

It's Too Hot to Stay Silent

How (and Why) to Hold Relational Climate Conversations



**CLIMATE
ADVOCACY
LAB**

ClimateAdvocacyLab.org



Overview

Where we're headed

- **Overview**
- **Climate Change Communication Basics**
- **Navigating Relational Climate Conversations**
- **Practice & Integration –**
 - Cultivating sameness with reflective listening
 - Creating energy by working with differences
- **Climate Conversations Roadmap**
- **Following Up**

Learning Objectives for Part 1

- *Identify the barriers to discussing climate change and climate issues with friends, family, and neighbors*
- *Develop knowledge and tools to overcome those barriers*
- *Grow confidence and self-efficacy that climate conversations are doable and powerful*

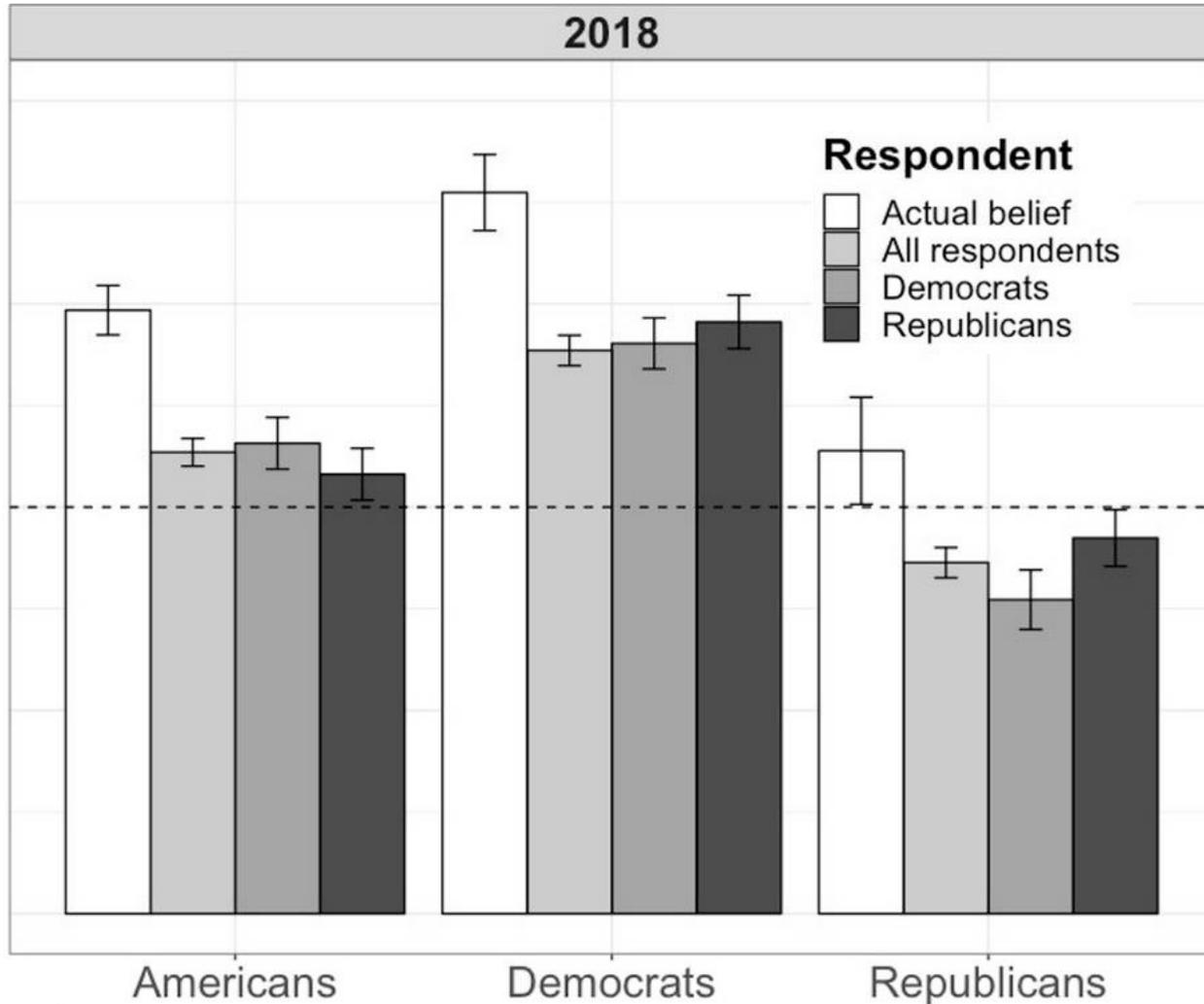


Why is it important to talk about climate change?

- Defeating isolation
- Fostering camaraderie and unity
- Developing support networks and efficacy
- Building shared understandings of problems and solutions
- Grassroots climate action depends on it



People underestimate how many Americans care about climate change



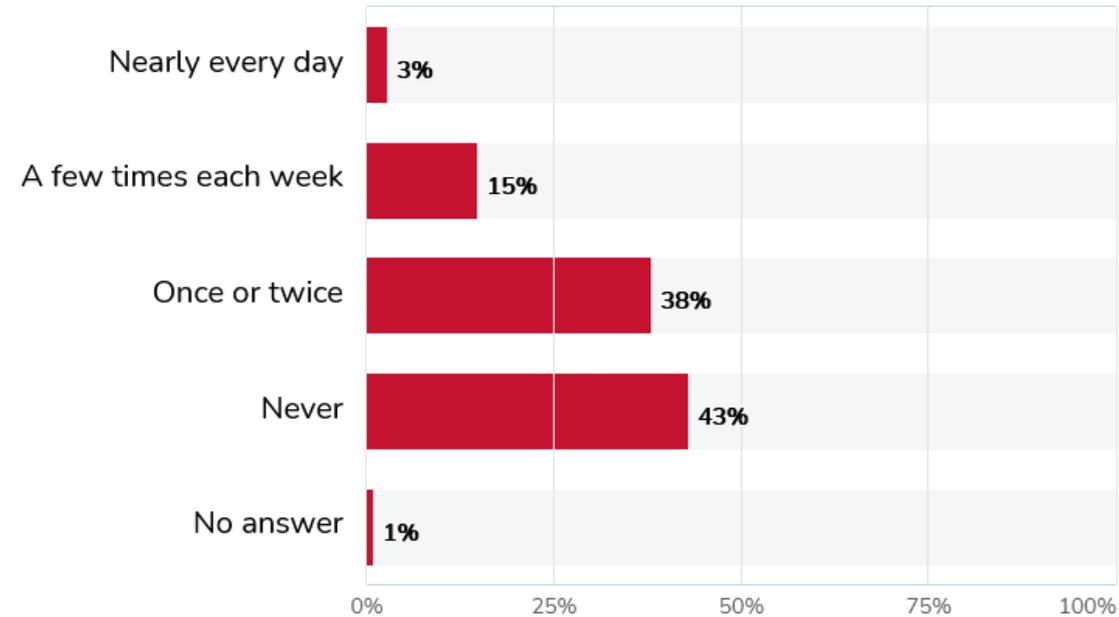
Faulty second-order beliefs of whether climate change is real

This is the unfortunate norm

81% say they rarely or never discuss climate change

Thinking about the people you talked with over the past few weeks, whether in person, over the phone, or online...How often, if ever, have you discussed the need for action on global climate change?...Nearly every day, a few times each week, once or twice, never

Sample: National adult (n=13749)



Source: Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel Poll. April, 2021. Roper Center at Cornell University

Interview Dates: April 20, 2021 - April 29, 2021

Geographic Coverage: United States

Survey Organization: Ipsos

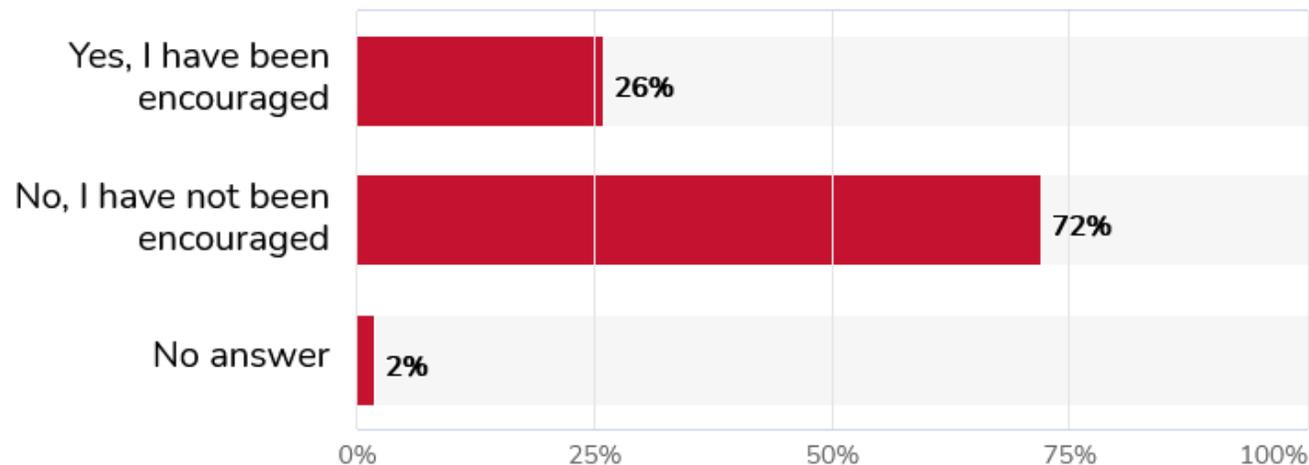
Sponsor: Pew Research Center



72% say they have never been engaged on climate

Has a friend or family member ever personally encouraged you to become involved in efforts to reduce the effects of global climate change?

Sample: National adult (n=13749)



Source: Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel Poll. April, 2021. Roper Center at Cornell University

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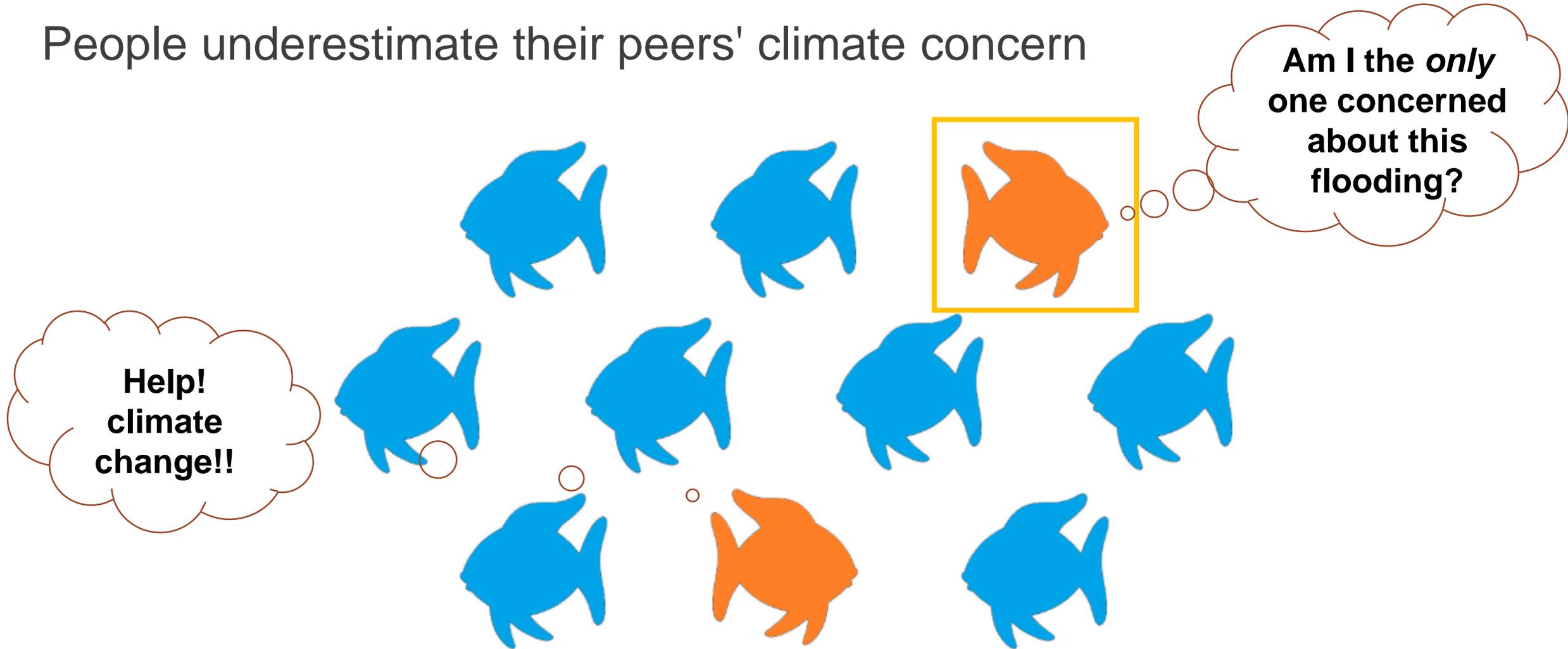
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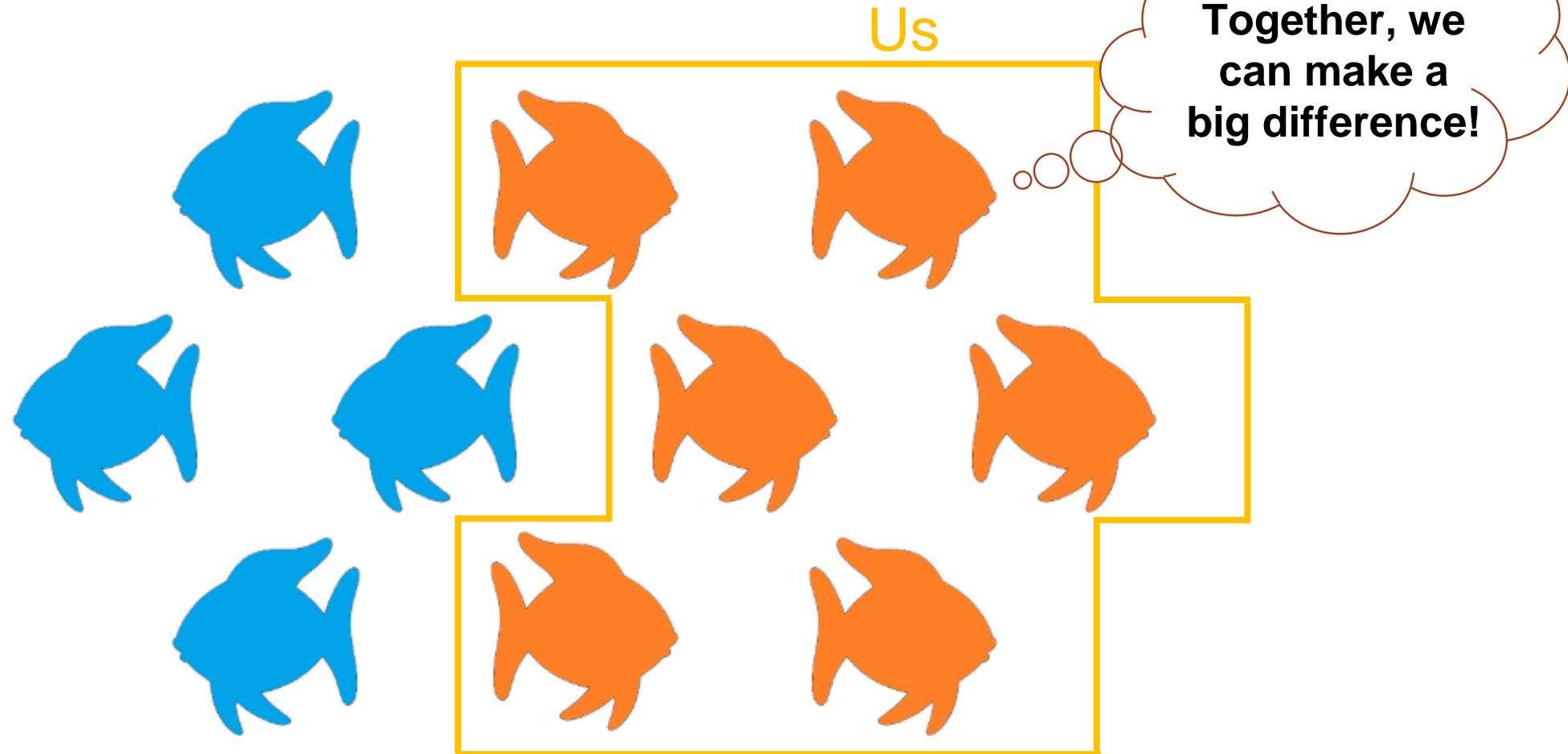
Leverage the power of social norms

People underestimate their peers' climate concern



Leverage the power of social norms

People underestimate their peers' climate concern



Shifting the spiral of silence...

- People underestimate their peers' climate concern
- Officials underestimate constituents' climate concern
- The solution: **correct misperceptions** and **emphasize the social consensus** on climate change and climate policies
- Conversational cascade: people can be swayed by peers, and officials by constituents

You're not alone!

One simple intervention: let people know that they're not alone in caring about climate change

Control



 **Oil Change International**
Sponsored · Paid for by Oil Change International · 

Climate change is a serious issue that demands serious action. However, U.S. oil and gas production is poised for an expansion that will be unparalleled in history, precisely at a time when we know we must quickly curtail our extraction and use of fossil fuels.

Our new report explains why we need to keep fossil fuels in the ground and move forward on 100% renewable energy and a Green New Deal.



Treatment



 **Oil Change International**
Sponsored · Paid for by Oil Change International

You're not alone. A growing number of Texans (now 71%) agree we should do more to fight climate change, including a majority of Texas Republicans. However, U.S. oil and gas production is poised for an expansion that will be unparalleled

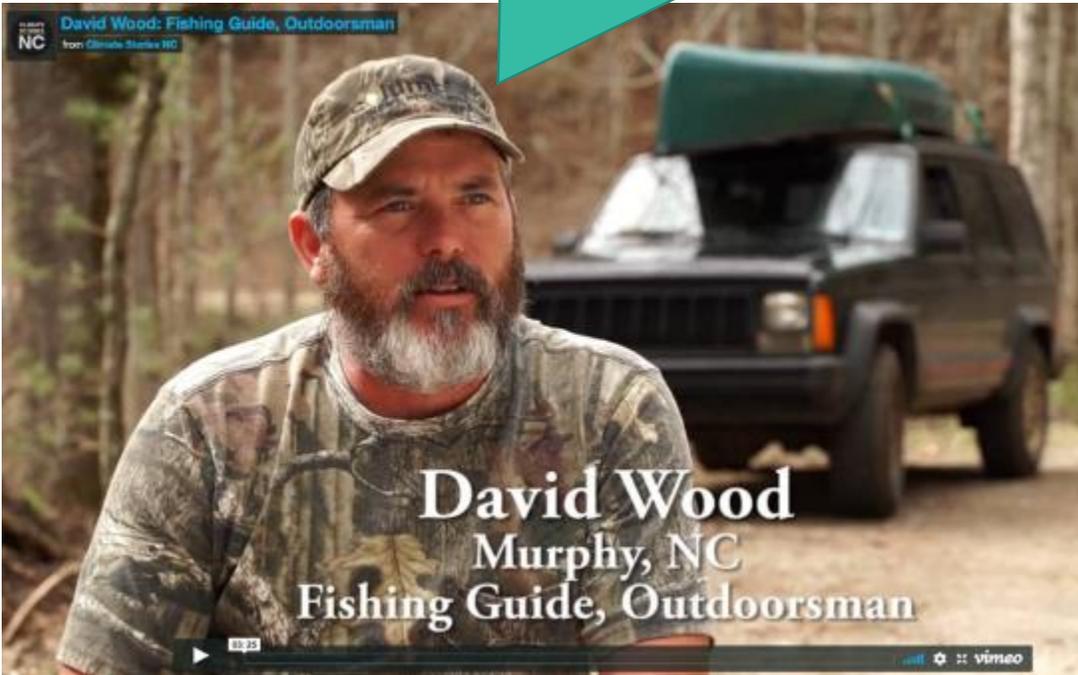
~2% engagement boost
on a fairly “hard” test

Identify + understand your audience(s)

- Who are they?
- Where do they live?
- How do they self-identify?
- What are their core values and motivations?
- To which other communities or groups are they connected?
- What are their opinions and behaviors on climate and energy issues, and why?

For example, rural audiences...

“Trout streams are warming up. Everything’s blooming earlier. I think the world is getting hotter.”



- Individual responsibility for environmental protection
- Supportive of “reasonable” environmental regulations
- Aversion to “environmentalists” and preference for “conservation” and “sustainability”
- Local impacts and solutions

What makes for a credible messenger?

- “Source credibility” composed of both *knowledgeability* and *relatability*
- Credibility is not inherent in any given messenger, but conferred by the audience
- Why might your audience trust *you* as a credible messenger for information on climate and energy issues?

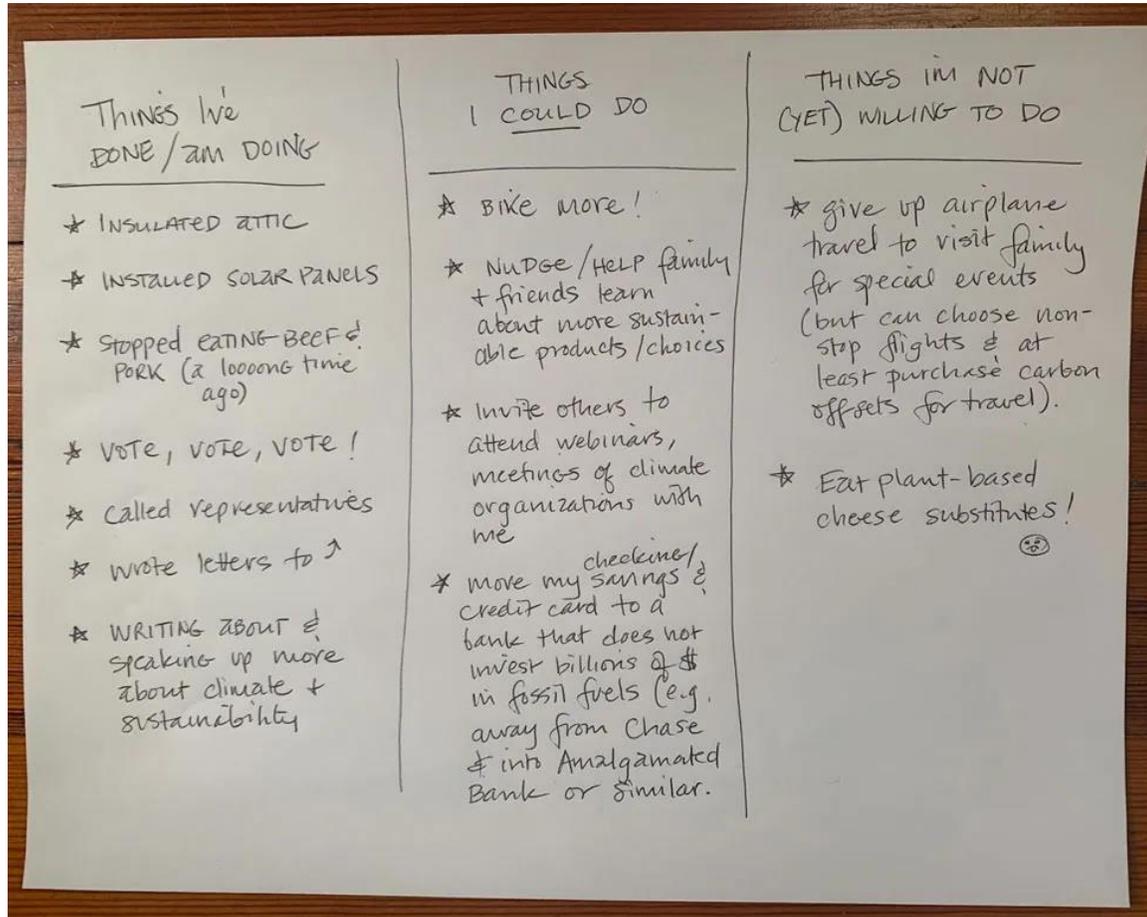


Communicating with emotions



- Audience matters
- Pair emotional appeal with a solution that empowers audiences to act
 - If a negative emotion, provide a way to reduce distress
 - If a positive emotion, build on enthusiasm
- Consider hope

Tell your story



- You don't need to memorize a whole spiel, but consider:
 - Why do you care about climate change? What was your entry point to the issue?
 - What are you doing to take action against climate change?
 - What do you hope to do in the future?
 - What aren't you willing to do (yet)?
 - How can your conversation partner help you on these last two questions?

Solutions-based messaging



- There's no “magical message”
- Consider your audience (how they self-identify, what issues that care about, etc.)
- Situate your neighbors and local community as part of the solution
- Clean energy and health are cross-cutting winners

Efficacy in climate advocacy

Self-efficacy



Collective efficacy



Response efficacy

2020 Democrats tout Thunberg UN speech: 'This is why we need young people leading the climate justice movement'

BY ZACK BUDRYK · 09/23/19 03:49 PM EDT

801 COMMENTS

For example, use “legitimation rhetoric” for self-efficacy

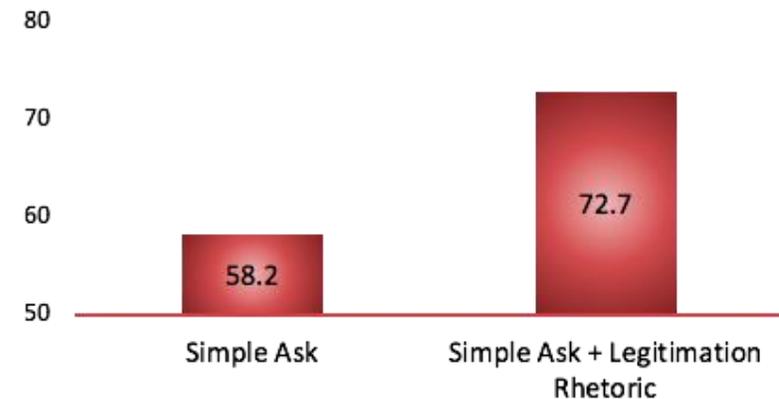
Acknowledge and legitimize peoples’ anxiety around risky political actions, but reinforce the importance of taking those actions

Characteristics of “*risky political action*”:

1. Unfamiliar, uncertain outcomes
2. Social interactions with unpleasant and/or hostile people

Will you help lobby your local Congressperson?
Please know that many people tell us they feel nervous about taking this on. It’s entirely understandable if you feel the same way. But it’s important to do...

Will you lobby your congressperson on climate?
(% signing up)

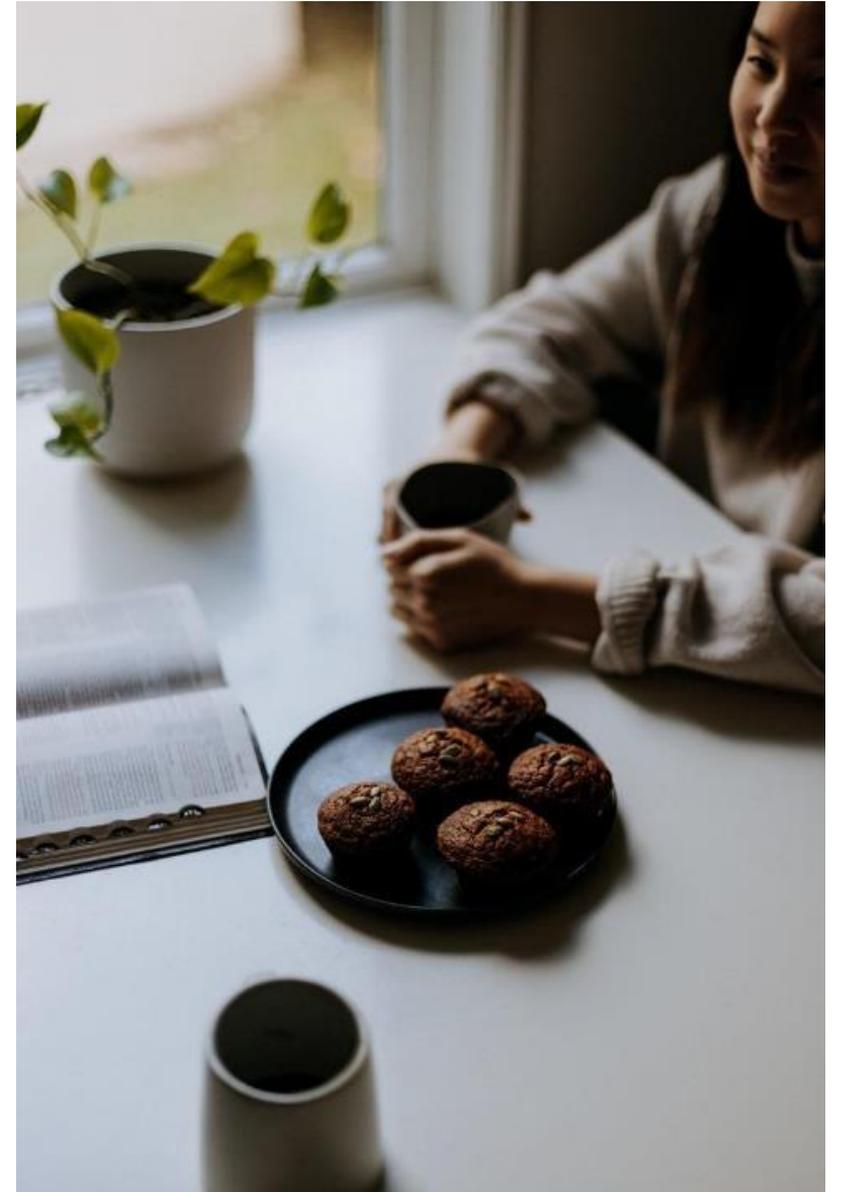


Learning Objectives for Part 2

- *Personalize climate change communications – from systems and institutions to relationships and individuals*
- *Introduce a simple, basic framework to help guide constructive conversations on climate – and beyond!*
- *Provide a few, simple interventions to keep conversations on climate constructive*



Having conversations about climate change



Sameness

Difference

Danger



Preservation

(relaxation, safety)

Growth

(Excitement, newness)

(Stagnation, rigidity)

Threat, fear,
fight/flight/freeze/
appease

Sameness

Difference

Danger



- Points of reference, for when differences arise
- Establish through listening
 - Drop own opinion
- Attend to own experience

- Excitement & energy
- Movement toward including them
- Integrating differences leads to greater complexity, vitality, robustness

- Too much differentiation is experienced as threat
- Common responses: withdraw or control

Keeping our conversations **constructive** and **connected**

Simple interventions

Clarify your intention

- Why are you having this conversation?
- What are you hoping to get out of the conversation?
- Is there an element of this relationship that is more important than your perspective?



Attend to your own physical sensations

- Do you feel discomfort in the face of conflict?
- Do you respond from habit (versus choice)?
- Where/how do you need to build more capacity to stick with tough conversations (without “dysregulating,” aka losing your cool)?



Prepare to listen

- Can you listen with no opinion?
- Opens us to new perspectives
- Soothes the nervous system
- Allows us to cultivate a sense of sameness



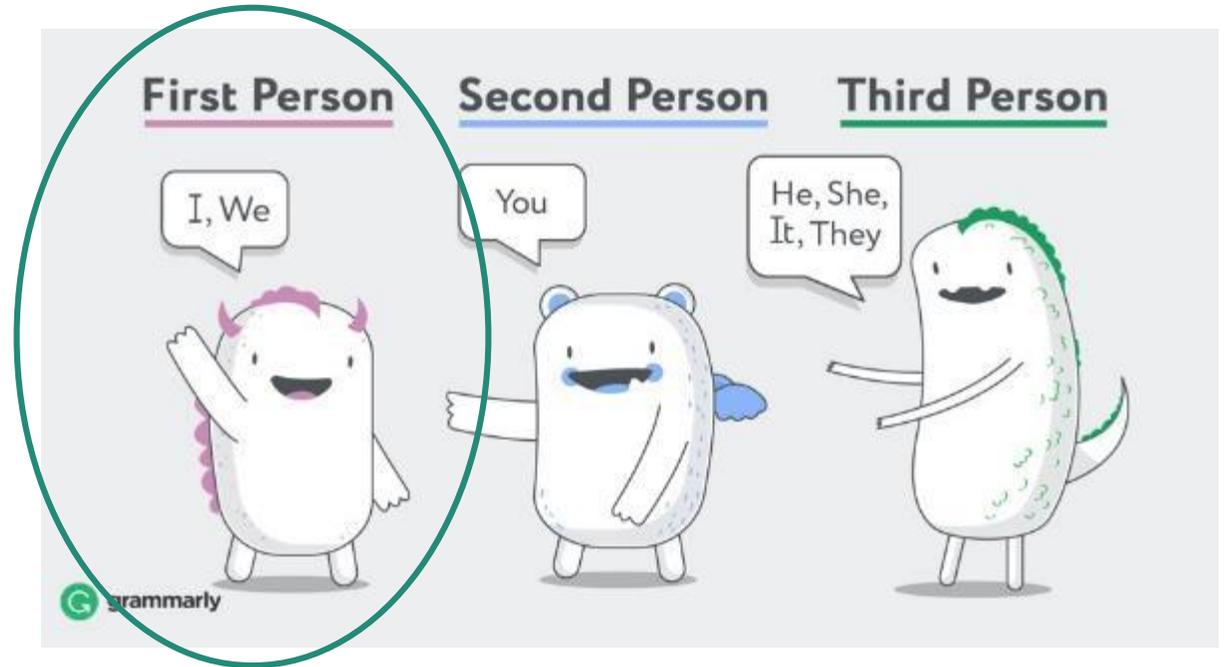
Principled disagreement

- Differences can energize a conversation
- ...but they don't *have* to enter the “danger zone”
- Principled disagreement allows us to engage in an exchange of ideas without needing to agree



Use the “first person”

- Stay in the first person (I/me/mine)
 - Your experience is sovereign
 - *“I don’t feel that way.”*
- Second person can quickly get us into trouble
 - *“You’re wrong!”*
- Third person requires agreement
 - *“The climate is changing.”* (third)



Name the difference

- Naming the difference/disagreement allows you to take the reins
- ...and redirect the conversation
 - E.g., *“I don’t think we’re going to see eye-to-eye on this, so rather than getting in an argument, why don’t we focus on _____”*



Navigating challenging climate conversations

1. Create experiences of sameness (listen) + attend to your own experience (feel)
2. Draw out differences to include them leads us to become more integrated and capable of holding complexity
3. When too much differentiation arises, return to touchpoints of sameness to re-establish coherence in the group



Practice & Integration

Practicing having climate conversations



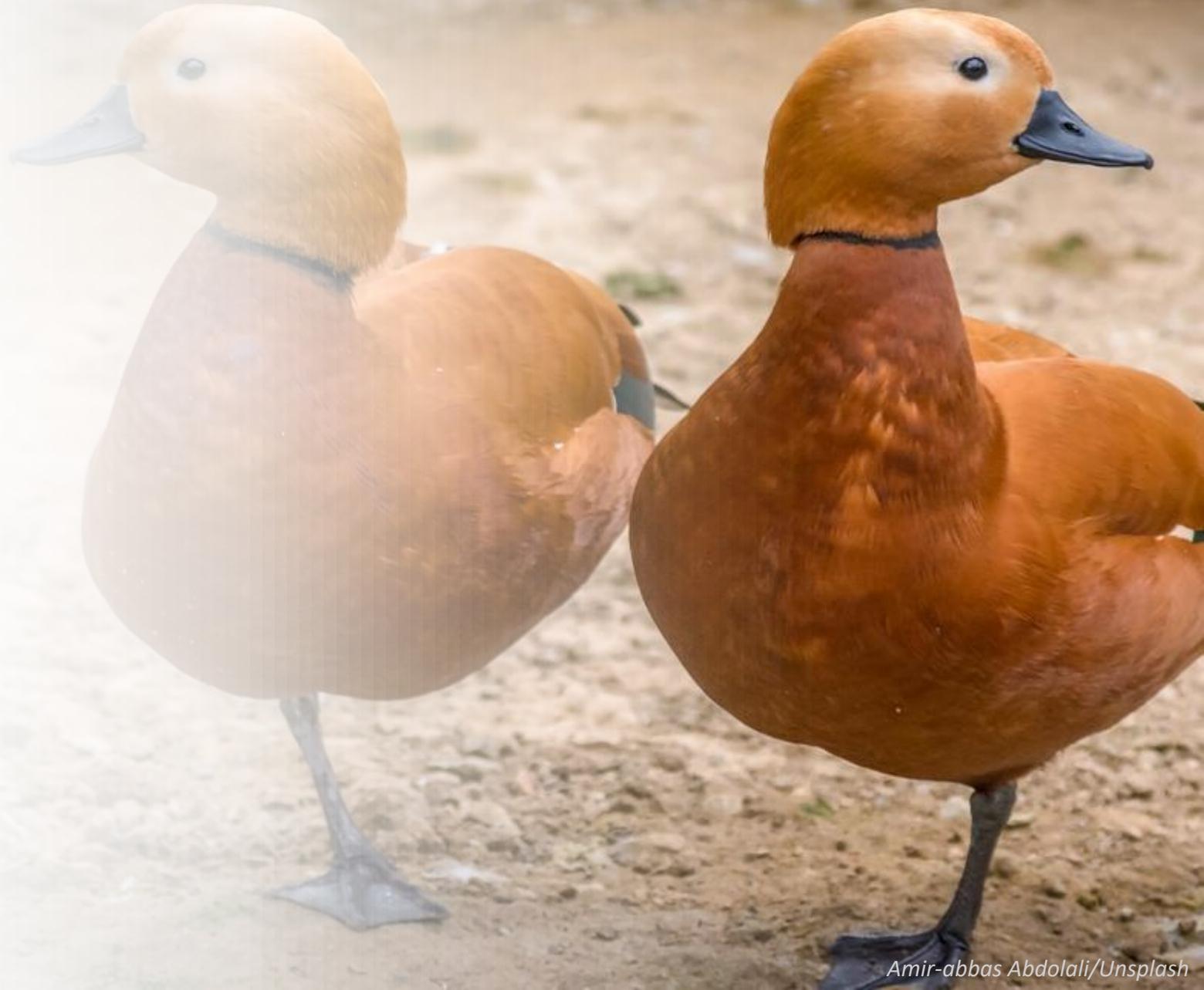
Cultivating “Sameness”

Identifying and leveraging where we
come together

Cultivating “sameness” with **Reflective listening**

What is it?

- Listening to give the other person an experience of *being heard* or “received”
- “Reflecting back” does not imply agreement; it demonstrates your ability to receive and hold their perspective alongside your own – even if they differ

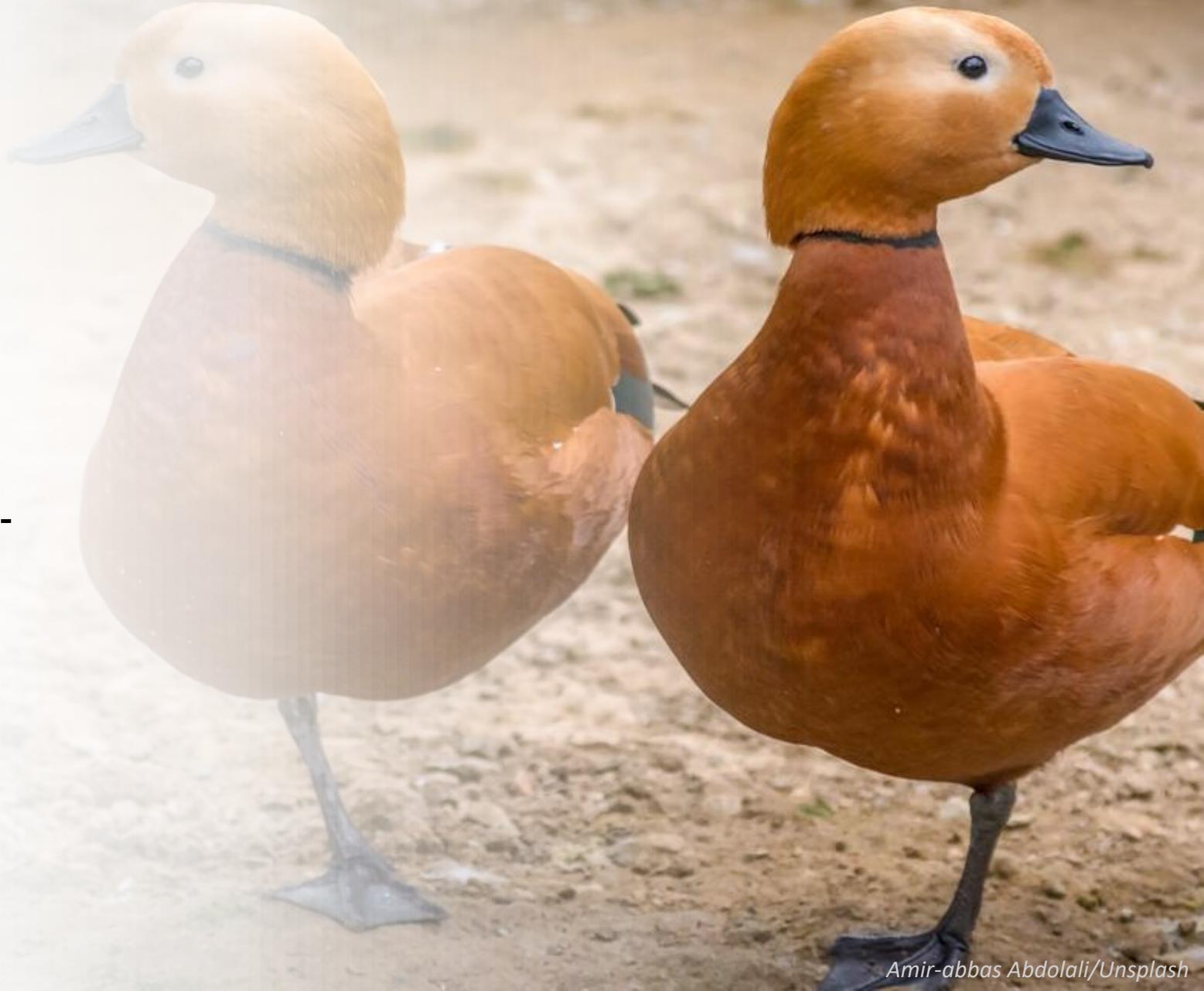




Cultivating “sameness” with **Reflective listening**

How do you do it?

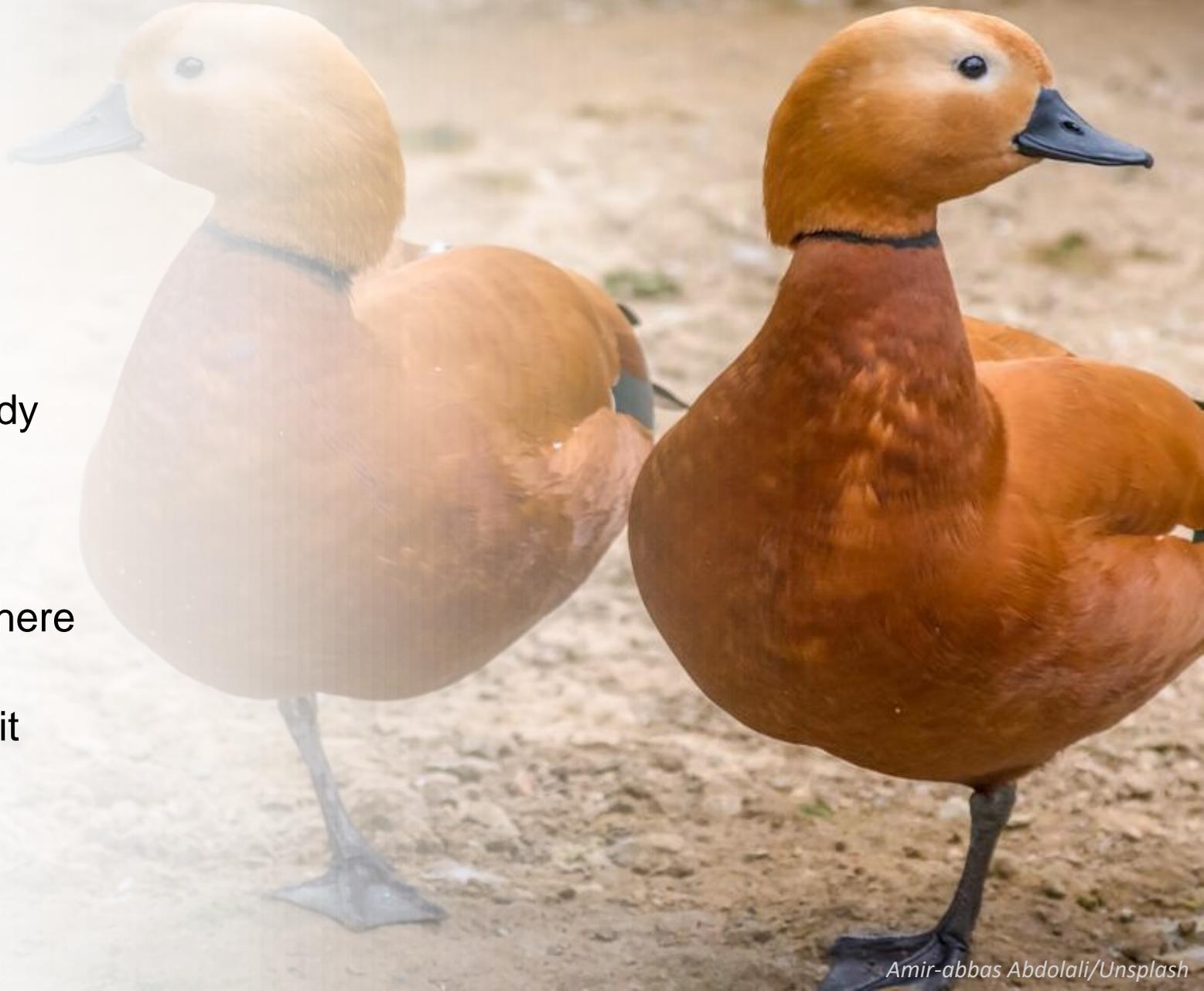
- Listen to your partner attentively; Can you listen with no opinion?
- Between each couple thoughts, share-back with them what you heard:
 - “What I heard you say is...”
 - “It sounds like...”
- Ask questions – keep it going!
- Close with appreciation:
 - “Thank you for sharing that with me...”
 - “I appreciate your thoughts on this...”



Cultivating “sameness” with **Reflective listening**

Some guideposts:

- Notice what is happening in your body (physical sensations)
 - Is it hard to listen?
 - Is it hard to be listened to?
 - Is there any part of your body where you feel it?
- Practice reflecting – it’s harder than it sounds!



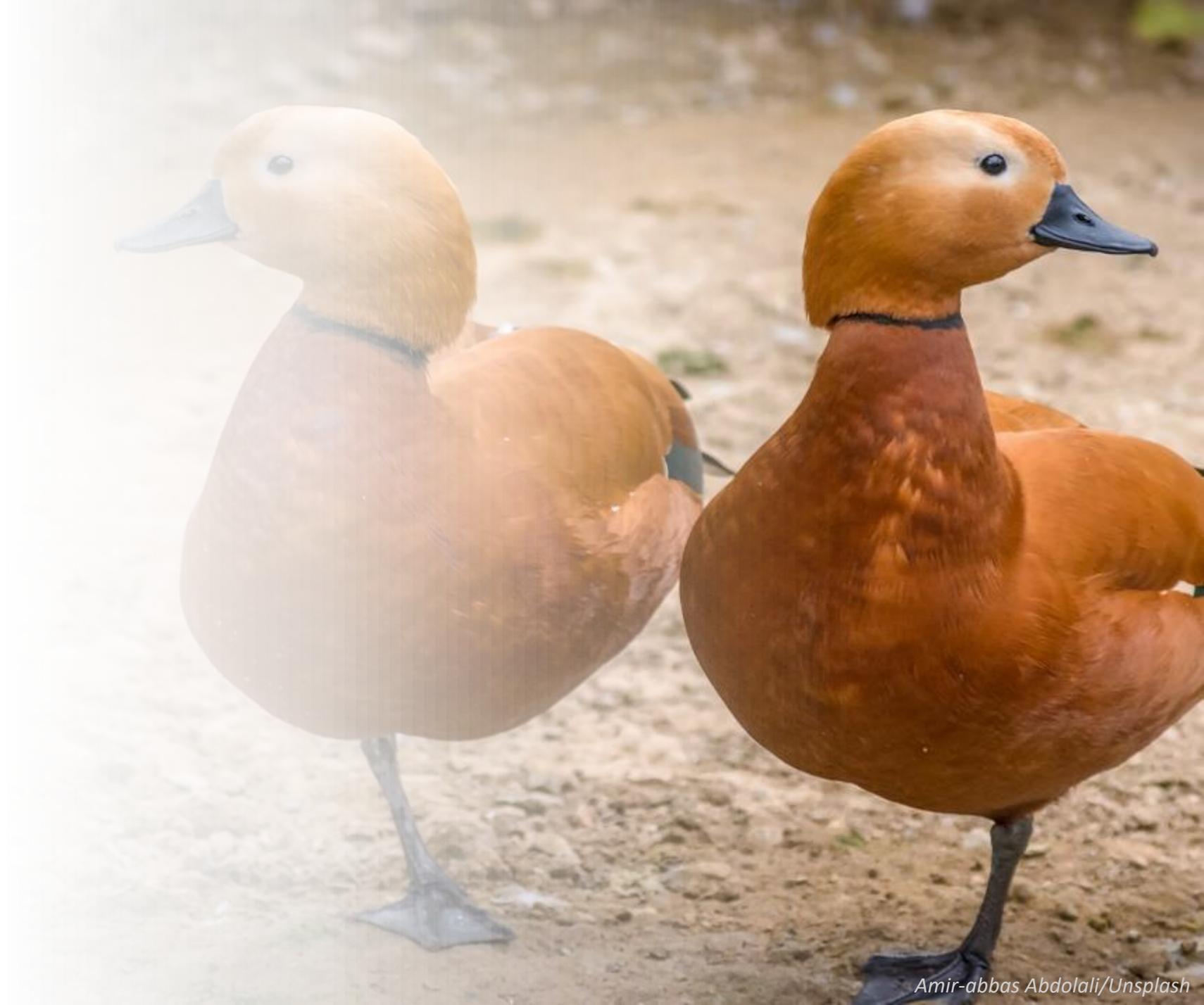
Two reddish-brown ducks are standing on a sandy, textured ground. They are facing left, with their heads turned slightly towards the camera. The ducks have a dark blue-black beak and a dark ring around their necks. The background is a blurred, light-colored sandy area.

JACK & REBECCA MODEL REFLECTIVE LISTENING
When you think of your community,
what aspect of climate change
concerns you the most?

*Up next: Your turn!
Practicing in pairs*

Cultivating “sameness” with
Reflective listening

**So, how'd
it go?**





Creating energy Working with differences

Exploring the upsides and
downsides of difference



Andrei Stratu/Unsplash

Creating energy

Working with differences

What is it?

- Knowing how to make differences constructive
- Knowing when to rein differences in



Andrei Stratu/Unsplash

Creating energy

Working with differences

How do you do it?

- Drawing out differences
 - Most forms of negation
- ...But in a principled way
 - “I appreciate your point, but I see it differently...”



Andrei Stratu/Unsplash

Creating energy

Working with differences

Some guideposts

- Goal is not to have a conflict, but to explore difference dynamics in a safe-but-brave space
- Notice any sensations in your body



JACK & REBECCA MODEL CREATING SOME ENERGY

Who is most responsible for the inadequate response to climate change?

*Up next: Your turn!
Practicing in pairs*



Andrei Stratu/Unsplash

Creating energy

Working with differences

How did it go?

What did you feel in your body?

What was different this time?

Climate conversations: a roadmap

1. Clarify your intentions
2. Pick your spot
3. Find common ground
4. Listen
5. Attend to your own sensations
6. Cultivate sameness
7. Generate productive differences
8. Follow up
9. Reflect and record



Following up

- Identify your relational climate conversation partner
- Connect with your buddy beforehand to share your conversation plan and pump each other up
- Reach out to us for any information or guidance you need
- Record your experience, and good luck!

