate." Show them through your actions that this is more important than Dancing with the Stars, Desperate Housewives, and The Simpson reruns.

4. **Take your children with you when you vote.** Show them the voting process and explain what you are doing each step along the way. Take them into the voting booth with you and let them watch you mark your ballot. You get to do this. Seriously, take them in the booth with you.
5. **Follow the election results together.** Discuss the outcome with your children the next day if their bedtime dictates missing the most important information. Since the final results will come well after they are fast asleep, discuss the results at breakfast the next morning. Remind your children that some people will be particularly happy this day since the person they voted for got elected. Others, will be disappointed because their favorite candidate did not get elected. Discuss how mature people handle these kinds of situations and that in the democratic process it is important to support the final decision so we can work together as one country.

Just like a family, our government works best when everyone gets involved and participates. Just like a family, our government works best when the leader accepts his or her responsibilities and leads to the best of their ability. It is time now for you to demonstrate to your children that you participate fully in our governmental process and in the education of your family. It is time for you to model for your children an effective leader who moves confidently into his responsibilities and teaches his family about the value of a participatory democracy.

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