

We need to talk.

These days, having a conversation with someone whose opinions run counter to yours can seem terrifying.

The fear of starting an argument is enough to keep people from interacting with anyone who might possibly disagree with them. But thanks to Carnegie Mellon University's Gabrielle Wong-Parodi, they may not have to be afraid—at least when it comes to expressing opinions about climate change.

Wong-Parodi, an assistant research professor in the Department of Engineering and Public Policy, studies evidence-based strategies for informed decision-making, and recently, she's been focused on the problem of communicating climate science in ways that are both ethical and effective. According to her, you don't have to be afraid to speak your mind, and these are her tips for how to do it well.



Listen first.

The quickest way to show someone that you care about their opinion is to listen. If you show them the courtesy of listening to their position, they are much more likely to do the same for you.

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Ask Why.

"After you've listened to their position," Wong-Parodi says, "ask them why they think the way they think, to affirm their belief in their position." This will not only help them feel that you're really listening to them, but it will also help you to understand what counter-information will be relevant to their beliefs.



Do your research.

"You'll want to arm yourself with two to four, well-researched talking points about climate change, so you go into the conversation ready to present evidence, rather than arguing from opinion or belief," she says.

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Make it a conversation.

"So often, these topics are so highly politicized, and very polarizing," she says. "By making sure you're both hearing and understanding each other—having a conversation—you make it less about opposing view points, and more about what it should be about: the science."

Don't be discouraged.

"Don't feel frustrated should this not have an effect. You need to have multiple conversations with people over time," Wong-Parodi says. "You never know—the thing you say today may not change someone's mind tomorrow, but maybe in 6 or 8 months, something you said will have stuck with them. Quite often, with respect to climate change, what changes people's minds are both these kinds of conversations with family members, but also the evidence they see around them, which is only getting worse."

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