

Raising an Engaged Citizenry: Parents Make A Big Difference

More than schools or even peers, parents play a key role in the development of effective and engaged citizens. Parents are crucial in helping their children develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with effective citizenship. According to recent research:

...parents appear to have a significant positive effect on the civic capacities of young people. Talking with parents or guardians about politics was the only opportunity that positively related to every one of our desired outcomes. California Civic Survey, Kahne, et. al (2005)

Constitutional Rights Foundation’s “10 Things Parents Can Do to Raise Engaged Citizens” provides a list of ideas for parents to do with their children that, according to research, promote positive civic capacities.

Parents can also urge schools to provide high-quality civic education. A national report called the *Civic Mission of Schools* has provided educators and researchers with promising approaches in civic education. The chart summarizes recent research on how different experiences effect young people’s civic capacities.

Classroom Practices Associated with Desired Civic Outcomes		Commitment to Participate	Intent to Vote	Informed to Vote	Civic Skills	Social & Political Trust	Political Knowledge	Political Interest
CIS Promising Approaches	Instruction in Govt, History, Law	★	★	★			★	
	Discussion of Current Events	★			★			★
	Service Learning	★			★			★
	Extra-Curricular Activities	★	★		★			
	Student Voice in School/Class Governance	★			★	★		
	Simulations/Interactive Methods			★	★			★
Other Practices	Discuss Politics with Parents	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
	Parents are Active in Community/Politics	★			★	★		
	Analyzing Different Perspectives on Issues	★	★		★			★
	Exposure to Role Models	★				★		★
	Exposure to Diversity	★	★	★			★	★
	Opportunities to Practice Civic Skills				★			★

Summarized from research conducted by Dr. Joseph Kahne for the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools: [The California Survey of Civic Education](http://www.civicsurvey.org)

Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization. CRF provides programs and instructional materials for K-12 civic, law-related, and history education as well as service learning.

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10 Things Parents Can Do to Raise Engaged Citizens

1. **Get involved in your community.** When your children see that you are concerned about issues and involved in making changes in society, they will feel that the family has a stake in the community. You can help instill in them a sense of civic pride and active participation.
2. **Talk to them about current events and politics.** By making current social problems personally relevant, students will be motivated to analyze them and take an interest in them.
3. **Watch a movie about politics.** For family viewing, select a feature with a subject relating to law, justice, government, or politics. Some suggestions: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Citizen Kane*, *Good Night and Good Luck*, *All The President's Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Gandhi*.
4. **Make them a part of the voting process.** Discuss candidates and ballot measures and take them to vote with you. They will learn about the importance of this democratic practice. They will also become eager to participate when they reach voting age.
5. **Encourage them to become involved in extracurricular activities.** There are clubs, sports teams, school newspapers, student government, and interscholastic competitions that students can choose from according to their interests. Through these, they can learn about leadership, communication, and cooperation with others in reaching common goals.
6. **Explore community service programs and local government.** Service-learning and civic action organizations can provide students with opportunities to do charitable work and affect policy. If they also attend a city council meeting or county hearing with you, they can see representative democracy at work.
7. **Take them to hear influential speakers.** Whether it is a notable leader in business, charity, religion, or politics, a role model can inspire young people to emulate their efforts to make a difference in society.
8. **Take them to culturally enriching events.** Exposure to a diversity of cultures and worldviews can expand students' appreciation of different members of society.
9. **Give them opportunities to make decisions.** The more your child can participate in family decisions, like where to go for a weekend outing or what to have for dinner, then the more they will practice decision-making skills and feel confident in expressing opinions.
10. **Subscribe to news and opinion periodicals.** Conversations about politics can receive a spark from a compelling or even controversial article or news item. Students will have access to the tools to stay well-informed on the issues that they care about.