



GUIDE TO GREAT CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS

*How to talk with your
friends and family about
climate change*



This guide outlines **4 key steps** to having productive conversations about climate change with family members, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances. You'll learn tips for who to talk to, what to talk about, how to approach the topic, and when and where. Refer to the sample questions and additional resources throughout 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 talking about topics that can feel overwhelming, frustrating, or even 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 simply talking about it is a deceptively powerful tool. People are more likely to be concerned about climate change if someone they trust shares their 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 them from people they know.

"To care about climate change, you only have to be one thing, a human living on planet earth; and we're all that."

74%

of U.S. adults trust friends and family for climate information.

[Yale, George Mason University 2022](#)

While 77% of citizens of the Raleigh-Cary Metro Area believe climate change is happening...

58%

rarely or never discuss it.

[Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2023](#)

[Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, renowned climate scientist and communicator](#)



STEP 1

UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

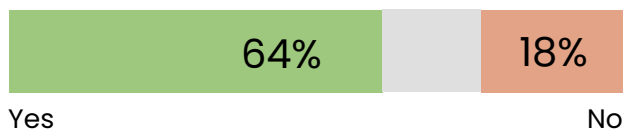
Start with those with whom you're closest – family members and friends – where you are a trusted source. Once you've gotten the hang of it and feel comfortable navigating the topic, you're probably ready to reach out to those in your extended circle – coworkers, colleagues, neighbors, friends from faith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

Opinions on climate change in Raleigh-Cary Metro Area, NC

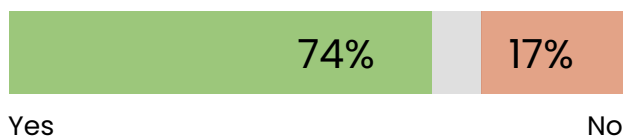
Global warming is happening



Global warming is caused mostly by humans



Global warming will harm future generations



[Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2024](#)

Find common ground

One of the most important steps to ensure you have a productive 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.

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 information on a specific point, refer to this [extensive list from Grist.org](#). Figure out what their specific concerns are and see if you can directly address them.

While opinions aren't unanimous, the **majority** of Cary residents both believe in (77%) and are worried about (69%) climate change. These are the people who would more likely be open to having a conversation about climate change.

STEP 2

MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE

People will be most receptive to understanding and taking action on climate change if you **lead with what they care about**.

Consider the person you want to have a conversation with. What do they value? What are their hobbies? What are they interested in? Ideally, find something you have in common (parenting, the economy, outdoor activities, etc.). It will be easier to have a conversation about something you both care about. Then, do some research about how those things or activities are connected to or being impacted by climate change. 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



Loss of wildlife/ecosystems due to higher global temperatures and more frequent/intense disasters, including wildfires and flooding. [Resource: Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss](#)



Climate change is causing a decline in our local wildlife populations and threatens the health of our beloved natural spaces. It's less fun to enjoy the outdoors when it's too hot or when natural resources are impaired.



Real Estate



Declining property values and rising insurance costs due to sea level rise and more frequent/intense flooding and natural disasters. [Resource: Climate Change and Real Estate](#)



Insurance premiums could rise in the future because climate change means we'll see more frequent and intense natural disasters like flash flooding.

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. [Resource: Climate Change's Health Risks](#)



Cary is experiencing two times as many dangerously hot days (heat index of "feels like" temperature above 100 degrees F) than 30 years ago. Extreme heat can increase the risk of heat-related illnesses, increase energy costs, and put a strain on wildlife and trees.



Equity



Climate change doesn't impact everyone equally. People with fewer resources to adapt and recover are more burdened by climate impacts (low-income, people of color, elderly, immigrants, etc.). [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 all living things. Climate change will also stoke new or exacerbate existing humanitarian crises, often an area of deep concern and for faith communities. [Resource: Dr. Hayhoe on Faith](#)



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



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 U.S. military is preparing for the impacts to our bases, foreign allies, readiness, and more. [Resource: Climate Change and National Security](#)



Climate change and extreme weather events will impact local armed forces as well as bases in the region.

STEP 3

DEPLOY THE RIGHT TACTICS

The right tools make any job easier. Fill your toolbox with the following tactics to conduct 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 then make a connection to climate change). Ask them if they've considering taking action and if they've faced any barriers or challenges.

"Have you noticed that summers are getting hotter and hotter? I recently learned that Cary is experiencing two times as many dangerously hot days than 30 years ago. Can you believe that?"



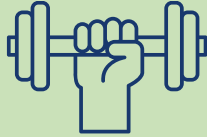
Listen

Be open and listen to how the other person reacts when you bring up climate change. If they 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 all take that make a difference. Plus, giving people ideas on how they can have an impact is empowering.



Balance facts with personal truth

Pairing personal stories with relevant evidence is one of the most effective strategies for talking about climate change. According to climate communicators like Dr. Katherine Hayhoe, if accepting climate change runs counter to someone's personal ideology or political affiliation, piles of evidence will not persuade them. So, telling a personal story could be more effective than talking about data.

Focus on local climate impacts and choose examples that are relevant to your own community and easy to envision. For example, you could talk about your experiences with extreme heat and how it's impacted you personally. [This video](#) summarizes this strategy and explains why it works so well.



Don't forget the positives

We're all want a happy and healthy future on our shared planet, and climate change poses a significant risk to that. Emphasize solutions and their possible benefits (clean air and water, [job creation and a better economy](#), etc.) and talk about what the future could look like if we properly address climate change.



Embrace your imperfections

Practice what you preach. The other person is unlikely to be responsive to suggestions about making changes in their life if you're not also making an effort. Talk about how you're working on 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.

LANGUAGE TOOLBOX

WHAT to say

Say less of this...

- Sustainable
- Emissions
- Renewable energy
- Greener
- Decarbonize
- Natural disaster

...and more of this:

- Safe and healthy
- Climate pollution
- Clean energy
- Cleaner, faster
- Eliminate pollution
- Extreme weather

HOW to say it

Use these phrases to kick things off or keep them going.

- What have you heard about climate change?
- How did you arrive at that position?
- What would need to happen for you to get interested in learning more about climate change?
- "I really agree with you on that."
- "I find that really hard as well."
- "Like you said..."
- "That's a good point, I never thought of that."
- "I respect the way you..."

STEP 4

DON'T LEAVE THEM HANGING

At the end of your conversation, offer to share some resources about the topics you discussed. Ask if they still have any questions and follow up with relevant information. Let them know you value their opinion and ask them what they think!

Resources to Share

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](#)

Social Media

- **@nytcclimate** on X
- **@insideclimatenews** on Facebook and Instagram, **@insideclimate** on X
- **@climatecentral** on Facebook, X and Instagram
- **@YaleClimateComm** on X
- **@ClimateReality** on X, Instagram and Facebook
- **@futureearth** and **@environment** on Instagram

Websites and News Sources

- [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 Reality Project](#) – information on the climate crisis, education and activism
- [Grist.org](#) – free, high-quality journalism on a variety of climate topics
- [Inside Climate News](#) – free, in-depth journalism on the climate crisis
- [Volts](#) – podcast on energy and climate solutions.
- [Project Drawdown](#) – articles on climate solutions.

Books

- *Saving Us* by Katharine Hayhoe
- *All We Can Save* by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson & Katharine K. Wilkinson
- *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety* by Sarah Jaquette Ray
- *Overheated* by Kate Aronoff
- *Generation Dread* by Britt Wray



Your voice matters.

While talking about climate change may feel intimidating, we hope you now have the tools and strategies to enter these conversations with confidence. 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.

CARY[®]

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