

## Tips for Talking to Kids about Elections

*Jason Lheureux, LPC | Wedgwood Director of Residential Services*

**PREPARE YOURSELF:** These seasons are stressful on each of us in our own way. It is important prior to talking to our children about these issues that we have processed our own emotions and are ready to create a constructive and safe place to celebrate agreement and embrace disagreement.

**START SMALL:** Concepts such as right and wrong, fair and not fair, kindness, having a choice, making good decisions, and being a friend are much more concrete and easier to navigate topics for children.

**DON'T BE PERFECT:** It's ok to say 'I don't know' to a child. You don't have to have all the answers, you just need to be a supportive adult in your child's life. Sometimes, you can even seek the answers together.

**ASK:** Ask your child what they have already heard or already know about elections. Try to use their terms and language and encourage their understanding before replacing it with yours. Framing your conversation with questions first allows children encourages critical thinking.

**CREATE CRITICAL THINKERS:** Teach your children the difference between facts and opinions and the importance of not believing everything you see and hear at face value. Teach your children how our decisions impact others and to cultivate empathy and the ability to take the perspective of others.

**OBSERVE:** There are so many teachable moments in our daily lives. Ask your child questions and be on the lookout for natural opportunities to have a discussion with your child. Observe a billboard, ad, or bumper sticker and ask questions that allows your child to ponder how they feel about things.

**FRIENDS DISAGREE:** Election seasons can be particularly divisive. It can be difficult for children to see that even if we don't agree on everything, we can still be friends. Try to find age-appropriate terms and role model that sometimes you can disagree with someone and still be friends.

**SHOW RESPECT:** Show your children that it's possible to root for their own team while still treating others with dignity and respect. It is possible to disagree with the perspective, beliefs, or values of another person while still valuing and respecting the individual. Showing others respect for their beliefs, builds relationships and allows important dialogue to continue.

**FOCUS ON THE PROCESS:** The process of government is so much bigger than one individual candidate. Teaching a child with age-appropriate terms *how* government works and what the various *roles* and *responsibilities* are of government helps them better understand the importance and big picture.

**PARTICIPATION AS A GIFT:** Not everyone in the world gets to have a voice in their government. Meet the child where they are at and discuss how special it is to get to be a part of the decision-making process.

**PARTICIPATE NOW:** Let them wear a sticker. Help them put up a yard sign. Take them with you to the polls. Find a small way for your child to participate with you, even though they cannot vote.