



Talking Turkey: Taking the “Dis” Out of Civil Discourse

Purpose: Many elder statesmen have commented on the fact that the collegiality they shared in the past with members of different political ideologies has disappeared in this modern era of polarization. The ability to discuss issues from varying points of view, debate their merits, and compromise on solutions is quickly disappearing from our political process. This is a shame, because the Founders believed that debate, discourse and compromise were important to continuing the tradition of government by the majority with protection for the minority. Perhaps we have lost the art of debate, discourse and compromise. This series of downloadable topic papers is an attempt to start reviving the skills of civil discourse by encouraging teachers, parents, and students to sit down together and really examine the important issues of our day. Each downloadable topic contains talking points from both sides of the issue, links to websites with information from important political figures like the President, governmental agencies, and related organizations. There are also guiding questions to help begin a conversation. This program is recommended for use in the classroom, but more importantly might be a great way to involve your Parent Student Organizations in meaningful discourse and discussion.

Objective:

1. Students, teachers and parents will examine information about issues of importance to our nation in order to learn the skills of civil discourse.

Key Words:

Discourse
Compromise

Debate

Materials:

1. Downloadable Topic Resources from the lessons plan page of www.youthleadership.net; topics include:
 - The Economy
 - Homeland Security/ The War on Terror
 - The Environment
 - Education
 - Health Care
 - Cyber Security
 - Social Justice and Civil Disobedience

2. Newspaper articles from local and national media on those topics.
3. The *Skills of Discourse* Worksheet

Procedure:

1. Working with your child or students, have them read and flip through newspapers, news magazines, and websites to find articles that deal with the issues covered in the “Talking Turkey” series. Read these articles together and have students/children discuss the main idea of each article, what supporting information the author has provided, the reliability of sources, and where one might find additional information.
2. Download the appropriate “Talking Turkey” resource page. Read the talking points with your child/student, and take the time to discuss your opinion on the information, explain your beliefs about the topic, and acknowledge opposing viewpoints. For more information on a “Talking Turkey” topic, see the links included with each resource. Both adult- and child-friendly links have been provided for most topics. View these resources either prior to discussing the topic or during your discussion. Alternatively, make them available after discussion for children/students who express additional interest in the topic.
3. Use the *Talking Points with Your Child* to illicit their ideas and proposals about how the problem might be addressed. The **Skills of Discourse** worksheet provides hints and suggestions for discussing and debating these issues. Identify areas of compromise between both sides of the issue.

Extension:

1. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about the need for discussion, debate and compromise. Use a specific issue from the program to illustrate how the process worked for you and how it might work on a larger scale at the statehouse or in Washington,D.C.
2. Use the Project Vote Smart page of the Youth Leadership Initiative website, www.youthleadership.net to see how your representatives feel about these issues and contact them about your solutions.

The University of Virginia Center for Politics



Skills of Discourse: Hints for Discussing Politics at Your Table

The following are suggestions for holding a discussion about political issues. They are intended to guide the process and make all participants feel comfortable in the process.

1. Listen to each person's opinions in their entirety before making a comment.
2. Keep an open mind.
3. Ask for elaboration if you feel you don't know enough about what was said.
4. Look for areas of agreement with the speaker.
5. Look for areas of disagreement so that you may address those after he/she is finished speaking.
6. Identify ways that you might compromise with the speaker if you don't agree with them.
7. Present your criticism positively. Refrain from using terms such as:
 - You're wrong.
 - That's stupid.
 - Who thinks like that?
 - Anyone who thinks that way is....Instead try:
 - I don't feel that way, can you explain your position?
 - How did you come to that conclusion?
8. Remember, we are all in this to make our country better.
9. If you don't know- ask. If there are terms or ideas you don't understand do some research to find answers to your questions.
10. Accept all ideas as possibilities and don't instantly dismiss them.

Teacher Tip: Consider presenting these rules prior to your discussion as a "Contract for Conversation", and posting them in your classroom or on your fridge. Invite students to suggest additional rules, or add onto the list yourself. Agreeing together makes you and your students/children accountable to a shared set of ground rules in which all parties are invested.

For more information visit: www.youthleadership.net