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How to Talk About the Climate Crisis

We know how hard it can be to have conversations about climate change. What if people think differently to me? What if I get the details wrong? What if I make it too complicated? We've all been there at some point. This guide is designed to help you or your organisation to have conversations about the climate crisis. What it is, why it's important and what needs to be done to protect our planet.

What is climate change?

Climate change is a long-term shift in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may happen naturally, through natural causes like volcanic eruptions, changes in ocean currents, the Earth's orbital changes, solar variations. Or they can be caused by man-made actions such as the burning of fossil fuels.

Since the 1800s, human activities, such as burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas, have been the main driver of climate change. Human beings are responsible for the rate that global temperatures are changing. It has been found that it is important to keep the global temperature change below 1.5°C. This will be explained in more detail below.

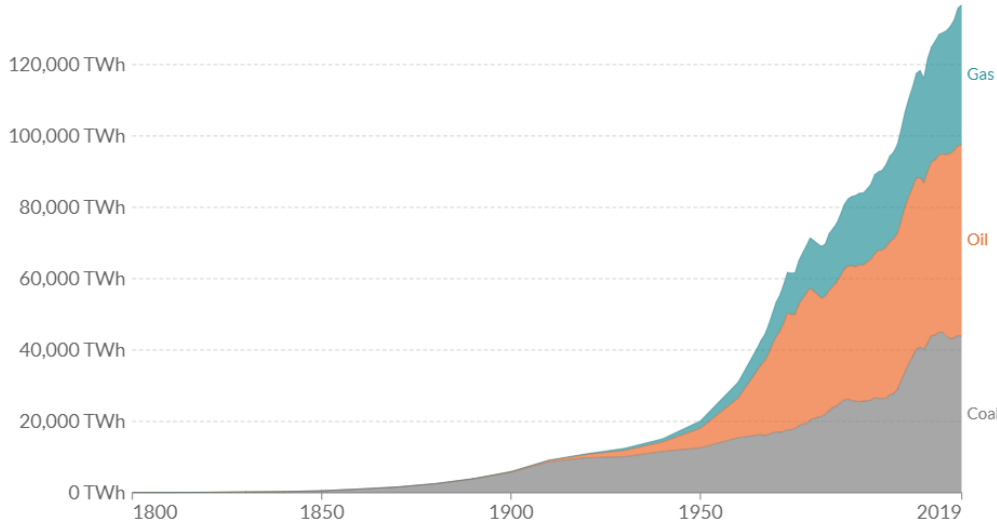


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Global fossil fuel consumption

Global primary energy consumption by fossil fuel source, measured in terawatt-hours (TWh).

Relative



Source: Vaclav Smil (2017), Energy Transitions: Global and National Perspective & BP Statistical Review of World Energy
OurWorldInData.org/fossil-fuels/ • CC BY

Burning fossil fuels generates greenhouse gas emissions. These emissions act like a blanket wrapped around the Earth, that traps the sun's heat and raising temperatures. Read a [simple guide to climate change](#) here.

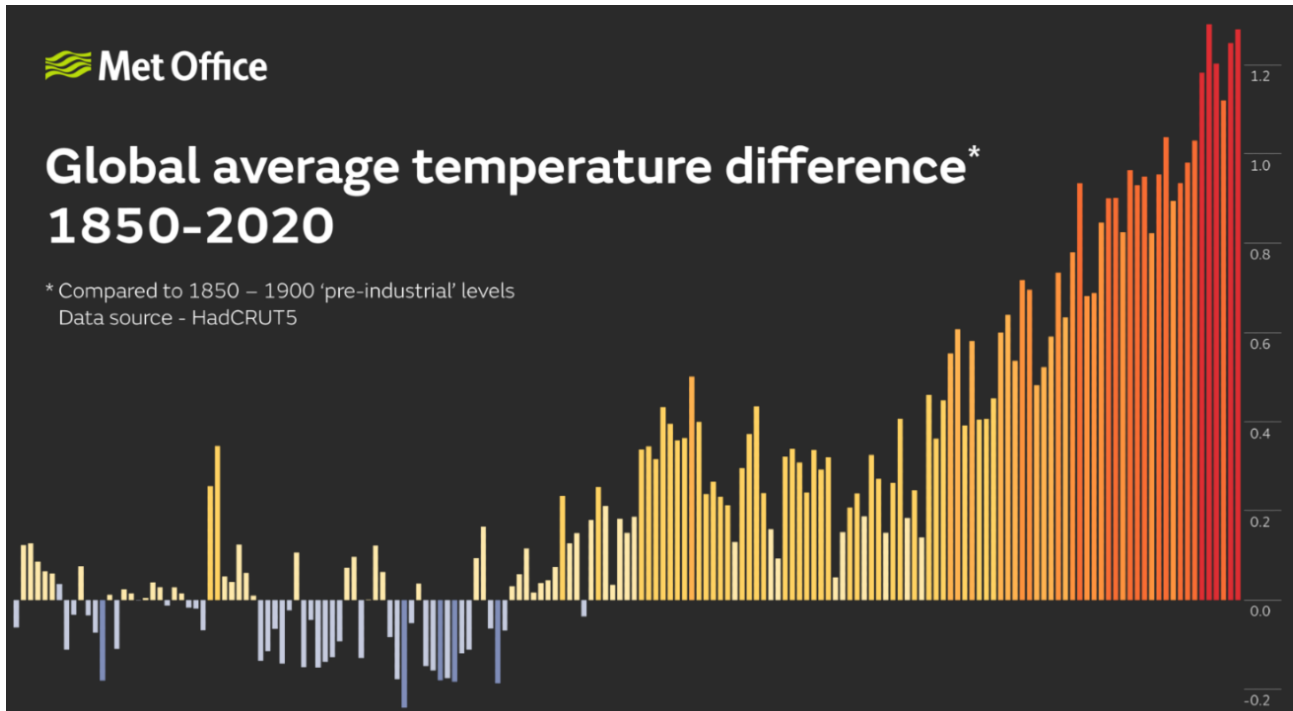
The burning of fossil fuels for energy began around the onset of the Industrial Revolution. But fossil fuel consumption has changed significantly over the past few centuries – both in terms of what and how much we burn. Fossil fuels are burned to provide energy but we also use them in everyday life every time we drive a car, take a bus, turn on a gas oven/hob, or a gas boiler.

As can be seen in the above graph Fossil fuel use has increased significantly over the past half-century, around eight-fold since 1950, and roughly doubling since 1980.

But the types of fuel we rely on has also shifted from solely coal towards a combination with oil, and then gas. Today, coal consumption is falling in many parts of the world. But oil and gas are still growing quickly.



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Greenhouse gas concentrations are at their highest levels in 2 million years. Data from many different studies were combined to establish the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) central annual global mean temperature shown in the graph above.

Why is this a problem?

Emissions continue to rise. As a result, the Earth is now about 1.1°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s. The [last decade \(2011-2020\) was the warmest on record](#).

Many people think climate change means warmer temperatures. But temperature rise is only the beginning of the story. Because the Earth is a system, changes in one area can influence changes in all others.

Warmer temperatures over time are already changing weather patterns and disrupting the usual balance of nature.

Why is it important?

The Climate crisis has already resulted in increased heat waves (with 2020 being one of the hottest years on record), more severe storms, increased drought, and increased health risk. If allowed to continue these effects will worsen and we will also see a loss



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of species, increased poverty and displacement, and not enough food to go around.

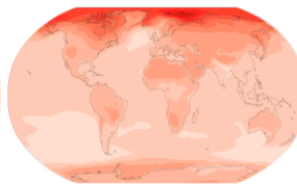
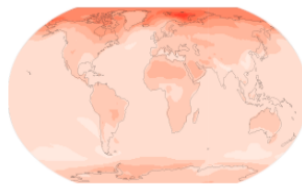
If left unchecked, climate change will undo a lot of the progress made over the past years in development. It can also exacerbate, as we are already seeing, current threats such as food and water scarcity, which can lead to conflict.

How the world could get warmer

Projected annual average temperature change relative to 1850-1900, at different levels of global warming

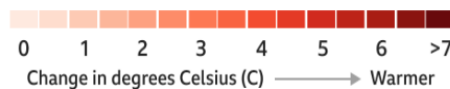
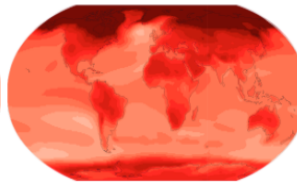
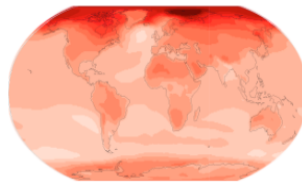
Change at 1C global warming

Change at 1.5C global warming



Change at 2C global warming

Change at 4C global warming



BBC

We can pay the bill now, or pay dearly in the future

Making things right and implementing new climate technologies is going to cost money. Governments and businesses are going to have to invest heavily to make this work. However, [climate inaction is vastly more expensive](#). If we act now, we can protect future generations from footing the bill for climate change.

Climate anxiety

Research shows that people are anxious about the climate crisis. This is why talking about these issues is so important. A new [study on climate anxiety in children and young people](#) came out on the 14th of September 2021.

59% of children and young people surveyed were very or extremely worried about climate change.



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More than half of respondents said they had felt afraid, sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and/or guilty.

Government inaction on climate change linked to psychological distress in young people - new study

Largest scientific study of its kind finds climate anxiety affects the daily life and functioning of nearly half of children and young people surveyed globally.

Press release

Published on Tuesday 14 September 2021

Last updated on Thursday 10 September 2021

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One of the best ways to face the climate crisis is [active hope](#). This is about finding, and offering, our best response to the crisis of sustainability unfolding in our world. Active hope means acting and working towards the change we want to see.

How does it affect me?

What is the impact of climate change?

Extreme weather events are happening more often and are becoming more intense. They are threatening people's lives and livelihoods. Global warming is turning [farmland into desert](#) in some regions. In others, extreme rainfall is causing catastrophic flooding. Those who will suffer the most are those in poorer countries.

They do not have the money to adapt to climate change as easily. Scientists have suggested that at least [550 species could go extinct this century](#) if we do not make significant changes now.

How will different parts of the world be affected?

Climate change has different effects in different parts of the world. Some places are getting hotter, some wetter and some drier.



If the global temperature rise cannot be kept within 1.5°C:

- The UK and Europe will see regular extreme flooding
- Countries in the Middle East will experience extreme heatwaves and huge proportions of farmland will be lost
- Some island nations might disappear under rising seas
- Many African nations are likely to experience extreme droughts and increased food shortages
- Australia is likely to suffer extremes of heat and drought

What needs to be done?

Obviously, it is key that worldwide and governmental change is essential. However, personal action and collective, political action need to work together to help stop the climate crisis. Agency and action matter regardless of what forms they take. Ultimately, how, when, where, and in what form to act is up to you. The most important thing is simply to act.

What can individuals do?

It is important to remember that one person can't do everything. This isn't about becoming the perfect being. It is about all of us taking small steps towards a better future. Whilst the biggest steps need to be taken by governments and businesses, individuals can act too. Why not try:

- Taking fewer flights
- Living car-free or using an electric car
- Buying energy-efficient products when they need replacing
- Switch from a gas heating system to an electric heat pump
- Turn off your lights when you aren't using them

Try using [Giki Zero](#), an online guide to calculate and reduce your carbon footprint.

What can businesses do?

There are some brilliant resources for reducing your carbon footprint which you can read below:

- [Going Green Together – Act](#)
- [Beenetzero](#)
- [10 Actions Companies Can Adopt To Fight Climate Change](#)



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What are governments doing?

Countries agree climate change can only be tackled by working together. In a landmark agreement in Paris in 2015, they pledged to try to keep global warming to 1.5C. The UK hosted a summit for world leaders, called COP26, in November 2021, where countries set out their carbon reduction plans for 2030.

Many countries have pledged to get to [net zero](#) by 2050. This means reducing greenhouse gas emissions as much as possible and increasing greenhouse gas absorption (with increases in initiatives such as tree planting, seagrass planting etc.)