

EARTH TALK

Questions & Answers About Our Environment

Dear EarthTalk: Do you have any tips for explaining global warming and other complex environmental problems to my kids?

— Peter Buckley, Pittsburgh, PA

Kids today may be more eco-savvy than we were at their age, but complex topics like global warming may still mystify them.

Luckily there are many resources available to help parents teach their kids how to understand the issues and become better stewards for the planet.

A great place to start is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) "A Student's Guide to Global Climate Change" website.

The site is divided into sections (Learn the Basics, See the Impacts, Think like a Scientist and Be Part of the Solution) so kids can get just the right amount of detail without feeling overwhelmed.

One feature of the site is a virtual trip around the world to see the effects of climate change in different regions.

An emissions calculator—with questions tailored to kids' lifestyles—helps connect everyday actions (like running

the water while brushing teeth) and climate change.

And a FAQ page answers some of the most common questions about climate change in easy-to-read short paragraphs.

Another great online resource is NASA's Climate Kids website, which engages kids with games, videos and craft activities and offers digestible info on what's causing climate change and how kids can make a difference.

A guided tour of the "Big Questions" (What does climate change mean? What is the greenhouse effect? How do we know the climate is changing? What is happening in the oceans? and others) uses cartoon characters and brightly colored designs to help kids come to grips with the basics.

Perhaps even more engaging for those eight and older is Cool It!, a card game from the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS).

The game, designed in collaboration with science educators, requires players to collect "solution" cards in the categories of energy, transportation and forests, while slowing opponents down by playing "problem" cards along the way.

"The game enables teachers and parents to talk about global warming in a fun and hopeful way," reports UCS. "Kids, meanwhile, will learn that all of us make choices that determine whether the world warms a little or a lot, and which of those choices reduce global warming emissions." The game is available for purchase (\$7.95) directly from the UCS website.

Younger kids curious about climate change can consult the Professor Sneeze



There are many resources available to help parents and educators teach kids how to understand environmental issues and become better stewards for the planet. (Photo courtesy of Global Imagination)

website, which features online illustrated children's stories that present global warming in a familiar context.

The stories for five- to eight-year-olds follow a cartoon bunny on various warming related adventures. A few of the story titles include "The Earth Has a Fever," "Where Are the Igloos of Iglooville?" and "Tears on the Other Side of the World." The site also features stories geared toward 8 to 10-year-olds and 10 to 12-year-olds.

Of course, teachers can play a key role in making sure kids are well versed in the science of climate change.

A recently launched initiative from the National Center for Science Education (NCSE)—long respected for its work in defending and supporting the teaching of evolution in the public schools—aims to help teachers do a

better job of teaching climate change in the classroom.

The group's Climate Change Education website points teachers to a treasure trove of resources they can use to demystify the science behind global warming, combat "climate change denial" and support "climate literacy."

CONTACTS: EPA's "A Student's Guide to Global Climate Change," www.epa.gov/climatestudents; NASA Climate Kids, <http://climatekids.nasa.gov>; NCSE's Climate Change Education Initiative, <http://ncse.com/climate>; Professor Sneeze, www.contespedagogiques.be/pages/accueil_angl.html.

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