

Climate storytelling workshop



Ages: 9+ (adapt for different age groups)



Time: 1 hour +

Purpose:

To think about how to have a productive conversation about climate change with an adult.

Youth work outcomes:

Outcome 2: Young people manage personal, social and formal relationships

Outcome 3: Young people create, describe and apply their learning and skills

Outcome 7: Young people broaden their perspectives through new experiences and thinking

Sustainable development goals:



Materials:

Sheets of paper, post-it notes/Jamboard, mentimeter

Context:

Many young people in Scotland and across the world are already engaged with climate change and feel worried about it – 70% of 18-24 year-olds are more worried about climate change now than they were a year ago. It's often older generations who are more skeptical about taking climate action or who have other concerns like work, family and bills. Young people are ideally placed to have conversations with adults in their lives about climate change and to influence their decision-making around this. It has been shown that adults are far more likely to change their attitudes when confronted with their own children's hopes and fears than with scientific facts or political statements. Even the CEOs of oil companies have changed their policies because of concerns from their children. Children and young people have a huge amount of influence, and youth workers can help them realise this and prepare them for these difficult conversations.

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Running a climate storytelling workshop

One way that youth workers can help young people fulfil their potential to change attitudes on climate change is by supporting them to tell their own stories. Stories are much more effective in changing people's minds than facts and figures, although it's important to have these straight too. You don't have to be an expert on climate science to persuade someone to care about it, you just have to be able to tell a good story. There are several tricks to telling an effective climate story and each of these can be workshoped with young people either online or in person. You can use online facilitation tools like Jamboard or Miro, or if you're in person, post-its and mind maps work well.

1. Know your audience

If young people are talking to adult family members or friends about climate change, it's likely they will already know them well. Ask the young people to discuss and write down the things that matter to the adults they are thinking of talking to. These can be values, people (eg. their children or elderly relatives), places, their career, music – anything. This will help the young people to put themselves in the shoes of the person they are hoping to persuade, as well as finding a starting point for the conversation.

Talking about the adults' current attitudes towards the climate crisis will also help in planning a conversation. Are they already aware of the urgency of the situation? Do they feel that the problem is too big and there's nothing they can do? Do they believe it's someone else's problem? [Climate Outreach](#) has done extensive research on different types of responses to the climate crisis among British people and how to deal with them, which may be helpful. Different attitudes require different approaches, for example it won't help someone who already thinks that the problem is too big to solve to go through statistics about the impacts of climate change. Ask the young people to think about how they might approach adults with different attitudes towards the climate crisis.

It may also help to talk about the setting of the conversation. How will the young person bring up the subject? Ask them to think about things on the news, recent events, or political decisions that the adult may find interesting. Watching a documentary or film (it doesn't have to be non-fiction!) could also be a good way to spark a conversation about climate change.

2. Find common ground

It helps for the young person to identify some areas that they have in common with the adult they are talking to. This will involve listening to what the other person has to say and showing respect for their values and concerns. This maturity will probably lead to the adult showing more respect to the young person, and it will help the young person to understand why the adult is resistant to change. It's important for the young person not to blame the adult they're talking to for not taking action faster, as this is more likely to lead to an argument than a productive conversation. Guilt and judgement don't lead to solutions, so the young people must learn to create a judgement-free zone to start their conversation from. They can practice this with friends or others in their youth group by working out what likes and dislikes they have in common.

3. Explain why you care

This is where the young people can tell the story of how they became interested in climate change themselves. This could have been through learning about it at school, through their own research, or through its connection to another issue they care about, such as social justice or conservation. Personal stories are a really powerful way of persuading other people to care. The young people can practice telling their climate stories in groups and discuss what makes each of them care about the climate crisis.

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4. Talk about your feelings

This is a very important part of conversations about climate change, and it helps if young people can identify their own emotions around the climate crisis. Create a word cloud or get the young people to write down their different emotions and concerns about climate change on post-it notes to share with the group. Talking about their feelings with trusted adults can help young people to process them, but will also help the adults to understand why the young person feels so strongly about the climate crisis. With your youth group, you could discuss the young people's concerns about what impacts climate change might have on their own lives, as well as their expectations for the future. Adults, especially parents or guardians, hate to see their children distressed, and if they understand the distress and anxiety that the climate crisis is causing young people, it may move them to take action.

5. Talk about solutions and what you can do

Don't forget that the point of having conversations about climate change is to encourage as many people as possible to take action! With the young people, brainstorm some ideas of solutions to the climate crisis that are both already ongoing, and that could be implemented in their local area as well as nationally and globally. It's important not to rely too much on technology and solutions that do not yet exist, as this can seem idealistic and unrealistic to adults who are skeptical about taking climate action. Instead, focus on solutions that already exist and need to be scaled up, as these will give more grounds for optimism and determination. If the adults see that young people aren't just complaining about the issues and doing nothing to solve it but are actively focused on solutions and alternatives, this will generate much more respect and productive conversation. Youth groups could discuss which solutions their parents or other adults in their lives might be particularly interested in, for example creating nature reserves, cutting down on plastic, switching to renewable energy, or sharing resources.

Remember that one conversation is probably not going to be enough to change someone's mind about the climate crisis. This will have to be an ongoing discussion, with time for the other person to mull over what has been said in between conversations. It's important to let the other person come to their own conclusions and make up their own mind, if they feel forced or pressured that are likely to get defensive and stop listening to the young person. This requires a lot of maturity and patience from the young person, as well as a faith in the adult that they will do the right thing. If several young people have decided to talk to their parents or adults in their lives for the first time about climate change, it can help to come back and discuss how it went with others afterwards, compare responses and talk about next steps. It is so important for young people to know that they are not alone in caring about the climate crisis, and feel supported by their peers and by youth workers.