

# How To Talk to Young People About Climate Emotions

This resource does not replace professional mental health care. In the US, text or call 988 for a 24/7 crisis hotline. For emergency mental health in other countries, visit: [findahelpline.com](https://findahelpline.com)

Humans are changing the climate primarily by burning oil, coal and gas. These changes are already affecting people's physical and mental health, ability to grow food and find safe housing. You may have noticed hotter summers, bigger storms, wildfires, dry spells, or floods near you. Young people need support from trusted adults, like family, teachers, and doctors, to understand these changes, handle their feelings about them, and act. But, only about half of parents say they have talked with their children about climate change. Here's how to start.



- **Ensure they feel safe.** Choose a quiet time of day when you can both be focused and present. If the conversation happens because of extreme weather near you or something on the news, try to pause and create a safe environment for them to share.
- **Listen to them. Ask "What are you curious about?"** Say, "I'm here to listen. Any feeling is okay." If you don't know the answer to a fact question, you can look it up together.
- **Ask them, "What do you know about climate change?"** Clarify when necessary. Build off the knowledge they already have.
- **Ask them, "How are you feeling about climate change?"** Be open to any words or non-verbal communication they use to describe their emotions. Depending on their age, draw a picture or use movement to express those feelings.
- **Be authentic and truthful. "When I think about this, it makes me feel..."** If you show openness and concern, then they will likely respond in a similar way. Share your own thoughts and feelings in a calm manner while taking into consideration your child's age and sensitivities.



- **Talk about actions you can take together.** Some young people may be ready to act, while others will want to learn more or simply sit with their feelings. Let them know that every action, no matter how big or small they feel it is, makes a difference.
- **Keep a balance and give them courage.**
  - ➔ Reassure them that you will always do what you can to protect them.
  - ➔ We each can make a difference. Millions of people, youth and adults, are working hard to help address the problem.
  - ➔ There are so many climate solutions. Look at [Drawdown.org](https://drawdown.org) for ideas.

## Why We Need To Talk About Climate and Mental Health



Climate change is affecting our children's physical and mental health now. In a 2021 survey of teenagers and young adults, 75% said that they think the future is frightening because of climate change.



People experience climate emotions like anxiety and sadness when we hear about, or live through, extreme weather events like drought, heat waves, hurricanes, wildfires, or flooding, or everyday pollution. These feelings can be made worse by other hard things children face in their lives, like racism, homophobia and transphobia, poverty, violence, and housing insecurity. **All of these climate feelings are valid.** And we can help our children handle them.



# What To Do as a Parent or Caregiver

## Take Care Of Yourself

We can all be part of the work to give our children a better future. To help young people in your life, first give yourself time to reflect on your own feelings about climate change. Educate yourself, practice self care, and prepare.



## Tips for Self Care and Wellbeing for Adults and Kids

Self care is anything we do to manage hard emotions in a healthy way. You can do these with your children, or encourage them to do them on their own when they experience big feelings about climate or anything else.

- **Move your body:** Stretch, dance, or jump up and down to your favorite music.
- **Connect with nature:** Spend time outdoors or bring nature inside with plants, photos and sounds of nature.
- **Quiet your mind and body:** Take deep, slow breaths. Spend time in silence. Listen to calming music and seek out positive media or news.
- **Express yourself:** Through arts including dance, music, drama, drawing, or journaling.
- **Build a supportive community:** Talk with friends and family who share your concerns. Join local organizations taking action in your community.
- **Read and Watch:** Read books and watch movies that affirm loving and respectful relationships between people, living things, and the planet. Public and school libraries are a great place to start.

## Taking Action

Not every person shares the same power or responsibility to address climate change, but we all play a role.

Join hands with friends and neighbors and you won't feel so alone. Take action with others: community action is a building block of the change that is needed at all levels, from local to global. You could start in your neighborhood, school or place of worship.

Drawing a poster, writing a song, composting food, speaking at a rally, measuring local air quality, signing a petition or writing a letter: support young people to take actions that match their interests and skills. Sometimes, strong emotions drive us too hard. If your family chooses to take climate action, this should always be balanced with other activities such as play, family time, arts and sports.

## Learn More

[Climate Mental Health Network](#); [Talk Climate](#); [Caroline Brewer](#); [Climate Mama](#); [Emily Diamond](#); [Kat Kid Adventure](#); [Kelsey Hudson](#); [Leslie Davenport](#)

**Scan the QR code below to get more resources:**

