Responding to difficult questions and hostile encounters

Talking to people on the street can be difficult!

As well as asking some questions you don't know the answer to, sometimes people can be angry towards activists/XR.

This page should help you deal with these encounters more easily.

Remember to BREATHE

Breathe - ground yourself, look at the support around you
Remember - the humanity of all, even those on the other side are human!
Empathy - before education, empathise, be calm, drop their guard
Ask first - is the other person ready to hear your view? Are they still angry?
THE reason - remember why you are there, & ground yourself in that

How to win a climate argument

People are not rational. Confirmation bias and denial mean that people will argue ridiculous arguments even when presented with clear evidence because their defences are up. The key to success is dropping these defences. Being logical often doesn't help. Try these instead....

1. **Ask how**! - A basic grasp of something leads many of us to be believe we are experts. Instead of pushing more evidence at people listen to their argument and then ask them to go further into depth. They will eventually talk themselves to a point they realise they don't really know what they're talking about! Their defences will drop and they will be more receptive to reasoned argument.

2. **Alter their subjectivity** - asking someone to step into someone else's shoes can remove the blinkering of blind political allegiance. Eg. 'I don't believe in climate change'.....'ok, well imagine you are a farmer living in Chenai right now, there are hundreds of ghost villages where the water has dried up due to failing monsoons and higher than average

temperatures....how do you think that would alter your view about the impact of climate change'

3. **Reframing** - climate denialist / conspiracy theorist / right wing politics / free market capitalist - all of these are inextricable. Using science of climate breakdown basically tells these people everything they believe is wrong. Reframing it to align with their own beliefs can be useful. Eg. 'there are some innovative breakthroughs in the green revolution that could lead to huge economic growth' Obviously this isn't necessarily in line with the actual solutions!! But it can drop defences as a start.

4. **Know the deception!** - Again, through confirmation bias, people latch onto any bit of evidence to support their world view, no matter how ridiculous. If you are confident on the story and history of climate science, and can fill in how fake 'evidence' came into being, you can replace their false narrative with a more convincing and compellign alternative. Eg 'global warming is a hoax'....

5. **Be calm** - people arguing - particularly from a point of weak knowledge - are often overly aggressive and rude. Remain calm and kind, be empathetic, and they will usually calm down and start listening. It is much easier to win someone over by being empathetic and calm to lower their defenses.

Common difficult questions

What are you/we doing?

We are part of an international movement which seeks to push the climate and ecological crisis to the top of the political agenda and minimise the impact of climate breakdown.

Why are you disrupting normal people?

It's not our intention to ruin anybody's day, but the government is allowing a few corporations to pollute our air, destroy our planet, and enganger our future. They have ignored us for years, and have left us no choice but to take to the streets

What's your problem- in a nutshell?

The United Nations has warned us that a global temperature rise above 1.5°C may trigger a series of events that cause climate change to be irreversible. This would threaten our water supply, our food supplies, and the air we breathe, as well as causing the death of millions of people. Currently, we sit at 1.1 degrees warming, and the government is not acting.

The government is already commited to change / carbon neutrality / Labour will fix it

The government is not meeting its own target. It's own Committee For Climate Change has said it falls far short of the necessary ambition, and has highlighted ministers fiddling carbon budgets. The

UK's target falls short of the UN's warning that we must be carbon neutral by 2040. Despite these promises, the govt perseveres with airport expansion, subsidising fossil fuel companies, scrapping laws for carbon neutral housing etc. They are not acting in line with the emergency we face.

It'll never work

Analysis of historical movements - like the suffragettes, civil rights etc - show that non-violent protest has been hugely successful. In fact all movements that used peaceful protest alongside disruption, were successful in bringing system change by the time they had 3.5% of the population on the street.

Climate FAQs

Why does CO2 cause global warming?

Solar radiation (which is short-wave radiation) from the sun is partly absorbed by earth's surface, and the rest is reflected as heat energy (which is long-wave radiation). CO2, as well as other greenhouse gases, act in a similar way to a pane of glass in a garden greenhouse. The gases (or glass) allow short wave radiation through, but trap long wave radiation at a much greater rate. So heat energy is retained by the blanket of greenhouse gases, leading to warming of the planet.

Common arguments

Surely you should focus on China!

1. We started the industrial revolution. We have a moral obligation to lead the fight against climate breakdown.
2. China is enormous, so you can't compare total emissions. Per person, UK emits 7.8 tonnes of Co2, China emits 5.6 tons. Even worse are historic emissions per capita, which put us 2nd, behind only Luxembourg.
3. Most importantly a huge portion of goods are made in China, the UK's emissions do not include imported emissions, so China's emission levels are inaccurately high. Far more accurate is to compare the carbon average carbon footprint per person. In is measure we are nearly 3 times more culpable for climate breakdown than China. (11.5T vs 4.3T)
4. We don't live in China!!! China uses centralised planning, so they don't need to write climate breakdown laws, they can simply enact new strategies, WHICH THEY ARE.

Renewables are too expensive

Onshore wind and solar are now the cheapest forms of energy in over 60 countries, including the UK! And this is despite the UK government's immoral policy to cut subsidies for renewables whilst continuing to subsidize fossil fuels at a higher rate than any EU member state.

You'll leave people in fuel poverty by switching off fossil fuels

There are multiple transition reports from various institutions which detail exactly how we can move away from fossil fuels. In fact, fuel poverty in the UK is a result of austerity by the government and the privatisation and lax regulations imposed by the government on the energy industry.

We could all stop eating meat / driving / flying / (insert defeatist argument here) and it would make no difference

And that's a very valid point! We do all have a responsibility to assess our own impact on climate breakdown, and mitigate that impact as much as possible, but your point is exactly why Extinction Rebellion is demanding system change which does have an impact on our future.

It will damage the economy

There are loads of great plans to transition to low carbon infrastructure and technology which will generate massive numbers of jobs. Whats more, the cost of not adressing climate breakdown - in infrastructure damage, health care, human life - will be many, many, many times greater than taking action.

Technology will save us!!

We have all the technology we need to become carbon neutral. What we lack is the political will and urgency to transition. Whilst some technology might be helpful, there are huge problems with this mindset. First, it encourages inaction, assuming that someone will come along and save us. Second, this does not stop the exploitation of our planets resources. Third, introducing geoengineering solutions can have huge unkown knock-on effects that we can't predict. And most importantly, relying on technology does absolutely nothing to address the reason the underlying cause of climate breakdown - a system which uses natural resources and people as commodities to focus only on growth, and funnels money upward whilst impoverishing the natural world and the vast majority of its citizens.

Countering Climate Change Denial

Some of this is more ridiculous than others. Ultimately, if you engage someone, and they are hostile or talking gibberish, there is little point in wasting your energy. Remember we only need 3.5%!

A lot of people use vague climate science denial as a defensive mechanism because they can't face the truth. You can sway these people with empathy, good knowledge, and a tight story. **If you're getting nowhere just move on.**

Thousands of scientists agree it's a hoax

Nope. what you're referring to is a petition from 1998 authored by the Marshall Institute which is funded by Exxon Mobil. The author is not a climate scientist, and the definiton used for eligible

'scientists' qualified to sign was anyone with a bachelor of science degree, meaning that vets, dentists etc were all free to weigh in on this so called 'climate paper'. There is no mention of a hoax in this petition. It is framed as 'insignificant data to conclude man-made global warming is a threat'. In a cross-section of the people who signed it most did not remember signing it, and virtually every signatoree said they would not sign it now.

The Antarctic ice sheet is growing

No it's not. It's decreasing at an accelerating rate, and poses a serious threat to sea level rise. Antartic sea ice was growing, (different to ice sheet) but this was in spite of the southern ocean warming more than any other ocean. This is due to a number of complex interactions, (including oceans currents creating gaps within the sea ice, and warmer seas leading to increased evaporation and rainfall, which fills these gaps as it falls, creating new sea ice.) However, since 2018 sea ice levels have been lower than the historical average and recently decreasing at an alarming rate.

Science is split on climate change

Over 97% of climate scientists agree that climate change is real and predominantly caused by human activity. Of the remaining 3%, a quick internet search is likely to reveal funding by the heritage foundation or another institute funded by the fossil fuel lobby. (predominant = over 50% of driving factor)

It's changes in solar activity

In the last 35 yrs, during the period of most intense global warming, there have been no significant changes in solar activity, and in fact solar activity is now weakening

'Urban heat island' (that urban areas where most measuring equipment is based record hotter temperatures because of reflection from urban surfaces)

Totally untrue. Urban and rural areas show exactly the same warming trends

It's a green technology scam

Green tech has spent less than 1% of the total lobbying amount that the fossil fuel industry has spent on preventing climate change mitigation laws.

Human produced CO2 is a fraction of overall CO2

That's totally irrelevant to climate change. The world's climatic and ecological systems have a fine balance controlled by positive and negative feedback loops to regulate climatic stability. Small increases in these - or large in the case of our CO2 contribution - can have a profound effect on destabilising climate systems.

Climate change is alarmist scaremongering

Science, by its nature, is conservative, due to the nature of peer reviewing. IPCC papers are widely accpeted to be understating the consequences of climate breakdown.

It's cold today

You're confusing weather with climate, and depending on what part of the world you live in (INCL the UK, due to shifting ocean currents) our cold days will get colder, whilst heatwaves get more intense

Climate models are unreliable

Climate models accurately predicted what we've seen happen over the last 100 years to high levels, in the oceans, atmosphere, and on land. This means that their projections for the future are likely to be just as accurate. The only uncertainty in climate models is the human response, and whether we commit to carbon neutrality to minimise the impacts of climate breakdown.

It's the troposphere cooling

The author of the paper that posited this claim, John Christy, admitted in 2005 his figures were incorrect. This paper is still widely quoted by deniers as a counter to man-made global warming

Water vapour is a worse greenhouse gas than CO2 (ie.small increases in CO2 are fine and we can keep burning fossil fuels) Yes there's way more water vapour in the air than CO2, but this argument is totally irrelevant to climate science as it completely ignores the interaction between waver vapour and CO2. WV creates a positive feedback loop. So increasing CO2 increases temperature, causing more evaporation & thus water vapour, leading to further warming & more evaporation. Water vapour in itself is part of the naturally regulated water cycle.

CO2 increases are natural

There are hundreds of studies showing the correlation of human activity since the idustrial revolution correlating with increasing CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere. The hockey stick graph is the most vivid representation of co2 concentration against fossil fuel activity

CO2 doesn't trap heat

This is as fundamental a denial of science as saying we don't experience gravity. The heat trapping effect of CO2 was demonstrated in the lab 150 yrs ago, and confirmed countless times since. In addition, spectral satellites confirm CO2 to behave identically in the atmosphere as it does in lab results.

The whole solar system is warming - (ie. it's not human activity)

Mars & Venus aren't, and solar activity is decreasing.

Volcanoes are to blame for high CO

Human activity produces roughly 100x more Co2 than volcanoes

Warming lags behind CO2 increases proving CO2 is not responsible

This is called climate lag and is basic physics. Imagine putting a pan over a flame. The atmosphere around the flame is instantly hot, but the water takes time to boil. Climate lag is around 40 yrs, due to the thermal inertia of the oceans.

The Denial Funders

Any person or 'scientist' associated with one of these (these are just a few of the worst) has been paid by the fossil fuel lobby to confound the science and confuse the public

- The Global Warming Policy Foundation
- Techcentralstation
- The Cate Institute
- The Heritage Foundation
- American Enterprise Institute
- The George C Marshall Institute
- The Reason Foundation
- The Manhattan Institute
- Americans for Prosperity

Lobbying

In the UK, one of our worst climate denying institutes is Members of the Global Warming Policy Foundation, which was set up by Lord Lawson, a well-known climate denier, peer in the house of lords, and father of chef Nigella. His name is Nigel. He called his daughter Nigella.

The problem is much worse in the US. In 2012 alone, fossil fuel companies donated over $70m dollars DIRECTLY to US politcal candidates and parties. They spent another $150m on lobbyists to Washington. This is on top of enormous amounts of dark money funnelled through foundations, think tanks, and universities which are used to confound climate science.

The practice of dark money donations to stop environmental protections was pioneered by the Koch Brothers. The list of right wing and free market groups they have used their vast fortune to support is endless but it includes the Cato Institute which Charles cofounded in 1977, the American Enterprise Institute, the George C Marshall Institute, the Reason Foundation, the Heritage Foundation, the Manhattan Institute and Americans for Prosperity, founded by David Koch himself and which spent $40million for the 2010 Congressional elections alone.

James Inhofe, a senator & previous chair (!!!) on the the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, has frequently called climate change “the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people”. He has also compared environmentalists to Nazis. To date, he has received $1,587,596 from the oil and gas industry.