



## Communicate With Your Students About Climate Change

Move past the media mumble, and help your students understand global warming.

By [Amanda Wheat](#) | January 11, 2008



### For Kids Under 8

First, consider age. If he's under 8, it's best not to broach the subject unless you have to. Instead, strive to [strengthen his relationship with the environment](#) so that when the time comes, he will have already developed a passion and appreciation for nature. Hiking, camping, [gardening](#), and just stopping to notice natural beauty are all great ways to enhance this relationship. Reading [books](#) about forests, oceans, plants, or animals are also great ways to foster a relationship between your child and the natural world.

If your students ask you about global warming, respond with a short, reassuring answer. Stress that adults are working very hard to solve the problem. Unfortunately, one of the stigmas that accompanies climate change is that it is a burden that will be left to the next generation. But this burden is far too heavy for young children to wrap their minds around.

### For Older Children

Now you can handle the topic a little differently. Kids in grades 3 through 8 begin to develop the ability to think abstractly about more complex topics. They are ready to learn about current events, including global warming. More importantly, kids of this age are very likely to pick up both accurate *and* inaccurate information from peers and even teachers. So create opportunities to talk with your child about what she knows and doesn't know about global warming. Answer questions to the best of your ability, but admit defeat when you don't know something (then do some research together). This will encourage your kids to do the same in the future, and help them learn how to seek out answers.

Watch TV news shows or read print coverage aloud to each other. This can help you weigh your child's reactions to the issue. Is she bored with the scientific jargon? Scared of what will happen to the earth? Or excited to get involved and start making a

difference? Your child might grasp the problem and say, "I want to help!" Fantastic! You've just created a budding environmentalist, and the world certainly needs them. Encourage this enthusiasm along with optimism, emphasizing the fact that it is not too late to save the planet. You might discuss careers that help the environment (such as forest resource officer, hydrologist, geologist, agricultural technologist, biofuels engineer, solar sales representative, wind development associate, atmospheric scientist, meteorologist).

### Kid-Friendly Resources

While you research, talk about your opinions on climate change. When children understand the difference between fact and opinion they will feel more comfortable sharing their own thoughts.

- [\*The Down-to-Earth Guide to Global Warming\*](#), by Laurie David and Cambria Gordon, offers diagrams, games, trivia, celebrity quotes, and vibrant illustrations that truly take kids on a journey to understand the environment.
- The [Earth Guide](#) Web site also offers great interactive tools and diagrams about global warming.
- For some common kid questions and answers, take a look at the National Wildlife Federation's [Climate Classroom](#).

### Help Save the Earth Now

The easiest way to help your child aid the environment is to start [taking action](#) in your own home. Turn the lights off, conserve water, change to compact fluorescent light bulbs, and recycle! Home conservation options are endless, but every little bit matters and sets a good example for kids. Try these [100 Ways to Act Green!](#)

If children want to do more, help them get involved in a larger-scale environmental initiative. Look into restoring local wildlife habitat, conservation research programs, or awareness-building projects. You can also write to your mayor to help get your city involved in a [climate protection agreement](#) or create your own [backyard habitat](#).

The media has unparalleled power to focus mass attention on specific topics. Its latest pick is climate change, which has created a new and heightened awareness of the issue. But to be sure that understanding accompanies this awareness, communication is key. Take the initiative to talk with your kids about global warming, and replace trendy media talk with an old-fashioned nature walk!