

<https://www.schoolstrike4climate.com/post/how-to-talk-about-climate-change>

Having conversations about climate change can sometimes feel like an uphill slog, especially given the misinformation that has been spread by climate change deniers over many years. Despite this, a growing majority of people in Australia want climate action, and the minority who deny the science is getting smaller and smaller.

That's why conversations are a great way to bring out this underlying support and help people turn their support into action! Every conversation is an opportunity to learn something new about yourself and the people you care about. Here are some tips to have a meaningful conversation about the issue instead of an argument. Good luck and have fun!

Start with curiosity and be open to change

Curiosity is a powerful way to connect with another person about a tricky idea. People see through you right away if you start a conversation with the goal of changing their mind about something - don't bother! Start from genuine curiosity and be open to changing your own views.

Use open questions to get the other person talking and try to listen actively rather than prepare your next argument while they are talking. You are giving people the opportunity to think things through, which they may not have otherwise had. You might be surprised by how much people want to talk!

Think about all the different ways you could start a conversation. Of course, climate change is making fires, droughts and floods worse – but there are also many stories about people taking action to draw upon. Young people have inspired millions across the globe to go on climate strike, demanding world leaders do more, people are shutting down city centres in protest, more and more people are learning from First Nations people about how we can better respect and look after country. Farmers are changing their methods and energy and transport systems are already being transformed. Think about who you want to talk to – what could resonate with them most?

Some ways you could kick off your conversation:

How is this bushfire situation for you? Is it making you worried? What about?

What do you think about the connection between these fires and climate change?

What have you heard about climate change?

Other question ideas:

How did you arrive at that position?

How do you feel about the situation?

How do you think change happens? Is it government policy, research & science, protests and social movements?

When have you seen positive change happen in your life / town / community? What led that change?

What would need to happen for you to get interested in learning more about climate change?

Build trust

The best conversations involve making a human connection. You're aiming to connect, not convince. Start with what you know about this person and work to build trust between you - listen, reflect back what you have heard to show you are listening, ask questions and share your own fears and vulnerabilities.

Ask yourself - does what I'm about to say build a bridge or increase the divide? Is the emotional content saying "I have your best interests at heart" or "I want to persuade you to do things my way"?

Build the trust bridge and walk your ideas over it.

In one conversation you might only add one brick to the trust bridge - but that it's a little bit more than before! You want people to be open to the next conversation. Note on bridges: try not to burn them ;)

Be genuine

Humans have a pretty damn good sense of when someone isn't being genuine - and guess what, that doesn't help to build trust. Be genuine about why *you* care about climate change and how *you* are feeling. Who knows, you might be the first person they have had a genuine conversation about the issue with!

Listen

People experience trust when they feel like they've been heard, when their ideas are reflected back to them and they feel they are being deeply understood. Be as present and real as you can be so you can tune into where the other person is at.

Mm, so it sounds like you've thought a lot about...

So what you are saying is?

It sounds like you are feeling XXX, is that right?

I totally relate to that feeling of...

How did you come to feel/think XXX?

Look for shared values

What does the person you're speaking with value most in life? How does this crisis impact upon that and how is this connected to what you care about? Concern about climate change in Australia is at an all time high. Build connections around shared values like family, love of nature, leaving things in good shape for the next generation, fairness and respect.

Stay cool

Look, we all know these conversations can turn out to be frustrating. Hopefully with trust, openness and curiosity that happens less - but if it does happen, it's important you are able to manage your own frustration.

Before having these conversations, take time to tune into yourself and how this issue is impacting on you. Think of the bridge - if you aren't feeling like you can build a connection right now, maybe save the conversation for another time.

Be frank

Sometimes these conversations can feel awkward or tricky. You know what's really disarming? Just naming it! Naming the awkwardness or making a joke about it can really open up a conversation - as can sharing your own fears or insecurities.

I know climate change is a tricky topic, but I'd love to hear what you think.

I want to talk more about climate change, but I often find it quite hard and scary.

Look after people

Climate change is scary! Don't open people up to anxiety and leave them hanging. If people feel hopeless or depressed, they can react in anger or they may shut down completely. If they seem engaged, but on the verge of shut down then figure out what they might want to do, ask if they have someone to talk to about this stuff, offer to talk again. Look after people. This could be a good opportunity to share how taking action helps because you're doing something to make a difference. It's also a chance to share how you remain engaged and hopeful.

Move to action

If it's a good conversation, people will ask you what they can do. Be ready with a few ideas, and questions for them about what they'd be interested in doing. Remind people that whilst individual/lifestyle changes are important, we won't see the action we need without lots of people taking collective action as part of movements to drive lasting political change and solutions.

[If they are just thinking about personal change you might ask]

How many of us do you think it will take to drive lasting change on this issue?

How could you get involved or make change beyond your own life?

Do you think that addresses the things we've been talking about?

What are your skills? Where do you have influence?

Listen carefully throughout the conversation for opportunities to talk about action. It can also be really powerful sharing your experience of getting involved – a lot of people might not see how they fit until they hear another person's experience