



CONVERSATION GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

We know most Australians are worried about climate change and want more action to be taken. But a lot of people don't understand what needs to be done.

We need to be able to cut through the noise, so everyday people know **what** will make the biggest difference, and **how** to go about pushing for the change that matters.

Purposeful conversations are a great opportunity to shift general concern about climate change into effective and meaningful action.

You don't need to be an expert to talk to others about climate change - just a person who cares deeply about our future!

Be confident to start a conversation about climate change. Evidence shows that more than eight out of ten Australians understand climate change is real, and they're worried about it. People are generally open to doing more to act on their concern - your conversation can help show them how.

People are different, and you will need to tailor your approach, depending on the situation and your relationship. That's where this guide comes in - it will help you to better understand the perspective of the person you're talking to, so you can talk about climate change in a way that makes sense to them.

Powerful conversations are all based on human connection. We connect by asking thoughtful questions, listening to understand, being authentic, and sharing something of ourselves in these conversations. We build hope and confidence by giving people a sense of what is possible and what is required, and showing that the things they care about fit into a positive shared vision for the future.

Listening is your most important skill - it's how you will understand the perspectives of people you're talking to, then link these perspectives to actions that will make a real difference in the world.



FIVE CONVERSATION TIPS

1

Ask questions – seek to understand:

Asking questions is a way of connecting with people, and making them feel supported.

“How are you feeling about...”

By asking open questions, we prompt people to think, and we find out what matters to them:

“How do you think climate change is impacting your life and the lives of people around you?”

“What do you think about the Great Barrier Reef bleaching?”

Dig a bit deeper.

“Why do you say that?”

“Tell me more about..”

2

Listen without judgement:

Listen without interrupting. What values are sitting under the things they say? Their answers will give you clues to how they understand the problem of climate change, and what may be holding them back from taking more action.

“What things are important to you?”

“How do you feel about climate change?”

“What do you think could make a difference?”

In order to understand what they can do next, people need to feel heard and empowered to act with confidence.

3

Focus on the Vision:

Clean air, water and renewable energy is the vision, not coal, oil and gas. Although Australians relate to bushfires, pollution, droughts and wildlife loss - the problem with focusing too much on the devastating impacts of climate change is that it can make people feel overwhelmed and cause them to switch off.

Climate change matters because it has grave implications for our health, prosperity and way of life. But if we want action, we must build people's confidence that we can make a difference on climate change by taking action.

We should help people imagine a future different to the current impasse. The things people care about are a part of the change we're pushing for: affirm a shared vision!

4

Help people see their place in the solutions:

Our individual actions and choices do matter...but we can make a bigger difference if we work together to push the people in power to make better decisions, than if we act alone.

What we can do at home, and what we buy (or don't buy!) to help stop climate change are a good place to start, but persuading someone to join you in pressing key decision-makers for real climate action should be the goal of your climate conversations.

Pressuring people into actions they're not ready for can backfire. Instead, we should support people to start where they are, and encourage them to keep taking steps toward stronger advocacy. For some people, a private action like signing a petition is the first step. Others will be ready to take bolder action. By listening and asking questions carefully and intentionally - and exercising patience and compassion in your conversations, you will find out where someone is at.

5

Talk about your feelings, what you're doing, and why:

When it comes to understanding climate change, most people value the opinions of their friends, family and colleagues as much as they do the facts and figures from scientists, firefighters and doctors. Don't feel like you need to be an expert on all the science to be persuasive. Of course, facts matter, they give us information, but it's through our emotions that we decide what this information means for us.

We already all know how to hold a conversation, and it turns out this everyday practice is a powerful way to help people connect to climate change emotionally. By including your 'story' i.e. why climate change matters to you, by being vulnerable, relatable and credible, you can build trust with the person you are talking with. Don't over-complicate things, just be yourself! Being authentic is what people will remember ahead of a long list of statistics or facts and figures.

By connecting on a human level, early on, you are in a far better position to face any challenging parts of the conversation that might crop up later. Remember, like you, most people are worried about climate change. Your best chance to persuade them to act on their concerns rests on your ability to cut through the noise and show them a meaningful way forward.






Australian audiences for climate change conversations

These mini profiles might help you understand the perspective of some of the people that you'll talk with. It will give you sense of how they think about climate change and the ways in which you could talk to them about climate change.

These profiles are based on recent research that identified seven segments in the Australians community according to their attitudes to climate change. Our focus is on the first five (the final two groups, 'dismissive' and 'doubtful', will be much harder to shift, so it's better to use our time motivating people who are more likely to be willing to take more meaningful action).

There's a lot of overlap between segments, especially when it comes to the level of confidence people have in talking about climate change. But there's also some really distinct things that can help you tailor your suggestions.



Alarmed



I think:

Humans are fully responsible for the climate crisis.

I feel:

Frustrated, anxious, sad and angry.

I say:

“Everyone is putting their heads in the sand and not addressing the issue.”

You should encourage me to:

Do more public campaigning, join an environmental organisation/group, change my energy provider, divest my super and talk more about climate action with those around me.

I need help with:

Knowing what to focus on, building my confidence to write/speak on the issue.

Try saying:

“We need to stand up to those with the power so they take effective action on climate, and also reach out to as many people as possible to bring them along with us.”

Alert



I think:

Climate change is important, but I don't think I can have an impact.

I feel:

Helpless, anxious, sad, uncertain.

I say:

“We need to intervene now on climate change or it will be too late. Their inaction is actually quite stressful.”

You should encourage me to:

Become more involved with environmental groups, change my energy provider, and talk more about climate action with those around me.

I need help with:

Understanding the links between climate and the economy, and building my confidence to write/speak on the issue.

Try saying:

“Renewables have serious potential to improve our economy and reduce emissions.”

“I've seen what can happen when enough people stand up for something.”

Concerned



I think:

Climate change is important, but most effects will be felt by future generations, not now.

I feel:

Uncertain, anxious, sad and unsure.

I say:

"The world has the knowledge to make significant changes but red tape and a lack of resources get in the way."

You should encourage me to:

Watch a doco, change my energy provider, talk more about climate action and influence my friends.

I need help with:

Building my confidence to write/speak to others about climate change, and to learn more about the issue.

Try saying:

"What we do today will change the future, for good or bad. We know what is needed - we just need to get everyone moving! We can do it together."

Cautious



I think:

Climate change is important, but I'm not convinced we caused it.

I feel:

Unsure about my individual impact.

I say:

"I'm concerned that Australia is doing its part but much larger countries & economies are not (e.g. India, China)."

You should encourage me to:

Invest in more efficient ways to run my household and lifestyle, and talk to others about it too. Take easy, quick actions, like signing a petition.

I need help with:

Understanding the links to things I care about, like economic security, healthcare, safety and cost of living.

Try saying:

"We're the sunniest country in the world, and one of the windiest. Imagine the economic opportunity if we had policies that used that natural advantage. At the very least, we could all change to green power and make a difference."

Disengaged



I think:

I don't get involved in politics much.

I feel:

Unsure, uncertain and neutral.

I say:

"I wonder whether there are more things that should be done but I don't know who is responsible for making those changes".

You should encourage me to:

Sign a petition, read an article, watch a program or do things to make my home more efficient.

I need help with:

Making climate change feel relevant - I relate more to localised messages and the cost of living.

Try saying:

"I've read about what will happen to the cost of living if this drought continues."

"I've seen politicians change their tune when people start standing up."



What if my conversation is with someone who denies climate change is real, or who becomes angry?

Remember not to expend heaps of energy when you're getting nowhere - forcing information or getting angry yourself will make you feel awful and could send you backwards in your relationships and our shared mission!

Some tips:

- Empathise where possible (e.g. "I understand what you mean when you say...").
- Don't engage! Politely end the conversation when you can.
- Educate and relate to any area of common ground e.g. solar panels that save \$\$ for homes and businesses may be a great way to connect.

Sample Conversation Guide



Start with an open question:

"How do you feel about climate change?"

Remember to listen more than you speak, without judgement:

"Tell me more about..."

Validate their opinions. Find common ground.

Tell your story to show why you want action.

Paint the picture of success.

Find out what holds them back.

Encourage action!

Ask them:
are they ready to take action?

Affirm their concern, and your shared purpose/perspective:

"I see you care about future generations; like you I'm worried my children will find things difficult."

Ask for a commitment.

What is the action?

Can you take action together?

Common Barriers

There are a few common barriers to taking action that consistently came up for different groups of people. Here are some ways to overcome them:

"I don't know enough"

It could be helpful to dig a bit deeper to find out more detail on what they need help with.

"What do you feel uncertain about?"

Share resources you trust with them. Acknowledge that it can be confusing.

"I'm not a good speaker/writer"

Reassure them that they don't need to be an expert - just a person who cares deeply about our future.

"I was nervous to write/call/speak too, so I reached out to a climate action group for help, and asked some friends to join me. We all really enjoyed it, and it felt less of a burden when we shared the load."

Facing objections:

Conversations to create change will often result in people questioning or arguing with what you say.

A useful framework for handling these objections is:

Explore: what is behind the objection?
(is it lack of knowledge, misinformation etc)

Empathise: acknowledge their position, even if you don't agree - "I understand..."

Elevate: lift them up with facts or a story of hope -
"I thought that too, until I learned..."
or "Did you know..?"

"I feel I do a lot for the environment in other ways"

"I don't know what would make the biggest impact"

Help them understand the most meaningful action they can take:
"To prevent climate change getting much worse, it's going to take a huge transformation. That means we should put our efforts into calling for government and businesses to change the system, so our individual and consumer actions are part of a broader push for change that takes us in the right direction".

"Australia needs the coal/oil/gas industries"

"Did you know more than 25% of Australia's energy supply already comes from renewables? We're the sunniest country in the world, and one of the windiest. If we had policies that made the most of this natural advantage, our economy could be so strong!"

