



THE POWER OF CONVERSATION

Training Youth to Lead Climate Conversations with Parents

ACE

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THE CHALLENGE

There is a sizeable gap between the scientific understanding of climate change and concern in the minds of the American public. While 97% of climate scientists agree that humans are responsible for climate change, only 45% of Americans consider climate change a very serious problem.¹



One data point provides a potential to bridge that gap, however. Seventy percent of American youth, ages 13-25, agree that climate change is real and a result of human activity.² Can this increased engagement with climate change be leveraged to increase overall public concern on the issue? Given support and training, do young people have the ability to influence older generations, in particular, their parents, on their perceptions, feelings and practices related to climate change? And can these support resources be effective when delivered not only in an in-person environment, but online and at scale as well?

Research is needed to understand the role of youth in catalyzing action on climate change and

how organizations can best support young people to have the greatest influence. In August 2015, ACE partnered with Skoll Global Threats Fund (SGTF) to support climate messaging testing and engagement strategies for Millennial audiences. Through this work, ACE tested and refined both digital and in-person strategies to support young people to “have the talk” about climate change with a family member. The current project builds off this earlier work and marks a significant step forward as we seek to test the potential for teens to influence their parents through targeted conversations, both through in-person training and through digital resources provided at scale.

1 Stokes, B., Wike, R., & Carle, J. (2015). Global concern about climate change, broad support for limiting emissions. Pew Research Center, 5.

2 Bladt, B. (2017) Young American Tracking Poll: Science, Emotion and Identity: Where Party Affiliation Matters to Young Americans. From [TMI Strategy](#).

●●● PROJECT OVERVIEW



The project was broken into two groups: In-Person (Part One) and Digital (Part Two).

Part One: In-Person

The in-person component focused on extensive training of a small group of highly-engaged young people. The goal was to evaluate the quantitative and qualitative impacts and benefits of climate conversation on the youth and their parents.

The participants in this component were 44 ACE Action Fellows, highly-engaged high school students in five regions across the country. These youth received the Climate Conversations Training, comprised of two 2-hour training sessions that were developed specifically for this project.

The Climate Conversations Training was comprised of tools and strategies adapted from motivational interviewing and related research.³ Motivational interviewing sets up a conversation that is non-judgemental, empathetic and encouraging, where both parties use careful listening to understand the other's point of view without judgment.

These included:

- Asking for permission to have the conversation
- Active listening and repeating back what was heard (reflection)
- Use of open-ended questions to elicit stories and experiences
- Understanding the “Three A’s:” Anxieties, Ambivalence and Aspirations
- Ask/Tell/Ask – asking permission to share information, sharing information (“tell”), and asking if there are any questions
- Acknowledging what the other has said
- Creation of a tool to remember these practices: OARTAC – Open-ended questions, Affirmation, Reflection, Tell, Acknowledge, Close

ACE Fellows were then asked to have a climate conversation with a parent. Results were analyzed through questionnaires of youth and of parents, focus group discussions with youth, and seven parent interviews.

³ Lertzman, R. (2015). *Environmental melancholia: Psychoanalytic dimensions of engagement*. Routledge.

●●● PROJECT OVERVIEW



Part Two: Digital

Participants were members of ACE's Youth Action Network, an online network of 300,000 young people. The goals of this component were: (1) to evaluate the potential for scaling a climate conversation intervention delivered via text messaging (SMS) and (2) to determine whether a short training video would affect outcomes of the conversation related to parent perceptions, feelings and practices.

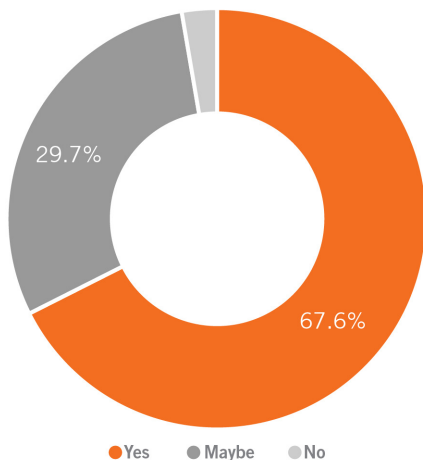
This part of the project was carried out entirely via SMS. Fifty-five thousand highly-engaged members of ACE's Youth Action Network were invited to participate. They were asked demographic and pre-survey questions in a fun "Would you rather...?" format. Participants were then asked to have a climate conversation with a parent. Half of the

participants were randomly selected to be offered a 4-minute, animated video called "*The Secret to Talking about Climate Change*" and half were offered no training video. The video is a condensed version of the in-person Climate Conversations Training used in Part One. Participants were then asked via SMS if they "had the talk" with a parent. If they responded yes, they were asked another short series of post-conversation questions.

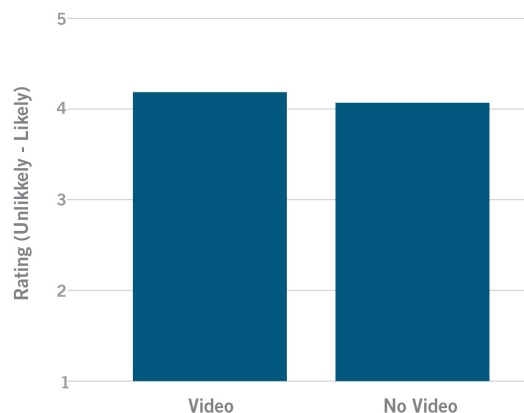


●●● WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Part One - In-Person:
Will you continue talking with your parent?



Part Two - Digital Study
Will you continue talking with your parent?



Desire for Continued Dialogue

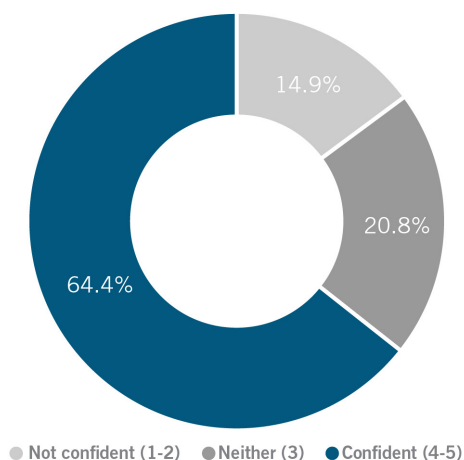
One of the primary outcomes reported by both youth and parents in Part One was an intent and desire to continue having similar conversations about climate change. Sixty-eight percent of Fellows said yes, they would continue talking about climate change with their parent, despite initial apprehension on the part of many young people to have the conversation.

In the digital component (Part Two), young people overall rated themselves likely to talk with their parent about climate change again. There was no significant difference between the video and no-video groups,

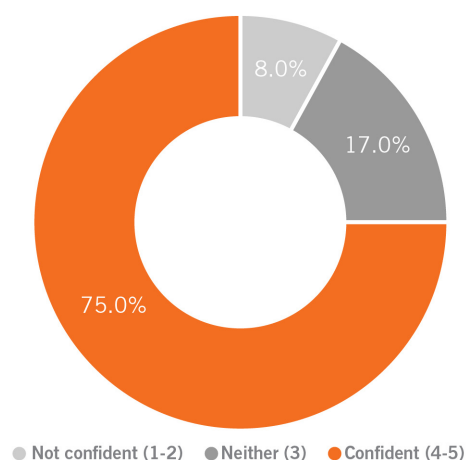
indicating the positive effect of just “breaking the ice” – after having initiated the first conversation about climate, subsequent conversations may be perceived as less challenging.

In Part Two, participants were also asked about their confidence in being able to talk to another relative about climate change. In both the video and no-video groups, a majority of respondents rated themselves as a 4 or 5 on a 1-5 scale (1 being very low confidence and 5 being very confident). However, significantly more people who received the video (75%) expressed confidence in their ability to talk to another relative about climate change than the group that didn't receive the video (64%).

No Video:
Confidence in talking to another relative



Video:
Confidence in talking to another relative



●●● COMMUNICATION STYLE IS KEY

The most significant finding from the parent interviews was that the quality of climate conversation – i.e., whether the youth was respectful, allowed the parent to ask questions, listened, and showed empathy – was more important than the informational content of the interaction. While many parents noted how their child informed or educated them on a range of topics and issues, what stood out to parents was the sense of pride in their child's initiative, sense of justice and how their child is able to communicate their beliefs.

Parents were asked a series of questions via survey to gauge their overall family communication style. These results were then compared to the outcomes of the conversation as reported by the parents. Several

outcomes were found to be correlated with particular family conversation styles. Parents who value discussing feelings and emotions within the family were more likely to report several key outcomes:

- Feeling proud of their child's work
- Being open to having more climate conversations
- Intending to have more climate conversations
- Intending to learn more about climate change

This result further illustrates the value of motivational-interviewing style of conversation in the context of talking about a divisive issue such as climate change.

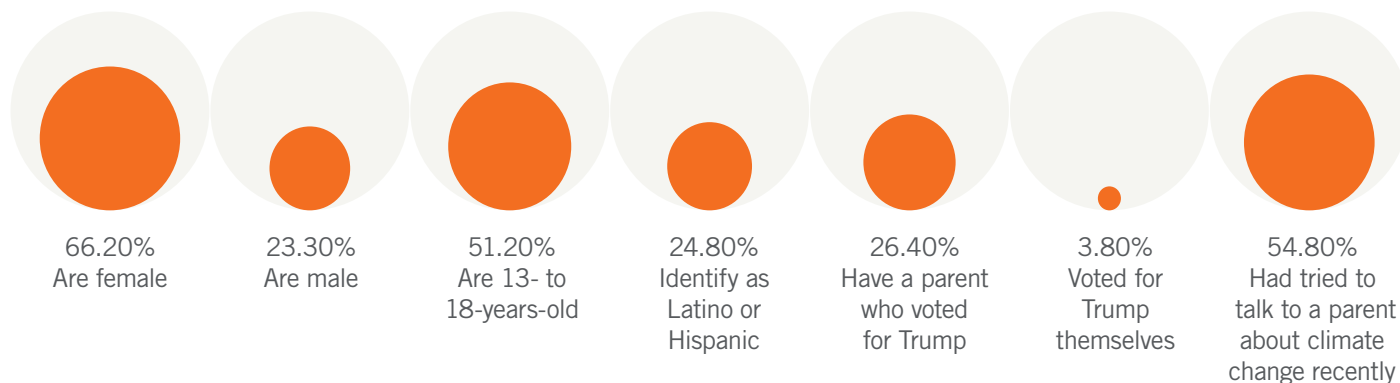
**“Her involvement has kept
climate as number one on the list and
my primary focal point, as far as what I’m trying
to do to change or influence what’s going on in
Washington or Sacramento.”**

- Father, Bay Area



The pre-conversation survey was sent to 55,000 members of ACE's Youth Action Network. Demographic data describing those who responded to this initial survey is shown below.

ALL RESPONDENTS

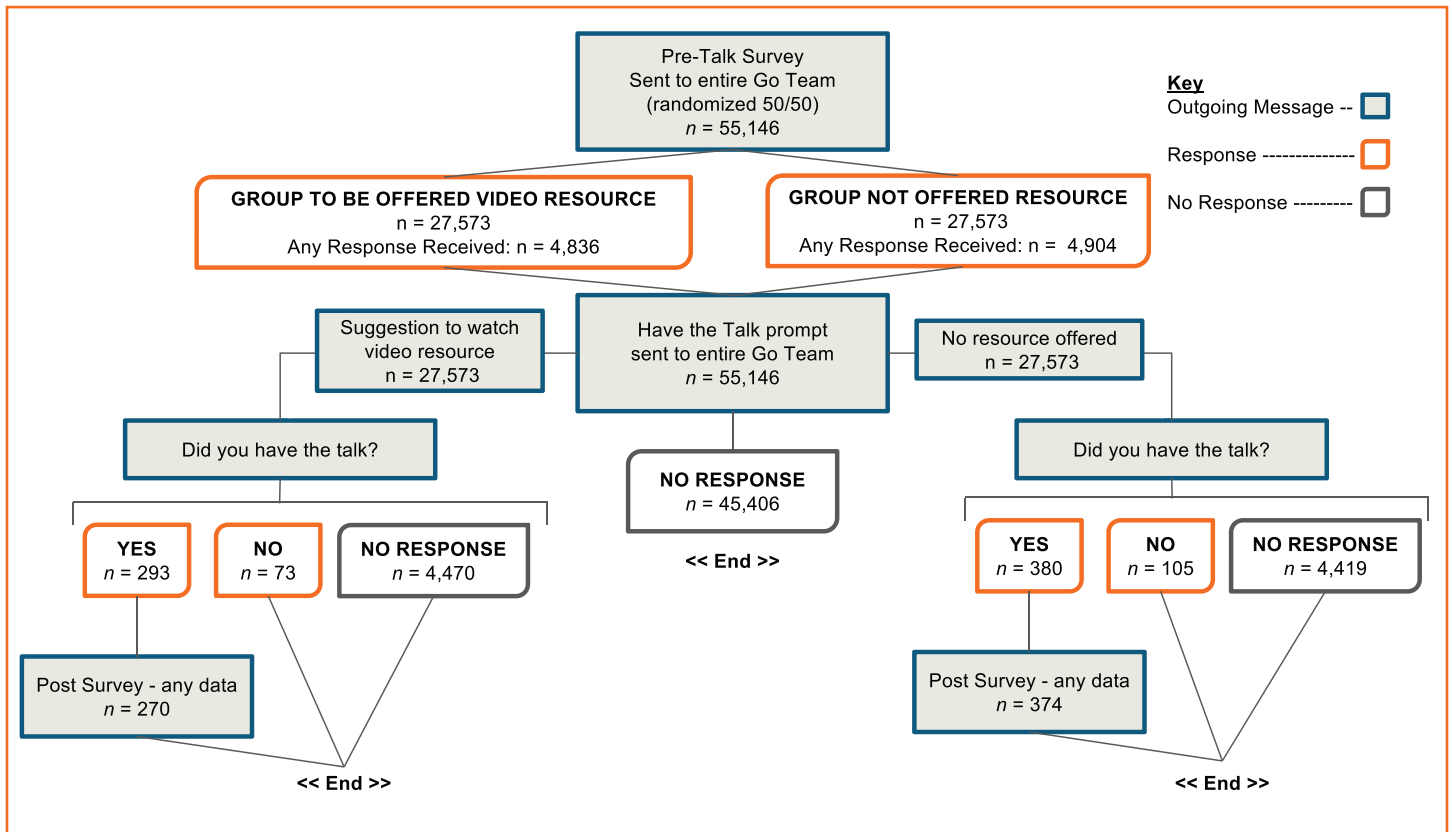


Of the 55,000 youth who were sent the pre-conversation survey, 12% participated in at least one question, with response rates decreasing throughout the text flow. 5.6% (over 3,000 participants) completed the full 14-question pre-survey.

Among youth who responded that they did have a climate conversation with a parent, 99% responded to at least one post-conversation survey question and 66% completed the full post-conversation survey. Of the initial 55,146 participants, a total of 673 young people reported having a climate conversation with a parent, or 1.2% of the total group.



OVERVIEW OF SMS FLOW



One variable that predicted the number of responses to both surveys was whether the participant had tried to talk to a parent about climate change in the past. Those who had previously tried to talk to a parent about climate change sent on average 0.4 more responses to the pre-conversation survey and 1.0 more responses to the post-conversation survey than did those who had not previously tried to talk to a parent about this topic.



Only two variables produced larger differences in the number of responses — not having a parent who voted for Trump and watching the ACE video. Those who did not have a parent who voted for Trump sent on average 1.4 more post-survey responses than those who did have a parent who voted for Trump. In the video group, those who watched the video sent on average 1.1 more responses to the post-conversation survey than those who did not watch the video.

A few other variables made smaller but still statistically significant differences in the number of responses. The number of pre-conversation survey responses was significantly higher among females and among those identifying themselves as *not* Latino. The number of post-conversation survey responses was significantly higher among younger youth (i.e., 13 to 18 years old, compared to those 19 to 27 years old).

●●● PARENT PERCEIVED AS MORE LIKELY TO TAKE ACTION

In Part One, youth anecdotally reported a range of outcomes of the conversation in terms of their parent's perceptions and practices on climate change. These include:

"It might lead to me asking more questions about climate change and his views when he picks me up from school on the drive home. It opened up the opportunity to talk more about climate change."

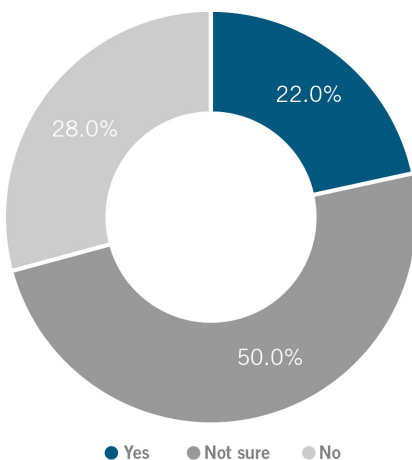
"It could lead to more family actions to stopping climate change."

"To more support for my work with ACE. To my Dad supporting legislation against climate change."

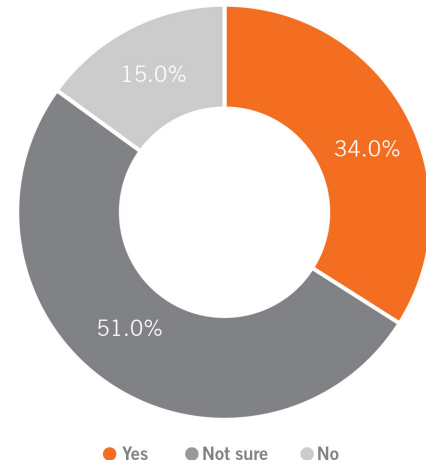
"My parents may be more open to solutions such as solar panels, renewable energy, active campaigning, etc."

In the digital study (Part Two), youth were asked several questions about outcomes of the conversation. When asked if the conversation led to a next step or further action, 22% of the no-video group responded yes, whereas 34% of the video group responded yes ($p < 0.01$).

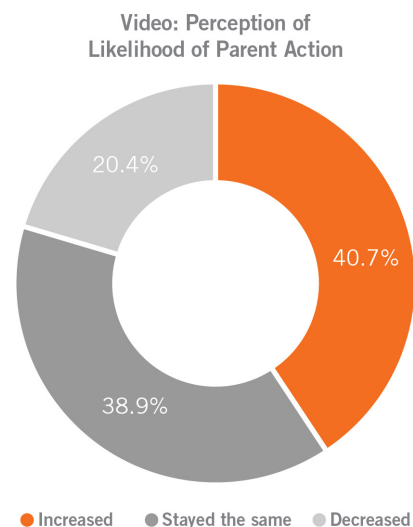
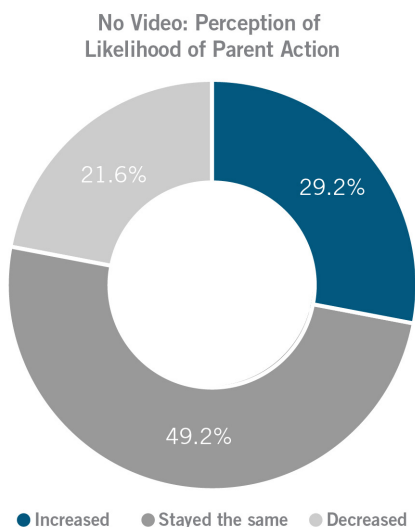
No Video: Did the conversation lead to next steps or further action?



Video: Did the conversation lead to next steps or further action?



One question was asked both in the pre-survey as well as after the conversation: “How likely is your parent to do things like take public transit or shorter showers?” In the no-video group, 29% of respondents showed an increase in how likely they thought their parent was to take action (ie, went from 1 to 2 or 2 to 3), whereas 41% of the video group showed an increase in the perceived likelihood of parent action ($p<0.05$).



Receiving the video made a greater degree of difference, as well. Average responses for the no-video group went from 3.02 to 3.1 (0.08 increase) on a scale of 1-5 (1 - very unlikely, 5 - very likely). Average responses for the video group went from 3.05 to 3.4 (0.35 increase) ($p<0.05$).

	No Video	Video
Mean Pre-Survey	3.02	3.05
Mean Post-Survey	3.10	3.40
Mean Change	0.08	0.35

These results indicate that offering a resource to support young people in having the conversation is an effective tool, even in the form of a single, short video. This is despite the fact that only 51% of the video group reported actually watching the video. Actually watching the video made a difference, as well.

Those who did watch the video were significantly more likely to report that the conversation led to next steps or further action (42% vs. 25% respectively, $p<0.05$).

When asked if the video made them more or less confident in the conversation on a scale of 1-5 (1 - much less confident, 5 - more confident), the average rating was 3.9, with the highest portion of respondents (38%) rating it a 5.

There were no significant effects of age or Latino ethnicity for any of the outcomes. In the video group, however, girls were twice as likely than boys to perceive an increase in the likelihood that their parents would take action – 50.8% versus 25.6%, respectively. This indicates that being offered a training resource (ie, short video) was significantly more impactful on girls and their perceptions of the outcome of the conversation than it was on boys. This may be due to girls’ degree of confidence going into the conversation or the content of the video being better received by girls. Further research is needed to fully understand this effect.

CONCLUSIONS



Training young people to have a climate conversation works. Young people can learn how to facilitate an open-ended dialogue about this challenging subject with their parents with positive outcomes for both youth and parents.

Digital training resources can be delivered at scale and still be effective. A 4-hour in-person training condensed to a 4-minute video was effective at influencing outcomes of a climate conversation.

Offering a training resource like a short video had the following outcomes:

- Increased youth confidence in their ability to have a climate conversation
- More youth reporting further action following the conversation
- Increased youth perceptions of the likelihood of their parent taking action on climate change

SMS can be a successful method of engaging young people to take in-person action.

Having a one-on-one conversation has been shown to be an effective means of impacting a person's views on an issue, particularly if that conversation is in the form of an open-ended discussion and dialogue with careful listening and without judgment.⁴ Climate change is a contentious issue with deeply held beliefs on both sides that are often linked to a person's ideology. A conversation can, therefore, be a tool to break down those entrenched beliefs.

Conversations can also be key in connecting the dots between online and in-person action. As ACE works to develop young people as climate leaders

by engaging them to take both online and in-person action, having a conversation with a friend or family member can be a first step in taking in-person action on climate change. Will young people who have had a climate conversation with a parent then go on to share their personal story about climate change in a more public way – in a blog post, or phone call to an elected official? Could they encourage their peers to also have a climate conversation and post it on social media? These are questions that ACE is interested in exploring as we continue to develop an engagement pathway for youth on climate.

4. Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2012). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change*. Guilford press.