

## Family and Politics

Rachel is a passionate supporter of one of the two main political parties in the U.S. Unfortunately for Rachel, the majority of her immediate and extended family support the opposing political party. Furthermore, her family is part of an extremist branch of that party. Rachel believes the extremist branch holds views that will prove detrimental to the safety and wellbeing of U.S. citizens. She truly believes that a government in the hands of her political party would better the lives of millions of Americans. She already donates money to her political party, publicly shows her support, and volunteers for political campaigns, where she goes door to door trying to persuade others of the value of her political perspective.

At her annual family reunion, Rachel finds herself alone with her brother Sam's children. Her niece Kate is 5 years old and her nephew Alex is 10 years old. Sam is a staunch supporter of the extremist branch of the opposing political party. Rachel believes that Sam's political views are deeply harmful. Rachel also believes that, while Sam does not usually discuss politics with his children, he is still raising them in a way that will make them more likely to accept his views later in life. As Rachel spends more time with Kate and Alex, she wants to talk to them about her own views. However, she knows Sam would be upset if she did so. Rachel carefully considers how she should proceed in this delicate situation.

On the one hand, Rachel knows that Sam would be furious if he found out. He would say that as Alex and Kate's parent, he should have more control over their political education than his sister should. Rachel should have to ask for his permission before sharing her political beliefs with his children. He would also say that Rachel should respect his parental wishes, and that, in any case, any attempt to discuss politics with young children would be taking advantage of them. Sam believes that such information should be withheld from Kate and Alex until they are old enough to think rationally about the opinions they hear. Granted, Sam will likely have an influence on what views his children eventually adopt, but he would say that part of his role as a parent is to exercise that influence responsibly, and to control whether and to what degree other adults have the same influence.

On the other hand, Rachel believes that discussing politics with her niece and nephew would simply be a continuation of her work to make the world a better place. From her perspective, these issues are so important that it is morally wrong not to do everything she can to raise awareness about them. Granted, Rachel realizes that promoting her political views around young children, and especially around young children in her extended family, could be viewed as her taking advantage of them, and could have damaging consequences for family relationships. But she also believes that Kate and Alex will be bombarded with one-sided political information for the rest of their childhood, and that the risk of her brother being upset with her is much less significant at the end of the day than the risk of two more people growing up in the world with harmful political values.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- (1) At what age does it become appropriate to speak with children about political issues, and why?
- (2) How much of a say should a parent have about whether or not other people speak to their children about political issues, and why?
- (3) When our duty to maintain healthy family relationships seems to conflict with our duty to advocate for issues that we think matter a great deal, how should we resolve that conflict in practice?

