



“ Speak up for the planet

Your guide
to having
climate change
conversations



The science couldn't be clearer.

We are facing a climate crisis that threatens the future of life on Earth. We need to talk about climate change more than ever. Day-to-day conversations between friends, family or colleagues can make change happen.

We know it can be difficult to have a conversation about climate change. It's not easy to push back against strong opinions, deal with awkward silences or find the confidence to speak up about what you care about, particularly on a topic as politically and emotionally charged as climate change.



That's why we spoke to our legal and policy experts to get their advice on how to have constructive climate conversations. They should know – it's what they do every single day.

In this guide, you'll find five key tactics to having climate conversations plus useful facts and resources to help you speak up for our planet.

Thank you for joining us – together we can protect life on Earth.



Five key tactics



Tactic #1: Ask questions

It's important to remember that the person you're talking to might not have the same values or everyday concerns as you.

Constructive conversations aren't about lecturing people with your own views – if people feel judged or guilty, they are likely to get defensive or disengage from the conversation. Take time to understand them.

Start by asking open questions to discover what they care about and what they believe - the better you understand the beliefs and values of the person you're talking to, the better equipped you'll be to engage them in the climate conversation.



Avoid asking people 'why' they believe what they do (which can sound judgmental) – instead listen, ask open questions and allow them to reflect on their views. We all suffer from “an illusion of understanding,” meaning we are often over-confident in our own views and overestimate our understanding of the topic.

As you dive deeper into their thinking, it's likely they will realise they don't know as much as they think. In turn, they will become more open to alternative views or arguments.



ClientEarth in action:

Anaïs Berthier,
Head of EU Advocacy



We start by asking the right questions to understand the economic, political and cultural realities and then work with lawmakers to push for new environmental laws and policies are strong and coherent.

The European Green Deal is the EU's plan to make the economy sustainable and the EU carbon neutral by 2050. It covers policy initiatives and laws on climate, agriculture, biodiversity, energy, forests and pollution. We work with decision-makers at EU level to ensure environmental protection is integrated into all EU policies and that the legislation adopted is of the highest level of ambition. It's fundamental that we ask the right questions and really understand the competing priorities of decision-makers, to ensure we present our proposals in a way they can get behind.



Tactic #2: Reframe the issue

For many people, climate change feels like a distant problem that won't impact them personally, so they tend not to engage with the topic.

You need to build a narrative that resonates with them.

If you've asked the right questions, you'll understand what motivates them and what they care about. Focus the conversation on connecting climate change with the things that interest them.

We've included three themes to help you get started.



The economy:

Taking climate action will be beneficial to economic growth in the long-term. There are many economic and industrial opportunities from investing in the infrastructure and technology needed for a net-zero society. In the UK, zero- and low-carbon goods and services already represent one of the fastest-growing parts of the economy.

What's more, taking action on climate change would reduce the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events like flooding and heatwaves that can have a huge economic cost. Between 1980 and 2011 floods affected more than 5.5 million people globally and caused direct economic losses of more than €90 billion.

Protecting nature:

We can't solve the biodiversity crisis without also solving the climate crisis. Right now, one million plant and animal species are at risk of extinction, many due to our rapidly changing climate. The rate at which our planet's climate is changing means many species are unable to adapt quickly enough.



Our health:

Climate change is expected to be the biggest human health threat of the 21st century.

An increase in the frequency of heatwaves will leave more people exposed to extreme heat. Infectious diseases are also likely to spread more easily. Higher temperatures create perfect conditions for reproduction of diseases whilst changing climates mean the insects which carry diseases can survive in more regions of the world. Changing weather patterns will also affect crop production – particularly wheat and rice production – and the availability of fresh water. This will likely cause undernutrition and other related health problems for the world's poorest communities.



ClientEarth in action:

Joanne Etherton,
Climate Finance Lead



Climate change is transforming the world we live in, including the financial stability of our economy. To drive climate action within businesses and industry, we focus on the financial risk of climate change.

Climate change is no longer just an environmental issue. The impact of climate change on the foundation of our economies make it a financial risk too, which needs to be reported on and mitigated. We work with regulators and investors to push businesses to take action on climate-related risks. For example, we launched a shareholder lawsuit against Polish energy company Enea over the financial risks posed by its investment in a new coal plant. Soon after, Enea announced it would suspend funding of the project over economic concerns.



Tactic #3: Tell a convincing story

Now you know what angle you're going to take – think about how you're going to make your point. Humans find it much easier to relate to experiences and stories than facts and figures so follow the classic story structure – setup, problem and resolution.

Setup:

Where possible, focus on the human experience of climate change - it makes it instantly more relatable. Why not start by talking about the impact of climate change on your own experiences? Why you are passionate about it? What triggered you to start taking action?



Problem:

You don't have to be an expert, or know all the facts, to talk about climate change, but if you're able to confidently explain the problem, it will help strengthen your case.

Solution:

Lots of people feel overwhelmed by climate change, so will switch off if they feel the problem is insurmountable. Make sure you can talk about some of the great things that are already happening and the solutions we already know work.



ClientEarth in action:

Sophie Marjanac,
Climate Accountability Lead



Stories have the power to reach across the world. The people of the Torres Strait / Zenadth Kes are on the frontline of the climate crisis and needed to tell their story. By sharing their personal experiences with the world, they have inspired thousands to take action and call for change.

Traditional life on the islands of the Torres Strait / Zenadth Kes is under existential threat from climate impacts like rising seas. Our lawyers are assisting a group of Zenadth Kes Islander people to bring a world-first complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee against the Australian Government over its inaction on climate change. Alongside the legal case, the claimants launched a campaign to protect their island homes.



They shared their story around the world and launched a petition calling for their Government to rapidly reduce its emissions and commit funding for more climate-adaptation measures. The petition has received over 30,000 signatures.

Stories like these make climate change a human issue that people can relate to.



Tactic #4: Know your stuff

Facts are hard to refute, and when it comes to the climate crisis, there is a lot of useful evidence you can depend on to help you make your point and explain the problem and solutions of climate change. Prepare some facts in advance to help support your story.

Here are the basics to get you started:

- The 2015 Paris Agreement was a landmark global response to combat climate change. It set a target limit of global temperature increase to 2°C above pre-industrial levels (1850-1900).



- An increase in average global temperatures risks sea level rise, extreme weather and the loss of species and habitats as well as food scarcity and increasing poverty for millions of people worldwide.
- By limiting global temperature increase to 1.5°C, we aim to reduce the most severe impacts of climate change.
- Already the average global temperature has increased 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels.
- Between 2020 and 2030, global fossil fuel production needs to decrease year-on-year to limit global warming to 1.5°C. However, the UN Environment Programme has found governments plans and projections indicate an average 2% annual increase for coal, oil and gas.

Useful resources:

- Global Warming of 1.5°C, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- Production Gap Report, UN Environment Programme
- Net-Zero by 2050, IEA



ClientEarth in action:

Gillian Lobo,
Senior Lawyer, UK Litigation Specialist



**We have proven that we will
not shy away from challenging
governments and businesses –
including through the courts.**

With over a decade of experience, we know how to use the law as a lever of change, particularly how to enforce it. Our legal teams spend months preparing and planning, looking for unique and innovative ways to use the law to bring about impactful change. We challenged the UK government's decision to approve plans to build Europe's biggest gas plant over climate concerns – the project has since been cancelled. We launched a complaint against BP over its ad campaign which we believed was greenwashing. Just months after, BP pulled the campaign and announced it would stop 'corporate reputation advertising'.



Tactic #5: Keep calm

Last but not least, keep calm. It can be frustrating that people are still in denial about climate change, or unwilling to support climate action despite overwhelming evidence. But it's important to remember, even if you don't end up changing their mind, that every conversation counts.

By speaking up for the planet, you are helping shift the global conversation towards making change happen. And change is happening. Action is being taken at every level – global, national, corporate and individual. It's important to remember that, especially when you feel overwhelmed or hopeless.



To help you stay calm, we asked our ClientEarth experts to share their favourite good news stories from the last year – here are some of the great things happening:

[Australian court finds government has duty to protect young people from climate crisis, The Guardian](#)

[EU proposes adding shipping to its carbon trading market, Reuters](#)

[DHL Express buys electric cargo planes for U.S. package delivery from start-up Eviation, CNBC](#)

[Good progress on greening the Belt and Road Initiative, CCICED](#)

[5 things to know about the EU single-use plastics ban, DW](#)

[Green-pawed sea otters are saving California's kelp forests, ScienceFocus](#)

[Shell: Netherlands court orders oil giant to cut emissions, BBC](#)



ClientEarth in action:

James Thornton,
CEO & Founder



We are driven by the desire for change. Our goals are large and the problems we address are growing, but I have no doubt that we can save the future.

The Paris Agreement is proof that humanity can come together to protect life on Earth. It has mobilised action on climate change at every level. The law now needs to shape a set of directions for how to act. That's where ClientEarth comes in. We will continue to work with policymakers and regulators to ensure environmental laws are strong; to hold governments and businesses to account and enforce the law; to push for citizens' rights to information and to go to court over environmental matters. A future in which people and planet thrive together isn't just possible – it's essential, and we all have a part to play in making that future a reality.



Common arguments and how to respond





It's a future problem, it won't impact us.



Climate change is happening now. Already in Europe we are seeing longer periods of drought, more frequent heatwaves and fires and an increase in the frequency and intensity of heavy rainfall. Around the world, changing weather patterns, rising sea levels and extreme weather events are impacting communities more than ever.



It's too late to do anything



It is not too late but the longer we wait, the harder it will get. The latest report from the IPCC states that past emissions alone are unlikely to raise global temperatures to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels so we can avoid warming above this level – but this is dependent on how quickly we can reduce our carbon emissions.



Climate change is part of the natural cycle.



The current speed of warming is more than ten times that at the end of an ice age. The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that human influence on our climate is now an established fact.



Nothing I do will have an impact.



While action at international, national and big business levels is crucial, individuals can have an impact and it will take all of us to turn this around. As an individual, you have a role in driving climate action from governments, businesses and all parts of society - pressure on the powerful can lead to big changes.





Our carbon footprint is trivial compared to China



Fighting climate change is a whole world effort, all countries need to play their part. Countries like the UK are very well placed to reduce emissions and should lead by example. China has pledged to peak carbon emissions before 2030 and reach carbon neutrality before 2060. So far, China has always delivered on, and exceeded, its climate commitments, and it's making great efforts to continue to do so.



We don't need to change, we just need to capture our carbon



Relying solely on carbon capture technology would be a huge risk. Carbon capture at scale is unproven and current global carbon capture and storage capacity accounts for about 0.1% of global fossil fuel emissions.



Technological advances will find a solution



The IPCC's scenario for limiting warming to 1.5°C already assumes technological advances. We have to reduce our global emissions as well as put our hopes on unknown technological developments to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change on our planet.

What's more, our climate responds to cumulative carbon emissions so we must start reducing our carbon emissions now to stay within the 1.5°C limit.

We do not have time to wait for future technologies.



About ClientEarth

ClientEarth is an environmental law charity with a unique approach, using the law to fight climate change, tackle pollution, defend wildlife and protect life on Earth.

To meet these global challenges, our lawyers and policy experts work with partners and campaigners around the world to find solutions that really work – and change the system for good.

We help write effective, enforceable laws and go to court when laws are broken. We advise decision-makers on policy and train legal and judicial professionals on environmental law.



We have taken governments to court and won, stopping major polluting projects in their tracks. We have protected irreplaceable forests and wildlife. The power of the law lets us hold governments and business to account, defending the rights of people and nature to a healthy planet.

Because a future in which people and planet thrive together isn't just possible: it's essential.

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