



Talking to Your Children About the Election (A Note to Trinity Families)

I imagine if you're talking to your child about the upcoming election it can feel complex. Granted, with the age span at Trinity, from 3 years old to 12 years old, it's quite the range. Our youngest Trinity students may have little, if any, context for the election, given their egocentric stage of development. Our oldest students, who are developmentally beginning to think abstractly, may be inquisitive and/or bewildered. As adults, we see the election through an entirely different lens.

In a recent New York Times article [NYT on the Election and Children](#) the writer speaks to a limited study with children aged 5 to 11 immediately before and after the 2016 election. The data found that 58% of the children interviewed cared a lot about the election and 23% cared somewhat. It's my experience, especially in Presidential elections, the children have a more heightened awareness and we have opportunities as families to help them navigate the complexities they may be confronting.

To me, it comes down to what we value as individual families. Let me try to explain.

When our children were 7, 4 and 1 year old, Tracy and I made the intentional move from Santa Barbara, where we had enjoyed living for 10 years, to San Francisco. While life in Santa Barbara was idyllic, we felt strongly, after living in New York City for 2 years during that time, we wanted our children to be raised in a larger city and experience urban life. The value of our children experiencing urban life was crucial to us.

As our children became older, we began to discuss elections in terms of values that were important to our family. It wasn't about denigrating particular candidates but more about issues we cared about and the importance of the democratic process. For example, Tracy and I talked with our kids about local issues such as public transportation, housing, the environment, and education from a local, statewide and national perspective. We also talked about the democratic process and our civic responsibility, such as this NPR article [NPR on Civic Responsibility](#) - how we vote for representatives and initiatives/propositions that, for our family, aligned with what we felt was the collective good for all. On election day, when it was less common to vote early or by mail, we brought our kids into the voting booth at our local precinct.

It's gratifying to see the long game impact of this. My daughter recently sent me a photo of the dropping her ballot into a designated ballot box with her own daughter in tow. And she works for The Nature Conservancy raising funds to protect ecologically important land. Of our sons, one is eyeing a PhD focusing on public transportation and another considering a position as a teaching assistant.

I bring up my own family as an illustrative example of how talking about the election can play out with children. In a time that seems like a polarization of political extremes and where the mass media feels less like a journalistic approach and more partisan, we can use our living rooms and dinner tables as a place to center our values as families.





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I encourage you to find times to talk to your children about the election. It doesn't need to be complex, the discussion can orbit around individual family values in the context of our republic and democracy, and it can be a learning moment which can have a lasting impact.

