

Activities and Books to Teach Kids How to Help the Environment

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Earth Day is every day – discover eco-actions for kids of all

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PHOTO: Everyone can make a difference

If you and your kids participated in one of the [local Earth Day](https://www.parentmap.com/article/earth-day-events-seattle-kids-families) (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/earth-day-events-seattle-kids-families>) activities this year, you all might be fired up about doing something to benefit the environment. And if you didn't do anything for Earth Day at all, you might be feeling a little guilty about it. Whichever state of mind you find yourself in, Earth Day is every day, and there's no better time than right now to teach your kids that they don't have to grow up before they can make a difference. No one is too young to connect with nature and learn that their actions have an impact.



Learning how things grow is a great way to help children cultivate a love and appreciation for the environment.

Eco-actions for preschoolers

For the littlest kids, animals and food are great places to start. Take your toddler or preschooler to the zoo and while you're there, explain how animals lose their homes when people generate too much waste and pollution. When you get back to your home, teach them which things to put in the garbage, and which go into recycling so that their waste won't end up in animal habitats.

Spend time in the garden with your child

(<https://www.parentmap.com/taxonomy/term/1013>), or if you don't have a garden, plant some vegetables and flowers in pots. If they are old enough, let them have a few pots or a small patch of their own to garden. If not, encourage your child to help you plant and water. (The drudgery of weeding may be counterproductive.)

While you are outside together, help them notice the birds, bugs and other animals (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/5-activities-kids-who-love-bugs-birds-and-other-critters>) that share your neighborhood with you. Use these examples to explain habitats and food webs. Then, remind them that when you grow plants without using chemicals, you are helping to make that whole community possible. Bonus: Giving kids a hand in growing vegetables also makes them more likely to eat them (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/vegetable-gardening-in-the-pacific-northwest>). Not only are they healthier, but homegrown vegetables have a much smaller environmental footprint than any snack that comes in a package.

Actions speak louder than words, but it is good to narrate your sustainable choices. Let your child know that you're walking to the playground to avoid polluting fuels and packing lunch in reusable containers to eliminate waste.

Eco-actions for kids in elementary and middle school

Once kids reach school age, they can start to understand more complex environmental topics and how humans impact ecological systems. Older kids can learn how to calculate their family's carbon footprint (<https://earthgenwa.org/learning-resources/carbon-calculator/>). Once they do, let them lead your family in choosing and implementing the steps to shrink your environmental footprint.

Kids can also continue their backyard environmental learning (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/backyard-kids-activities-environmental-learning/1#pager-content>) with hands-on projects. By now, connecting with wilder environments on family hikes (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/kid-friendly-hikes-wide-trails-seattle-eastside>) and camping (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/seattle-family-camping-guide>) trips is more practical, too. And you can turn screen time into environmental action with age-appropriate apps such as Earth Rangers (<https://www.earthrangers.com/EN/CA/get-the-app/>), which is designed to empower environmental leadership through educational and practical environmental challenges.

At this age, kids and tweens can also start to get involved in the wider environmental movement and begin to encourage others to make more sustainable choices. If your child's school has a green team (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/how-green-your-childs-school>) or environmental club, encourage them to join it. Support them in taking action with groups such as Fridays for Future (<https://fridaysforfuture.org/>), and other youth-led and family-oriented climate action organizations (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/youths-and-their-families-fight-climate-change-together>).



Photo credit: ourclimate.us

Eco-actions for high schoolers

Teens are old enough to be aware of all of the existential threats society faces today, and having an [action plan \(https://www.parentmap.com/article/get-active-plan-help-your-teen-feel-more-optimistic-about-life\)](https://www.parentmap.com/article/get-active-plan-help-your-teen-feel-more-optimistic-about-life) is important for their mental health. Many people still think that the environment and social justice are competing priorities, but poor and marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted by pollution and climate change. If your teen is passionate about social justice issues, leverage that interest to engage them with the [environmental justice movement \(https://www.teenvogue.com/tag/environmental-justice\)](https://www.teenvogue.com/tag/environmental-justice).

Teenagers' growing independence also gives them more choices about sustainable living. [Support your child's decision \(https://earth911.com/food-beverage/when-your-child-wants-to-become-a-vegetarian/\)](https://earth911.com/food-beverage/when-your-child-wants-to-become-a-vegetarian/) to become vegetarian or vegan – meat production has a huge environmental footprint. [Driving \(https://earth911.com/eco-tech/good-better-best-reduce-transportation-carbon-footprint/\)](https://earth911.com/eco-tech/good-better-best-reduce-transportation-carbon-footprint/) generates more carbon emissions than any other activity they participate in. Encourage your teen to bike, walk or take public transportation whenever possible. Another lifestyle area in which young people can have an impact is [fashion \(https://earth911.com/inspire/youth-and-sustainable-fashion/\)](https://earth911.com/inspire/youth-and-sustainable-fashion/). Fast fashion has made the textile industry one of the most polluting in the world, and it is responsible for child labor violations and dangerous sweatshop conditions for workers. Learning to thrift, mend and creatively style a smaller wardrobe can help Generation Z break the fast-fashion habit.

Even if they can't vote yet, teens can make an impact through civic engagement. Organizations such as [Our Climate \(https://ourclimate.us/mission-and-vision/?gclid=CjwKCAjw6liiBhAOEiwALNqncQ2rdq3PIJVW_T4pIR21lZrcJy4KrTIERM6l_2u_7xEtc\)](https://ourclimate.us/mission-and-vision/?gclid=CjwKCAjw6liiBhAOEiwALNqncQ2rdq3PIJVW_T4pIR21lZrcJy4KrTIERM6l_2u_7xEtc) and [Schools for Climate Action \(https://schoolsforclimateaction.weebly.com/\)](https://schoolsforclimateaction.weebly.com/) provide resources to help teens and their families advocate for climate action at multiple levels of government, from Congress to the local school board. Teens can and do make a difference through nonprofit leadership, protests and volunteering on projects such as [beach cleanups \(https://www.earthday.org/campaign/cleanup/\)](https://www.earthday.org/campaign/cleanup/) and [salmon restoration \(https://www.greenrivercoalition.org/\)](https://www.greenrivercoalition.org/).

Required reading

At any age, books can help people connect with nature and understand their role in it better. Here are some titles to get your child's eco-education started.

Picture books

"Heart to Heart: A Conversation on Love and Hope for Our Precious Planet (https://www.amazon.com/Heart-Conversation-Love-Precious-Planet/dp/0063216981/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)" (by the Dalai Lama and Patrick McDonnell), an illustrated conversation between the Dalai Lama and his panda pal, is simple enough for little kids to understand but deep enough to read over a lifetime.

"From Seed to Plant (https://www.amazon.com/Seed-Plant-Gail-Gibbons/dp/0823410250/ref=sxts_entity_rec_bsx_s_def_r00_t_auf?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)" by Gail Gibbons introduces young readers to the processes of pollination, seed formation and germination.

"Linh's Rooftop Garden (https://www.amazon.com/Linhs-Rooftop-Garden-Where/dp/1682631680/ref=sr_1_8?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)" by JaNay Brown-Wood guides young readers in closely observing the unique characteristics of the blueberries that grow in Linh's rooftop garden.

"The Lonely Polar Bear (<https://www.amazon.com/Lonely-Polar-Bear-Khoa-ebook/dp/B094P24G6Q?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20>)" by Khoa Le gently introduces young children to the concept of climate change and its impact on animal habitat through the story of a polar bear.

Middle-grade reads

"Linnea's Windowsill Garden (https://www.amazon.com/Linneas-Windowsill-Garden-Linnea-Books/dp/9129590647/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)" by Cristina Bjork provides hands-on activities to help kids get involved with plants and gardening, even if they live in an apartment.

"Planet Earth: Finding Balance on the Blue Marble with Environmental Science Activities for Kids (<https://nomadpress.net/nomadpress-books/planet-earth/>)" by Kathleen M. Reilly teaches the history and ecology of the planet through hands-on science experiments and everyday actions families can take to be more sustainable in their habits.

"Our World Out of Balance: Understanding Climate Change and What We Can Do (<https://www.amazon.com/Our-World-Out-Balance-Understanding-ebook/dp/B08X2T2FKC?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20>)" by Andrea Minoglio is an encouraging illustrated guide to climate change, offering clear facts and positive solutions to address air pollution, rising sea levels, plastic pollution and wildfires.

"Old Enough to Save the Planet (<https://www.amazon.com/Enough-Save-Planet-Loll-Kirby-ebook/dp/B08577HLGG?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20>)" by

Loll Kirby profiles 12 young activists from around the world who are speaking out and taking action against climate change.

Young adult titles

["Dry \(https://www.amazon.com/Dry-Neal-Shusterman/dp/1481481975/ref=sr_1_8?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)"](https://www.amazon.com/Dry-Neal-Shusterman/dp/1481481975/ref=sr_1_8?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20) by Neal Shusterman and Jarrod Shusterman introduces teens to climate fiction, imagining a world where drought has reached catastrophic proportions and life has become a desperate search for water.

["Fashion Conscious \(https://www.amazon.com/Fashion-Conscious/dp/1405295651/ref=sr_1_10?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)"](https://www.amazon.com/Fashion-Conscious/dp/1405295651/ref=sr_1_10?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20) by Sarah Klymkiw explores the impact of clothing choices on people and the planet, encouraging youths to demand answers and empowering them to take action.

["No Planet B: The Teen Vogue Guide to the Climate Crisis \(https://www.amazon.com/No-Planet-Vogue-Climate-Crisis-ebook/dp/B08BJF8NH6/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)"](https://www.amazon.com/No-Planet-B-The-Teen-Vogue-Guide-to-the-Climate-Crisis-ebook/dp/B08BJF8NH6/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20) by Lucy Diavolo is a collection of timely stories from the climate justice movement, providing accessible, concise explanations of climate change and what it means to take an intersectional approach to environmental justice.

["How to Change Everything: The Young Human's Guide to Protecting the Planet and Each Other \(https://www.amazon.com/How-Change-Everything-Humans-Protecting/dp/1534474536/ref=sxts_entity_rec_bsx_s_def_r00_t_aufi?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)"](https://www.amazon.com/How-Change-Everything-The-Young-Human's-Guide-to-Protecting-the-Planet-and-Each-Other/dp/1534474536/ref=sxts_entity_rec_bsx_s_def_r00_t_aufi?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20) by award-winning journalist Naomi Klein offers young readers a comprehensive look at the state of the climate while providing tools to join the fight to protect the planet they will inherit.

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