

Creating Safety Post-Election 2024



In the days after the election, emotions will be running high. Our students will sense the tension around them and will be hearing words from adults that they may not fully understand. Any time of transition can prompt anxiety. Our job, as educators, is to listen to what our students are telling us and use their words and questions as a launching point for conversation. We cannot ignore our students' reality and we have a responsibility to help them process the moment unfolding around them. In the coming days we must ensure that all of our students feel safe, seen and heard.

Things to keep an eye out for:	Ways to respond:
Students expressing fear about what comes next <i>Example:</i> "Everything feels really scary. I am worried that with a new president we are not going to be safe."	"There are many people feeling the same way that you are right now. That's because elections bring about change and uncertainty which is scary for people. And while the laws and policies elected leaders make have a real impact on our lives, there are also so many people in your own life who are here to work to keep you safe. That is our job and we will do that no matter what."
Students chanting for the winner or chanting campaign slogans that could make other students feel uncomfortable or unsafe <i>Example:</i> Students loudly chanting a candidate's name in the hallway.	"Remember that there are a lot of different people who are feeling a lot of different ways today. While it is okay to express your feelings with those who are able to hear them, we have to leave space for those who are feeling a different way as well. Let's think about the ways your words might impact others in our classroom community."
Students noting the tension and anxiety amongst grownups in their lives <i>Example:</i> "I don't understand. I saw a bunch of 7grownups crying last night and I don't understand why they are so upset."	"The days after an election are often filled with big emotions because adults are also having big feelings about who won or did not win. Some people have big emotions of happiness because the person they wanted to win did. Other people have big emotions of sadness because the person they wanted to win didn't. What is important for you to know is that even when grownups are upset, they are still there to help you and keep you safe."

Students making hurtful comments about who won or those who voted for a particular candidate <i>Example:</i> "I am so mad about who won. They are going to ruin our country and everyone who voted for them is dumb."	"What is happening here in our learning space is the same thing that is going to be happening across the country today. That's what happens when people with different lived experiences and beliefs share one leader. While we cannot control what happens beyond our learning space, in here we can make sure that everyone has a chance to say what they are thinking and feeling while also being aware of the impact our words have on others. We will do that while taking care of each other, ourselves and our community and it is my job to make sure that happens. Our job in this classroom has not changed. We are still here to learn together, be good people and have fun. Everyone will be treated with respect."
Students sharing misinformation and/or misunderstandings about the election <i>Example:</i> "I heard that the election was stolen!"	"I am curious what is making you say that? Whenever I hear something that I am not exactly sure of, I always want to seek out some reliable sources to help me understand what is really going on. Do you think we can look for some sources together that can help us better understand this?"
Parents and caretakers expressing concern that their child feels unsafe with classroom discussions on the election and its aftermath <i>Example:</i> "My child feels like they can't voice their opinions about the election without someone getting mad at them! Please refrain from any conversation about the election results."	"I am so sorry that your child is not feeling safe and I am grateful that you let me know. Our students are noticing a lot of the events unfolding around them and they often do bring up the election in our classroom conversations. When this happens, I meet the students where they are and help them to process what they are feeling in an age-appropriate way that allows for multiple perspectives. I am making sure to do this in a way that follows our district's policies and curriculum. This is an important opportunity to help students learn how to exist in a community with others who may think and feel differently than they do."
Students questioning if a winner is not declared on November 5th. <i>Example:</i> "My grownup says that we don't know who won the election. What happens now?"	"Sometimes elections take longer because it is important that all of the votes are counted. Over two-thirds of eligible Americans voted in the 2020 presidential election, with over 81 million people voting for the winner in 2020."

Resources:

American Psychological Association: Talking to Children About the Election

<https://www.apa.org/topics/politics/talking-children-election>

Learning for Justice: The Day After: <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/the-day-after>

Psychology Today: Talking to Children and Teens About Elections:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-full-picture/202409/talking-to-children-and-teens-about-elections-and-government>

