

## Early Childhood: Responding to the Election

When The Jewish Education Project released our [Early Childhood Resource Guide](#) for the upcoming election, we heard that educators and families wanted to know how to help promote the well-being of young children in response to uncertainty and potential unrest. **Sasha Kopp, our Community Early Childhood and Family Engagement Consultant** had a conversation with **Leah C. Marks, PhD, NCSP**, a school psychologist and licensed clinical psychologist, to discuss how parents and educators can best support young children at this time.

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**Sasha:** How can teachers, parents and caregivers best support young children at this time?

**Dr. Marks:** *Children are naturally curious and may want to learn more about what adults may be talking about. It is important that adults screen media such as the news or other videos first to ensure that it is developmentally appropriate for a child to be viewing it. Even without having exposure to media, young children may pick up on emotions that adults are feeling about the election. Before engaging in conversation about the election:*

- *Check in with Yourself*  
*Adults should first check in with themselves that they are feeling emotionally ready to discuss their feelings. It is okay to be honest with young children about your emotions, but if you are feeling overwhelmed it may be difficult to have a developmentally appropriate conversation.*
- *Share Your Feelings in a Relatable Way*  
*You could say something such as “I am feeling worried what is going to happen in the election. When is a time you were worried, what did you do to feel better?” It can also help to reassure children “it’s okay to feel frustrated, I am going to go read a book because that helps me calm down.” It may be best to state how you are feeling but encourage the child you will talk about it at another time and ask them a question about things they are interested in.*
- *Know That it’s ok to Not Know*  
*It is also okay to admit to children that you may be feeling confused or that you are feeling nervous waiting on election results and see if you can relate these emotions back to the child’s own experiences.*
- *Maintain Consistency with Behavioral Norms at Home and School- Teachers may be concerned that children may have questions or maybe even get in conflict with other children regarding politics or repeating things they have heard even out of context. In these times it is important to emphasize existing classroom rules or norms around kindness, respect, and problem solving. It can be helpful to discuss how children and adults may have different ideas and opinions and that is okay. It could also be helpful to talk through other times children have different opinions (enjoying certain foods, identifying a favorite color, choosing a preferred center to play in).*

**Sasha:** What behaviors may children demonstrate during and following the election?

**Dr. Marks:** *The election like any national event can come with a lot of stimulation and sometimes stress for adults and children alike. During times of stress, adults may notice an increase in behavioral difficulties, increased intensity of emotions, or difficulties with slowing down. Young children may demonstrate increased difficulties with solving problems or coping than they would typically. These are all expected behaviors whenever there is a change or stress that is experienced by adults and children may sense it.*

*As with any stressor, it is important that adults demonstrate consistency, care and safety in the contexts in which they interact with the child. Adults should emphasize that although things may change in the outside world, rules and routines that are present in their home or classroom remain the same and children may benefit from these reminders.*

**Sasha:** What recommendations do you have for parents in interacting with their children following the election?

**Dr. Marks:** *This may be a difficult time for parents in general, and that is on top of a pandemic and many other stressors that may be occurring. First and foremost, parents should be ensuring they are caring for themselves. If parents are experiencing big emotions that are difficult to cope with, they should seek their own mental health support including therapy services. Parents can always be most effective if they are helping to care for themselves.*

*During these stressful times, it can be helpful for parents to spend quality time with their children away from screens. Open ended and child-directed pretend play can be very helpful for this. Parents can simply engage in play with their children allowing children to lead the play and parents following the lead. Even spending just 5 minutes doing this can make a large difference and can really help to reinforce the positive relationship with the child and feelings of safety. Engaging in other activities together such as getting outside for a walk and asking for your child's observations can be a nice way to reinforce that positive relationship.*

**Sasha:** PJ Library has some resources for parents to use as well about helping children cope with scary situations. They include [videos and additional resources](#) that might be useful as well.

**Sasha:** How can teachers and staff best help each other when responding to the election and working with the children in their classroom?

**Dr. Marks:** *It is important to recognize that the election may have different effects on teachers and staff for a variety of reasons. This is an important time for staff to support each other when they may be experiencing an increased amount of stress. Teachers and staff should be prepared to "tag team" frequently during the time in the election. Teachers should discuss effective communication strategies to indicate to others when they may need a brief break, or would benefit from another teacher taking over, whether it be for a particular lesson, or solving a problem with a child demonstrating difficult behaviors. It can be helpful to develop a hand signal or code word to indicate to the other adult "I need help."*



**Sasha:** What considerations should teachers make regarding their curriculum and lesson planning around the election?

**Dr. Marks:** *Teachers should anticipate that the time surrounding the election may be a time of stress for students and their families, therefore this would not be the best time to introduce a lot of new concepts or activities that will place high demands on children. Allowing children open ended opportunities to express themselves will be helpful. Additionally, teachers may want to return to activities and lessons that have been successful in the past. Teachers should also think about monitoring the activity level of their students and respond accordingly. Some children may need the opportunity to move more, while others may benefit from activities that will help calm their bodies down.*

**Sasha:** These ideas are great! I love that you are bringing in the need for more open-ended play! I think another open-ended idea to keep in mind is art. Teachers and parents should feel encouraged to use art as a tool to help young children express their feelings and as a tool to reduce any anxiety.

I also think a great tool to use are books. One book that I am thinking might be helpful in the upcoming week is the Mo Willims book: **Waiting isn't Easy**. Additional books that could be helpful are those that focus on feelings like, **Sometimes I'm Bumbaloo** by Rachel Vail or accepting differences such as **The Sandwich Swap** by Queen Rania of Jordan Al Abdullah. These books can act as provocations for children to share that they are thinking and feeling in an age appropriate way.

**Sasha:** Do you have any final words for parents and educators during this time?

**Dr. Marks:** *It is sometimes hard to remember how resilient kids are. Even though there are a lot of stressful things happening right now, young children can be a good reminder of joy, curiosity and excitement. In the end, it is always important that as adults we check in with ourselves so we can best be there to support children in their own growth and development.*

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For more of our resources on **Civic Education and Engagement in Jewish Education**, please see:

- [CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY 2020](#)
- [SURVIVING AND THRIVING THROUGH CIVIC AND CIVIL ENGAGEMENT](#)

