

An open invitation to talk to children and young people about clean air.

Dear healthcare professionals,

Thank you for considering starting conversations with children & young people about clean air. We know you might feel apprehensive about not knowing what or how much to say, or saying the wrong thing, but **you don't need to do something huge. You can start today, in the community, with small shifts.** One of our peers taught us the Chinese proverb which we wanted to share with you too

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time – is now.”

It's definitely time now, if not 20 years ago, to get talking about the issue of clean air.

When the RCPCH &Us Climate Changers group were thinking about how we could help clinicians explore the topic of clean air with children and young people, we spent a weekend at [Sol Haven](#), a permaculture centre near Northampton. We wanted to visit somewhere that really embraced the importance of nature and the way we fit into it, and the benefits to everyone of looking after our world.

Permaculture is an approach to land management that aims to reduce waste, prevent pollution, maximise sustainability, and protect wildlife and habitat. **So much thought is put into everything. Nothing is wasted.** There are twelve guiding principles that underpin this, and we were struck by how many of these principles could be equally applied to how we should approach talking about clean air:



Permaculture principle: integrate rather than segregate. Talking about clean air should be part of our everyday conversations about health, rather than an add on, or something that's only talked about in certain situations. It affects everything about us and forms part of our whole. Just as ten years ago talking about mental wellbeing in an appointment about physical health needs would have been very unusual (and now it's now quite common), we would like clean air conversations to become a routine part of health conversations.

Permaculture principle: observe and interact.

Talking to children and young people about clean air involves a two way conversation. **Everything starts with a conversation.** Finding out what children and young people

already know, being informative without frightening, willing to share your own experience and to take on board theirs, are all important parts of the process.

Permaculture principle: use and value diversity.

We believe **that everyone has a part to play. Everyone's contribution is important and valuable.** We all bring different abilities and experiences to the table – one size does not fit all and so it's important to have a range of suggestions and options around how to breathe cleaner air ready for discussion.

Permaculture principle: creatively use and respond to change.

As a group of children & young people passionate about improving our climate we believe new and creative ways are needed to help address the issue of clean air beginning with better conversations and accessible information, and we are willing and keen to work with health care professionals to support these conversations with other young people.

For many of us, coming from a city, Sol Haven felt strange and totally removed from our usual surroundings, and we also reflected on this as a group – thinking that maybe this was similar to how some healthcare professionals might be feeling about having clean air-related conversations with young people. A bit uncomfortable, unsure, unfamiliar. However we'd like to encourage you to do just that, using some of the resources from the Clean Air Companion to support you, because it's only by starting a conversation can we become more informed and in control of our futures.

Change can feel hard, impossible, sometimes. But actually, you just have to start, and start small.

The RCPCH &Us Climate Changers



RCPCH Air Pollution Companion

Learn more about air pollution and child health
<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/key-topics/air-pollution>

