

RAISING CHILDREN TO THRIVE IN A CLIMATE CHANGED WORLD

Many parents who are concerned about climate change know that the climate-altered world their children will live their adult lives in will be very different from today's world.

This generation of children will need to adapt to faster and more wide-ranging changes than we have ever seen before. Even with swift action on climate change, there are still likely to be more extreme weather disasters and serious shortages of fuel, water and food in many places. Further, as we move to a zero-carbon economy, there will be major changes in our lifestyles - in the ways we work, consume and travel. These changes will require great adaptability and capacity to cooperate with others.

This information sheet is a companion to the information sheet, *A Parent Guide To Climate Change*. It helps parents think through the skills and capacities that our children - the next generation - will need to keep working so they can help to restore a safe climate, and to adapt to the inevitable changes ahead, and how parents can help their children develop these skills and capacities.



WHAT SKILLS DO I NEED TO TEACH MY CHILDREN SO THAT THEY CAN THRIVE IN A CLIMATE CHANGED WORLD?

'Positive development' is a term psychologists use to refer to developing the capacity to live a happy, healthy, productive and engaged life, which is what all parents want for their children. These skills are also important for helping them to adapt to climate change and thrive in a climate changed world. There are four sets of characteristics that help children develop in this way – individual skills, inter-personal skills, social engagement and citizenship skills - and parents can help build all of these.

Individual skills and capacities

Every child has a different personality, but there are some skills that are important for all children in helping them to cope and thrive even when things are tough.

Help them learn to manage their feelings and behaviour (what psychologists call **self-regulation**) by:

- Acknowledging their feelings (“I know you are feeling angry/sad/...”).
- Helping them to label their feelings themselves.
- Helping them relax and calm down before reacting.
- Encouraging them to use ‘self-talk’ to calm themselves (E.g., “I’m sad because ..., but I can cope with that”).
- Encouraging them to do something that will help them feel better (E.g., “I’m going to cuddle the cat or go outside for a swing under the trees to make myself feel better”).
- Helping them to avoid ‘catastrophising’ the problem, and instead to think of positive sides to the problem.
- Help them to learn how to delay gratification – be prepared to work for a longer-term goal (like a healthy climate) even when it means missing out on shorter-term things (like lots of consumer goods).

Teach values of **justice and equity** in your children and adolescents by:

- Being a role model and mentor to them (E.g., by letting them see how you support disadvantaged people and fight for justice).
- Helping them expand their care and concern beyond their immediate circle of friends and family.
- Teaching them that people have different needs and that sometimes, for things to be ‘just’ and ‘fair’, some people will need more time, attention and support than others.
- Holding your children to high ethical standards, such as honouring their commitments, doing the right thing even when it is hard, standing up for others when they are being treated unjustly, and insisting that they’re being respectful, even if others around them are not behaving that way.
- Helping them to become ethical thinkers by listening to them and guiding them as they think through their own ethical dilemmas (E.g., whether to tell a teacher when they see their friends walking through the new garden beds that have just been planted; whether to buy some new clothes that they don’t really need so as to seem ‘cool’).

Individual skills and capacities

Encourage **flexibility and adaptability** by:

- Supporting them in trying new things, taking acceptable risks and experimenting with different 'selves'.
- Discussing all the possible ways that a problem could be handled (e.g. "How can we reduce the amount of plastic we use in this house?").
- Encouraging them to embrace changes and model doing this yourself. For example, if you had planned an activity but something comes up which prevents it, model being optimistic and positive about the change. If your children express disappointment at the change, let them know that this is OK and understandable, but also (when appropriate) ask them to think of all the enjoyable possibilities that this change might bring.
- Talking about how lifestyles will need to change to stop climate change, and how many of these changes could make us happier and healthier.
- Teach your children how to adapt and persevere. As they grow up, give your children opportunities to sort out a few challenges, so they learn how to cope and adapt, like making their own way home from school, or thinking through how to deal with a bully at school on their own before asking for help.

Remember to keep noticing and valuing all of these 'emotional intelligence' skills at least as much as 'academic' skills, and encourage schools and other people to value them too.





Interpersonal skills and relationships

Skills in interacting with others and building strong supportive relationships will be particularly important in a zero-carbon world, where our lives will be more inter-connected. They are also critical sources of resilience when facing climate-induced events like droughts and floods.

Teach your children **cooperation** by:

- Teaching them turn taking.
- Getting them to work on things together like chores or a problem that they need to solve.
- Praising them when you see them cooperating.
- Engaging them in team sports or other group activities which require teamwork, according to their interests.

Make sure you ***maintain a strong relationship*** with your children, even when things are tough, by:

- Making it clear that your love for them is unconditional.
- Making time for fun family activities.
- Showing interest in them and their lives.
- Talking about your feelings and encouraging them to do so too.
- Making sure nothing is 'off limits' for talking about.
- 'Being there' when they need to talk or support.

Interpersonal skills and relationships

Help your children to **build and maintain healthy relationships** with their friends and other community members by:

- Being interested in their friends, offering a welcoming place for friends to visit.
- Encouraging your children to “work it out” if they are having a problem with a friend or a group, rather than just quitting.
- Talking about how much you value friendships, and showing how friendships involve ‘give and take’ by both giving and receiving support from your friends.
- Encouraging them to have a diverse set of friends, including people with different backgrounds to themselves.
- Showing children how sharing and doing things together is more fun and sustainable, like inviting others over for shared meals, going on holidays together with friends, or helping with a neighbour’s tomato bottling or apple harvest.
- Showing your children how to look for the best in other people.
- Explaining to children the importance of **being a ‘giver’** – someone who likes to give and help other people. Take them with you when you are helping other people so they can share the sense of fulfillment that results, and can feel the appreciation that comes your way.
- Trying to make sure that your child feels a sense of belonging and being valued at school, and encourage them to develop good relationships with teachers.

Learn **negotiation and conflict resolution skills** and then use these with your children.

- Teach them how to say what their needs or concerns are, listen to the other person’s ideas and concerns, brainstorm creative ways of meeting everyone’s needs, and then to choose the best solutions which can meet most of the important needs. (See <http://bit.ly/wiseways> for teaching children conflict resolution.)





Social engagement – helping children make a difference in their communities

Becoming a contributing member of society is an important aspect of positive development.

Besides, to solve climate change, and to live in a climate-changed world, people will need to be closely engaged with their communities.

Encourage your children to be engaged with their community by:

- Giving them opportunities to engage meaningfully with their neighbours. E.g., taking meals over when someone is sick, offering to walk their pets, helping to fix a hole in the fence that their dog has dug, or even just stopping for a chat when coming and going.
- Helping them to be a 'joiner', by getting them involved in community groups and teams: Look out for local events like community board game afternoons, picnics, tree planting events, or the Australia Day cleanup.
- Helping them to get involved in volunteering and other forms of community engagement. E.g., they could join local climate action groups, or youth-focused climate groups (like the Australian Youth Climate Coalition), or Landcare groups.
- Encouraging children to speak up about problems they see in their community. Talk with them about whom they could contact to get action on these problems, and help them do this.
- Helping your children recognise their own skills and use them for good in the community. E.g., if your children love pulling things apart, take them along to your local repair café (or start one up if you don't have one yet!), and let them learn how to repair broken equipment.

Civic engagement – helping children become global citizens

We all must take on roles as active citizens if we are going to succeed in getting on top of climate change, stop its worst effects and prepare well for unavoidable changes. Teaching citizenship skills is important for children to feel they have some capacity to make change.

Teach your children **active citizenship skills** by:

- Taking your children along with you when you do your volunteer work.
- Getting them to join you on marches/protests.
- Showing them how to write letters and emails to politicians, CEOs of fossil fuel companies, etc.
- Going together to visit your local politician to ask for better climate policies.

Build your (older) children's awareness of **bigger-than-self issues**, like global issues and social justice:

- Talk about how climate change is going to be worse for people living in developing countries (where 85% of children live), and how unfair this is (since they didn't cause climate change).
- Discuss ways they could help them, like asking their school to bring in speakers who can raise awareness, raising money to send to communities that are affected by climate change, writing to the government to ask for more overseas aid.

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