



CLIMATE CONVERSATION GUIDE

TURN YOUR WORDS INTO ACTION



Why, How, When and Where
to Talk to Friends and Family
about Climate Change and
Your Community



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This guide will give you everything you need to have a climate conversation with someone — who to talk to, what to talk about, how to do it, and when and where. Along the way, you'll find sample questions and additional resources you can refer to and share with others.

WHY START A CLIMATE CONVERSATION?

Chances are, if you're reading this guide, you care about climate change. You probably also know that it can be a sticky subject sometimes — not everyone loves to talk about topics that can feel a bit depressing (or be the one delivering the message). We understand that the task can feel daunting.

However, if we don't start a conversation, who will? It's more important than ever that we tackle the climate crisis, and discussions are a powerful tool in accomplishing that goal. People are more likely to be concerned about climate change if someone they trust shares their own concerns. [Studies](#) show that personal stories can be one of the most persuasive tools for generating awareness about climate change and that people are more likely to retain key facts -- [like the clear scientific consensus](#) about climate change-- when they hear it from people they know.

"Well when you look at the data it turns out that about three quarters of people in the whole U.S. don't even hear somebody else talk about climate change more than once or twice a year. And if we don't talk about it why would we care, if we don't care why would we act. So action begins with the conversation."

[Katherine Hayhoe, reknown climate scientist and communicator](#)

90%
of people trust
friends and family
for information
on brands and
services.

[Big brands know](#) the power of friends and family. Word-of-mouth matters for shopping and for saving the the planet!

WHO SHOULD YOU TALK TO ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

The short answer? Anyone. However, we recommend you start with those with whom you're closest — family members and friends — where you are a trusted source. Once you've gotten the hang of it and feel comfortable navigating the topic, you're probably ready to reach out to those in your extended circle — coworkers, colleagues, neighbors, friends from faith or community organizations, the list goes on. These are people with whom you can have an authentic conversation.

It starts at like a row of dominoes. A conversation pushes over the first domino, and it something that every single person can do."

Katherine Hayhoe

If they don't hear it from you, will they hear it at all?

In 2019 the Oxford word of the year was "climate emergency."

But 2020 brought the COVID 19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter movement, a presidential election and more — and major news coverage of climate change plunged as much as 50%.

A [Media Matters analysis](#) found that "climate coverage as a whole still made up only 0.4% of overall coverage on corporate broadcast morning, nightly and Sunday morning news shows in 2020."

Yet there is still a climate crisis that demands bold action. So we each need to talk and act.

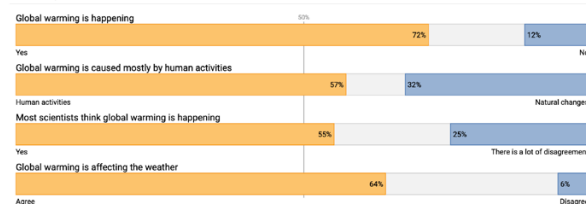
Public Opinion

Not only do the majority of people in the U.S. believe global warming is happening and human-caused, but they are also worried about it and its impacts on the future. This data should give you some confidence that whoever you talk to will likely be open to or already have some level of understanding of the topic.

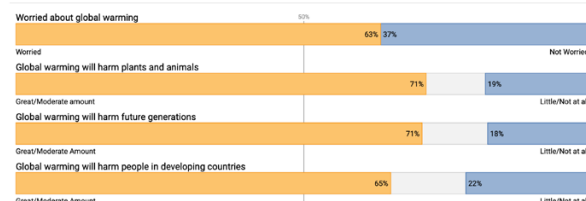
[Yale Opinion Climate Maps](#), 2020

Public Opinion Estimates, United States, 2020

BELIEFS



RISK PERCEPTIONS





One of the most important steps to ensure you have an effective discussion about climate change is to focus on the other person. By centering their opinions, values and ideas, you're more likely to have a conversation that leads to understanding and, ultimately, action.

HOW SHOULD YOU HAVE A CLIMATE CONVERSATION?

Before the conversation

People will be most receptive to understanding and taking action on climate change if you lead with what they care about. Take some time to think about what they value and are interested in and how that may align with climate change's impacts. Most importantly, see if you can find a value you both share (parenting, the economy, outdoor activities, etc.) — you're bound to have something in common you can leverage as a discussion point. Also consider and do some research on how these specific impacts are visible in your own community. Have these connection points prepared beforehand, if possible.

Here are some examples of values and how you can connect them to climate change and your local community.

Value/Interest	Climate Connection	Local Impacts
 Outdoor activities/ wildlife (hunting, fishing, birdwatching, etc.)	Loss of wildlife/ecosystems due to higher global temperatures and more frequent/intense disasters, including wildfires and flooding Link to resource: climate change and biodiversity loss	Climate change is causing a decline in our local wildlife populations that will make it harder to fish and hunt in the future. Warmer temperatures mean that some species may have to migrate further north to survive.
 Real Estate	Declining property values and rising insurance costs due to sea level rise and more frequent/intense flooding and natural disasters Link to resource: climate change's impacts on real estate	Insurance premiums in our city could soar in the next few decades because climate change means we'll see more natural disasters like (flooding, fires, choose what's local to you).

Value/Interest

Climate Connection

Local Impacts



Health



Hotter temperatures/longer summers that pose a health risk, especially for vulnerable people like children and the elderly

[Link to resource:](#) climate change's health risks



In our city, average temperatures have increased by “X degrees over the past Y years”. These higher temperatures pose a serious health risk, especially for our elderly family members.

[See how temperatures are changing in your own community to fill in the blanks](#)



Equity



Climate change means a greater risk of displacement and financial/physical consequences for those with fewer resources to adapt/recover (low-income, people of color, elderly, immigrants, etc.)

[Link to resource:](#) Why Climate Change is an Environmental Justice Issue



Climate change is an issue of environmental justice. Our most vulnerable community members, who have [historically faced](#) disproportionate negative environmental impacts, are hit hardest by impacts like air pollution, heat waves, high energy costs, storms and flooding.



Faith



For faith communities, this is an opportunity to think about being good stewards of God's creation and all living things. Climate change will also stoke new or exacerbate existing humanitarian crises, often an area of deep concern and engagement for faith communities.



The most vulnerable in our community – those experiencing homelessness, refugees, youth and elderly – will be most impacted.



Military



Climate change is considered a National Security threat that could further destabilize many parts of the world where there is already conflict and incite further violence, refugee and humanitarian crises. From rising sea levels to violent storms and melting permafrost, the US military is preparing for the impacts to our bases, foreign allies, readiness and more.

[Link to resource](#)



This will impact any local armed forces as well as any bases in the region, many of which face threats from sea level rise.

During the conversation

Follow these steps to have an effective, respectful conversation.



Share your own stories

Talk about how you have experienced the effects of climate change yourself or the particular concerns you have. Share any climate action steps you've taken or if there was a particular event or person (maybe your kids) who made you care about it?

"My allergies have been getting so much worse over the past few years. And with climate change it sounds like that might keep happening."

"Michael came home from school talking about the amount of food we waste in America and how that makes climate change worse. Now we're starting a compost bin in our yard!"



Ask questions

Ask the person you're talking to if they've noticed the same impacts you have and make a connection to climate change.

"Have you also noticed that allergy season has been getting worse? Warmer temperatures are making our pollen season longer."

Here are some additional discussion questions:

- Do you know what our city/town/county is doing about climate change?
- What kind of extreme weather events will we see more of in the future? How will these impact us? (physically, financially, emotionally)
- Will we have to evacuate more often in the summer or fall because of hurricanes or wildfires?
- How will this impact our quality of life? Are we ready for that?
- How will climate change affect our summers? Will our kids have to spend more time indoors because of hotter temperatures? Will local pools stay open into the early fall to give us some relief?



Listen

Be open and listen to how the other person reacts when you bring up climate change. If they agree with you or seem receptive, you may want to extend the conversation, especially to topics you know they care about. If not, you may want to spend some more time discussing your opening subject. If they don't seem willing to talk at all, it's okay to step away from the conversation.



Validate

Make sure you're validating the other person's opinions and contributions. It's important they know you understand them and their concerns.



Empower

Suggest simple actions your conversation partner can take. Share steps you have taken, what resources you consulted or lessons you learned. Climate change can be an overwhelming topic and will take large scale systems changes to truly address, but there are important actions we can each take – plus giving people ideas on how they can have an impact is empowering.

Additional Suggestions



Balance emotion with fact

Pairing personal stories with relevant evidence is one of the most effective strategies for talking about climate change. If accepting climate change runs counter to someone's personal ideology or political affiliation, piles of evidence will not persuade them, says Katharine Hayhoe, one of the world's most renowned climate scientists and communicators.

Circling back to the importance of talking about local impacts, choose facts and examples that are relevant to your own community and easy to envision.

This [video](#) summarizes this strategy and explains why it works so well.

Example: [By the end of the century](#), summers in New England could be as warm as they are now in South Carolina.



Don't forget the positive

Though it's easy to get overwhelmed by all the doom and gloom of climate change, it's important to remember why we're talking about it in the first place. We're all looking for a happy and healthy future on our shared planet, and climate change poses a significant risk to that. Emphasize solutions and their possible benefits (cleaner air from fewer emissions, job creation from renewable energy, etc.). Envision and talk about what a future where we properly address climate change could look like.

See [here](#) for some benefits to refer to.



Embrace your imperfections

Practice what you preach. The other person is unlikely to be responsive to suggestions about how to make changes in their own life if you're not also making an effort. Talk about some of the ways you're working toward living more sustainably or reducing your climate impacts, while acknowledging that you're still learning and growing too. This way, the conversation won't feel like a one-sided lecture, but an authentic discussion.

After the conversation, don't leave them hanging!

At the end of your conversation, offer to share some resources on anything you talked about. This is particularly important if you discussed any ways to take action. This allows for delayed follow up, too. For example, if you have a shared appreciation for hiking or fishing you can send them a notice about a trail or river cleanup and refresh the conversation.

Keep the other person in the loop and let them know you care by respectfully continuing the discussion. With their permission, send them news articles or social media posts about climate change, especially related to the topics they're interested in. Ask if they still have any questions from your conversation and follow up with relevant information. Let them know you value their opinion and ask them what they think!



PRO TIP

**Skip the dull, academic articles on your first pass.
Opt for fun, engaging resources like these:**

[Climate Time Machine](#)

See how major indicators of climate change have changed over the years

[How Does Your State Make Electricity?](#)

See what share of energy sources power your state

[Six Americas Super Short Survey](#)

Understand your own climate views better and compare them to others'

[Surging Seas Map](#)

Visualize how rising sea levels will impact any coastal location in a map overlay

[The Cost of Hurricane Harvey](#)

See how the economic costs of natural disasters have grown over time

[The Point Of No Return](#)

A visual overview of what action has been taken to address climate change worldwide

90%

of people felt more hopeful about climate change when exposed to good-natured comedy on the subject (and more likely to commit change/action)

[Studies](#) tell us not to be afraid to share a little lighthearted climate humor!

You know the crazy people you see in the streets shouting that the world is ending? Turns out, they're all [actually climate scientists](#).

Trevor Noah, host of Comedy Central's The Daily Show.

[“Research shows](#) that in a time of deep polarization, comedy can lower defenses. It temporarily suspends social rules and connects people with ideas and new ways of thinking or acting.”



Fun Facts

Before sharing the real deal content, drop in an unexpected fact or something that challenges conventional wisdom.

- A plastic bag is used for an average of 12 minutes but will remain in the environment for 1,000 years before it decomposes.
- As of 2018 more than 70% of Americans believe global warming is happening.
- Up to 90% of the energy used during a washing machine's cleaning cycle goes into heating the water, so use the cold setting.
- The average American consume 7 trees worth of paper, wood and other products each year.

How to Talk to Climate Deniers

Talking to climate skeptics can be difficult. In some cases, it may be best to walk away from the conversation. If you determine it's okay to continue the discussion and are looking for info on a specific point, refer to this [extensive list](#) from Grist. As we mentioned earlier, remember the importance of *listening* to and *validating* the other person. Figure out what their specific concerns are and see if you can directly address them. If someone is spreading false information, do not let it go unchallenged – but find an appropriate way to address it that doesn't shut down the conversation.

Find a natural time and place to start or revisit a conversation about climate change. This could be a lull during a soccer game, commiserating on a scorching day, or in a text chat.

WHEN AND WHERE SHOULD YOU HAVE A CONVERSATION?

Now that you've thought about who you want to talk to, what you want to talk about and how to do it, it's time to figure out the best time and place. We recommend you naturally weave climate change into your conversations whenever the time seems right — you don't have to necessarily make it a separate event.

Some places to start a conversation:

- Family get-togethers (online and in-person)
- Social media groups
- Dinner with friends
- On the playground or park
- School events
- Social meetings (faith gathering, knitting group, community garden, volunteer shift, etc.)



Weather? Climate? What's the difference?

While you may be tempted to tie every extreme weather event (floods, hurricanes, blizzards, heat waves, etc.) to climate change, be wise about your approach. Emphasize that climate change isn't just the single event you're discussing, it's what's causing a pattern of more frequent and severe natural disasters. For example, climate change isn't just causing a particularly hot day, but it's what's behind longer, hotter summers, and more intense droughts, wildfires, and storms.

[Here's](#) a brief explanation of climate change's different impacts on weather. This [interactive map](#) demonstrates the number of events that can be attributed to human-caused climate change.

RESOURCES

Here are some resources for you to use and share — articles, videos, podcasts, and who to follow on social media. It's not comprehensive, but it's a solid start!"



Watch these videos

- [The Secret to Talking about Climate Change](#)
 - [How can we start a conversation about climate change?](#)
 - [The most important thing you can do to fight climate change: talk about it | Katharine Hayhoe](#)
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Check out these websites

- [America Adapts](#) — podcast on adapting to climate change
 - [American Association for the Advancement of Science](#) (How You Respond) — nonprofit and publisher of Science journals
 - [Climate Central](#) — scientists and journalists researching and reporting on climate change
 - [Climate Communication](#) — science and outreach website
 - [Climate Crisis 101](#) — free, downloadable & shareable e-book on the basics of climate change
 - [Climate Reality Project](#) — information on the climate crisis, education and activism
 - [Grist](#) — free, high-quality journalism on a variety of climate topics
 - [Inside Climate News](#) — free, in-depth journalism on the climate crisis
 - [The Energy Gang](#) — podcast on renewable energy, technology, and the environment
 - [Treehugger](#) — free news on sustainability
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Follow these social media accounts

- Prof. Katharine Hayhoe (climate scientist & communicator): [Global Weirding show](#) on YouTube, [@KHayhoe](#) on Twitter, [Katharine Hayhoe](#) on Facebook, [@katharinehayhoe](#) on Instagram
- Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson (marine biologist, co-host of [How to Save a Planet](#) podcast): [@ayanaeliza](#) on Twitter and [Instagram](#)
- Michael E. Mann (scientist, author, professor of atmospheric science): [@MichaelEMann](#) on Twitter, [@MichaelMannScientist](#) on Facebook and [Instagram](#)
- [@nytclimate](#) on Twitter
- [@insideclimatenews](#) on Facebook and [Instagram](#), [@insideclimate](#) on Twitter
- [@climatecentral](#) on Facebook, [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)
- [@YaleProgramOnClimateChangeCommunication](#) on Facebook, [@YaleClimateComm](#) on Twitter
- [@TheEnergyGang](#) on Twitter
- [@ClimateReality](#) on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#)
- More climate-related [accounts](#) and [people](#) to follow on Twitter



TIME Magazine cover April 2021, [“COVID-19 Remade Society. Now It’s the Climate’s Turn”](#)

COVID Conversation

The COVID 19 pandemic has shown us that we’re all capable of resilience. We reached out to friends and family in new ways, helped out in our communities, and were reminded of the importance of personal connection. Part of what brought us together and made us stronger are **conversations** (many of them on Zoom or behind masks) — about how to adapt to the new normal, where to find resources, and simply how to support each other.

However, as we have witnessed, these conversations are not complete without the inclusion of all voices — especially our most vulnerable community members (often people of color, low-income, elderly, etc.). We cannot build resilience without making sure our community relationships are as strong as possible, and conversations are a great place to start. This stands true for any shocks or stressors a community may face, including climate change. Take the time to talk to others in your community now to build and bolster a strong foundation for the challenges we will face together in the future.



Your Voice Matters

While talking about climate change can feel a bit intimidating, we hope you now have the tools and strategies to address these chats confidently. It’s important to remember that every conversation, no matter the outcome, is a valuable opportunity for learning and helps you grow as a communicator. Make sure to continue engaging your family, peers, colleagues, neighbors and friends — you can help build a world filled with passionate and climate-conscious people!

With every conversation comes discussion, education, reflection, and the opportunity to inspire hearts and minds to pursue climate action.

**Take action now.
Start talking.**



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