



My Political Autobiography

**A WORKBOOK TO SUPPORT
HEALTHIER POLITICAL DISCOURSE**





Talking politics

Talking about politics is difficult, especially when there's an election coming. Why is it so tough? Because politics is one way that we express values, beliefs, hopes, and fears—the things we care about. It's also really complicated. A person's political perspectives are shaped by their family histories, education, religious commitments, a sense of justice, concerns about the future of the planet, feelings about war and peace, as well as a personal sense of safety and health. When we talk about politics, we are navigating all those different identities, experiences, and feelings.

How to use this workbook

This workbook is a journal, a prompt, an exercise, a preparation. It can be completed from start to finish or you can focus on the parts that feel most helpful to you. Print this out and write directly on the page or grab a journal to write in. The point is to begin thinking about what experiences, relationships, and values have shaped your current political beliefs, why the things you care about now matter so much to you, and what would happen if you had the political power to make changes. By feeling more fully grounded in your own beliefs, you'll be ready to engage with others in a healthier dialogue about politics, political events, or an upcoming election.

What's the deal with dialogue?

Dialogue is not a debate, an argument, or a fight, where the goal is to win or persuade. Instead, dialogue is a way of communicating with the goal of understanding other people, and so other people can understand you in turn. It is a way of holding your own perspective while engaging openly with the different ideas people have about your community, the country, and the world. Politics becomes dysfunctional when we cannot talk to each other without fighting, or when we avoid talking altogether. We *should* talk about important issues. Dialogue can help.

Getting ready for dialogue

It can be really hard to talk about what we care about and why we care so much. This workbook is meant to help you make connections between your personal stories and your political beliefs, so you can share these stories as well as your perspective with others. It takes a little preparation, but sharing the stories behind your perspective will help people understand and engage with views that differ from their own. If we can all learn to engage in healthy dialogue about politics, it will help create a more inclusive, more representative, less dysfunctional political system overall.



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

These questions are meant to help you understand the political history of your family and close friends—the people who have shaped your life.

Questions for the dinner table

- Can you 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 family's 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.

Questions for a one-on-one conversation with an older family member

- 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?
- What was the big political issue when you were my age? 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

This exercise is intended to help you visualize some of the people and places as well as books and movies, bands and television shows that have been important to you.

- 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 and to 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 values

What values, ethics, or community commitments are most important to you? In the box below you'll find a (very incomplete) list of values and principles. Read the list and circle 3-5 that feel especially important—or write down the ones that are missing.

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 are these so important to you? What led to you really caring about these values?



About Essential Partners

Founded in 1989, Essential Partners helps people build relationships across differences to address their communities' most pressing challenges.

EP's proven approach helps people live and work better together. Through richer, healthier, more inclusive dialogue, people strengthen relationships while gaining new insight into themselves and each other as well as the problems they face together. The strength of relationships rooted in trust and mutual understanding empowers people to address the most pressing challenges—from partisan polarization and political dysfunction to interfaith conflicts and abortion access—without compromising their deepest values or identities.

We believe that the most urgent problems can only be addressed by people who live and work together every day. That's how we change the world: one community at a time. Our vision is a world of thriving communities strengthened by difference, connected by trust.

Essential Partners collaborates with civic groups, schools, faith communities, colleges, and organizations across the globe to build resilience, belonging, and trust across differences of values, beliefs, and identities.

Find resources, training opportunities, and stories at whatisessential.org.