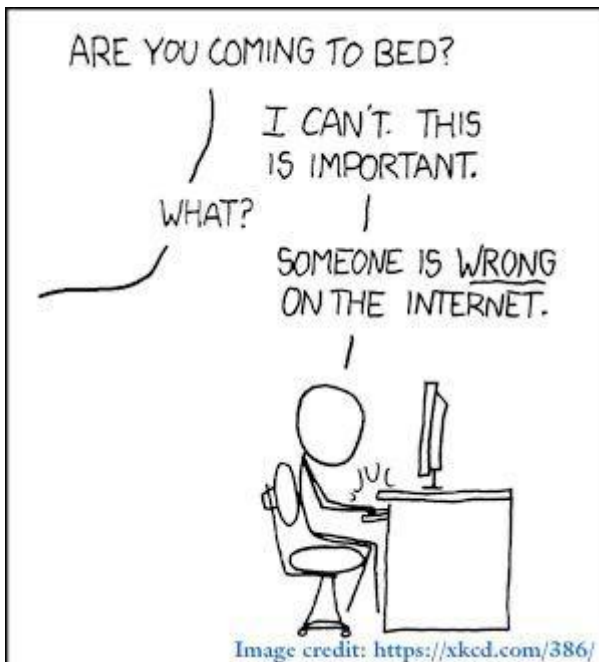


Comment threads: how to engage with the public on social media

Commenting on social media requires patience and emotional control. You are not just replying to the person you are responding to. You should always keep in mind all the other people who are watching and learning from the interaction. It is an opportunity to educate and inform everyone who is reading the comments, not just the person that you are replying to.

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Overview



Handbook Contents:

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- **Personas**
 - People you may meet and people you may be
 - How people emotionally process the climate crisis
 - General Criticisms of XR, and possible responses
 - Negative comments on XR / rebels / Greta
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Strategy

What are we commenting for?

Before typing, it can be helpful to think about what you are trying to achieve through engaging in conversation online. There are different types of conversations to be had, and different ways in which these can contribute to the overall aims of the movement. Here are a couple (although there will be others):

- **Telling the truth.** This is core to both XR and the purpose of this group. While a single comment might not result in someone who isn't facing up to the climate emergency doing an instant u-turn, it may chip away at these views. Perhaps more importantly is the effect it could have on others viewing the conversation.
- **Amplifying action-specific messages.** If people are discussing an action and its effects, if at all possible, we can try to bring the conversation around to the intended message of the action.
- **Explaining and defending the movement itself.** XR does not need everyone to agree with our tactics - previous successful social movements have attracted criticism. However, if we alienate too many people, this could undermine our message so it is worth listening to people's concerns and explaining the reasoning behind our actions.

Where are we commenting?

To actively look for people on social media to respond to, you can search for Extinction Rebellion or #ExtinctionRebellion on social media. If there are action-specific hashtags (eg #ChangelsNow #MakeHistory #CitizensAssembliesNow) search for these. On X (Twitter) some people mis-spell rebellion with one 'l' (i.e. #extinctionrebelion) so try this too.

You can also create new social media content. However, the focus of this guide is largely on responding to existing comments as this is a way of engaging with people who are already discussing climate change and XR.

The comments sections of newspapers are also very important for Rebel Responders Online Outreach. These can have a lot of comments and very large numbers of people reading them. Sometimes comments are very negative - especially in articles about disruptive XR actions - and a few positive comments can really change the overall feel of a thread.

For news articles, you can search for 'extinction rebellion' in google news or in any news site's search.

Personal vs Official Social Media Accounts

Most people involved in Rebel Responders are using their personal social media accounts. There are of course 'official' XR accounts for geographical areas and interest groups. But the intended audience for this guidance document is people who want to help the movement using online engagement without necessarily having an organising role. Often it is a way of contributing to actions for people who would love to attend but can't. If you are speaking on behalf of XR, using an official account, it's important to be respectful to the range of views; but when responding as an individual we can be more personal and only have to represent ourselves.

XR news on Facebook

New Outlets As XR activists take action they'll get featured in local and national media. Many outlets have a Facebook page where they post their stories. These attract comments we can engage with.

Ads When XR use Facebook ads people can, and will comment. These ads are reaching a large audience, so adding positive comments is really useful if you see XR ads.

Local Media Finding who your local media are can be exhausting and frustrating, but local newspapers are still a good place to start as they will have a web presence.

[Local Media Works](#) is a good UK wide directory that will give you the names and contact details for local newspapers; you can use this to search for on-line versions of the same.

[Public Interest News](#) lets you search using a map that also includes some local radio.

[The BBC Directory of Partners](#) Is another list of local news organisations with links to BBC news.

How should we go about responding to comments?

Social media does not always bring out the best in us. Don't lose your cool, we are not necessarily aiming to win the argument, we want to win the person. Social media is usually not a private conversation so what really matters is how XR supporters come over to all the people reading the thread later on.

Take a breath. Take three breaths. Walk the dog. Then respond with truth and respect even if the other person shows none. Surprise people with stories, wit and charm. Nobody ever changed their mind because of a Facebook response from a stranger beginning "Well, actually..." -- remember that people operating with incorrect information are victims of media [gaslighting](#). We've provided some ideas and information below, but don't just cut and paste things, speak truthfully in your own

voice. Listen to the story of the other person, if possible, and find points of agreement.

If you are very new to XR, please read key parts of the website, including the [demands](#) and our [Principles and Values](#). Try putting these into practice, for example thinking of: 'We welcome everyone and every part of everyone'. Speaking from personal experience and showing the different backgrounds and stories of those involved might be as important as the discussion itself. The climate crisis is an issue for every single person on Earth and no individual is responsible for it.

Engage with people

Be friendly, polite, and witty. This is important for everything else to work. Having a curious and open attitude are key. Genuinely listening to people and their concerns about change with curiosity is helpful. People find it hard to accept change about things that are widely accepted to be harmful even when misinformation is not a widespread issue (think smoking in western countries) let alone an issue where ignorance, fear and misinformation from key figures are widespread. It also can help you to empathise with them.

Listen

Genuinely listening means holding space. It means not formulating a response until the person has said what they need to say, then deciding how to respond when they are done. Open questions such as 'what is important right now?' 'how should these issues be addressed?' 'how can the way we address things improve?' (you never know, you may come across some helpful ideas)

Be reflective

Acknowledge that this is a difficult reality to face for a lot of people. Simple reflection involves stating a person's concerns back to them e.g. Them: What is the point? You: 'you don't believe we can address this?'.

[Click to see more examples...](#)

More complex would be:

E.g. You are concerned that we're in a situation that we cannot deal with for our future so would rather focus on what is important here and now

The point is to infer the rest - they will let you know if you are mistaken, but if you're right they will carry on the conversation.

Educate but don't keep trying to force people to accept your reasons for change

Plenty of people know smoking can be harmful to their health, but if you keep telling them why they should quit they will automatically take the other side of why they should/want to keep doing it/can't stop unless they are already motivated to make changes (however they are most likely ambivalent about this because they're not sure how). Same with engaging with climate activism (and that involves many changes at individual and system levels), not just one by an individual).

What could this conversation look like?

It can be better to ask 'what positive social changes would you like to see', 'if we were to have a magic wand which addressed these issues what changes would have happened, in your view', ask for an elaboration.

Whatever changes they suggest, try to link what they want to XR demands or any current campaigns/training/events we have. e.g. 'politicians are rubbish' might lead to talking about Citizens' Assemblies. Or 'my river is polluted' might lead to joining the Restore Nature Now event, or highlighting the work of Dirty Water campaign. Even if you can't link to something specific, then acknowledge their concerns and leave room for more discussion about taking action in some way. Not everyone is ready or motivated, but you've opened that door to further engagement. And you have hopefully had a positive conversation in what might be a very negative environment.

We have some ideas of what can make change difficult so use that. Ask the person, what they feel are the 2 most difficult obstacles then say something like 'you want to see positive change happening in xyz area and ABC makes that tricky' (do not use the word "but" in place of "and", as people will not listen to anything before that word). A "pros and cons" list of change can be helpful to acknowledge ambivalence (but not too long!). Then ask for a bit more elaboration on what desired change looks like.

Even if they say 'xyz makes it difficult', they're imagining it. Ask them what would help. Gain permission before you provide any suggestions and find out what, if anything they know about your suggestion before elaborating on it.

E.g. can I make a suggestion about what might help?

Them: okay.

You: The UK has a lot of wind power available, which you might have heard about before. Can I ask what you might have heard about this before

Them: rattle it off

You: Fill in gaps, address misinformation etc

Then you, this is what we would like to achieve with our movement. Would you like to ask me any questions about this and what we do/why we do it this way?

This is a more digestible and collaborative way to share information

Ask people what they value

Most people value their security, family, ambitions etc. Then link what you are aiming for to those values. Also talk about what XR values to build their empathy towards you, e.g. a safer and healthier future for everyone, particularly younger generations.

Also ask if they prefer subsidies going to fossil fuels or building more sustainable infrastructure for example. Most people want that. Building empathy for others including younger people may also help. Remember to show that you are concerned for everyone's welfare including theirs and that we are open to doing things better to achieve change. Remind people of what we want to achieve. Sometimes people will not want to listen though and it can help to check in with yourself to be able to sustain efforts.

Example from Apple training

Apple stores have scary training on how to deal with customers, but a really important bit is about empathy. For example;

Customer: This Mac is just too expensive.

Apple store staff member: I can see how you'd feel this way. I felt the price was a little high, but I found it's a real value because of all the built-in software and capabilities.

Some key reminders

Invalidating someone's feelings and experience means they won't listen to anything you say. They may have badly incorrect information but there's a lot of it out there and we can help with that, if we show respect and empathy even for people with very toxic views. Don't give people the argument they want.

Don't insult people even if they are very very wrong or mean. Don't always feel the need to reply, trolls are in this for fun - often responding to a troll with a reasonable comment and then not engaging in an argument will look excellent in the eyes of other people reading your interactions.

Sometimes it might be easier to link to a blog or youtube video and say "this explains it much better than I can".

Note for XR social media moderators

While this chapter is aimed at people commenting, and responding to comments on any platform, some of those platforms are ones where XR has moderation powers.

When in doubt, just follow the guidelines in this doc. As moderators we often have to distance ourselves from our personal opinions and in a way totally ignore the topic itself to just focus on whether or not the "rules" are being followed. So even if you don't like someone's comment or the way a thread is developing, if it doesn't violate our guidelines, just let it be.

Personas & types of responses to the crisis

People you may meet online

No two people are the same, but we can define broad groups of people who comment negatively about XR on social media, and look at their motivations so we can best deal with each in a positive and productive way.

- **Edgelord.** Contrary people, troublemakers, winders uppers. Their ambition is to provoke reaction. This person uses both sides' talking points. Debating an Edgelord seems pointless BUT it's still worth keeping them busy. Time spent arguing means no harm elsewhere. Ideally via direct message to keep toxic discussion away from everyone else.
- **Tabloid Talking-Point Talker.** This person is absorbed in talking points against XR or climate change. It's easy to get sucked into an argument throwing cliches at each other. Surprise them: listen. Ask questions about why they feel the way they do instead of trying to win logically. Nobody (except maybe a well trained scientist) ever changed their mind because of a logical argument. Find common points and be sympathetic to their concerns. They may be a future ally.
- **Hypocrite Hunter.** This person will find a way in which the environmentalist is flawed and use that as an excuse to dismiss their message. This may well be a sign of an underlying sense of shame or guilt. They find flaws in the halos of people taking action to excuse themselves for doing nothing.
- **Nihilist / Climate black-pilled.** This person is dealing with the truth about the climate crisis with fatalism. They ask why bother, it's too late already what about CHINA? And is humanity dying out even such a bad thing?

[Click to read a rebel's experience...](#)

I felt like this until seeing XR actually start to shift public opinion. 100 years ago women couldn't vote and "right thinking" people thought that was a good thing. There's still a huge range of possible futures, and it's worth fighting now to avoid the worst case scenarios. We can slow the speed at which the ship is sinking and buy future generations time to act. If you don't like what humans are doing, hopefully we can agree that it's still not good for billions to have their lives cut short by war or food or water shortages.

- **The Keyboard Warrior.** This person is on a mission to discredit XR or climate change science. They cut-paste the same long statement again in many threads. They might even be, in rare cases, paid opposition. They are not worth engaging directly, but may give an opportunity for XR members to look good in responding. Remember that you are not just responding to the comment but for the benefit of other people reading the thread.

- **Single Issue Soldier.** This person only cares about one thread of the broad climate and environmental issues and want XR to focus on that over everything else. They are tricky as they are potential allies but need to respect XR's mission and principles. Examples of issues on which these individuals may focus are: chem Trails, 5G rollout, animal rights, over-population or conspiracy theories.

- **The Contrarian.** This person has a knee-jerk disbelief in climate science because it is becoming accepted by the mainstream. This person is similar to the Tabloid Talking Point person, however they are unlikely to be convinced by quoting facts and figures. It may be useful to others watching to counter their misinformation, but resist getting sucked in.

- **Concerned Citizen.** This person has honest questions or concerns about how XR operates. Very much a possible future ally or even activist if handled well. XR is still a relatively new movement and many people still haven't made up their minds what to make of it.

How people emotionally process the climate crisis

In many ways the way people react to the crisis are similar to how people cope with change or grief. Realising this can help you have empathy (understanding how they feel) and compassion (wanting to help them with their suffering) for some of the toxic ways people talk to and about us. These help explain some of the personas described above.

- **Denial** - it's comforting to decide it's not real and so no change is required.
- **Anger** - blame the messenger and other countries (what about CHIIINA?)
- **Bargaining** - technology will fix things, I don't need to change or worry
- **Despair** - it's already too late so there's no point caring about it or changing

When dealing with toxic people you can try to think more like a grief counsellor than a preacher. Nobody enjoys being told they are part of the problem and need to change.

There's lots of articles online about grief [[1](#), [2](#)] and dealing with change in business [[1](#), [2](#)]- you may get inspiration from them.

General Criticisms of XR and possible responses

Here's a bunch of things people commonly say and some ideas for coping with each. Responding with personal experience can be helpful too e.g. your own motivations for taking part in XR or your personal fears about the future that aren't listed here.


Please don't feel constrained by what's suggested below - they are just ideas and things that have worked for other rebels.

Overall one of the most powerful responses to "I don't agree with your methods" or "you are all hypocrites" is to ask for advice. "What would you do differently" can seriously change a conversation thread for the better, and to see things from our perspective without feeling attacked. It can be a way to explain citizen's assemblies and sometimes we might even get new ideas!

Most importantly, please *don't* cut and paste the same response again and again into social media as it makes us look bad and makes you look like the troll.

EXTINCTION REBELLION INSULT BINGO

Each time you hear a variation of one of these lazy cliches mark the box, first person to get a line wins.

Uncooperative Crusties	Haven't you got anything better to do?	Leftie Scum	Rent A Mob	Why don't you protest in China?
Scruffy	George Soros paid for your coaches	Overeducated	I bet you'll leave a mess after the protest	Trustafarians
Marxists	Bunch of Cultists		What's the carbon footprint of your protest?	Virtue Signalling
Eco- fascists	Bet you've all got an iPhone	Uneducated	Duck Squeezers	Soap Dodgers
I'm gonna eat 2 steaks to make up for you	Get a job	Tree Huggers	One of you had coffee in a disposable cup	Did Mummy drive you to the protest in her SUV?

Negative comments on XR / Rebels / Greta

This section gathers together some ideas for responding to regular negative comments. As ever, never copy and paste.

Unwashed hippies...

We're all sorts of people - including scruffy anarchists. but we're also:
 XR Grandparents: <https://www.facebook.com/XRGrandparents>
 XR Youth: <https://www.facebook.com/XRYouth/>
 XR Doctors: <https://www.doctorsforxr.com/>
 XR Lawyers: <https://www.lawyersforxr.com/>
 XR Farmers: <https://twitter.com/XRFarmers>
 XR Jews: <https://www.xrjews.org.uk/>
 XR Buddhists: <http://xrbuddhists.com/>

Some of us dress smart, some dress “scruffy”, some turn up in scrubs, some in costumes. Some work flexible hours, some are unemployed, some use their annual leave to be able to come.

We’re a real mixed bag!

We really do have plenty of alternative looking people which isn't always good optics, but they are the most visible and keen.

Don’t judge a book by its cover

You want people to ignore the demand for a future in which people and other life on Earth can survive because you don’t like the outfits of some of the people in a protest?

Sure, there’s a few hippy types, but there’s also a surprising number of scientists and doctors.

Can you tell which of those hippies is the surgeon, ex-policeman, head-teacher, psychologist, mother, designer, musician, nurse, engineer, lorry driver, scientist?

Jobless...

Use real life examples of people who you know have used up lots of their annual leave to come to actions and protests.

I have a good job doing XYZ.

Many of the XR supporters work, either part-time or full-time, donating their spare time to help raise awareness and engage with people

Sure there are homeless and jobless people in XR, but there’s also lawyers, doctors, plumbers

and single mums. Most of the people at the protest are using up their leave instead of having a holiday.

Use this as an excuse to tell something about the humans of XR; "That's what I thought initially, but it turns out lots of members are parents and Grandparents. I met one couple who'd just had their first baby and they told me that it was the moment that they realised they really wanted grandchildren that they felt they had to take things seriously and make sure those future grandchildren had a good world to be born into."

Many people in XR are employed full time, they're using their annual leave to fight for a cause they believe in. (Almost) everyone in the UK is entitled to paid time off, what we do with it is up to us.

XR is broadly a cross-section of pretty much any community; a mix of professions and trades, and of course some people may not currently be employed. Everyone volunteers their time to support XR, a cause that they believe in.

You're all naive unrealistic kids -- people saying the XR approach won't work

It's easy to show it does BUT...

It's better to treat these comments in good faith and ask them for suggestions, as they implicitly are agreeing with the problem existing but not the solution

There have been many experiments conducted with regards to social norms, and people sitting down and standing up - its about people's perceptions of what is normal.

Things start small and grow. The climate strikes started with one teenage girl bunking off school on Fridays because she took her future seriously... now we're seeing millions of people getting involved world wide.

Send them a link to this lovely video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fW8amMCVAJQ>

150 years ago it would have been hard to imagine women, in the UK, getting the vote.

It's already working, massive changes have happened since XR was formed in 2018!

Despite people saying it wouldn't:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/19/extinction-rebellion-climate-change-protests-london>

XR are kids

Young people have got the most to lose, but they're supported by middle aged peeps too and there's plenty of retired people lending a hand too

Young people today are constantly told to get off their phones, get involved in the world - do something. This is them doing something.

Many retired people at our protests who want to do right by their grandchildren.

XR are a minority trying to bully the majority

There isn't a clear binary between people who are concerned about the climate emergency and those who are not so it might be best to try and shift the debate from 'majority' vs 'minority' framings. (Polls show that a majority of people in the UK believe that we are in a climate emergency AND that a majority believe the government is not doing enough about it (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/18/climate-crisis-seen-as-most-important-issue-by-public-poll-shows>). So you could technically claim that we are representing the majority! But it is unlikely most people are as far along in their journey of accepting the climate emergency as XR members.)

This isn't ideological. This isn't about religion or beliefs or preference. It's about self survival. We need to acknowledge the crisis we're in and work together to make solutions. That will take everybody.

It's OK to shout fire in a crowded theatre if you notice the theatre is currently on fire!

We're trying to get the government to understand how serious the situation is, and trying to propose ways for the citizens to have more influence over the political class rather than less.

Greta Thunberg is not neurotypical and therefore mentally ill and nobody should listen to what she says. Also she's being controlled by adults

Many influential thinkers are "on the spectrum", people with aspergers react differently to information. Sometimes our world can overload them because they find it harder to filter, but it's not an illness, it's more like a different computer operating system that has strengths and weaknesses.

Her message is simple "Listen to the overwhelming and urgent scientific consensus before it's too late"? Which sounds more sane than most politicians.

XR are anarchists

XR isn't an anarchist movement, but they do aim to disrupt our way of life. To change our system of politics with the introduction of Citizens Assemblies and to change our economy by investing in technology of the future, not the past.

XR are criminals

Breaking the law isn't always amoral - unless perhaps it is our own government not adhering to their own laws, such as being accused by the High Court of failing to implement its own commitments of their own Climate Change Act and have systematically broken laws on air pollution limits.

So were the suffragettes/Rosa Parks/Gandhi, whom history now exhaults as heroes and role models of civil disobedience movements

- All initiated successful non violent protests
- However, be careful as from some people's perspective they were fighting for their own rights which is slightly different.
- If appropriate, it may be worth pointing out that we are fighting for our rights of survival with the weight of science behind us.

Sadly, breaking the rules is sometimes the only way to get people to pay attention.

Many XR campaigners have tried legal methods such as writing to MPs, 'awareness raising', changing our own consumer behaviour, demonstrating, etc. Traditional approaches haven't worked.

The climate is already changing rapidly. Radical action, including peacefully breaking the law, is a proportionate response to the climate emergency. Civil disobedience forces lawmakers to into a difficult dilemma of choosing crackdown, or addressing the issues most of us are concerned about. This is what we are trying to achieve.

XR cost the taxpayer/economy money

This is true, but the costs of not preparing and mitigating for climate change will be staggering, so it's an investment that will pay off.

Do you know we already have climate refugees in the UK? Fairbourne in Wales are the first 1,000 whose village is now decommissioned. This story is set to be repeated.

We are already seeing millions displaced around the world, most recently in Pakistan. The UK is contributing to global funds in an attempt to help the global south mitigate impacts, because the Government knows climate migrants will come here, costing taxpayers more in the long

run.

XR are dumb people

XR have a huge mixture of people from kids to people in their 80s and even older. More importantly, many are engineers, doctors and scientists, social workers, lawyers, even ex-police officers. There's also a lot of parents who believe what the science suggests is likely to happen if we don't change how we do things. If you are talking about our methods, that's something else...

XR are hypocrites because flying/train/car/water bottles/meat

You're right. It's really tough. Personally I've been trying to shift to one or two animal-product-free days a week. That way I don't need to worry about it so much. I'm trying to think about red meat as a treat not a basic. Individual actions don't matter BUT it's valuable to act like you take it seriously.

Trying to use the phrase "animal-free diet" or similar as I find many people (me included) have had very negative experiences in the past with aggressively evangelical vegans.

It says a lot about the day and age that we live in, that we feel like we cannot go without cars - this is partially because our public transport is not good enough to support the population, and partly because a lot of adults living now, do not remember what it was like before cars became commonly affordable and we are lazy. Overall though, it's about balance and reducing as much as possible. The benefits of getting a bike and using it are phenomenal. Walking the kids to school may take longer but it's healthier both for the adults and the children.

None of us are perfect, but I don't know anyone in XR who isn't trying to do better. Sadly, the society we live in forces impossible choices, which is why we need things to shift on a bigger scale. We can only do so much as individuals...

Most people have already made the individual changes they're able to - within their financial and social means. We've been making individual change for 30 years, but the government and big business haven't been pulling their weight. It's too easy for a government to set far off targets for another government to actually deal with, and that's all they've been doing.

I know climate change is important but ... XR have caused me to be late for work

First empathise rather than trivialise: I'm sorry to hear that. None of us take the disruption we cause lightly.

Our choice of methods is based on academic research showing how effective non-violent direct action has been in the past. The US civil rights movement, Gandhi's non violence, suffragettes...

- [Why Civil Resistance Works](#)
- [The Future of Nonviolent Resistance](#)

XR has come about after decades of scientists and campaigners raising concerns about the effects of human activity on the climate. The legal, not-disruptive methods haven't worked so it is time for more radical activism (this is also a good time to point out if you've personally taken part in legal environmental activism).

XR Drink/Smoke/Do Drugs

XR is staunchly drug and alcohol free at their protests. That doesn't mean none of us drink or smoke, but it's strongly discouraged during actions. That also doesn't mean that people (Whether involved in XR or not) don't disregard that view. But for the most part, it's a pretty sober place.

I know climate change is important but ... what about if an ambulance can't get through. Someone could die!

When planning road blockades, making sure emergency services can get through is always part of the process; this is our "blue light" process.

It might seem surprising but we liaise with the police and other emergency services, both before and during actions, to try to make them as safe as possible.

A lot of planning and careful thought generally goes into choosing appropriate sites and making the whole action as safe as possible for ourselves and the public.

We are fully committed to being a non-violent movement. The aim is to be disruptive, not to cause anyone to get hurt.

I've been campaigning for years and non-violence doesn't work. We've got to take on the state and the police and smash the system. Fighting is the only way to get change - look at the French yellow jackets.

XR is committed to non-violent actions. Engaging in violence will simply alienate the general public and undermine the cause and the message. That tactic has been proven in research to be less successful than nonviolent direct action movements.

We are an inclusive organisation. We have people who are young, old and disabled. Violent action is off-putting to more vulnerable groups.

A core principle is to work with the police to ensure everyone's safety, whilst recognising that they are employed to maintain the status quo., and that not all people get the same treatment by police. The police do not need a reason to not follow procedure and giving them an excuse to be heavy handed helps none of us.

There are many other examples in history of non-violent protest being successful (suffragettes, etc). The key to this is having the numbers to support the movement. Small protest groups can be dealt with harshly, and with few repercussions. Large groups of protesters, drawn from all aspects of society, protesting non-violently makes it harder for that to happen as there is far more accountability.

By communicating clearly and non-violently, our message is easier to hear and respect, and is consequently spread further. We aim to build a mass movement, not to alienate unnecessarily. This is how movements become successful, by demonstrating we have the moral high ground. The government's own Office of National Statistics says two thirds of adults in the UK already are concerned about climate change; we need them to become activists too to change the system.

It's a zombie death cult and everyone's brain-washed

XR is constituted from people of all different backgrounds and beliefs, including doctors, scientists, lawyers, and a variety of religious groups. What we have in common is our desire to try to focus the Government on taking the climate crisis seriously and setting up a Citizen's Assembly. There are many things that we'd all disagree on amongst ourselves, but that's the point of the Citizen's Assembly, a truer form of Democracy that allows us to discuss, learn and decide on actions and policies. Everyone is free to express their opinions as long as it's done with respect.

People critiquing XR for excluding various groups

When we see the movement we believe in so much being criticised, it can be tempting to run in to defend it. Hold back though. If someone feels XR is racist, ableist, foregrounding middle class people, etc., even the most carefully worded defence is likely to come across as just not listening. There is a good chance that if you immediately go into defence mode, you also actually aren't really listening to what is being said! Some rebels use the acronym 'WAIT' which stands for 'Why Am I Talking?' to encourage this pause in action, especially when it comes to historically privileged groups contributing to debates involving less privileged groups. We are all learning as we go and the best thing sometimes is just to take in a critique and mull over it.

If, after some thought, you decide this is a conversation you can meaningfully add to without detracting from anyone else, here are some ideas on things to say.

- I'm really sorry if you feel excluded or that XR isn't in your corner. We're made up of a really mixed group of people - from the working class to the elite and everyone from single parents to university professors. We know we can always do better as we are fighting to get those in power to change and sometimes don't get messages right. We are learning though. We know that individuals have done as much as they can do within their means, but it's time for those in power to use that power for the good of all of us.
- It's true that many people are less able to participate because they lack the resources or the time to do so, or are not able to take the risks that white, middle class British citizens can, because of the discrimination they face. We are more privileged than others. We recognize that and we are working to make sure that our actions and demands are more inclusive of those who face exclusion. We work alongside other action groups, because we understand the need to support each other in shared goals of ending the oppression of too many people right here in the UK.
- XR's lack of diversity stems from the toxicity of the system as a whole (marginalised groups can be too constrained by their immediate difficulties to have resources to protest about the future). We are sincerely trying to recognise where XR reproduces that toxicity, and change by working to include more diverse populations and work alongside other movements, where we share goals.

Comments on the climate emergency

As well as the suggestions below, there are also some very thorough responses to common climate denier arguments in this article: [How to Talk to a Climate Skeptic: Responses to the most common skeptical arguments on global warming.](#)

Overpopulation is the problem we just need to fix that

Wealthy people in the North part of the planet have a much much higher carbon footprint than people in poorer countries. The issue is about how much consumption each person has and how much of it leads to emissions. **The top 1% have a carbon footprint double the size of the poorer 50% of the world.**

This is a problem, and it does need addressing, but without putting a limit on the number of children that people are allowed, or ending up with a society like that in Logan's Run, or the planet causing a mass extinction (which we are already experiencing, if not an instantaneous extinction), or pandemic of some description, there is no EASY answer to this question. It does however, raise more questions that we should be asking each other about the kind of future that we want to create and live in!

Overpopulation is a big issue - but it's an issue based on our ability to provide for that population - XR is fighting for sustainability, and a sustainable world will include addressing overpopulation.

Be careful entering into debates about overpopulation. This is the only major environmental issue in which it is possible to blame the world's poorest people (see [this article](#)). So when people claim it is the 'most important' issue, on some level (maybe not consciously) they are using this to refuse to engage with the fact that it is the wealthy, over-consuming parts of the world and our ineffective governments that have got us into this mess.

Providing education is the best way to lower birth rates

China (or China & India) is so big and polluting that nothing we do matters.

"I found out recently that Chinese citizens are much less polluting than us, a lot of the pollution in China is to make products for export to the UK and other developed countries, so we're outsourcing our own pollution"

"I used to think that too, but apparently China is embarrassing us in terms of tree-planting, which is one of the most effective measures of dealing with climate change. China is moving into renewable energy faster than many European countries."

The Chinese love their grandchildren just as much as we do, they are starting to take this seriously, and we have to too.

XR India exists & XR Hong Kong exists - so we work here where we can realistically make a difference and leave it up to our fellow activists abroad to do the same.

Here's a [video about the global climate strike from India](#)

India and China run thousands of factories making things for us, here in the UK. The emissions produced by those factories are done in our name - so we own a share of them too.

There are high levels of awareness of the climate emergency in most Asian countries. People living in poorer countries are most at risk of the effects of the climate emergency and also want their governments to act. Some are even taking great risks to take part in protests.

We're just a small country so nothing we do matters

We lead by example (appeal to national pride -- UK has a history as a world leader in policy)
Our consumption is an issue that makes us complicit for much of the far East's pollution

We are a small country, but nobody else is going to get our house in order for us. Let's do our bit, and lead by example.

As one of the main countries (arguably the country) that started the industrial revolution which was of course fueled by coal, we have a responsibility to also lead the rapid shift away from this type of economy. UK historical emissions per person are among the top 5 countries in the world.

The USA is so polluting that nothing we do will matter.

See the previous 2 talking points!

XR USA are out in the streets today too!

It's too late and we're already f----ed so just enjoy your life

INSERT A BUGS LIFE clip/quote/synopsis (about how a colony of ants and some circus bugs can defeat the bigger mean grasshoppers - moral of the story being about being small and coming together and working together) The good news is that there's no scientific consensus on it being "too late" - though we are "likely" to need to radically adapt as an entire species, especially in the global South.

There's a concept called "Deep adaptation" (see Jem Bendall / Rupert Read's writing) that is a key focus of some people in Extinction Rebellion; not just mitigating harm but also supporting us to prepare for Deep adaptation; another way in which our government, most media and business is currently failing to tell the truth.

Our actions today will still have a vast impact, and we just don't know exactly how much power we have to mitigate harm, so instead of just sitting on the Internet arguing with you, I'm going to do everything I can - so I can tell my grandkids I tried my best!

Many of us have children and grandchildren, and that changes the perspective many of us have. Yes, the situation may look hopeless, but knowing that our kith and kin might have more of a chance of a better life as a result of our actions today makes it worth trying.

Climate change is a scam/false

This resource is excellent for countering arguments, but remember someone spouting them is probably using them as an excuse for doing nothing, so arguing facts probably won't change their behaviour.

Rather than argue with a conspiracy theorist, I usually talk to them about mass extinction which is undeniable and clearly man made -- and saving animals from habitat loss is still important enough that I'd rather they raged against that than at climate protesters

I wish you were right but apparently 97% of people who have specialised in this area of research agree that climate change is real AND caused by humans. This video covers a lot of points a lot better than I can here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hCRafyV0zI>

We've already passed peak oil, so we need to adapt to other sources of power anyway. Even if it turns out to be false, the actions we are campaigning for would make the world a better, healthier and more sustainable place for our children to grow up in.

Using the fact that the climate has changed in the past to debunk human caused climate change isn't terribly useful to anyone.

The earth has been hotter than it is today, and it has been cooler. It's never changed between them as quickly as it has since the industrial revolution, however.

But regardless of what the planet does normally, humans can't survive in those conditions. That's all that really matters.

XKCD have a pretty good visualisation of the temperature changes since the last ice age, and why today's changes are different. (It's also worth understanding that in the context of the climate "warming" means an increase of energy, in the scientific sense - so there's more energy bouncing around creating hotter hots, colder colds and faster transitions between them).

A word of caution, some have said that the flaw in the XKCD comic is that most of the data is extrapolated from indirect evidence so it's possible there were sudden peaks and dips and we're just seeing a smoothed out line.

1m sea level rise isn't that much

Yes, but that's every high tide being a meter higher. Every storm surge being a meter higher.

Speaking very roughly a 1m sea level rise means floods that would happen every 100 years start happening every 10 years and floods that would happen every 10 years start happening most years.

Parliament Square is only about 5m above *average* sea level. A bad storm at high tide and then the Thames barrier is all that's stopping London being flooded like New Orleans.

The UK is a friggin ISLAND for fucks sake - you don't have to be a genius to work out it will affect us (insert disaster movie clip that illustrates point?)

The country of Kiribati has already lost a few islands and is purchasing land on Fiji preparing for losing the rest of their land to climate change. Rising sea levels are already impacting entire populations today, and they'll be on your doorstep soon too.

I'll be dead before it matters, and I don't have kids

Great. Extinction Rebellion is your worst enemy. We're here for the people who care about future generations, and will only be an endless torment for those who are interested solely in their own selfish gain at others' expense.

You may not be dead before this happens at the rate things are going currently.

You may not have kids, but plenty of other people do - do you really want to be held partially responsible for the death of many others?

If there is nothing or nobody else that you care about then that's fine, but many of us do, and we will continue to campaign to try to reduce the impact on future generations.

I would bet that you still care about other people. People in your life who are younger than you. And maybe even people you don't know, just because they're human beings too. Don't you? (or something like that - appeal to the good in them)

If someone is creative or cares about creative culture, then they might care that 1000 years from now nobody will be left to appreciate Shakespeare, Motorhead, Yeats or Batman.

X isn't the problem, you should focus on Y (eg 5g, chemtrails etc)

XR are not about individual problems, we're about putting pressure on governments, and other organisations that dominate our lives, to act appropriately to the scale of the crisis.

XR doesn't state that it has all the answers, just that we need to be able to believe that the Government is serious about listening to scientists and implementing the courses of action that need to be taken.

Flying isn't that big a deal as a %age of the problem

But worldwide plans are to massively increase air traffic.

It's massively increased in recent years, so reducing to say 1990 levels isn't an unreasonable ask. People now commute by air.

COVID has caused a change in our culture's acceptance of teleconferencing, and it's reasonable to think those tools will get even better with mass uptake, so many flights for just working in an office or having meetings are no longer very useful.

Taxing flights is bad as it penalises the poor more and stops people getting the benefits of seeing other cultures

Quotas would work better. So you can get say a flight every 2 years at normal prices, but anything more than that (including for work) is punitively taxed, like we do for having a 2nd home.

Common questions

Check out [this document](#) to see a list of Frequently Asked Questions and how to answer them.

Closing Remarks - Ending a Conversation

Sometimes you need to bring a conversation to a close, perhaps because the person/people you're talking to are repeating the same message - or possibly because you've run out of time and need to excuse yourself. Here's some inspiration on how you can do that:

"I've shared my view on SOME TOPIC and I've heard yours. We disagree on the importance of them in the context of the climate emergency but I don't feel I have anything more to contribute on that topic which is relevant to this thread. Thank you for the discussion, THEIR NAME, and for your time. I've really enjoyed talking to you about this, I'm afraid I need to go offline to get to work - but thank

you for your time."

Ideas & other training

- [How to do Digital Outreach and Troll Patrol](#) Web site, XR Scotland
- [The Nervous Rebel's Guide to Social Media](#) Document XR Scotland
- [Social Media Trolls: A Practical Guide for Dealing With Impossible People](#)
- [Campaigners create Twitter 'fact avalanche' to combat climate untruths](#)
- [Do not feed the climate trolls](#) - Article from ScienceAlert.com about how they deal with Climate Trolls.
- [Message to White Allies from A Black Anti-Racism Expert: You're Doing It Wrong](#)- this is about Black Lives Matter, but the principles are still useful
- [You're not going to believe what I'm about to tell you](#)- excellent article about how humans react to information that does not fit their world view.

Insights from Psychology

The Conditions Required for Successful Persuasion

According to [research by Cialdini, Petty, & Cacioppo \(1981\)](#) persuasion works best differently in two different conditions:

- When the information feels highly relevant to the person being persuaded: quality of the argument is a key factor (central route)
- the information feels less relevant to the person being persuaded: expertise of the speaker is a key factor (peripheral route)

Attitude changes from the former route are more likely to be enduring and predictive of later behaviour. They concluded that one consequence of the different routes to persuasion was that changes induced via the central route tended to be enduring and predictive of subsequent behavior.

- Further elaboration on central/peripheral route, John T. Cacioppo and Richard E. Petty (1984) , "The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 11, eds. Thomas C. Kinneer, Provo, UT : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 673-675.

Mood & Persuasion

Bless et al. (1990) found that:

people in good moods are less likely to use the 'central route' that focuses on argument quality, whereas people in bad moods are more willing to 'elaborate' - i.e. think through and evaluate argument quality i.e. are more likely to use the 'central route' that leads to enduring attitude change - IF you can persuade them!

Bless, H., Bohner, G., Schwarz, N., & Strack, F. (1990). Mood and persuasion: A cognitive response analysis. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 16(2), 331-345.

How do these 'routes' work

The final article (Chaiken, 1980) is a really in-depth document that explains how the two 'routes' work (referred to in the paper as systematic and heuristic processing. Heuristics refer to the idea of using 'rules of thumb', so this is the peripheral route and systematic = central). It's worth reading if you want to understand these concepts better, but to fully understand it requires a working knowledge of ANOVA stats methodology.

The key finding is as follows: 'In the first study, high consequences subjects exhibited significantly greater initial opinion change in response to messages containing six arguments but were unaffected by the communicator's likability. Conversely, low consequences subjects exhibited significantly greater opinion change in response to the likable communicator but were unaffected by the amount of argumentation provided.

In Experiment 2, subjects for whom the message topic was high in personal relevance showed slightly greater opinion change when receiving five arguments from an unlikable communicator than when receiving one argument from a likable source. In contrast, subjects for whom the topic was low in personal relevance exhibited significantly greater opinion change when they received one argument from a likable (vs. five arguments from an unlikable) communicator'

To interpret: for those with a high level of involvement - arguments matter. To those with low involvement - likability matters.

NOTE: DON'T interpret this as 'it's a good idea to be unlikeable'! The point is that arguments matter for people who feel highly involved in a situation.

Chaiken, S. (1980). Heuristic versus systematic information processing and the use of source versus message cues in persuasion. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 39(5), 752.

So what does this all mean:

We want people to be using elaborated, evaluative thinking if we want them to have enduring attitude change - focusing on personal relevance of the issue results in people using this 'central route'

If, however, people seem likely to only process the information in a quick, simplistic way, focus on being likeable, on conveying expertise, and keeping them in a good mood!

Self Care / Self Preservation

Having decided to join this group, please do not feel under any pressure to respond to all types of negative comments you see. Your own wellbeing is important. If you only want to comment on particular types of online conversations (e.g. you don't have the energy for conspiracy theorist climate deniers, or you don't want to have anything to do with a thread where people are being aggressive) that's fine. Set your own limits based on what you feel comfortable with.

Even then, if the scope of the online negativity becomes too much and you find yourself becoming irritable or depressed, you might need to take further steps to set boundaries around online outreach. It can seem quite obvious, but it's really important to do this. Here are some suggestions:

- If you find yourself getting a little bit compulsive, try setting limits on your phone. Most phones let you set time limits for particular apps. Iphones are more fiddly than Androids, but you can do it in 'Screen Time'. There are various ways to achieve this on the desktop as well. Turning all your devices off for a bit is a simple one!
- Practice conscious time management. For example, you could use the pomodoro method to commit to 25 minutes of online outreach every day, and then walk away from it for the rest of the time. It doesn't have to be 25 minutes of course- the important thing is that you create a dedicated time for it and try not to let it bleed into other areas of your life.
- Practice good sleep hygiene and put your screens to bed at the end of the day, about an hour before you plan to go to sleep. Don't keep them in the bedroom. Don't check them if you wake up in the middle of the night, especially if you are already having trouble sleeping.
- Rinse your brain and reset. Read a novel or collection of poems. Go for a walk in nature. Go for a walk in town. Talk to someone face to face. Ride a bike. Do yoga. Listen to a nice audiobook. Do whatever is necessary for you to clear your head.