



Eco-anxiety is real. How do we help to counter it?

Young Climate Warriors

'43% of young people surveyed have worried about climate change / the environment in the last 3 months' (Place2Be survey, BBC Newsround, 2024)

'45% of global youth surveyed say climate anxiety and distress is affecting their daily lives and functioning' (AVAAZ survey, published in The Lancet Planetary Health, 2022)

'Almost 9 out of 10 children don't think enough is being done to tackle climate change and 81% don't feel they are being listened to' (UNICEF UK survey, 2021).

'Nearly 3/4s of young people say they are worried about the state of the planet – 22% say they are VERY worried'. (BBC Newsround survey, 2020).

Eco-anxiety is real. Negative emotions associated with the perception of climate change are often voiced through an extreme concern about animals – for example the plight of polar bears, or about scenes they have seen on TV – such as ravaging wildfires; or an immediate concern about the impact of local issues like flooding. It can often stem from a feeling that society, the government, or just the 'adult' world is not doing enough about it. It is important to acknowledge their anxiety and distress, and validate their feelings. Let them know that it is a normal response to be worried about things going wrong in our natural world. It is healthy to care and love the world around us – the animals, plants and nature on our doorstep, and worry is an extension of that concern. Here are some suggestions for helping to counter eco-anxiety:

Spending time in nature is a great way to stay motivated and hopeful.

Learning about the magnificence of our natural world, alongside examples of where nature thrives, and how it adapts can be encouraging. Get out into nature as much as possible. Learn about re-wilding schemes, and watch nature documentaries – especially balanced programmes like the Planet



Earth, or Green Planet series. Encourage the use of reputable sources of information, that are reliable, accurate and not scaremongering.

Perspective is important. Look at what we have achieved. Just shy of 200 countries signed an agreement to limit global warming to well below 2°C as part of the UN Paris Agreement – that was an incredible achievement. Over 400 scientists work together as part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – assessing the science and reaching consensus about recommendations. Globally thousands of top professionals are putting their minds together to help combat climate change. No one person is going to solve this global problem – but we are all working together, engender a sense of collective spirit where possible.

Emphasize solutions – systemic change can happen. Globally, we do have the solutions and the technologies, we just need the political will and direction to motivate businesses and organisations to take action. Millions of people around the world are working on these solutions today – projects, (for example – <https://earthshotprize.org>), investors, entrepreneurs, innovators, scientists, policy makers etc. As Professor Myles Allen said ‘we can fix it, it is a fixable problem’ (FT for schools – Engaging with Climate Change – 1st March ‘22). Strive to share ‘good news’ stories and highlight positive projects and ideas – especially where they seem realistic, possible and are gaining traction. Reinforce the notion that we are capable of affecting the course of events, we can have dreams and visions for the future. We can choose to build a better future together.

Encourage a global perspective. Climate Change is about thinking beyond ourselves. There are huge benefits to taking action today to protect what we love – for children all round the world and for future generations. Projects reducing carbon emissions today will prevent worse climate change impacts in the future. In all discussions about climate change look ‘globally’ at effects, impacts, mitigation projects and adaptation options. Aim to inspire empathy and connection with children around the world and to help establish a values framework rooted in social justice.

Make small positive changes, these can feel empowering. Enabling small age-appropriate positive changes, improving the situation, helps children feel it’s



possible to make a difference, potentially lowering anxiety levels. Learning about how we live in an interconnected world, but can take action as individuals is important, even if children don't feel they can control the big world around them. Encourage taking action as part of a 'team' – participating alongside other children, families, community groups or schools can help children feel less alone, and help amplify their voices.

Talk about it. As IPCC Scientist Katherine Hayhoe said – 'The most important thing you can do to fight climate change: talk about it'. Create a safe classroom/kitchen table culture that welcomes conversation, discussion and reflection, alongside action. Providing a forum for children to talk honestly and openly helps invite discussion and provides meaningful emotional support when needed. Choose reliable materials and resources where the tone, format and style aims to provoke critical thinking and curiosity about our natural world around us. Discussion, conversation and learning can help children feel empowered and then able to reflect and choose their own path of action.

Be part of the movement for change. Participate as a family, a school, or a youth club. Nationwide campaigns can help show the power of public action – and highlights the fact that there are many others in society who care about the same things that children care about. There are many topic-based campaigns – choose those linked to big charities that are not politically driven. Being part of these types of campaigns, that have a proven track record, helps children to influence others, and the 'powers that be', helping children feel a sense of positive engagement.

Live by example. Make 'sustainable living' choices. Making changes to our everyday lives helps send a message to businesses that consumers are making conscious choices that are supporting a healthier planet. Making those choices also helps change our 'social norms' – making 'green and sustainable living' choices more acceptable amongst children and their peer groups. As individuals however we are not individually responsible for saving the planet. Be wary not to let the 'green' choices lead to a climate footprint guilt. Nurture a longer-term overarching attitude of care and concern for our planet, as a steward of the future, establishing the bedrock for life-long pro-environmental choices rather than focusing on counting the carbon emissions today.



This framework and positive ethos provides the backbone to the Young Climate Warriors (YCW) initiative. We are 'hopeful' and take seriously our role in helping to counter climate change related eco-anxiety. YCW wholeheartedly promotes the concept of Stubborn Optimism, as a responsible choice. The term was coined by Christiania Figueres – Executive Secretary UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (2010–2016) and a recognized leader on the global diplomatic efforts on climate action. Explained here – the Case for Stubborn Optimism. (<https://www.globaloptimism.com>).
https://www.ted.com/talks/christiana_figueres_the_case_for_stubborn_optimism_on_climate

The choice that we each must make every day requires that we are fully aware of the reality that we see, not blind to it, and at the same time filled with the conviction that we possess the ingenuity, innovative capacity and determination to change that reality for the better.' Global Optimism – led by Christiania Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac

Parents helping to support their child who is suffering from eco-anxiety may appreciate the support of their local community 'green' group or Transition Town initiative – <https://transitionnetwork.org> or their nearest Friends of the Earth group – <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/take-action/join-group-near-you>

Children who are feeling worried about climate change need to know that they are not alone. They may appreciate the BBC webpage – 'Tips if you're feeling worried about climate change' – <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51644659>. If parents are concerned that their child's eco-anxiety is interfering with a child's day to day functioning they should consult with an appropriate medical professional.

To learn more about the Young Climate Warriors initiative – visit <https://www.youngclimatewarriors.org>