



10 + 1 tools to discuss environmental issues with children and the youth

At the nature school of Haltia The Finnish Nature Centre we want to provide everyone with tools to discuss our big and small environmental problems with children and the youth. Moreover, they should be discussed in a way that takes emotions into account. Here are our 10 + 1 tips:

1. Do not remain silent, speak. To remain silent in the face of environmental issues does not mean that a child might not have heard or would not be worried about environmental issues. 70 per cent of the youth in Finland are worried about climate change (Youth Barometer 2018, YLE). A discussion can be fruitful to both the child and adult.

2. Ask, listen out for and point out in words that you understand emotions. Ask what the young person is concerned about and why. Take their worries seriously, and do not put down the thoughts of a young person. Let them tell their thoughts freely. You can acknowledge emotional aspects simply by saying e.g. "I can see that this issue makes you sad". In case you have felt sad for the same reasons, you can tell about it.

3. Deal with different kinds of threats in a reasonable way. There is no reason to cover up the threats. They have different kinds of impacts, some bigger and some smaller. It is good to remember to deal with each one of them based on true information.

4. Put things into specific terms. Especially with smaller children being concrete is the best way to talk things through. For instance, with a very small child you can talk about what kind of concrete impacts litter has for animals living in nature, and think about what you can do together to reduce the impacts.

5. Have the courage to face change. You might need to shatter the perceptions of your own and of a child or a young person in order to form a new kind of realistic trust into a good future.



6. Do not escape the responsibility. Saving the world is in charge of the adults. They take care of the big solutions. There are many people constantly trying to resolve the problems with great effort. The adults who do not take actions directly, can at least vote. Remember, that the smaller a child in question, the more problematic it is to demand responsibility of them.

7. Act. Do something concrete together and remember to adapt it to the child's age: go for a hike, search a political candidate interested in environmental issues, build a bird house, pick up litter, learn to recycle material you have not recycled before, find means to consume less etc.

8. The power of saying "I don't know". Information on climate change and other threats is often difficult to understand even for adults. You can look for true and concrete information together with a young person. Remember to use trustworthy sources of information.

9. Hope - and remember success stories. There are already several solutions to environmental issues and threats. Tell about how much we are doing and how much we know. For example, in Finland the current status of freshwater lakes is a lot better than it would be without the water purification processes first implemented in the 1970s. Preventing the ozone depletion has been a great success from an international perspective.

10. Remember that the world does not stop, it only changes. We have a chance to adapt and live on. Human kind has undergone big changes in the past and we are still here. Some of the things that might seem very difficult now might not be hard at all to achieve in the future.

In addition:

11. Guide a child or a young person to another adult. If you do not consider yourself the right person to discuss the environmental issues and thoughts with a child or a young person, let them know who else to turn to. The issue might be of a highly serious concern to the child even though you might not feel the same way.

This material has been written by the personnel of Haltia's nature school and customer service. The main sources are researchers Panu Pihkala and Maria Ojala, whose expertise has been expanded with the pedagogic and hands-on experience of Haltia's personnel in environmental education and working with children and the youth.

SOURCES

Researcher Panu Pihkala, <https://ekoahdistus.blogspot.com/2018/11/miten-puhua-lapselle-ilmastonmuutoksesta.html>

Researcher Maria Ojala, <https://prefiguringsustainablefutures.wordpress.com/>

Nuorisobarometri (Youth Barometer), YLE <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10346864>

Haltia's Trace exhibition: <https://www.haltia.com/en/visit-haltia/exhibitions/special-exhibition/trace/>

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