

NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Perhaps more than anything else, we want children to feel and be safe. It's a natural instinct to want to protect them from the harsher realities of life. However, climate change poses a very real and ongoing threat. Your family may have already experienced bigger storms and hotter summers or had to stay indoors due to smoky, unhealthy air. Maybe you've had to evacuate from wildfires or floods. Unfortunately, climate scientists are warning us that these kinds of climate change impacts are going to increase in the years ahead. When faced with any of these difficult events, children want and need to understand why their lives may be changing. The ongoing threats to our communities are real, and it makes sense when both kids and adults become concerned about climate change. In fact, feelings of distress are a sign that we care about the well-being of life on Earth.

Even if you live in an area that hasn't undergone severe impacts from climate change, kids are besieged with news about it from television, car radios, friends, social media, and overheard adult conversations that often describe the most extreme weather events. Powerful images of destruction and hearing from people traumatized by a climate event can lead children to make wrong assumptions about the immediate dangers for them and their family.

Many schools are beginning to introduce a climate curriculum into their classrooms, but it doesn't typically include coping tools to support the feelings that can be triggered when kids learn what it means to live in a warming world. The disappearing glaciers and how that devastates polar bears and other arctic wildlife; the decline

in bee and other insect populations and the effect of that on the food cycle; and the myriad forms of suffering that climate change is visiting on people, land, other animals, and cultures: It's not surprising that children may become frightened or confused. Kids need help to put climate change into perspective and feel supported in their individual and family lives.

While you can't fix climate change for your child, you can help them discover the facts, know they're not alone, and find ways to take action together. It really matters to kids how the important adults in their lives respond to their concerns. If their caregiver avoids the topic, it makes them more anxious. Seeing adults working to protect and care for the Earth and prioritizing sustainable actions carries a powerful message to kids. This is an opportunity to not only provide good parenting but also to continue your own personal discovery of eco-wise living and how to live more sustainably.

Climate change is a challenging subject for most adults, too, and entering into family discussions may multiply your own complex feelings. Remember that children are affected by the emotions of those around them, especially family. While you want to acknowledge and validate the feelings that climate change can trigger in your child, you don't want to process your feelings with them. It's important that you also have supportive adults to talk to. Don't let your own fears lead to sharing your speculations about the future. Think of ways you can take care of your own emotions so you can be available for your children. Can you do something like go for a walk or talk to a friend before talking to your

children? If you don't already have support, consider talking with other parents about how they cope or joining an organization that offers family-oriented environmental education and projects in the community.

It's also helpful to brush up on climate science, and there are many reliable resources online such as NASA and National Geographic Kids. But what's more important than knowing all the answers are the ways you can connect with your child throughout the exploration. Caring for the environment can become a valuable and ongoing conversation. Read through this book first to familiarize yourself with the ideas and exercises presented. When you start the conversation about climate change, ask your child what they know and how they feel about the topic. You might be surprised to learn how much they've already heard, including unfounded misperceptions that need to be corrected. Give your child your full attention, and listen closely to their feelings, questions, and hopes. Without minimizing their worries, let them know that you care about the future of the Earth, too. If they're frightened, you can express something like this: "I know that climate change is big and it can feel overwhelming, but I also know that there's so much we can do to make a difference. Let's read this book together. I don't have all the answers, but I know it's a very important subject and we can learn together. Let's keep talking: I like to hear what you're feeling and thinking. Let's set up a regular time to do this." Tell the truth gently. Rather than lecturing, make sure that your answers are in response to what your child is curious about. Follow their lead, paying attention to when they

need a break from the topic. It's most effective to provide information in small doses, giving them time to take it in and think about it. And be sure to read together about the many wonderful people and organizations working every day to reverse climate change.

Climate psychology understands that addressing eco-anxiety in kids and adults has two core components: validating and learning ways to deal directly with emotional distress, and finding out how to take action and become part of creating a safer, healthier world. *What to Do When Climate Change Scares You* provides you and your child with step-by-step guidance and exercises in both of these areas. As you learn together, you'll discover the importance of social/environmental justice. As greener policies are being developed at all levels of government, meaningful change needs to prioritize the fair treatment of all people, regardless of color, national origin, or income. This is explored in kid-friendly terms in Chapter Six.

Climate change has unfortunately become an inevitable part of life, and this book can guide your efforts to help kids navigate the present and future challenges more successfully. But focusing on the exploration as a family offers the possibility of much more than improved coping. There remains the very real need and opportunity to rise to what's perhaps the greatest challenge in our history. We want to leave our children the legacy of a better world than the one we inherited. We all have a role to play in driving the cultural shift toward a healthier world—and when enough people work together, we can make a significant difference in our children's future.

CHAPTER 1

Your Feelings About a Changing Planet



Ready to start a learning adventure and discover more about yourself and our beautiful planet?

You'll be zooming out into space and peeking up close at the plants and animals to learn more about how climate change is warming up our world. And you'll be exploring your feelings and finding out how to care for this amazing place called Earth where we all live.