

How to talk to kids about climate crisis

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WITH a large proportion of Australia in lockdown, millions of parents are grappling with the challenges of home schooling. This can be hard enough when the curricular content is straightforward, but helping kids when they're learning about tricky issues like climate change can be even harder. In fact, it's hard for teachers too.

Climate change is both genuinely scary and highly politicised, creating an emotional storm around the issue. In the wake of the latest (and pretty terrifying) IPCC report, catastrophic wildfires in the northern hemisphere, and the Australian government's continued inaction, locked-down kids are probably stressed out, frustrated and overwhelmed by climate change right now.

My research explores how teachers can and do respond to their students' ecological distress. Here's four things the best environmental educators in Australia do to help cultivate "active hope" in their students (creating hope through our actions).

Help kids explore how they feel

Some fantastic psychologists I've worked with over the years say "you can tame what you can name". So, encourage your kids to investigate what they feel and why. You could get them to do an art project to explore this. Be prepared: there's likely to be a lot of feelings, and that will likely make you feel a lot of things too. But don't rush to try to fix your kiddo's feelings - just do your best to listen.

Validate their feelings

Help your kids realise these feelings are normal and healthy, and help them see that others share those feelings too. Maybe check out the School Strike 4 Climate website, or isthisshowyoufeel.com. The key here is showing that you understand and empathise with their feelings, that you know they are legitimate responses, and that they are not alone.

Now you know how they're feeling, support them however seems best

If you're not sure, ask them what they think could help. Maybe it's a hug right there and then. Maybe it's going for a walk or taking a break. Over the longer term, it might be something like taking meditation classes together, or having regular check-ins. Perhaps it's doing something proactive about the issue - which takes us to the next step.

Empower their collective action

There's plenty of things you can do at the household level to reduce your family's carbon footprint, and that might be a good place to start during lockdown: *Fight for Planet A* is a great show to watch together for ideas. But we also need - and your kids probably already know this - much more systemic change, the kind of change that can only be made at a society-wide level, including by our governments. Helping your kids find the right kind of action that they want to take, with the right group of people, will help them feel reassured that people are taking action on climate change, and it will help them -

and you - create the kind of future they want. The internet can be your friend on this issue. There are endless lists of things people can do about climate change, organisations they can join, and actions they can take.

Will this help kids stop worrying about climate change? Probably not. Will it be an easy conversation to have? Probably not. But it will hopefully help them feel recognised and supported, bring you closer together, and help them feel they are taking meaningful action.

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