

# **Raising Earth-Conscious Children**



We live in a time where the Earth has taken a lot of beatings, again and again. The Earth is running out of resources, and if we do not make changes both small and large in the near future, we may find ourselves without a suitable place to live in.

It is the responsibility of us all to take care of this beautiful world, and to conserve this home in which we live together. There are so many things we can do and so many steps we can take. There is simply no longer an excuse not to be earth-conscious and to take better care of this space.

Here are some ways we can make changes and become better citizens of the world that we hope to live in happily for many generations to come.

## **Why Being Earth Conscious Is So Important: The Facts**

The Earth is the only place that is suitable for us to live in. We can't just pack up and leave if things get bad, and for this reason among others, we need to make it a priority to treat it properly. The Earth has not been cared for enough by our generation or the generations before us. Abuse of it is rampant. As time has moved on, we have become aware of exactly what toll our actions are taking. If we care enough to make changes, now is the time. Here are some thoughts to digest.

### **Water**

Water is essential to human life. Without it, we would die within a short period of time. Many people around the world do not have access to clean water. People are dying because they do not have a sufficient amount of water, or because the water they do have access to is not properly sanitized and can cause disease and death. If we do not curb our water use, we could essentially be left without enough in the future. This is a terrifying thought as a lack of water means death for all of us, as well as future generations.

### **Ecosystems**

The Earth's ecosystems are under attack. Many species are on the verge of going extinct because of our lack of respect for them. When any species is endangered, it doesn't only affect that particular species, but also the other species around them, and all life itself. We are dependent on the delicate balance of nature, and when we harm the Earth and any of its inhabitants without regard, we are putting ourselves in danger.

This loss of biodiversity is doing the Earth a grave injustice. Overfishing is one such way where humans have demanded a massive volume of something for themselves that is simply not sustainable. It is estimated that by 2050, there may be no more commercial fish stocks left in the seas.

### **Petroleum**

Petroleum is used to power 96% of the Earth's transportation. Scientists are warning that we may be headed quickly toward a phenomenon called peak oil, which occurs when the production of global petroleum goes to its maximum level and then drops. It was once thought that this phenomenon was a long way off, but it appears to be looming more closely in the future than once thought.

## **Our Carbon Footprint**

We as individuals and families each have what is referred to as a carbon footprint. This refers to the amount of greenhouse gases used to support human activities. It should be our goal to reduce our own carbon footprints, and to encourage those around us to do the same. It only makes sense to want to take steps to reduce one's global footprint when you see the impact you can make on the world. Whether that impact is for good or bad is essentially up to you.

## **Pollution**

Our water, air and soil is being polluted constantly by industries that are focused solely on making money. Vehicles are putting an overwhelming amount of pollution into the air, plastic garbage is floating in the ocean, and heavy metals are seeping into the soil. We must rise up as individuals and do two things. First, we must take care of our own amount of waste and cut down on consumption of products. Second, we must encourage others to do the same. We can start the change, and then we can promote it among everyone else.

## **Deforestation**

Another major concern in our time is deforestation. At this point in time, forests cover roughly 30% of the Earth's surface. But with all the clearing of forests on a huge scale, the land has been damaged and left without its former health. This has a negative impact on the world and its ecosystems. Short-term profit and greed are satisfied while the Earth pays a steep price. Both plants and animals in these areas suffer and are destroyed in a myriad of ways. Wildlife lose their homes and become endangered, and plants often times cease to exist.

## **What Does It Mean to "Go Green"?**

The phrase "go green" has different meanings to different people. Sometimes when that phrase is spoken, people think of nature-loving recluses sitting on their back porch, far away from civilization. Another common misconception of "going green" is of a very wealthy individual who has built their multi-billion-dollar house with solar panels and its own fancy water system.

But going green isn't any more about these misconceptions or extremes than it is about just living in balance with nature. You don't have to be a hard-core environmentalist to make positive changes for the Earth (not that there's anything wrong with being a hard-core environmentalist, if you are).

There are many small ways you can go green, and many areas to go green in. Why not start in the home by making many small changes that add up to something significant? Turn the water off when you are brushing your teeth. Turn the heat down at night and compensate by using a warmer quilt. Buy less produce and eat everything you buy instead of wasting it.

When you are out of your home, try some of these suggestions to do your part in taking care of the Earth. Take your own mug to the local coffee shop in order to save the world from yet another plastic cup being tossed. Don't drive around without a purpose in where you are going. Borrow books from the library instead of having to buy yourself a copy of every book you read.

You are also free to make bigger changes... the stereotypical changes that all the wealthy people are admired for. Rip out your ceilings and install those solar panels if you decide. Do as much or as little as you are prepared for and able to complete.

## **Modeling Good Practice and Getting Kids to Help**

If we want our children to be individuals who are conscious about the Earth and know how to conserve its resources, we must set the example ourselves. As a parent, you have the best chance of reaching your child with this message, since you are the one who will likely spend more time with them in their childhood than any other person. There are so many things to do though and so many things to consider. Where should you start?

### **Being Earth Conscious in the Bathroom**

The bathroom is the room that almost everyone thinks of when someone mentions conserving the Earth's resources at home. Because of all the water (and electricity) that is used within it, it is a great place to think of first. Being conscious about the amount of water you use in the bathroom comes in many forms. Have a shower instead of a bath, as this saves large amounts of water. If you are going to have a bath, try to save it for a special treat instead of having one every day. When you do finally have one, don't fill it to the top. Instead, fill it up halfway and only add more water if you need it.

There are other ways to save water around the bathroom as well. When you brush your teeth, turn the water off every time. Don't leave it running and then assume all will be well since it is only for a short time. Every little bit of conservation helps. If every person would hold to this one simple water-saving habit, it would save a great amount of water over time in each and every home. Don't flush the toilet needlessly, and don't use the toilet to flush things like tissue paper that you only blew your nose into... use the garbage instead.

When you are choosing body products such as makeup and shampoo, stick to products from companies that are kind to the Earth when creating them. Buy large bottles of shampoo and conditioner when necessary, instead of small containers that use more plastic in the long run. Keep in mind that products that are friendly to the Earth are also often more friendly to our own health, so avoid lotions, toothpastes and other products that are filled with chemicals. Buy those that have ingredients that promote health instead of destroying it.

Use your towels more than once instead of washing them every time you use them. You can use the same towel for several days as long as you let it dry completely in between uses. As an alternative, you can keep two towels per person and rotate, so that you use the first towel for your daily shower, the second one for the next, the first one for the third day, and so on.

### **Being Earth Conscious in the Living Area**

Are you like many families who have a huge collection of electronics in the living room? And are you aware that when items such as television and stereos are plugged in, they are using energy - even when the power is off? Plug your cords into a power strip and turn it off when not in use.

Put blackout blinds on your windows that will keep out the heat in the summer, and hold the heat in when needed in the winter. When you are in the living room enjoy your time there, but when you leave the room, turn off all lights and entertainment. There is no need to keep every

room in the house waiting for your return. By simply turning lights off when exiting the living room and every other room in your home, you can cut down your electricity bill substantially.

### **Being Earth Conscious in the Kitchen**

Be earth conscious in your kitchen. A lot of unnecessary water and electricity is used in this room alone. Let us begin with our dishes. Almost every new dishwasher has an energy saver cycle, so use it. Own enough dishes so that you are able to wait until the dishwasher is full before running it, instead of running the dishwasher every time you run out of plates or cutlery. When washing dishes by hand, or rinsing, run a certain amount of water in the sink, and then turn on the tap only when actively rinsing a dish. Stop unnecessary water use.

Fill up your garbage bags before taking out the trash. If you find you are taking out half-filled garbage bags, then buy smaller ones so that you are not needlessly wasting plastic every time. Be thoughtful about the number of items you are throwing out.

Recycle containers and all else as much as possible. If you feel like you are throwing out a needless amount of waste, reconsider the brands of food you are buying. And instead of throwing away scraps of fruits and vegetables, consider attempting to compost your leftovers for the garden. Your old scraps can turn any garden into a rich and healthy environment with not much effort on your part.

Choose to center your diet around whole foods and plenty of produce. Avoid packaged foods. This accomplishes two things. First of all, you will not waste packaging. Second, it is better for your body and health. Talk about these things out loud while in the grocery store with your children, asking questions about whether certain brands use recyclable packages, and whether there is a better alternative. By making these conversations a normal, day-to-day part of your children's lives, it will prepare them to think about and make decisions about the same things when they have homes of their own.

Don't use lights just because they are there. Do you really need to keep the light on in the oven while cooking food? Save it for a quick peek when you believe the food may be done. Cut out things that are not needed, nor fulfilling any purpose. When you are eating, keep the light above your table on but dim the rest. This sets a cozy atmosphere and saves a small amount of energy.

When you make muffins and other baking, turn off the oven a few minutes before the time is up, and simply leave them to finish cooking in the oven with the heat that is left. As you experiment, you will find more and more ways that work for you and that get the job done even when saving electricity.

Then there is food. So many of us wish to keep our cupboards and fridges full just in case of an emergency. But how often do we really need to have everything on hand at once? When you go grocery shopping, try buying just a few fruits and vegetables instead of every type in the store. And buy fewer of each kind. Instead of a bag full of apples, buy only two. This will prevent extras from rotting, which wastes money as well as food that could have been given to someone who truly needed it.

Appliances in the kitchen are another culprit. These energy-sucking devices can all be unplugged when not in use. This prevents a small but continual drain of energy from each one. Even toasters and coffee makers will use energy when they are plugged in, regardless of

whether the power switch is set to “on” or “off.” When you are at a time in life that you need to purchase a fridge and freezer, buy an energy efficient model. This can save your energy bill substantially over time.

### **Being Earth Conscious in the Laundry Room**

Start things off by purchasing a front loading, energy-efficient washer and dryer. Fill them up with clothing when using them, instead of wasting an entire cycle for a few items. Mix your loads so that you can put as many items in as you can fit.

When it comes to laundry detergent, choose an environmentally responsible kind. The detergent you use ends up in our water supply, so choose wisely. Avoid chemicals and choose a natural, non-toxic type. If your climate or the size of your home allows it, hang your laundry to dry when possible instead of using the dryer.

### **Taking Part in School Activities**

School is a great place for children to learn about caring for the Earth. Fortunately, this is a topic that is covered in most curriculum for children of all ages. Being good stewards of this Earth that we share is an important part of everyday life. When children learn with friends rather than just studying a topic alone, it helps them to get excited about it. Most schools will offer plenty of opportunities for this type of learning to happen.

Your child can also take the initiative to motivate their teacher and fellow students to get more active in regards to earth-conscious activities. When there is an opportunity for your child to educate others, encourage them to take it. This kind of behavior will cause your child to grow as a leader among their peers and even people in different age groups.

When Earth Day is coming close, encourage your child to ask their teacher if they have any activities planned. If they do, your child can volunteer to lead the others in activities, and to assist the teacher where needed. If there are no activities planned yet, your child could display his (or her) leadership by suggesting some activities and making plans to help the teacher find some worthwhile activities for the class to participate in.

Your child could help copy pages for an Earth Day school yard scavenger hunt. Or how about giving a presentation to the class about some of the hardships that the world is facing at this point in time, along with ideas on how to make changes for the good.

When it is time for your child to take part in a science fair, encourage them to choose a project that can make a difference in the world. There are many young people whose concern about the environment has led them to make large and positive changes, even at a young age. For example, it was a very young man who came up with an idea on how to clean the oceans of their trash in a fairly quick manner. Impress upon your child the fact that they don't have to be an adult to help make a difference in the world in a substantial way.

Your child can take a stand for the Earth at school informally as well. Give him a few ideas and see what he chooses to run with. How about if he initiates a competition between him and his classmates to challenge each other to cut down on their amount of trash, including packaged food wrapping?

## **Watching Nature Programs and Finding Earth-Conscious Online Activities**

When your child is at home, is he (or she) tempted to waste time on the computer, playing games that don't matter and won't make a difference in anyone's lives? Offer some earth-conscious alternatives in replacement for his current choice of entertainment. There are plenty of different publications and programs that can give your child hours of fun, while motivating him to learn more about caring for the Earth.

Give your child access to the Planet Earth collection, which is a well-done series produced by the BBC Natural History Unit. Each of the eleven episodes dissects a different habitat on Earth.

Disney Nature also produces great environmental-focused shows... movies that are about the environment and the creatures who live within it. It is an excellent group of movies that will familiarize your child with various animals, as they learn how each and every one plays their specific part. Movies such as "Bears" and "Monkey Kingdom" will have your child laughing hysterically at the antics and sweetness of the animals they focus on, while determining to keep this world a safe place for them to exist in.

Videos of this quality will stimulate and challenge your child to take a look outside the small part of the world that they live in. It encourages care and dedication to making the world a better place for everyone to live in.

There are some great websites that help children to learn more about the world and its complexities. NASA's Climate Kids is one such site. With an unlimited amount of information, this site is geared for kids, but adults can learn a lot from it too. There are many articles that are written with school-age children in particular in mind, and games to play that will cement the ideas into your child's mind. This site is a great and reliable resource if your child needs to reference their learning for a report or other project.

National Geographic Kids is another great site, with age-appropriate activities for children young and old which focus on wildlife and issues that affect them and the world they live in. TIME For Kids is an online offshoot of the adult's version of the popular magazine. The website offers educational information about the Earth and other topics of interest.

Get your kids excited about these websites since they are the kind of activity that is both fun and causes personal growth. The whole family can get in on the action, since we are never too old to learn more.

## **Ways to Get Kids Involved at Different Ages**

No matter what age your child is currently at, you can help them to get excited about taking charge of caring for the Earth and the environment.

### **Preschool Children**

When your child is younger, begin talking about the issues at an age-appropriate level. Introduce them to many animals, both domestic and wild. Talk to them about how we are all interconnected, and how we as humans must take care of the many living things that surround us.

Young children tend to be extremely caring and are generally very open to learning what they can do to help living creatures. Children come without bias, and only learn it from their parents and the other individuals who surround them on a continual basis.

By piquing their interest in the environment while still young, this will have the effect of propelling them toward a life of service for the things that matter in life. With your child, watch movies about wild animals that portray them as the intricate beings that they are. Take your child to the zoo and wildlife conservatories so they can get up close and personal with the animals they are learning about. Their affection will grow to familiarity and love for the animals they get to know.

Teach your young child about the amazing qualities of flowers and plants. Bring your child with you to the local garden center to pick out their favourite plant to be put into their room. NASA did testing on several plants in regards to air purification, but all plants have the same effect to some degree, so it is really a matter of personal taste.

Your young one will love this chance to indulge in their personal choice, and they will feel good knowing that you trusted that choice. Indoor plants are a natural and energy-free way to purify the air in your home, and even help individuals get to sleep easier, and wake up feeling healthier and more full of energy.

### **Young Schoolchildren**

As your child gets a little older, continue to educate them on a personal level about the world around them and the creatures within it. Younger school-age children are still at a time in their lives where they generally want to be helpful, and are willing to get their hands dirty. Although they may not get a lot done compared to those who are older and able to work hard, their enthusiasm will make up for what they lack in skill and coordination.

Encourage your child to stand beside you in the kitchen while preparing food, sorting out the pieces that can be put into the compost pile. Let them help you in the vegetable garden. Children love hands-on activities and they will enjoy digging in the dirt, or making a game out of pulling weeds. Let them help you dig out the tiny holes and toss a few seeds into each indent where produce will eventually grow.

### **Middle-School Children**

Middle-school-aged children often love playing detective, and this is a great age to help them begin researching food sources and finding out where the things that end up on their plate originally come from. Give your child a notebook and ask them to go through the store and figure out where each of the fruits and vegetables come from. Are they local or imported? Teach your child where to look in order to find out if the vegetables are organic or not, and how to spot GMOs.

Because your child is at an age where they are no longer simply accepting what is told to them, and instead are questioning everything around them, teach them about the deceptiveness of marketing. Help them to learn this lesson and how it applies both to food, items and services. Your child will relish uncovering any intentionally hidden facts, and spotting fallacies in marketing.

Now is also a great time to get your child familiar with becoming a politically active citizen. Any child old enough to compose a letter is also old enough to write to their local politician and state their views on laws that should or shouldn't be changed. Help your child research where to find this info, and then help them put together a simple letter to make their voice heard where it can make a difference. If you have them write one letter per year, they will be accustomed to fighting to make a political difference on behalf of the Earth by the time they are adults.

As your child becomes old enough to possibly have access to social media with your watchful supervision, allow them to create a blog about environmental issues and reach out to other kids who want to make a difference. Once they have their own email address, help them subscribe to blogs and websites that teach about issues affecting the Earth.

Children love crafts, and this is a great age to help your child see the beauty in creating something lovely out of something already used. No matter what your child's interests may be, there is something they can design and create out of used materials. Art, clothing and household items are just a few ideas of objects that your child may wish to explore and design.

## **Teens**

Teens are at a stage where they are gaining strength and maturity, and now is a great time for added responsibility at home. Ask your child for their ideas, since teens are filled with creativity and often have even greater ideas than we as their parents do. Have your teen regularly take care of the garden. Equip them with knowledge that will take them far when they have a home of their own someday. The things you teach them now will go with them throughout their lives, so make this time count.

The teen years are a time when children may be tempted to want to keep up with the latest fashion. Through conversations, discuss whether this is a good idea, and why. Talk to your teen about which fashion labels are environmentally conscious. Discuss the concept of clothing quality rather than quantity, and how cheap fashion from overseas is often made at the expense of the health of the individuals trapped in low-paying and unsafe jobs.

A lot of clothing is also made with cheap, synthetic materials which are not earth-friendly in any way. Educate your child about choosing clothing of good quality and eco-friendly materials. Talk about how buying clothing second-hand is another option to cut down on consumerism, and encourage them to donate or give away their own clothing when they are finished using it.

Do a room detox with your teen, taking them step by step through every square inch of their living space. Make plans to give away and donate anything that is not being used. Recycle old papers and materials that your teen no longer needs. This training will stay with them when they are decluttering their own homes someday.

Now that your child is a teen and more independent, buy them a bicycle to ride around on if you live in a neighborhood where everything is close enough that this is an option. Your child can exercise and strengthen their own health while saving on gas money and putting a stop to pollution. Little steps add up to make a big difference. This is exactly the concept you want your child to hold on to for the future.

## **Environmental Field Trips**

Field trips bring learning experiences that will help your child to remember a concept far longer than if they simply read it from a book. Although your child may do field trips through their own school, you can also create extracurricular opportunities to make an impact on your child. Here are a few places you can visit that will get the conversation started about our impact on the world, and what we can do to make as little of a negative impact as possible.

### **Landfills**

Visit a landfill. Talk about what you see. Observe the buildings that contain the massive amounts of waste. Often times children and even adults don't think about where their waste goes, and just assume it goes into the garbage bin and is never seen again. This couldn't be further from the truth. The products we consume create garbage, and this garbage collects in landfills, piling up and lasting a very long time, sometimes indefinitely.

Take your child to a dump as well, where the garbage sits out in the open. It is a strong reality check for your child to think about how the garbage bags we fill up every week add up, and that with everyone contributing the same amount of garbage, it can really make a huge amount of waste. The conversation should include the short-term and long-term negative effects that garbage has on the Earth and the people living on it.

### **Recycling Center**

For a field trip that helps remind you and your child about all that is positive in the world, visit a recycling center. Find one in your community and take a tour through it. Your child will be fascinated to learn about where items go after they are taken from your recycling bin. This is a very educational process that will interest individuals of any age. Discuss how recycling helps minimize our negative impact on the Earth as compared to simply throwing everything away and expecting landfills to take care of it all.

### **Organic Farm**

If you want to encourage your child to eat foods that are good for both them and the environment, take them to a local organic farm so they can talk to a farmer and learn about the difference between growing organic and conventional produce. Before you leave for home, allow your child to pick some of the fresh produce to take home with them.

Also visit the local farmer's market so that your child can learn the joy of choosing fresh, healthy food, and include them in the cooking of it as well. Teach them about how choosing organic produce is so much better for the Earth, and how the practice contributes to healthy soil and plants, as opposed to conventional farming.

Teaching your child to be a productive and healthy citizen of the Earth doesn't have to be a huge, lengthy lecture. There are many ways to communicate the message to young people, and you will have many opportunities to do so. Use your voice to share your concerns and solutions with the next generation, and watch in anticipation to see where they will take the torch that has been passed to them.