

# Talk to children about the climate crisis

– a guide for parents  
and other adults



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**The climate crisis is already affecting children and young people, both physically, developmentally and emotionally. Climate-related anxiety, worry and lack of hope for the future are growing problems that affect young people’s mental health. A recent Swedish survey showed that six out of ten young people between the ages of 12 and 18 are worried about the climate – and only half of respondents felt hopeful that we will solve the climate crisis. Likewise, a recent UK survey with 2,000 children showed that nearly three quarters (73%) said they are worried about the state of the planet right now, and 17% reported having their sleeping and eating habits affected by their concerns.**

When children and young people learn about the seriousness of the climate crisis, and at the same time don’t see that adults are acting forcefully enough, anxiety, frustration and anger can arise. Many feel that the adult generation is failing them. The good news is that as a parent, grandparent or other adult who cares about children, you can play a key role in helping children and young people deal with knowledge about the climate crisis. Here are our top tips for how you can become better at meeting young people’s questions, feelings and commitment to the climate.



Source/Photographer: Maskot

# Do!

1

## Educate yourself

Start by reading up about the climate crisis to get a little insight into the subject. You can usually find easily-digestible and science-based information through environmental organizations in your country, your national weather association or your government's environmental department. There are also many good podcasts, books and articles. If you want to deepen your knowledge further, feel free to read the Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Don't be afraid to connect with your emotions when you educate yourself. In fact, letting yourself "feel the science" shows us that we have understood the severity of the situation. It's also good to discuss your own feelings with other adults before talking to your child so that you do not risk transferring too much of your deepest fears to your child.

2

## Act – with or without children

The most important thing is that we, as adults, act to contribute to the solutions to the climate crisis. We need to do this regardless of whether the children around us are interested or worried about the climate crisis, or not. Remember that nobody can do everything, but everyone can do something. Find ways to contribute that work for you and your life situation. Focus on things that can create ripples, such as joining an environmental organization or climate group, or influencing work policies, or changing practices in your sports club. It's extra important to show children who are worried about the climate crisis that we are willing to pull our weight. Keep in mind that many children who learn about climate change in school can become frustrated with family behaviors that are contrary to what they learn, for instance driving fossil fuel cars, flying or eating a lot of meat. Show that you as an adult are ready to compromise and discuss how you can best make changes together.

3

## Ask open questions: What are your thoughts about climate change?

To get an idea about how the child you are talking to thinks about the climate, and how worried they are, start by asking an open question. If the child expresses interest in something in particular, like how our oceans are affected by plastic pollution, or the health of our rainforests, offer to find out more together. If the child seems anxious, help them express and name their feelings and emotions, and steer the conversation towards finding ways to get active together with like-minded people.

4

## Tell the truth, but point out that it's not a done deal

When you talk about the climate crisis, it's important to have courage to explore the seriousness of the climate crisis and discuss what it means. Right now we are on the way to over three degrees warming according to researchers. What does that mean? Who is responsible for resetting the course? Why is what we do here in our country important? It's important to also focus on hope when you talk about the climate crisis. Show and tell how people, organizations and companies work tirelessly to improve the situation. It is important to let children know that step matters, but that change must take place at the societal level and that it is the responsibility of adults to act.

## 5

### Talk about feelings

How does it feel in our bodies when we think and talk about the climate crisis? Unpleasant feelings can arise when we are faced with the seriousness of the climate crisis but remember that these are completely reasonable reactions to the situation. Helping children and young people to put their feelings into words is central to being able to handle information about the climate and create hope. Feel free to say that you also feel worried (if you do). If conversation gets “stuck” solely on the problem, help redirect towards talking about the solutions and finding ways to contribute. Do not forget that anxiety, frustration and other climate-related feelings are completely reasonable reactions to the situation – the goal is not that we should help the child get rid of the feelings. Feeling strongly means that we understand the situation, which in turn can encourage commitment and action.

## 6

### Support collective action

Working together with others and acting with like-minded people for a more sustainable world is central, both to help young people manage their climate emotions, but also to give them an early experience of being able to influence society in a positive direction. Ask your child for their perspective and views: What do you think the solution to the problem is? How could we help? Remember that it is important as an adult to show that you are also involved and acting, together or next to your child. It's good to reference historic examples of how collective action can have effects locally, nationally and internationally.

## 7

### Experience nature

Research shows that children benefit greatly – emotionally, cognitively and environmentally – by being out in nature. Having a connection with nature and our ecosystems is key to environmental behavior later in life. Think about how you can bring in nature as part of your everyday life. It doesn't have to be complicated! Everything counts: taking a walk with the dog in the woods, growing cress in the window or going to a park are all great options.

## 8

### Connect through school

It is good to tell your child's teacher that you are talking about the climate at home or that your child seems worried about the future. And vice versa! Ask if they have discussed the subject in school (or home if you are a teacher), and how. It's good for parents and schools to join forces in supporting children in dealing with the climate crisis.



# The pitfalls

1

## Talk without action

Children already know a lot about the climate. But when knowledge of the climate is not matched by the actions of adults around them, frustration can arise. Feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and loneliness are common in young people in relation to the climate crisis, and some of the emotions we should look out for, especially in combination with climate anxiety. That is why it's important for adults to show young people that we are acting – with or without them.

2

## Too much responsibility on the individual

Be careful not to place all the responsibility for the problem on the individual as a consumer – or suggest that the solution lies solely at the individual level. Children understand that more recycling or a vegan diet will not solve the climate crisis alone. In addition, research shows that we are pretty bad at picking the most effective things to do at home that have an impact. Instead, our personal lifestyle choices are often governed by habits, values, finances and social structures. In addition, young people are sensitive to feelings of guilt and shame about their own behavior, and these emotions are not productive when it comes to empowering young people to take action on climate. All that said, starting with small changes at home as a family is of course part of the solution, and it's a good way of signaling to our children that we are ready to take bigger steps towards solutions.

3

## Say that everything will be fine

Avoid giving assurances that everything will be ok. This can lead to children and young people not feeling listened to, or even lied to. It is also easy to point out solutions that are not matched with the scale of the problem, for example that we need to recycle more. In itself not a bad thing, of course, but it won't solve the climate crisis. Resist the temptation to jump straight from the problem to the solutions without giving young people time to reflect. Young people need to be aware that they will grow up in a climate-changed world, and they have the right to have the right tools – emotionally, practically and educationally – to engage fully with their future.

4

## Believe that new technology solves all problems

New technology and innovation are part of the solution, but will not alone solve the problem. The most important thing is that we quickly stop emitting greenhouse gases. Conscious young people will experience more loneliness and hopelessness when hearing about solutions that they know at present are only fantasies. We need to change our way of life, no technology will be able to help us continue in this way. Many young people understand this and they have the right to be taken seriously in their concerns. However, remember that many children may find talking about new innovations and ideas exciting.

# 5

## Say that young people solve the climate crisis

Be careful to suggest that it is today's young people who will "save the world". It is the next few years that are critical to be able to steer towards a sustainable society, long before most young people are even allowed to vote in general elections. As adults today have created the crisis, we must lead the way in resolving it. In saying that, climate action is a great way for young people to manage anxiety, and it's good to normalize sustainable behavior from an early age.

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# OUR KIDS<sup>o</sup> CLIMATE

Our Kids' Climate is a network of 58 parent groups from 23 countries who are uniting for climate action to protect the kids we love from the climate crisis.

We act because we must for our kids, many of them too young to make their voices heard and to vote. We believe that working with parents on climate has the potential to move mountains - because that's what we do for our kids every day.

Want to get in touch? Visit [www.ourkidsclimate.org](http://www.ourkidsclimate.org) or send us an e-mail: [hello@ourkidsclimate.org](mailto:hello@ourkidsclimate.org).



This guide is made in partnership with We Don't Have Time – the world's largest social network for climate action. Join us today and we plant a tree. [www.wedonthavetime.org](http://www.wedonthavetime.org).