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# THE CLIMATE BABY DILEMMA

## Educational Materials & Discussion Guide



A DOCUMENTARY ON THE PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

THE CLIMATE BABY DILEMMA is a bracing and intimate exploration into one the most surprising impacts climate change is having - how, and if, we parent. It delves beyond the specific question of parenthood, exploring this manifestation of deep climate anxiety.

[TRAILER](#)

[US EDUCATIONAL SALES](#)

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Directed by: Victoria Lean

Produced by: 90th Parallel

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# Discussion Questions

This guide is intended to provide individuals and organizations with questions and prompts to spur group discussions related to key themes from the film after it has been screened. We hope this resource will be a useful tool in your efforts to discuss difficult topics and convene critical conversations about climate-related mental health challenges, reproductive anxiety, and climate resilient family-making. **Select questions that resonate for your group discussion from the list below, or if you have enough time, use them all!**

## 1. Reproductive Anxiety

**1.1** Which statement best describes how you're feeling at this moment after watching *The Climate Baby Dilemma*? For instance are you:

- a. Shocked. There was a lot that you were not aware of.
- b. Not surprised. You're already aware of the issues discussed in the film.
- c. Validated. Your concerns were explored and legitimized in the film.
- d. Overwhelmed. You're just taking it all in and don't know where to start.
- e. Motivated. There's a lot to do to address this crisis. You're feeling ready to move this forward into action.
- f. Something else (please describe)

**1.2** Many stories and experiences have been featured in the film. Whose story/experience resonated with you most and what did you learn from it?

**1.3** There are two central concerns about reproduction among the climate-aware: what having a child will do to further strain the planet, and what a warming world will do to the health and safety of a child. Compare and contrast these considerations. Is one argument more compelling than the other in your mind (or perhaps neither is compelling or there's another key reason)?

**1.4** Reproductive anxiety due to planetary uncertainty is a rising phenomenon in societies around the world. Child-free people have often been stigmatized as "selfish" for deciding to enjoy life without kids, but this label is increasingly being used for people who knowingly decide to have kids in the climate crisis. Discuss this multifaceted stigma and how you feel about it.

**1.5** Dr. Jade Sasser says in the film, "*If population is our solution to the climate problem, it's not going to work.*" Where is this argument coming from, and how has the legacy of overpopulation rhetoric gotten wrongly mixed up with many people's concerns about having kids in the climate crisis?



# Discussion Questions

## 2. Climate Emotions & Action

**2.1** We know that eco-anxiety isn't pathological - it's normal and appropriate to feel some distress about what is happening to our climate and environment. What is your relationship to feelings of distress (anxiety, anger, sadness, etc.) as it pertains to climate change?

**2.2** Later in the film, Dr. Britt Wray explains that we need to support people, especially young people, so that eco-anxiety doesn't become debilitating and impair their functioning, but then "we need to harness this for transformative change on climate." What did she mean by that?

**2.3** Do you ever notice yourself toggling between distress over difficult information about the climate crisis and states of resilience? What helps you move towards feelings of strength?



**2.4** During the Conceivable Future house party, a participant named Swelen points out that "*Our systems - capitalism in particular - continuously makes us return to ourselves and I'm at fault, or I have to make this decision. And I'm alone in it. And it's like, no. It's about our systems. How can we as a society begin to really hold accountable the people that are supposed to represent us?*" How would you answer this question she raises? How do you view the government's role and responsibility in addressing the climate crisis?

**2.5** Consider the 'No Future No Children' campaign from the film. Do you think that people abstaining from reproduction is a tactic that could elicit real change from leaders?

**2.6** Payton Mitchell, a youth climate activist in the film, states that she sees "activism as an act of love and a really beautiful place to build community." Are there instances in your own life where you have experienced this?

# Discussion Questions

## 3. Cross-cultural Perspectives

**3.1** How have overpopulation narratives often caused harm or threatened the civil liberties of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour?

**3.2** Times have been apocalyptic throughout history for many different cultural groups. How can living in a hostile environment affect reproductive decision-making for vulnerable populations?

**3.3** Has the film sparked thoughts about any opportunities for cultivating solidarity across different cultural, racial, or age groups in the climate crisis? If so, describe.

**3.4** In the film, Indigenous activist and filmmaker Sarain Fox acknowledges the pain of imagining a future, pointing out that *“for so many populations who have had the privilege to live outside of genocide, they’ve never had that before... so this sense of not having hope - this is new.”* However, she elaborates that *“the motherhood question is kind of this window into so many demographics, who live with that same fear every day because of the world they live in.”*

What do you think she means by “this window”?



# Discussion Questions

## 4. Parenting in the Climate Crisis

**4.1** Are there alternative models to the nuclear family that appeal to you as we figure out how to live in our warming world? Chosen family, queer family structures, and broader kinship networks are all relevant here. What kinds of support systems, communities of care, or networks feel inspiring and potentially relevant to ways you'd like to live your own life in relationship with children, whether they're biologically yours or not?

**4.2** Why is it important for caregivers and parents to learn how to cope with their own eco-anxiety before they try to help their children with theirs?

**4.3** What does climate-aware parenting mean to you?

**4.4** As a youth struggling with eco-anxiety, Severn Suzuki felt that action was what saved her. When her young sons experience similar feelings of grief, she suggests activities like garbage cleanups. What are small actions and activities that can help alleviate anxiety for youth?

## 5. Climate Conversations

**5.1** Reflect on the following quote from climate psychologist, Dr. Renee Lertzman, in the film: *"I think the number one thing that we can be doing is having conversations about these issues with everyone that we come into contact with, but in a way that is emotionally intelligent. It sounds very very simple, but it's actually I think the hardest thing we can do."*

What does this quote mean to you, and why are these conversations so important for individuals and for climate justice?

**5.2** Climate conversations can be difficult. Conversations around reproduction can also be difficult. Put them together, and you've got an easily explosive topic. What are some ways you could envision having thoughtful and caring conversations with your friends and/or family about this topic, especially if you expect they might not feel the way you feel?

# Discussion Questions

## 6. Wrap Up

- 6.1** What is one big idea you learned about today that you'd like to explore further?
- 6.2** After watching *The Climate Baby Dilemma*, have your feelings about the climate crisis changed in any way? How?
- 6.3** What are the next steps in your own climate journey?



# Background

The CLIMATE BABY DILEMMA explores the personal stories behind the facts and headlines.

## How to raise kids in the climate change

A conversation about parenting, our planet's hope.

By Sean Illing | @seanilling | sean.illing@vox.com | Jul 11, 2023, 7:00 AM

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Vox



The Guardian

**Climate crisis**  
More people not having children due to climate breakdown fears, finds research

Analysis finds concerns about environment key factor in having fewer or no children - but reasons differ around world

Climate Solutions Climate Lab Green Living Business of

## The Washington Post Should you not have kids because of climate change? It's complicated

### BOOKS THE MORALITY OF HAVING KIDS IN A BURNING, DROWNING WORLD

Two recent books, "The Quickening" and "The Parenthood Dilemma," consider the ethics of procreation in the age of man-made climate change.

### To Breed or Not to Breed?

In a world of pandemic chaos, political strife and climate catastrophe, some would-be parents see the future and choose not to procreate.

Share full article



## No Children Because of Climate Change? Some People Are Considering It



**GO**  
A Better Way to Think About Climate Change and the Kids Conundrum

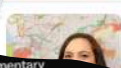
2y ago · Colin Groundwater  
**CHATELAINE**  
Should You Have Kids In The Midst The Climate Crisis?



1y ago  
**THE GLOBE AND MAIL**  
Months-long drought on B.C.'s Sunshine Coast prompts water ban, climate anxiety



1y ago · Nancy Macdonald  
**INSIDER**  
Women are putting planning family on hold because of climate crisis



Opinion Political Op-Eds Social Commentary

## Opinion: Why I'm not going to have children

Opinion by Anna Lee

## Should I have kids, given the climate crisis?

A veritable societal phenomenon in the Western World, Ezra Klein of The New York Times says it's the one question he's been asked more than any other. Even politicians and celebrities like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Miley Cyrus have spoken up about the doubt swirling around having children in this uniquely stressful time.

39% of youth said that the climate crisis makes them hesitant to have children. 56% feel humanity is doomed.

Children being born now are likely to experience extreme climate events at a rate that is 2-7x higher than those born 60 years ago.

PTSD prevalence among direct victims of disasters is 30% to 40% compared with a prevalence of 5% to 19% in the general population.



# Film Synopsis

Deciding whether to have a child is an emotionally fraught and deeply personal process. Deciding amid increasingly dire warnings for the planet makes it even more overwhelming. The Climate Baby Dilemma explores what to expect when you're expecting... the climate crisis.

With the future promising to bring increasing instability, conversations about parenting amidst climate disruption are heating up. Following prominent science writer, Dr. Britt Wray, over three years as she delves into this multifaceted issue, we encounter a diverse and fascinating array of activists, authors, psychologists, caregivers and prospective parents considering the growing trend and its underlying anxieties and emotions. We learn alongside Dr. Wray as her groundbreaking research explores the emotional toll climate change has, and the ways identity, privilege and experience impact these fears.

The film also meets youth at the centre of the climate moment. A growing number of Gen-Z and millennials are either refusing to bring a child into an increasingly unstable world or struggling with the question of whether they should.



*Still from CBD featuring Indigenous activist Sarain Fox*

Those deciding to have children, while being very climate aware - like activists Sarain Fox and Severn Suzuki - offer perspectives and lessons for raising children in the climate crisis.

Though the realities are stark and distressing, The Climate Baby Dilemma considers how one can transform climate anxiety and grief into transformative action. It compels viewers not to grieve prematurely, as the solutions to climate change already exist, and posits that the action of building and maintaining community may ultimately be the best means to combat eco-anxiety.



*Dr. Britt Wray gives lecture at the World Economic Forum*

# Screening Resources

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## *Promotional materials for your screening*

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**Trailers: [Youtube](#) and [Vimeo](#)**

**[Key Art](#) (link to posters in various sizes)**

**[Promotional Photographs](#) and [caption sheet](#)**

### **Scenes from film available for embedding**

[Opening scene](#) featuring Gen-Z Climate Activist Payton Mitchell, explaining why she feels she can't have children

[Scene featuring researcher Britt Wray](#) and youth climate activist Payton Mitchell explaining the various reasons why people are connecting reproductive choices to climate change.

[Scene with Severn Suzuki](#) At 12, she spoke with piercing moral clarity about the need to avert ecological breakdown at the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio. Thirty years later, she has sons the exact same age, facing grief similar to what she felt as a young climate activist.

### **Additional standalone mini-docs (deleted scenes)**

[Additional scene with Jinhwa Hwang-Ambrose](#) - A mother in Vancouver became a climate activist around the time her daughter turned one. Hear her story from learning about the depths of the impacts, falling into fear and despair for her daughter, and how she overcame it.

[Additional scene with Imara Ajani Rolston](#) - The policymaker and director of the Community Climate Resilience Lab describes what climate resilience means through a justice lens, and shares his perspective on the future as a father of three of Barbadian descent.

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## *Articles & Press for The Climate Baby Dilemma*

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["The World is Burning - Should we have a baby"](#) - Film Review in the Tyee

["Finding hope for bringing babies into a climate anxious world"](#) - OpEd by Director Victoria Lean for the Toronto Star

["The Climate Baby Dilemma"](#) - episode of the podcast Green Majority Radio

[Deciding to have a baby amid the climate crisis: whatever you're feeling, you're not alone](#) - OpEd by featured subject Dr. Britt Wray for the CBC

["I'm all in: Being a parent amid the climate crisis"](#) - CBC article supporting additional scenes

["Video Interview: Vicki Lean talks The Climate Baby Dilemma"](#) - POV Magazine

# Supportive Resources

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## *Resources mentioned by Dr. Britt Wray in the film*

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- [Gen Dread](#): a newsletter about staying sane in the climate crisis
- Conceivable Future [House Party How-To](#) resource, where you can find instructions on hosting your own like the one featured in the film
- [Climate Mental Health Network](#)
- [Climate Psychology Alliance of North America](#)
  - [Directory of climate-aware therapists](#)
- [Upcoming Climate Cafe trainings](#) (to learn how to facilitate a climate cafe on your own)
- [Good Grief Network](#): Offers facilitated 10-step spaces to help people navigate painful feelings about climate change and the general state of the world. Highly recommended.
- [All We Can Save Circles](#): Another way to create group support for navigating climate emotions is to create or join a climate book group! This resource guides you through doing just that with the amazing book [All We Can Save](#).
- [All We Can Save Resources for Working with Climate Emotions](#)

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## *Resources from participants*

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- [Dr. Britt Wray](#)
  - [Unthinkable website & Resource Hub](#)
    - Book: [Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Anxiety](#)
    - [Gen Dread](#) newsletter
- [Dr. Jade Sasser](#)
  - [Podcast: Climate Anxiety and the Kid Question](#)
- [The Conceivable Future](#)

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## *Resources for parents & grandparents*

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- [Moms Clean Air Force](#)
- Organizations/resources focused on grandparents/elder generations:
  - [Third Act](#)
  - [Elders Climate Action](#)
  - [Recent New York Times article](#) on grandmothers and climate action

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For inquiries, please use  
the QR code or visit:

[www.unthinkable.earth](http://www.unthinkable.earth)

