



Lost for words

Speaking to children about eco anxiety

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A coachee's 11 year old daughter saw the news of the LA wildfires and asked: "will this be what we have to face as well? Will we be safe? What will it be like when I grow up?"

How do we hold space for our children and their fears?

As adults, we often see ourselves as problem solvers. This can feel like an impossible weight, especially as we don't always know how to respond. So out of overwhelm we sometimes say something that is meant to be reassuring but that quickly puts a lid on any further expression. This doesn't make children's fear go away, they just learn that we are not available to hear them out.

It is so hard to sit with our children's fear, knowing that we can't solve it or fix it. But what children (and adults) need most in these moments isn't answers, but connection.

Here's how we can hold space for eco-anxiety in the shadow of increasing crises:

- 1. Validate:** "Name it, to tame it" is a simple, science-backed technique you can use to calm spiralling negative thoughts or intense emotions. Naming our emotional states, re-activates the prefrontal cortex and calms us down, especially if our feelings are validated by another. You can say: "it sounds like you are really anxious about your future and I can understand why you worry when you see these images".
- 2. Acknowledge the fear:** Avoid platitudes like, "It's going to be okay." Instead, meet their questions with honesty: "I don't have all the answers. I can't see into the future, but I'm here with you. You are not alone. We are a good team ..."
- 3. Focus on shared values:** Talk about what you both care about—protecting nature, helping others, or standing up for what's right. Talk about what makes you angry and what feels unfair—and translate this into values you both hold. This helps children feel that your



family has a moral compass and that this can give guidance on finding small and not so small ways to act on those values together.

4. Provide stability in chaos: Even when everything feels unstable, relationships can anchor us. Showing up—fully present and open—can make all the difference. By holding space for the difficult emotions, we can build a foundation of courage, care, and connection—qualities that will carry us and future generations through.

5. Model resilience: It's okay to say, "I don't know," or, "This is hard for me too." Showing children how we navigate difficult emotions teaches them that we can face challenges without losing hope.

And most importantly remember to prioritise connection over solutions: Children don't need perfect answers—they need to feel safe in their relationships. Being present, listening without judgment, and simply sitting with their emotions is often more powerful than making up solutions.

By holding space for difficult emotions and staying connected, we help children—and ourselves—develop the skills of psychological resilience that can carry us through an uncertain future.