

Let Your Kids Campaign!

Kids are acutely aware of what's "fair" and what's not. Here's a quirky way to teach your first grader the importance of voting, by bringing it down to her level. Let your kid campaign! This simple activity will help her learn how a decision can be reached fairly by a group of people, once everyone's heard each side.

What You Need:

- Pencils
- Index cards
- Shoebox, with a slit cut in its cover

What to Do:

The next time you're in the car or sitting at the table with your family, pick a family decision that you would like your first grader to tackle. This can be a simple, everyday decision like what to eat for dinner, to a more special one like where everyone would like to go on your next family vacation.

Turn to your first grader. Tell her that since people in the family have different views, you're going to work together to make a "fair" choice by voting. Everyone gets one vote, and the "majority" will decide. You can even use the word "democratic" here so your child becomes familiar with voting terminology. Explain that before people vote, they always need to think about their choices. This is why candidates come around and give speeches.

In this decision, every member of the family should start by talking about choices and exploring all points of view. After hearing everyone speak, have your first grader conduct a vote. It's tempting to have everyone raise hands, but as a lesson in civics, it's better to go with a "secret ballot" process. Ask each family member to jot their vote on an index card and put it inside the shoe box. Explain that nobody will sign this "ballot," that it's intentionally anonymous, just like in "real life" elections in a voting booth. Later, you can also discuss why this "secret" process might be important in a school or community.

Give the box to your first grader to tally. After all votes are counted, ask her what she thinks you all can do with the information. How does a decision get made? (This is a good time to remind everyone about the term majority!) After your family has made a choice, have your first grader document this decision by writing it down and hanging it up in a common area for all to see. "We are going to Disneyland!" or "Macaroni and Cheese on Friday!" Have fun with it. Let your child color it brightly or glue on a decoration.

Sure, it's one small family decision; but it's a sign of huge concepts: the importance of being heard, and the privilege of being allowed to vote and help make a group decision in a democratic country.

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