

Voting: An Asset-Building Approach

"It's not the hand that signs the laws that holds the destiny of America. It's the hand that casts the ballot."—Harry S. Truman, 33rd president of the United States

On Election Day, we go to the polls to vote for the people who will lead our country, our states, and our communities. Although only adults can vote, you can include your kids in ways that help them become engaged citizens who can't wait to vote when they turn 18. Consider these ideas to make Election Day a family day.

Try it...

For all parents

- Take your kids with you to the polls. Young children can often accompany parents into the polling booth, and older kids will pick up a lot of the buzz by observing the process from a distance. Most polling places enjoy having kids come, and many make them feel right at home, even though they're not old enough to vote.
- If you're comfortable talking about your political beliefs and choices, then talk about whom you are voting for and why. Explain what your hopes are for your country, your state, and your community. Then ask your kids for their opinions.
- Learn more about voting and elections by visiting the [government's citizen guide](#).
- Make Election Day a family day by watching the polling results and listening to what election forecasters have to say. Find a media source that you respect and pay attention to it.

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- If your polling place gives out stickers that say, "I voted," give your sticker to your child (or ask one of the organizers if your child can have a sticker of her own). Most young children love wearing stickers, and many will proudly say, "I voted!" even though they're not old enough to do so.
- Find a photograph of the president in a book, on the Internet, or in a magazine and show it to your child. Talk about how the president is the leader of country. Even if you're not a fan of the president, getting your child familiar with idea and the person will help him become more engaged in the process as he grows.
- Declare Election Day as red, white, and blue day and wear those colors. Make flag pictures together to hang on the refrigerator. Serve something red (strawberries), white (potatoes), and blue (blueberries) for a meal.

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- Talk simply about Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Children at this age

often become fascinated by the animal that represents a political party, such as the donkey and the elephant. If you're interested in another political party (such as the Green Party) talk about that one instead of the Independents to keep the explanation simpler.

- Have your child (and other family members) vote for a leader at home. Create a ballot box and give only two or three choices. Design the ballot with pictures of those running for office. Don't be surprised if your child picks someone based solely on "how nice" she looks. That's okay at this age. Have someone tally the votes.
- Make the political process fun, even though it is serious business. Keep your strong opinions for adult conversations. You don't want to turn your kids off to the process if you get overly emotional.

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- As a family, research those running for office. Ask your kids to do research through the Internet and see what they find. Talk about what you've learned.
- Begin introducing the idea of political platforms and issues to your child. Together, learn which candidates advocate for which issues—and which issues are important to you and why. Get your kids' opinions about important issues as well.
- Bring your child with you to a political caucus or primary. You don't need to stay long to give your child a sense of what happens at these political events.

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- Encourage your teenager to get involved in the political process at school. Many high schools have political parties, debates, and straw votes during election time. Find out how the student body voted—and what your teenager thought of the results.
- Help your teenager register to vote when he turns 18. If you're not sure how to register in your area, visit [Project Vote](#). If your teen still lives with you, take him to the first voting election.
- Talk with your teenager about the contradictions and the political process. For example, some people question how a candidate can talk about "family values" after having an affair. Honor your teenager's growing sophistication and maturity by not shying away from how politics can get mean or incoherent. Talk about why that happens.
- Have family discussions about candidates and the issues. Talk about why it's important for family members to vote and be politically active.