

2025

Climate Education for Schools

Why Environmental Learning Must Start Early

Why Climate Education Must Begin Early

Children today are already experiencing the effects of climate change such as rising temperatures, pollution, disrupted seasons, and visible environmental degradation. For young learners, these are not abstract global issues; they are part of the world they are growing up in.

Research shows that ages 6 to 10 are a critical window for shaping lifelong environmental values and behaviors. At this stage, children are naturally curious, emotionally connected to nature, and eager to take action. Studies also confirm that young learners can understand simple climate and environmental concepts when these are taught through stories, play, nature-based activities, and hands-on exploration.

In Lebanon, where children face daily environmental challenges from waste problems to water stress starting climate education early is essential. Teaching climate literacy at this age is not about fear or complexity; it is about building awareness, nurturing responsibility, and empowering children to believe they can make a difference.

This report explores why early climate education matters, how it can be taught effectively, and the opportunities it creates for Lebanon's schools, teachers, and communities.



Understanding Early Childhood Climate Literacy

Children between the ages of six and ten are far more capable of understanding environmental and climate concepts than many adults assume. Research shows that young learners can identify basic climate impacts such as changes in weather, melting ice, or pollution, and can link these to simple causes in their environment. At this age, children are rapidly developing the cognitive skills needed to recognize patterns, compare observations, and draw conclusions, all of which support early climate learning.

What makes this age group particularly responsive is their natural sense of curiosity and connection to the world around them. Children frequently ask questions about animals, weather, trees, oceans, and the visible changes they notice in their surroundings. When guided properly, these everyday observations become the foundation for understanding larger environmental ideas.

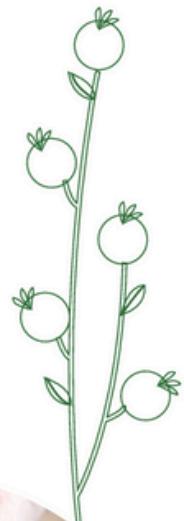
Young children possess strong pro-environmental attitudes and a willingness to act. They are quick to adopt simple behaviors such as recycling, saving water, caring for plants, or avoiding litter. Such behaviors that become harder to instill later in life. Early exposure strengthens this mindset and nurtures a sense of personal responsibility and agency.

However, misconceptions are common. Children may confuse global warming with seasonal changes or think climate change affects only far-away places or animals. This makes early education essential: *not to overwhelm them with complex science, but to gently correct misunderstandings and help them build an accurate, age-appropriate understanding of their environment.*

Therefore, when concepts are presented through simple, relatable, and nature-based activities, children quickly grasp the idea that their actions matter and that caring for the environment begins with everyday choices.



Effective Early Climate Education Programs



A Clear and Child-Focused Educational Vision

Developmentally Appropriate, Inquiry-Based Learning

Play, Exploration, and Nature-Based Activities

A Structured Curriculum that Builds Environmental Competencies

Purposeful Learning Environments and Prepared Educators

Strong programs are guided by a philosophy that links children's development with connection to nature.

They prioritize cultural relevance, health and safety, community involvement, and continuous improvement through regular evaluation.

Effective approaches are grounded in child development research. Activities are age-appropriate, hands-on, and inquiry-driven, supporting social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth.

Learning is centered on authentic experiences rather than abstract concepts.

Programs create frequent opportunities for children to explore natural environments both indoors and outdoors.

Using natural materials, guided play, and open-ended discovery helps strengthen curiosity and builds early environmental understanding.

Environmental learning is supported by a curriculum that develops key skills: observation, critical thinking, problem-solving, responsibility, and care for living things.

The framework integrates environmental concepts into broader learning goals across subjects.

Effective programs require supportive spaces-classrooms, gardens, outdoor learning areas that are safe, inclusive, and rich in natural elements.

Equally important are well-trained educators who possess strong environmental literacy and the skills to create engaging, meaningful experiences for young learners.

Five Ways to Teach Children About the Environment

1

Engaging in Nature Activities

Simple outdoor experiences like walking, observing insects, or exploring school gardens help children build a natural connection with their environment and understand why it needs protection.

2

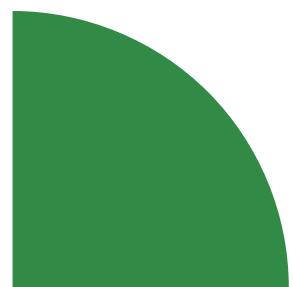
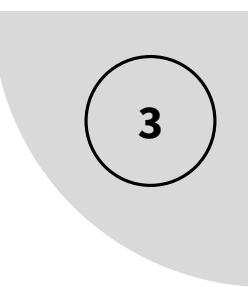
Visiting Farms, Gardens, and Nature Centers

Spending time in natural or agricultural settings fosters respect for living things and reinforces the idea that humans are part of the environment, not separate from it.

3

Participating in Community Cleanups

Spending time in natural or agricultural settings fosters respect for living things and reinforces the idea that humans are part of the environment, not separate from it.



Practicing Waste Segregation in the Classroom

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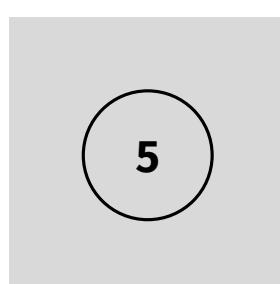
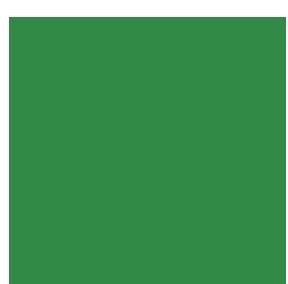
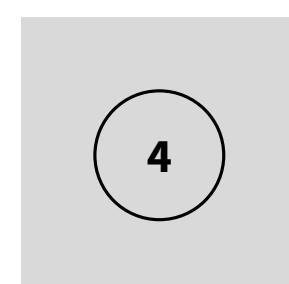


5

Discussing Environmental Issues in Simple, Age-Appropriate Ways

Conversations about nature and environmental problems framed positively and supported with pictures, books, or stories help children think critically about causes and solutions.

4



Advance Environmental and Climate Education for Children

Around the world, there is growing recognition that environmental and climate education must begin early to prepare future generations for a rapidly changing planet. Several international frameworks and initiatives support this vision, emphasizing the importance of sustainability learning in early childhood. Some major global efforts include:



SDG Target 4.7 – Education for Sustainable Development

This target calls on all countries to teach learners the knowledge and skills needed for sustainable living. For young children, it means introducing simple climate and environmental ideas through play, exploration, and everyday classroom activities.



UNESCO promotes integrating sustainability into national education systems. It highlights early childhood as a key stage where values are formed and encourages schools to adopt whole-school approaches including curriculum, teacher training, and school environment to nurture responsible, environmentally aware students.

The Greening Education Partnership

Launched by UNESCO in 2022, this initiative helps countries “green” their entire education system by updating curricula, training teachers, and promoting environmentally friendly school practices. It emphasizes early childhood as the foundation for long-term climate resilience.



UNICEF’s Climate and Environmental Education Initiatives

UNICEF supports countries in teaching climate resilience and environmental awareness to young children. Their approach focuses on child-friendly, empowering learning avoiding fear, building confidence, and using nature-based activities to help children feel connected to their environment.