

Talking with younger people about climate change

A Suzuki Elder Salon - March 1, 2018



TOOL KIT

Suzuki Elder Salon March 1 2018

WORKSHEET – What conversations do we have with *ourselves* about climate change and its impact on younger people.

Individual work, dyad work, whole group work.

Climate change is a complex problem and confronting it is not an easy task. Today, as we work together to share our stories, thoughts, hopes and fears let's step back from denial and fatalism as we embrace this quest to listen to and encourage both ourselves and our young people.

Instructions:

1. As an individual, think about and write down your responses to the two worksheet questions. (10 minutes)
2. Find someone else and discuss your shared thoughts. (15 minutes)
3. Provide feedback when the whole group convenes again. (15 minutes)

1. What fears/concerns do you hold for younger people re the impact of climate change on them?	2. What hopes/possibilities do you bring to counteract your own fears and despair for their future?

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"Talking with younger people about climate change" – Suggested Guidelines.

CONTENT (what you say) can consist of:	DELIVERY METHOD (how you say it) is shaped by:
Facts/knowledge	Relationship you have with the person (teacher, parent, relative, friend, leader, mentor)
Heart/feelings	Developmental age of younger person (what are they able to take in/understand, developmental changes over time)
Stories/insights	Personality type of the younger person (naturally fearful? Sensitive? Activist orientation? Problem solver? Curious?)
Encouragement/support	Venue (family dining table, school, camp, on a walk, classroom project, doing a public speech)
Questions to ask, share	Our own personal feelings about the issue. (guilt, sadness, positivist, cynical, hopeful, fearful)
Wonderings/"what if?"	Our own political stance on the issue. (right, left, centrist, good people/bad people or black/white world view.)
Ideas about action, "What we can do...What can we do?"	Recognition/knowledge of cultural origins of younger people we are talking with.
	Our own ability to be open to questioning ourselves and the world around us.
	Our own ability to appropriately ask questions of younger people (and probe as necessary).
	Our own ability to be honest, and transparent in saying what we personally) know and don't know.
	Our own ability to sense when comfort is needed and to provide it.
	Our own ability to listen....and listen some more.
	Our own ability to know when to stop talking – to let go.

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What the Literature Tells Us – some examples

From: How to talk to a 5 year old about Climate Change – ThinkProgress

“When we talk to our kids, we have to explain the science of what’s happening...but it is important to quickly pivot to what we can do to solve it.” Lisa Hoyos, co-founder of Climate Parents.

It is perfectly understandable for parents to hesitate talking about climate change with young children. A report from the American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica said that children *“tend to be especially vulnerable to the psychological impacts of climate change, especially those related to stress and anxiety.”* It would be a mistake to minimize the role parents can play in talking about such topics. Psychiatric epidemiologist Helen Berry has found children who do not feel connected to their families and communities risk being more traumatized by climate related natural disasters than better connected kids.

From Talking with Children about Climate change – Environmental Centre, Dr Lawrence Rosen

Craft the message in sync with your child’s developmental stage. Young children need simple concrete examples that don’t scare them. Teens can handle more abstract and complex information.

Be positive: fear-based approaches have not worked. There are notable social and economic co-benefits to dealing with climate change. Help kids focus on opportunities to do good in their neighbourhoods.

Reduce polarization: climate change is more than a political issue – it is a human issue. To model effective climate change strategies for our kids, we must see that those who deny it are real people, with real fears and wishes, just like us. No progress is made by demonizing others.

From How to Talk to your kids about Climate Change – One Million Women (Australia)

Connect with nature: this reinforces the sense that humans are part of nature, not separate to it. Fostering this connection between your children and nature is a way to move them to want to protect it.

Talk about animals: children’s love of animals is a perfect segue into climate change – no matter what animal they love, they will likely want to know how to protect it.

Emphasize action/start in your home: a stream of facts out of nowhere is going to either not have an impact at all or really freak them out. Start the conversation in your home by taking action in the home and explaining the reasons behind it...from putting stuff in your compost, not using plastic...

Get involved in the community: show your kids that we aren’t alone and that there is support available...go on a march, join a cleanup crew, volunteer at a local garden.

Make it a life- long lesson: don’t make climate action a novelty, make it the norm – a habit to carry on.

For ages 2-5 years: Focus on “We share our homes with nature”

Introducing very young children to nature from the start will provide the groundwork for a growing understanding of the environment as they get older. Concrete familiar ideas such as home provide a starting point for very young children to engage with nature on a personal level. Help children recognize the ways and places nature is present in their own homes and lives. Talk about nature in and around your home. Look in your back yard, out your windows, or in familiar nearby outdoor areas. Talk about how these spaces that feel like home to you might also feel like home to other animals.

Guiding questions	Activities at home	Examples
-which animals live outside near us? -Do we share our own home with any plants or animals? -what do you think ‘home’ looks like to them? -what makes that place a good home for them? -how does that home help them live and be comfortable? -how do our own homes help us live and be comfortable?	-go on a nature walk, search for animal homes in your area. -gather natural materials and build your favourite animal home -use those materials to build a model house that a person might like to live in. -how do people and animals use things from their environment to make homes they want to live in?	-birds, squirrels and insects are common to parks and yards. -birds build safe and comfortable nests using twigs and other materials they find -squirrels build nests -bugs might build hives or burrow in the ground -all of these animals use what the environment provides to have a home that is the best fit for the way they live.

For ages 6-9 years: Introducing Human Impact

Children of this age level are old enough to start exploring cause and effect: the ways nature affects their daily lives, and the idea that humans can also impact nature. Start with simple causes that have clear effects. For instance, weather events (rain/snow, a very hot/cold day) can lead to conversations about how weather, as part of nature, affects your day to day lives. Meanwhile human actions like cutting down trees or picking up litter have obvious and direct impacts on nature. This is a good time to introduce the idea of climate change (what the weather is ‘always’ like, over a long period of time) as an early prelude to discussing how climate can change.

Guiding questions	Activities at home	Examples
-does the weather ever change what you do? -what would you do differently on a sunny day than you would on a rainy or snowy day? -where do you go to be in nature and what do you do there? Does it look the same each time you visit? What is the same or different? Does nature notice you were there? -how can you protect that nature you go to?	-set up a home rain catcher or thermometer. -keep a weather journal, check to see how weather changes day to day.	-heavy rain can cause floods in our own house (nature affecting a human). When people use lots of water during a rainstorm they add a lot of water down the drain and flooding can get worse (humans affecting nature).

For ages 10-12 years: Looking to the Future

The climate is changing and we can too. By this age children are generally ready for conversations specifically about climate change. Begin with honest, simple facts: human actions over a long period of time have changed the climate around the world, and it will continue to change in the future. Together you can gradually explore more details about which human actions have created what changes and how. Focus on empowering the younger person with actions they can take. How can you adapt to live with a changing climate? Talk about specific human actions that can impact the climate, like energy use and transportation, and choices you can make in your own lives so that the climate doesn't change even more.

Guiding questions	Activities at home	Examples
-what would it be like if it rained all the time? -what would happen to your neighbourhood and everything that lives there? -what are some good ways to deal with the problems that arise from too much rain? -what if it never rained at all? -what are some things we use electricity for? -can you think of ways to do those things with less electricity?	-talk about things that your family/group does every day that might have an impact on climate change. -decide on a few things that you can do differently together that will help reduce climate change in the future. -how do you make a plan that is good for the environment that you can stick with over a long time?	-climate change can make a summertime even hotter, so we want to use air conditioners a lot. -Unfortunately, producing electricity has a big impact on climate change and air conditioners use more electricity than almost anything else in a home, so turning it on can make the problem even worse. - Luckily, there are other ways to cool down. Some good ideas are: building well-insulated houses, using fans, or only air conditioning a few rooms instead of a whole house.

Some useful links

5 Pro Tips for Talking to Kids About Climate Change (Without Freaking them out) | Danielle Cranmer, Rainforest Alliance

<https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/articles/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-climate-change>

How To Talk To Your Kids About Climate Change | 1 Million Women

<https://www.1millionwomen.com.au/blog/how-talk-your-kids-about-climate-change/>

Wisdom for talking to kids about climate change | Sightline Institute

<http://www.sightline.org/2016/12/09/wisdom-for-talking-to-kids-about-climate-change/>

Talking to Children about Climate Change | Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum www.naturemuseum.org

› Nature & Science in Action › Sustainability Resources

Laurie David and Cambria Gordon The Down-to-earth Guide to Global Warming

<https://www.amazon.ca/Down-Earth-Guide-Global-Warming/dp/04390249>

[How To Talk To A 5-Year-Old About Climate Change – ThinkProgress](https://thinkprogress.org/how-to-talk-to-a-5-year-old-about-climate-change-ef8ec30b...)

<https://thinkprogress.org/how-to-talk-to-a-5-year-old-about-climate-change-ef8ec30b...>