Keep Your Kids Sheltered From Politics

When I was a kid, I rarely heard the grown-ups around me discussing the topic of politics. Sure, I'd catch a little snippet of a conversation between my parents from time to time as they watched the evening news, but that was about the extent of it. They never talked about such things with their friends and certainly not with me and my older brother.

When it came to their friends, my parents seemed to live by the *"You can't argue politics or religion"* belief. When it came to us, they understood that it was a topic our young minds couldn't possibly grasp, and that we wouldn't have any interest in it even if we could.

Today's different.

Discussing politics isn't really all that taboo anymore. It often starts up in casual conversations among family, friends, and acquaintances. Things tend to go smoothly when everyone in the room is of like mind, but when they're not? Well, I'm sure many holiday dinners are ruined because of such things each and every year.

Social media's where you really see a lot of political rhetoric flying back and forth, and not always in the most civil of ways. It usually starts with someone letting off a little steam, and searching for a little validation from their friends who they assume will all agree with them. When one doesn't, and lets their opposition-voice be heard, you can easily end up with a long, heated argument and some pretty hurt feelings by the time all is said and done.

You know, I've always found it fascinating that a lot of people naturally assume that everyone they know agrees with them politically. And when they find out that they're wrong,

they almost feel betrayed. I've never been that way. My assumption has always been that *no one* shares my political views. I suppose that's why I tend to save my political commentary for outlets like BernardGoldberg.com. Believe it or not, I rarely ever bring up politics in my everyday life — that is, unless someone else brings it up first. I'm just not of the belief that my friends need to listen to me grandstand or impose my beliefs on them.

Still, political conversations between adults rarely bother me. It's a free country. People can talk about whatever they want. What does bother me, however, is when adults drag their children into the political fray.

When my kids get out of school each day (they're both the elementary age), I'm generally the one who picks them up. I meet them on the school playground before walking with them across a street and down a residential block where I park my car. A little over a year ago, when the 2012 presidential campaign was in full swing, a number of homes on that block had campaign signs displayed in their front yards. Some endorsed President Obama. Others endorsed Mitt Romney. This was nothing unusual during election season, of course.

What WAS unusual, and pretty disturbing, were some of the remarks I heard children make about the signs as they passed them on their way home from school. One day, I heard a young boy say, "I hate Obama!" Another day, I heard the same thing said about Romney, only it was followed up by an expletive that I won't repeat. This kind of thing happened a few times, and I was taken back not just by the children's words, but also by the seriousness with which their words were spoken. Their statements weren't made as part of some attempt at humor, as a way of trying to get their friends to laugh. No, there was clear animosity there, which most certainly stemmed from the things they had been hearing their parents say at home.

I hear other stories from time to time that equally disturb me. I'm talking about those instances when the children of political candidates are harassed at school by other students because of who their parent is. Again, this problem comes back to adults. No child is going to torment another child for a reason like that unless they were influenced by something they've heard their parents say.

On Amazon.com, you can actually find children's books that explain to kids why one political party is good and the other one is bad. It boggles my mind that any parent would actually buy such a book for their child, but some apparently do.

This never seemed to be an issue when I was a kid. I couldn't have cared less about politics because it was a foreign topic. I was blissfully ignorant when it came to political philosophy, because the adults around me essentially sheltered me from it. And they did so with minimal effort. My friends were every bit as oblivious to those things as well.

As far as I'm concerned, that's the way it should be.

Kids, especially at the elementary age, just don't have the capacity to understand such things, nor should we expect them to. They're very impressionable, and we as parents need to be mindful of imposing our political will on them, whether its done consciously or not.

I'm not talking about the principles we instill in our children, that may fall in line with a particular political ideology. That's fine. I'm talking about how being weary of building resentment and stoking animosity in them toward an opposing political philosophy.

I understand the temptation, believe me. It's not always easy to keep our adult views in check around our children, because many of us gravitate toward a particular political belief precisely because we're worried *about* our children. We're worried about their future. We want the best for them, and

when we think people on the other side of the aisle are preventing that goal from being achieved, it's tough to remain disciplined. With the disintegration of thoughtful political discourse in this nation in recent years, it's become even harder.

Sadly, I think many grown adults these days tend to view political issues the same way a child might, and that doesn't help the situation. We've been conditioned by a media culture engrained in ideology to look at issues in their most simplistic, instinctive terms. We've been conditioned to attribute the worst possible of intentions to those who disagree with the media's sense of political-correctness.

If someone believes that government programs aren't the best answer for aiding those in poverty, the media tells us that we're supposed to believe that person lacks compassion and doesn't care about poor people. If someone takes a firm, vocal stance against an issue like illegal immigration or a politician whose skin-color differs from their own, we're supposed to assume they're a racist.

Sometimes it's not the media, but rather a traditionalist's view of the world that leads people to vilify those who don't share a generally-accepted premise. We convince ourselves that non-traditional lifestyles are attacks on the sanctity of our own, more traditional lifestyles, and again we find villains.

Unfortunately, reasoned debate in this country has largely been replaced with demagoguery and knee-jerk reactionaryism.

It's this culture that makes it easier to assail those who see the world differently than we do, and I think that's something we should protect our children from. I think we should teach them that it's okay to think someone is *wrong* without thinking they are *bad*.

Several years ago, I remember hearing some media personality

say that a person's political affiliation tells you everything you need to know about them. I very much disagree with that. In my experience, someone's politics alone tell you very little about the kind of person that individual is.

Personally, as many of you know from reading my columns, I'm conservative on most issues, and I'm very critical of the modern-day liberal movement because I believe it is doing enormous damage to our country. Yet, some of my best friends are liberals, and I would never trade their friendship for ideological compliance.

As frustrating as it can be for some of us to listen to someone support policies that we believe to be detrimental to the country, the truth is that the definition of one's character runs much deeper than their voting habits.

I would hope that as we raise our children, we as a society could manage to keep that in mind.