

## ***How to become a confident climate communicator***

This guide will assist in giving you confidence to communicate with people about the climate crisis. You will learn to connect over shared values and avoid science overload. You will understand psychological distancing, climate solution aversion, and the need to communicate urgency. Group discussion and role plays will allow you to practice in a safe environment.

The guide has been divided into four parts, each of which will take 30-45 minutes (or even more, depending on the interest of the group). It is not necessary to follow the parts - it can be done all at once but breaking it into sections can be helpful if you have limited time.

People's reactions to the climate crisis can be broken into alarmed, concerned, cautious, disengaged, doubtful and dismissive. The majority of people fall into the first five. There is no point trying to speak with those who are dismissive, because facts won't change their minds.

### ***Part 1***

**Shared values.** The best way to engage people in climate conversations is to connect over shared values, rather than over facts. To do this, you need to be clear on what your values are, to discover who you are and why you care.

Consider these questions:

1. Where do you live?
2. What do you love doing?
3. What is your background?
4. Who do you love?
5. What do you believe in?
6. What community do you think you could reach out to?

Practice putting this understanding of yourselves into your climate conversations through role play.

Learn to attune yourselves to others, i.e., try to dig deeper into your own feelings and the feelings of others through compassion and curiosity, without judgment or shame, allowing people to be who they are. Remember how you felt and acted before you decided to get more involved in the issue of the climate.

*Role play:* break into pairs to share your fears, worries, concerns, hopes, and successes about climate change and practice the skill of attunement. Take 10 minutes to do this. When you return to the group, take another 10 minutes to share your thoughts about the exercise. Although you are speaking to like minded people here, having expressed yourself will give you confidence.

**Zombie arguments.** You will encounter so-called “zombie arguments”, i.e., erroneous statements about climate change that just don’t go away, no matter how often they get debunked.

Here are some examples:

- "climate change has done more good than harm so far" (defense contractors anticipate that climate change will lead to a rising demand for weapon systems)
- Climate science is a conspiracy of the 'elites'
- It's a natural cycle
- CO2 doesn't cause warming
- We'll just build a colony on Mars

When you come up against such arguments, have an answer from the heart rather than from the head.

1. Acknowledge the objection
2. Provide a brief response acknowledging any partial truth in order to make the person feel heard

3. Pivot promptly to connecting over shared values/mutual concerns

*Role play:* break into small groups. Take turns presenting a 'zombie argument' and practice responding. Even if you don't know how to refute these arguments, the exercise will give you practice pivoting to shared values.

(This [6 minute video by the United Nations](#) will give you a basic overview of what causes climate change.)

## **Part 2**

**Psychological distance** is the human tendency to ignore threats that are further away from us in concreteness, time, physical distance and social relevance. Psychological distance allows us to be unconcerned, because the climate crisis:

- Can be too vague a concept
- Is removed from us in time and space
- Isn't relevant to the world we inhabit

Questions for discussion

1. Think about and share your own experiences when your actions or thinking were driven by psychological distancing. What kind was it?
2. How is psychological distancing impacting the climate change movement?

Psychological distance is a greater challenge than whether or not we accept the science of climate change.

*Role play:* Start a climate conversation. Take 15 minutes in small groups to practice building confidence in initiating a climate conversation. Bring up the changes you have noticed in your local community and connect them with climate change. Remember shared values and making connections with others. Start off by giving a prompt to the person starting the

conversation. For example, the initiator could say, “This smoke is freaking me out!” This creates the opportunity to practice connecting their comment to climate change.

To end on a high note, share local climate solutions that are taking place in your communities.

### **Part 3**

**Climate solution aversion** is the idea that people fear the solutions more than they fear the negative climate impacts. They may fear a rising cost of living, they’ll have to give up air travel to visit family, etc. This aversion can put us in a bind, where we feel that what we *want to do* isn't doable for us personally, or we haven't found a way to do it. Guilt and other negative self-talk can spring from this bind.

Finding ways to have conversations with compassion and kindness around our aversion to solutions is a necessary step to becoming climate solution communicators.

*Role play:* Break into groups of about three and take ten minutes to discuss your own personal experiences with solution aversion, and the binds you may have felt or experienced.

### **Part 4**

#### **Build confidence as a climate communicator.**

*Role play:* Take 15 minutes in your groups to think of an example of a conversation you would like to have with someone who hasn't yet made the connection between their choices and the bigger picture of the climate crisis. In this scenario, see if you can get them to rethink, convince them not to fear the solution, or to recognize that the impacts will be worse if things don't change.

Give everyone a chance to role play - five minutes each.

1. Ask open-ended questions or simply an interesting question
2. Share how you feel (I'm worried, or I've noticed/ have you noticed?)
3. Listen for shared values, things you can agree on (remember attunement?)

4. Aim for empathy
5. Know when to stop the conversation

Further tips on how to navigate the climate conversation:

- Use personal stories and experiences in preference to data
- Talk about a celebrity, influential person or group that is doing something good for the climate
- Share what scientists say
- Don't be afraid to talk, research tells us people want to talk
- Accept that it is possible to disagree and remain respectful

“The future we collectively face will be forged by our own actions. Climate change stands between us and a breathtaking, exhilarating future. We cannot afford to be paralyzed by fear or shame. We must act, with power, love, and a sound mind. Together, we can save ourselves.” Katharine Hayhoe from *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World*.

These pointers and suggested role plays are drawn from a condensed version of *Saving Us Reading Circle Guide*, created as a collaboration between West Kootenay Climate Hub and Castlegar United Church, by Judeth Betts, Shemmaho Goodenough and Laura Sacks:  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Tw5Qf9yUunDNZGBwHUOo80h3QFYsVC1K2tS2X-K00BY/edit#>