

KNOW! HOW TO CULTIVATE KINDNESS DURING ELECTION SEASON



Election season can bring public issues, strong opinions, and challenging conversations into young people's everyday lives. It can also give families opportunities to practice democratic literacy—the skills young people use to understand civic life, evaluate information, consider different perspectives, communicate respectfully, and participate in their communities.⁵

Trusted adults can model these behaviors by giving young people opportunities to ask questions, express their feelings, and practice respectful dialogue.

1. MODEL KINDNESS AND RESPECT

Adults can model kindness in everyday interactions and help young people learn to discuss public issues without name-calling, stereotyping, or dismissing others.^{2,3}

To model kindness and respect, try to:

- Separate people from ideas. Show that it is possible to disagree with an idea and still respect the person.
- Use respectful language when talking about public issues, candidates, or communities.
- Ask questions and listen rather than assuming what someone believes or why.
- If you make a mistake or say something later shown to be wrong, admit it and correct it.⁴

Talking Tip: “I don't agree with that idea, but I want to understand what you mean. Can you help me understand why you see it that way?”

2. ENCOURAGE EMPATHY AND INCLUSION

Kindness means noticing and including others, while civic learning helps young people find their voices and understand their role in the community.^{1,5} Help them recognize that people can care about the same issue while having different experiences, perspectives, and ideas.

Caregivers can build empathy by:

- Creating space to discuss feelings without judgment.²
- Asking what another person may be experiencing or feeling.²
- Encouraging curiosity about perspectives beyond their immediate circles.^{1,4}
- Explaining that listening does not require agreement—young people can ask questions and maintain their own opinions.³

Talking Tip: “What would someone else with a different experience from you think about this issue?”

3. PRACTICE DISAGREEING RESPECTFULLY

Disagreement is part of relationships and civic life. Election season can provide opportunities to practice communication and perspective-taking at home.⁵

Try encouraging youth to:

- Take time to calm down before responding if a discussion becomes heated.⁴
- Listen to understand rather than simply preparing a response.
- Ask questions instead of assuming someone's motives.
- Focus criticism on an idea or information rather than the person.
- Know when to walk away if a conversation becomes too stressful or unsafe.

Talking Tip: “We see this differently. Can we slow down and talk about what information we're each using?”

4. SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES

Young people encounter information about elections and public issues online every day. This makes media literacy an important civic skill, helping them access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act on information.^{5,6} Trusted adults can help youth dig deeper before accepting or sharing a post by:

- Ask where a post came from and help youth find the original source instead of relying on screenshots, reposts, or short videos.⁶
- Encourage youth to check reliable sources when a claim is surprising, emotional, or hard to verify.
- Remind youth to pause before responding to or sharing posts that make them angry or afraid.⁴
- Helping them distinguish between facts, opinions, and unproven claims.

Tailor conversations to your child's age. With younger children, focus on kindness, listening, inclusion, and respect. With older youth, explore different viewpoints, discuss how to evaluate the credibility of information and recognize misinformation, and encourage positive participation in their communities.^{1,5,6}

Talking Tip: "What do we need to check before we share this post? Where does the original information appear?"

5. SPREAD KINDNESS IN THE COMMUNITY

Kindness extends beyond one-on-one interactions. Helping, volunteering, sharing skills, and working toward shared goals build connections and help youth engage in their communities.^{2,5} Simple ways to practice kindness include:

- Helping a neighbor with a chore.
- Donating gently used books or supplies to a community organization.
- Volunteering or participating in a community service project.
- Asking someone how they are and actively listening.
- Working with other young people on a school or neighborhood project.

Afterward, ask what they learned about their community and how they'd like to help next.

Talking Tip: "What is one small thing we could do this week to make our school or community feel more inviting?"

Election season brings information, strong feelings, and disagreement. Young people don't need to have all the answers to build civic skills. What matters is how they engage. Encourage and recognize their efforts to listen, ask questions, check information, include others, and disagree with kindness and respect. These skills strengthen healthy relationships and help young people participate positively in their families, schools, and communities.^{2,5}

RESOURCES

- <https://www.pbs.org/parents/empathy/>
- <https://circle.tufts.edu/our-research/equitable-k12-civic-learning/>
- <https://circle.tufts.edu/circlegrowingvoters>
- <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/kindness>

SOURCES

1. <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/help-your-child-be-a-kind-friend>
2. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_be_a_kindness_role_model_for_your_kids
3. <https://www.pbs.org/parents/empathy/>
4. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/kindness/kindness-matters-guide>
5. <https://circle.tufts.edu/our-research/equitable-k12-civic-learning>
6. <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/youth-rely-digital-platforms-need-media-literacy-access-political-information>

Scan for additional Know!
Prevention Tips for Everyone:

