

Aimee Maxwell: Talking to Children about Climate Change – September 2026

Clear, honest, practical advice and **concrete examples** characterised Dr Aimee Maxwell's presentation on talking to children about climate change. Coming from a background of [Deep Adaptation](#), Aimee's approach accepts that it is **likely that we are headed for societal collapse, but that it need not be catastrophic**. We can't offer our children complete certainty about the future, but we can offer '**honest loving company**' on the way there. Regulate your own feelings, do not succumb to 'doomerism', and allow room for children's feelings.

She emphasised that children **live very much in the present**, and are less concerned than adults about the broader geopolitical context. Meet them where they are, and **focus on their specific worries**, i.e. ask them 'What part is worrying you?'. If they hear something on the news or at school, or via an overheard adult conversation, **they want to know about the immediate effects on them**. Is it happening here? Is it happening tonight? Am I meant to fix it?

If they are **directly experiencing the impacts of climate instability** (fire, smoke, flood, heat or school disruption) they need to know what is happening now, what the adults are doing, and what happens next.

Children at different ages require different messaging. For young children, keep it **simple and brief**, focus on today and familiar routines. Increase the complexity with age. For primary school children **introduce justice** - causes and fairness, and have conversations about values. Emphasise that the problem is not theirs to fix. For ages 12 to 18 more open conversations can be had around **uncertainty, values and agency**, without burdening them with the need to provide solutions.

Some general principles for all conversations:

- **Give children words for their emotions**, and an opportunity to let it out. **Do not shut down their feelings or ignore them**. BUT, don't pathologise feelings either (avoid terms like 'climate anxiety').
- **Regulate your own emotions**, and find other adults to support you with these. **However**, it is ok to acknowledge your own emotions and give examples of how you deal with them. Let children know you can be emotional, AND emotionally available.
- **Tell the truth carefully**, in small doses, and pause often to check for emotional responses to the information, and that it has been understood. Do not answer a question your child has not asked.
- Let children know **we are all in this together** and there will be adults to help them, but don't let them feel overly responsible. The outcome does not depend on what they do.
- **Orient them to the here and now**, and get them involved in a practical activity – cooking, gardening, star-gazing. Make room for joy and pleasure in life.
- **Restore agency to older children** by offering actions that are shared, manageable and freely chosen (personal habits, family action, community action, civic participation).
- **Be comfortable with uncertainty and return to values** – we don't know where we're going, but we do know how to behave.

Aimee gave examples of **specific wording about climate change** that are appropriate for children of different ages, including **language to avoid**. For example, for young children you could say, 'The Earth is getting warmer because people have used a lot of fuels that make the air hold more heat. Many grown-ups are working on ways to make this better.' Avoid irreversible catastrophe and global predictions.

See Aimee's **presentation slides** for other examples.

Adolescents often think they need to protect adults by not talking about climate change. Offer them **honest solidarity**, and listen and engage with them **if they want to**.

Aimee also outlined situations where **more support is needed**, or when urgent assistance is called for. Do not be afraid to directly ask your child, 'Are you thinking about suicide?'

Above all, **keep the conversation open!**

Aimee closed with a reference to hope:

'Hope is not certainty about the future. It is a way of meeting the present without surrendering our capacity to care.'

Conversation afterwards was lively and wide-ranging, covering topics such as generational differences in responses to climate change, and what to do when people around us won't listen to us. Aimee's response? **Relationships are more valuable than protecting an imagined future.**

RESOURCES - Conversations, recovery and support

<https://www.unicef.org/parenting/talking-your-child-about-climate-change>

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/communication-and-meaning-making/>

What children need during disaster recovery

<https://mhpn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Episode-transcript-What-children-need-during-disaster-recovery.pdf>

Anxiety in children

Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

<https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/anxiety/>

Direct conversations about suicide and safety

Headspace

<https://headspace.org.au/assets/School-Support/How-to-talk-about-suicide-with-young-people.pdf>

Kids Helpline/Lifeline

<https://www.kidshelpline.com.au/get-help/phone-counselling/>