

Deciding to have a baby amid the climate crisis: whatever you're feeling, you're not alone | CBC Documentaries

Britt Wray · Posted: Nov 24, 2022 10:51 AM EST | Last Updated: November 27, 2022

*The **Climate Baby Dilemma** airs Friday, November 25th at 9pm on CBC and is now streaming on CBC Gem.*

Have you ever felt a mixture of joy and sadness when looking at a child's face? At first glance, their adorableness rouses glee. But then you think about the water shortages, extreme weather, and deepening inequality that scary climate headlines constantly tell us is coming for their generation, and therein lies the grief.

The global climate crisis is affecting how young people feel about having children.

One in four childfree American adults, according to a [poll](#) released by Morning Consult in 2020, say climate change is a factor in their decision to not have kids. In 2021, I co-authored a global study that was published in The Lancet. We surveyed 10,000 youth in 10 countries, and [nearly 40 per cent](#) of 16- to 25-year-olds reported feeling hesitant to have kids one day because of climate change.

Many young activists are connecting their reproductive decisions to their climate fears. In 2019, 18-year-old Canadian student Emma Lim created [#No Future, No Children](#), a pledge not to have children until governments take serious action against climate change. More than 10,000 young people took the pledge by 2020.

In the CBC Docs Original **The Climate Baby Dilemma**, I talk to people who are hesitant to bring new life into the world amidst their climate anxiety. I also meet parents who are emboldened to act, fighting for a better future for the children they have.

Whatever you're feeling, you're not alone

Perhaps you've questioned having kids, considered adoption so you can have a family without committing another new person to our turbulent world, or experienced sleepless nights because your kids are already here and thinking about their future makes you anxious.

If so, you're not alone.

I myself faced the question of whether to have a baby while writing [Generation Dread](#), a book about the mental health impacts of the climate crisis.

If you're on the fence about having children thanks to the climate emergency, firstly, I'm sending

your compassion. I know it's not a fun place to be.

Coming to a decision around this dilemma is not easy, and for some, it's downright excruciating. While the pressures causing this are public concerns, it's an entirely personal decision with no right answer.

With so many people now perched on this fence, I'd like to share some of the perspectives that helped me think and feel through my own decision.



"If I were to be pregnant in 2030, I don't know what would happen to me." | The Climate Baby Dilemma

Britt Wray hears two main reasons for not having children - the guilt of a new child's carbon footprint, or the worry for the safety of that child. One young activist describes her reasons.

Having a child is a hopeful act

As the former Czech president Václav Havel put it, hope "is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."

Ask yourself: would having a child, with all the love, growth and hardship it brings into existence, be meaningful enough to you that it would make sense to go through with it, regardless of how the climate crisis develops?

This is not the first existential crisis humanity has faced

Climate change isn't the first existential threat humans have endured. Marginalized communities, especially Indigenous and Black communities, have had to organize for centuries to change the

systems in which they live for the protection of their children.

Rather than turn away from bringing babies into the world, many work to change the world so that their babies can more easily live within it. As a global community, we don't yet know the extent to which we can organize and achieve climate justice.

Trying to bend that long arc of the climate crisis toward justice is always worth doing; it's the only thing that will protect our kids' futures in a warming world. But being a climate-concerned parent today requires taking action with others. Is that a role you are ready to take on?



The climate crisis will enlarge the cracks and chasms that chronic inequity creates, says climate advocate | The Climate Baby Dilemma

Imara Ajani Rolston is the director of the Community Climate Resilience Lab in Toronto, and a father of three. He says we need to be deeply involved in changing our systems to protect our children.

Imagine different scenarios

Try to imagine *not* having a kid because of climate change. What does it feel like? Is it liberating? Relieving? Sad? A commitment to your fear? The thing that will allow you to have enough time and energy for activism or other passions?

Put yourself in that mindset — really explore it — and journal about what you sense. Then do the same for what it would feel like to have a child, in spite of your climate concerns. Is that terrifying? Exhausting? Courageous? A commitment to your joy? This exercise may reveal insights to help guide you.

It's also important to talk about these feelings with others. Consider hosting or attending a house party or get together, like those organized by [Conceivable Future](#), to "talk, testify, and take action." In the process, you'll build a community around yourself with similar concerns and goals.

It may also help to think about alternative family structures beyond the nuclear model. Perhaps raising kids in a multi-parent household or creating lifelong bonds with children who don't have your DNA feels appealing as a way to reconcile some of your concerns.

Whatever reasons make you hesitant to have children, spend time honouring them, instead of exploring your question through the single lens of the climate crisis.

[Point of View](#)

[Raising and protecting children amid the climate crisis 'is the revolution': Anishinaabe activist Sarain Fox](#)

[In Depth](#)

['I'm all in': Being a parent amid the climate crisis](#)

Parents need support too

If you're already a parent, you might be looking for ways to support yourself or help your kids with their own climate anxiety. I recommend Elizabeth Bechard's [Parenting in a Changing Climate](#) and psychotherapist Jo McAndrews's talk on [supporting children in the face of climate change](#).

Support groups like the Good Grief Network's [10-Steps to Personal Resilience & Empowerment in a Chaotic Climate](#) program are designed to help navigate difficult emotions related to climate change, use these emotions to inspire purposeful action. They also offer a parent-specific program to help individuals get serious about raising resilient kids in a warming world.

In writing *Generation Dread*, I researched the ways one can live more meaningfully amid the climate crisis, and the importance of channeling anxiety and grief into transformative action.

I wrestled with this same dilemma myself, both professionally and personally, for more than three years. For me, having a child was an expression of joy and courage over despair. Others may stay childfree as a way to be happier and less stressed. It is different for each of us.

Britt Wray is author of Generation Dread, a book and newsletter that examines the mental health impacts of the climate crisis and what we can do about it. She is featured in the documentary The Climate Baby Dilemma.

Watch ***The Climate Baby Dilemma***.