

SPECIAL NEWSLETTER

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Dear Parents,

Election Day is on November 7, two weeks away.

Just as you have the responsibility of feeding your kids, immunizing them, and sending them to school you have the responsibility of BEING A GOOD CITIZEN and MODELING GOOD CITIZENSHIP.

So let me once again repeat my important and timely message for parents about that four-letter word all parents should use in front of the children. The kids should see you do it from the time they are toddlers. You should talk about doing it in front of the children. You should remind them over and over again that they will do it when they are grown up and they must do it every time they can, carefully and thoughtfully.

The word? VOTE!

Parents complain how hard it is to raise kids today because of problems in our neighborhoods, schools, communities, and environment. Parents ask me over and over again, "What can we do?" A one word answer: VOTE.

I get cross when I read that voter turnout is low. I am dismayed about voter apathy when so many decisions vitally important to families must be made. I go ballistic when a parent tells me, "I just don't bother to vote." because it gives such a negative message to their children. And I am saddened enough to cry when a woman or a member of a minority group doesn't vote. When my 98-year-old mother was born, women could not vote. It was 22 years later before women won the right to vote in 1920 and it was 1965 before blacks were guaranteed the right to vote in all states.

Don't try to tell me you're too busy. Don't make the excuse that it doesn't matter, what's one vote? Don't tell me all politicians are the same, so what difference does it make? Do your parental duty and VOTE!

Remember to take your children with you to the voting booth if possible as children who see their parents vote are more likely to vote themselves when they are adults. If you vote by mail you can involve the children. Show them what you are doing. Explain who you are voting for, and why. Discuss how you are voting on the propositions. Point out that you get your ballot in on time to be counted.

Get your children involved in the whole voting process. Explain what voter registration is and how the polls make sure no one votes more than once. Discuss how you get information about candidates. Walk around your neighborhood to discuss the candidate signs. Tell the children how you make up your mind. Wear your "I voted" stickers proudly.

You feel uninformed about how to vote or how government works? Hit the library. You don't know anything about the candidates? Read the newspapers or call the local party headquarters for information. You want to know something about ballot initiatives? Call the League of Women Voters (327-7652) or visit their website (www.smartvoter.org).

Studies have shown that people who don't vote often feel incompetent. They don't think they know enough about candidates or issues to vote. None of us knows all that we want to know, especially in elections with many candidates and initiatives. It's hard work to become an informed voter but it's your job and your duty, especially if you have kids, to do the best you can. It's especially hard these days because the US has been infected with a malicious virus called spin. Highly-paid political manipulators can take any incident or floor vote and twist things around so their candidate who did bad now sounds good. So be especially alert about TV spots, and teach your children to do the same. THINK before you buy into a political commercial, notice what organization is sponsoring the ad.

I try to keep this column as apolitical as possible because I want to be helpful to all parents regardless of their political affiliation. But this year I am exercising my first amendment rights to speak my mind. I urge you as a parent, for the sake of your own kids and for everybody's collective well-being to vote for pro-family, pro-children, pro-education, pro-community, pro-environment candidates. Children are our future. The family is the vital infrastructure children need in order to grow, develop, and thrive. Without quality schools and a healthy environment our children will be unable to compete for jobs and will be forced to live on a noxious planet.

All of the adults in this country have the right to vote inscribed in the Constitution. Rights always mean responsibilities. We parents have responsibilities to our children and to the community in which we raise them. So live up to these responsibilities and VOTE!

Marilyn Heins, MD