

Teaching How Decisions Get Made — Activity Plan

Age-banded activities for showing your child the gap between the public vote and the real decision — from bedtime at home to a real public meeting.

The skill you're growing

Every institution has a public ceremony and a real decision, and they usually aren't the same moment. Teaching a child to ask 'who decides this, and who do they listen to' is the beginning of power mapping — built young, in contexts small enough to actually watch. You're not teaching them what to think about any decision. You're teaching them to see the structure underneath it.

Early (~5–9) — your plan

The decision

Pick something from your house or co-op your child already lives inside — bedtime, dinner, the field trip destination, the co-op calendar.

Who decides?

Name the person or people whose name is on the decision.

Who do they listen to?

Name one real influence — a doctor's advice, a budget, how the last trip went, what another parent said.

How your child will show it

A drawing works well at this age: the decider in the middle, lines out to who they listen to. No wrong answers — the goal is the habit of asking the second question.

Middle (~10–13) — your plan

The real decision

Pick something with actual community stakes — library hours, a school schedule change, a park rule, a co-op steering-committee vote.

The public face

Who is publicly named as making this decision?

One layer deeper

Who recommended it, whose budget it came from, or which committee looked at it first — dig one real layer, not five guesses.

Primary source

What posted minutes, agenda, or email thread can your child read themselves, rather than you summarizing it for them?

Older (~14–18) — public-meeting field trip

The meeting

Name the specific public body, date, and location — school board, city council, library board, planning commission.

The agenda item

Pick one specific item ahead of time, ideally one with visible public interest.

Pre-read guess

Before the meeting: who's the staff sponsor or presenter, what section of the agenda is it in (consent vs. contested action item), and who does your teen guess is really behind it?

What actually happened

During the meeting: who spoke, how the vote went, how much of it matched the pre-read guess.

The debrief question

Afterward, ask 'what surprised you' — not whether the outcome was good or bad, but whether the way it happened matched the guess.

Facilitation reminders

Ask 'who do they listen to' far more often than you answer it yourself

Stay on mechanism, not verdict — if asked what you think about the issue, keep it brief and separate from the activity

Treat a wrong pre-meeting guess as information to revise, not something to correct

Let the map be theirs, even when it's incomplete or you'd have drawn it differently

Keep your teen's notes, map, and meeting observations offline — no login, no account, no minor's name or work on this platform; only your own planning stays here