



## Helping Children Understand Global Warming

When a complex “adult” issue intrudes into the lives of children, they need extra support to understand how it fits into their own lives. Without that support, they are left to use their limited experience and child-size knowledge (and fears) to grapple with something powerful and potentially overwhelming. Global warming is such an issue.

Children hear these words—or their variation, “climate change”—everywhere, from the classroom to the family dinner table to the movies. It’s a topic of great concern even for adults. For children, it can be terrifying. Children may have unrealistic expectations about their individual responsibility for and ability to change the course of this global event.

We at Audubon Adventures believe this serious topic is an important one for children to understand as fully as possible. It is a topic that belongs in the classroom, just as learning about the workings of earth-quakes, the study of habitats, and news of severe weather do. It’s a topic rich in science (earth science, life science, and physical science) and geography. The tricky part is that it’s happening even as we’re learning about it. It can also be controversial, because its causes and consequences and what to

### What Does It Mean?

#### A Quick-Reference Glossary

**climate change:** the slow process of shifts in Earth’s weather patterns. Global warming is a type of climate change.

**compact fluorescent bulb:** a type of light bulb that lasts longer and uses less energy than an incandescent (“regular”) light bulb.

**fossil fuel:** fuel, such as oil, coal, and natural gas, formed deep inside Earth from the remains of plants and animals that lived in the distant past.

**global warming:** the process by which temperatures on Earth are rising slowly as a result of the build-up of carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere, which is caused by the burning of fossil fuels.

do about it spill over into the political arena.

The National Audubon Society fully agrees with the United Nations and leading scientists in the U.S. and around the world that global warming is a fact and that it is caused by human activities. The latter—that the engine of global warming is human activity—reveals the dual nature of the problem that we want to help children grasp: People caused it; people can take steps to remedy it. In other words, yes, there’s trouble, but there’s also hope for the future because we have recognized the problem, we are smart, and we are on the case.



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Here are some simple recommendations that can help you talk about global warming with children in your classroom:

- 1 Give them the facts.** The facts may be sobering, but they can help dispel unrealistic fears and expectations. Knowing the facts about what’s scaring you is the best defense. Learn as much as you can about the topic on your own. Answers to many questions about global warming can be found at [www.audubon.org/globalWarming/GetTheFacts.php](http://www.audubon.org/globalWarming/GetTheFacts.php). Here you will also find a copy of the United Nations’ report, “Climate Change 2007: Mitigation of Climate Change.”

- 2 Reassure children** that the disasters often described as consequences of global warming are neither close at hand nor inevitable.
- 3 Try to avoid the “blame game”** because that invites both anger and guilt. Instead, point out that people didn’t always know that burning fossil fuels would cause a problem like this. Now that they know, they’re doing something about it.
- 4 Help children understand** that the actions of individuals in their daily lives (such as using compact fluorescent light bulbs, walking more/driving less, using less plastic, and so on) do

make a difference when they’re added to the actions of millions of other individuals. Slowing and stopping the trend of global warming requires commitment on a large scale from governments, businesses, and people around the world.

- 5 Bring parents into the discussion.** Let them know how you are dealing with this topic at school. Share these tips and the facts with them so they can support their children’s need for both knowledge and reassurance.