

My Political Autobiography

By: _____



essential
PARTNERS

Talking politics

The elections are coming up! Talking about politics is difficult because politics is one of the ways we express what we really care about—our hopes, our values, our deepest concerns. Political beliefs are about our education, religious commitments, sense of justice, the future of the planet, war and peace, our personal sense of safety and health.

Why dialogue?

Dialogue is about understanding other people and being understood. It is a way of learning about one another and engaging in our ideas about the world. Politics becomes dysfunctional when we cannot talk to each other about the most important issues without fighting or going silent. When we think about important but sensitive issues, we think we only have two choices: fight about it or avoid the conversation—and sometimes the person—altogether. Dialogue is the alternative!

Getting ready for dialogue

This workbook is meant to help you get ready to engage in a dialogue about your political beliefs. It isn't always easy to talk about what we care about and why, to share the reason for our beliefs or the values that underlie them. What story could you tell people to help them understand you and your values. What person or place in your life has made the greatest impact on you? This journal is meant to help you discover those stories and make those connections.

How to use this workbook

This workbook is a journal, a prompt, a helper. You could do it all—start to finish. Or you could read it through and find the parts that are most interesting to think about. Write directly on this or have a journal that you use to keep your thoughts in. The point is to have fun thinking about where your beliefs come from, why things matter to you, and what would happen next if things were up to you.



About you: Where did you come from?

- ❑ What is your name? How did you get it? What does it mean?

- ❑ Where were you born? What do you know about that place?

- ❑ Where have you lived in your life? Name all the places you have lived through the years and why you moved from one place to the next.

- ❑ How has the place you were born and lived impacted your political beliefs or the issues you care about?

- ❑ Who was president when you were born? What do you know about them?

- ❑ Who is the first president you remember? What do you remember about them?

- ❑ What is the first political cause you remember caring about? What caused you to care?



Learning from those close to you

Learn about the people closest to you. These questions are meant for you to understand the political history of your family and friends—the people who have shaped your life.

Dinner table conversations

- Share a story from your past that you think of as one of the first moments you remember caring about an issue or political idea?
- Who in the world (other than your parents) do you most admire and why?
- What in the news is most concerning to you?
- What local issue in the community is most concerning to you?
- If you had more time to volunteer what would you volunteer your time doing? Why is that important to you?

As you talk about these things—these agreements might help—especially if your politics and your folks' politics are different!

- Agree to set aside the desire to persuade. Instead focus on understanding each other's perspectives, and the hopes, fears, and values that guide them;
- Agree to be curious and ask questions first to avoid attacking and defending;
- Choose to move beyond stereotypes, slogans, and assumptions.

Parents questions: questions for an interview with your parents

- What was the first presidential election you remember? The first you voted in?
- Who did you vote for?
- What was something you protested or campaigned for earlier in your life?
- When you were my age, what was the big political issue? How did you feel about it?
- How have your political opinions changed from when you were my age?
- Who in your life influenced your political thinking the most?
- How did your political opinions differ from your parents' political opinions?



Picturing your political life

- ❑ Draw a picture of yourself in the center of this page.
- ❑ Draw little people around you who have taught you things that are important to you— your values, beliefs, codes, ideas: write their name and what they taught you.
- ❑ Draw books, songs, shows, or movies around you that have influenced the way you see the world and what you care about: what did they teach you?
- ❑ Draw places in the world you have visited or lived that have informed who you are and what you care about: what did you learn there?



Moral or religious ideals

What values, ethics, or community commitments are most important to you?

Creativity	Dependability	Courage
Good humor	Reliability	Education
Compassion	Loyalty	Perseverance
Spirit of adventure	Commitment	Patriotism
Motivation	Open-mindedness	Service to others
Positivity	Consistency	Environmentalism
Optimism	Honesty	Courage
Passion	Efficiency	Education
Respect	Innovation	Perseverance
Fitness	Caring	

□ Why? What lead to you really caring about these values?



The issues that you care most about right now

- ❑ What issues do you care most about in the world?

- ❑ What news story over the last year has moved you, impacted you, did you want to know more about?

- ❑ If you were going to go out into the street and protest one thing—what would it be?

- ❑ If you were going to write a letter to the president to ask him to work harder on something what would you ask for?



Envisioning the future

- ❑ If you could snap your fingers and change 3 things about the way the world is run or the way things are done, what would they be?

- ❑ When you run for President of the United States in 20 years—what 3 things will you promise to accomplish in your first term?

- ❑ If the President of the United States called you tomorrow and said: “You can have any job in the U.S. government—secretary of state, peace corps volunteer, ambassador to Paraguay, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, park ranger at the Zion national park—anything! What would you want to do for the next two years?”

About Essential Partners

Essential Partners has worked for more than 28 years to facilitate conversations and equip people to communicate using Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD), a method which relies on preparation, structure, questions, facilitation, and reflection to enable people to harness their capacity to have the conversations they need to have.