

# How can educators best support children through climate anxiety?

Learning through Landscapes CEO, Carley Sefton, reflects on how The Big Ask, recent climate anxiety reports and COP26 must provoke some big conversations

The concept of 'environmentally aware' young people has changed so much over the last few decades.

When I was growing up in the '90s, I cared about the environment and thought I was doing my bit to help by going on rubbish collections and taking aluminium cans for recycling at our local supermarket.

But in recent years, the public's understanding of the climate crisis – as well as the scientific research linked to it – has gone so much deeper. Over the last few months, Glasgow's COP26 summit, studies on youth climate anxiety and the publication of the [Children Commissioner's Big Ask report](#) have highlighted that, in an era of constant information and escalating environmental issues, being an

'environmentally aware' young person today means facing many more climate worries than my peers and I ever did.

And it's taking its toll on their wellbeing: results from The Big Ask have shown that 39% of children (aged 9–17) said that the environment was one of their main worries about the future, making it the second most common answer, while [Avaaz's recent report](#) has shone a spotlight on the sense of abandonment that many young people are feeling at the hands of adults over the climate crisis.

As educators, we need to recognise the impact that climate anxiety is having on our children and young people and do everything we can to support them. So, how can we help?



Credit: Simon Hadley

Initially, the task can seem overwhelming. We are not responsible for government policies, and educators can't solve all the problems of climate anxiety by ourselves. But we can hold important conversations with the children and young people in our care, and it's essential that we do.



# Tips for talking about climate change



## 1 Do your research

Before holding conversations on climate with your class, find time to read trusted sources of information and good resources about climate change. Consider not only the potential associated concerns, statistics and impacts, but any positive steps and projects that are already taking place around the world to combat the climate crisis – from local litter-picking groups to examples of international award-winning projects, such as those from the [Earthshot Prize](#). National Geographic also have a huge number of helpful articles and have their own [tips on how to help climate anxiety](#), and you can visit the latest [IPCC report](#) for a deeper insight into the most recent scientific research and updates.



Credit: Simon Hadley

## 2 Assess the level of awareness

Use your research to introduce the topic gradually and ask simple questions about the climate crisis to assess levels of interest and anxiety, e.g. “do you think it’s important for us to look after the planet? Why?”. You may find that awareness of and engagement with the topic varies between children, so ensure you don’t overwhelm them with information or heighten the concerns of those who are already anxious for the future. Make sure that everyone in your class feels included in the conversation – especially children and young people from disadvantaged and underrepresented communities.

## 3 Provide a safe space

If you think your class would benefit from it, consider holding regular sessions to discuss news and developments in the climate crisis conversation and ask children to present their views on environmental topics. Listen to children and young people when they express their concerns, so that they feel validated and understood. Just talking about something can alleviate stress and anxiety.



## 4 Transform concerns into positive action

After discussing climate crisis concerns, remind children and young people of their own power in fighting the ongoing crisis – even the smallest action can make a positive difference! Empower them to make changes at home or in school to help the environment, promote life skills that they can use to develop resilience, talk about youth environmental action and, if there’s interest, research ‘green’ careers together. Make it clear that they are not alone in their interest in protecting the planet and that the climate crisis is important to your school/setting. And above all, fostering a love, understanding and respect for the planet among all children and young people is key. Only by giving all young people the opportunity to experience, learn from and discuss the natural world around them can they become informed and empowered to care for it.



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