



Best Practices for Talking with Climate Skeptics

From: Kelly Rigg: [How to Talk to Climate Skeptics? Stick to the Basics](#), Anna Fahey: [Talking to The Tea Party About Climate?](#), Larry Susskind: [Talking to Climate Skeptics](#), eHow: [How to Talk to a Global Warming Skeptic](#), Amanda Staudt: [Tips for Talking Climate Change at the Holiday Party](#)

The following “do’s and don’ts” are a synthesis of recommendations on how to engage those who deny the existence of climate change. Experts recommend that communicators consider at the outset whether it is in your best interest to engage with climate deniers as part of your public engagement strategy. If they are one of your target audiences, keep these tips in mind:

Do’s

- Know **whom** you’re dealing with (i.e. doubters v. industry-funded deniers)
- Approach people in an **emotionally sensitive**, aware manner to make them feel less threatened. Talk to people with the same **respect** you’d like to have them talk to you.
- Argue on the basis of **what you know**.
- In spite of differences in beliefs or levels of understanding, look for opportunities to reach **agreement**.
- Go for the gut, not the brain. Talk in terms of **commonly held values** such as economic stability, benefits for health, stewardship, and pragmatic solutions.
- Explain that our **military, medical, and religious leaders** are already grappling with how to respond.
- Research the **arguments of the other side**. Most global warming skeptics use at least one of three basic arguments: “climate change is a natural phenomenon, the evidence is inconclusive, and addressing the problem will harm economic growth.”
- Identify **who stands to gain** by questioning global warming and how these individuals benefit from misinformation.
- Talk about the impacts that are happening right now, such as **extreme weather**, as a way of connecting the dots and making climate change **concrete and local**.
- Shift the conversation to a discussion of **risk** and the need for **preparedness**, even if these risks are not fully predictable.
- Talk about the **consequences** if we don’t deal with global warming now and the opportunity to achieve **co-benefits** (i.e. improving public health and the economy).
- Point people to **solutions**. Help people identify actions that they could take (or may already be taking) now and paint a **positive vision** of the future.

Don’ts

- **If you’re not a scientist, don’t argue the fine points of the science.**
- **Avoid asking yes or no questions.** Instead ask “when, where and how” questions. How could we reduce risks while accomplishing other goals?
- **Don’t personalize the conversation.** Focus on outcomes that would respect everyone’s values.
- **Don’t get stuck on is-it-happening claims.** Share how climate change will significantly impact our lives and what we can do about it.