



GENERATION NEXT:

How to talk to your kids about the climate crisis

For parents and carers of
primary-aged children

GREENPEACE

Introduction



Caroline Hickman is a psychotherapist and lecturer at the University of Bath. She works with children and young people experiencing eco-anxiety. In this guide, Caroline shares her advice on how to talk to primary school children about climate change – exploring why, when, and how to do it.

When asked what she wanted from a conversation about climate change, Sophia, aged eight, said:

“We need you to tell us the truth, otherwise you are lying to us, and if you lie to us, we can’t trust you, and if we can’t trust you, we can’t tell you how we feel, and if we can’t tell you how we feel, we are on our own.”



Why should I talk with my children about climate change?

The climate is changing rapidly. From natural disasters abroad to heatwaves and floods at home, these changes are hard for adults to handle – let alone children. Many children are experiencing deep sadness about climate change and are very concerned about their futures.

Parents and carers want their children to have a worry-free childhood; it's a natural instinct to shelter them from scary truths. But when it comes to climate change, this puts them at a disadvantage. Your children will come of age during a climate crisis. Nurturing their emotional resilience is one way to prepare them. This means creating a safe space for them to express their feelings, explore their thoughts, and seek reassurance.



78% of six to 12 year olds have heard of climate change and are worried about it.



One quarter are very worried.

When should I talk with my children about climate change?

When a big change happens in your young child's life, you take the time to explain it. New babies, illness, divorce, moving house – although these are difficult subjects, you know it's important to prepare your child for the challenges all families face.

Climate change is no different. That's why it's essential to address it openly and early on. Conversations can start as early as three to four years old, but you know your children best.

By empowering your child to talk about climate change from a young age, you can prepare them to deal with its emotional impacts as they get older.

Before they learn about it at school, many children are hearing about climate change on TV, at home and through friends.





How should I talk with my children about climate change?

Parents and carers often wonder how to broach the subject in a safe way – how to comfort their children without making false promises, how to help them understand such complex issues, and how to support them to cope with feelings like anxiety or fear. Here are eight practical tips.

1. Be curious together

Whilst your child might have a lot of questions, you can't possibly know all the answers. Make the conversation a joint exercise. Tell your child that, whatever comes up, you'll find out the answers together.

2. Set an example

Be mindful to manage your own emotions during the conversation. Have courage, stay calm and breathe. This will support your child to do the same.

3. Balance the good with the bad

Climate change can be a scary subject, but there are positive things that people are doing to fight for a better world. Acknowledge the difficulties caused by climate change, alongside the solutions. For example:

Extreme weather



Bad news: All over the world, the weather is getting worse, with wildfires, droughts, hurricanes and floods happening more often because of climate change.



Good news: Lots of organisations are trying to solve the problem. They are demanding that governments and companies protect our oceans, stop cutting down forests and get climate change under control.



4. Look at the bigger picture

A lot of people feel guilty about climate change – like it's somehow their fault. But if you focus on personal responsibility, you risk your child feeling like they aren't doing enough.

Instead, think about how to tackle climate change from different angles; talk about the role of your local community, of governments and of companies.

The individual choices we make are important, but to deal with climate change, we need local, national and international action.



5. Put feelings before facts

Don't get bogged down in facts and figures. Connecting with your child on an emotional level is the best way to build their resilience. Be sure to explore what they're thinking about their own future, as well as the future of the planet.

Tell your child that an 'emotional biodiversity' is just as important as ecological biodiversity. Just as we need grass and oceans and elephants and insects, we also need sadness and hope and anger and joy.

**All your
feelings
matter**



6. Reframe eco-anxiety

'Eco-anxiety' is a term to describe overwhelming worries about climate change. This can make it sound like a mental illness. Yet feeling anxious about climate change is a mentally healthy response to the problem. Reframe eco-anxiety as a positive feeling. Say to your child:

"If you're having feelings of sadness or anxiety about climate change, that's only because you care about the planet. You should be proud that you care. I'm proud that you care."



7. Use visual tools

Find images of climate change to guide your conversations. Ask your child to draw their feelings, or use emojis. Find illustrated stories that talk about the problems facing our planet. Get them to talk to a favourite toy about climate change and the worries they have. Listen and join in, using creativity and playfulness to explore and validate their feelings.

Remember: discussing tough topics together isn't harming your child, it's helping them. By developing their emotional resilience, your child will be more ready to handle the climate-related challenges to come.



8. Take action together

Having a sense of purpose may calm the feelings of worry in children and empowering them to take action for the world can help them with their anxiety. If, after your conversation, your child wants to do more for the planet, there's plenty of ways you can get involved with Greenpeace...

- [Check out our free educational resources for kids](#). We've got a range of visual guides for children and young people to learn about our campaigns, understand the problems facing our planet and discover ways to help.
- [Explore the actions you can take together](#). Our website lists some practical things you and your children can do to help protect the environment.
- [Request for a Greenpeace speaker](#) to run a workshop at your child's school (best for ages 8-11).



The advice contained in this guide was provided by a professional therapist working with children and young people experiencing eco-anxiety.