

## Three Topics I Learned to Avoid as a Child

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Expert Forum



As a young boy, my parents told me there were three topics I should never address with adults - age, religion, and politics. I'm not quite sure why I was given that directive, but it seemed that every kid I knew got the same lecture. I think it had something to do with respecting people's privacy and in the 1950s the climate was pretty reserved and many things were kept "close to the vest".

Things have changed dramatically since then and it seems that any topic is fair game, especially with the advent of social media. Sadly, though, we seem to have forgotten about respect and our ability to freely share our thoughts has become mean and divisive.

Recently at the Multicultural Forum in St. Paul, MN one of the key note speakers, Van Jones, a news reporter with CNN, invited us to look at the political divide in this way - Republicans are into liberty while Democrats are for social justice. Jones says both perspectives are necessary if we are going to have a structure that allows for disagreement. I found it refreshing to hear someone talk objectively about the breakdown in our political system and provide insights into what we might do moving forward.

So how do we engage in the conversations where we don't necessarily share the same thoughts, beliefs, ideals? First, we need to learn to listen respectfully and without judgement. Second, we must monitor our own responses and maybe even agree to disagree. Third, see if you can establish points of commonness on which to build a foundation for further discussion. Finally, know that you will not be able to do this with everyone so choose carefully the conversations you are willing to jump into.

While it's a fact that communication has changed dramatically from the time I was a kid, the need for respect has not.