



9 tips for talking to your family about degrowth during the holidays

By Nathan Barlow

[@degrowth.info](https://degrowth.info)

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Stay respectful

This should be obvious, but unfortunately when we're passionate about a topic and think we're 'right', there can be a tendency to tread into the dangerous waters of not communicating with care and compassion to others. So, first and foremost, let's stay respectful!

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Listen then speak

Understanding the concerns, frustrations, and passions of those you're speaking to can help you to highlight the points of degrowth that are relevant for them. It's a lot to digest at once, so don't overload them and make sure you find the right entry-point.

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Keep it simple, and avoid jargon

Many of us in the degrowth movement work and study in academia or have spent a lot of time around universities, and our (over)usage of theoretical language shows it. Try to limit the usage of jargon unless it's really needed, because you will have to stop the flow of conversation to 'define' some of these words and it can create more confusion than clarity.

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Highlight real-world issues, not just theory

Think in advance of some real-world issues that exemplify degrowth. For example, food waste. The unsustainability of the current food system is evident to anyone after a few visits to the grocery store dumpster. The injustice of not sharing the excess products with the workers or vulnerable people highlights the need for new ways to organize businesses.

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Provide basic statistics

I don't personally memorize masses of statistics about the social and ecological crises, but remembering some can be very helpful to describe the severity of the situation. This avoids phrases like, "trust me – it's really really bad!" For example, in 2019 the Guardian reported that, "41% of global insect species have declined over the past decade".

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Relate the abstract to lived experiences

In my hometown there is currently a massive takeover of the roads and parking lots by Amazon delivery trucks that have decided to establish a 'hub' here . . . Is an Amazon 'hub' really what this town needs? How would a degrowth vision address the challenges this town faces? If you can identify a lived experience like this one to contrast with degrowth, do so!

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Give bridging ideas

While degrowth directly contests ideas like sustainable development, it can be helpful to begin from more commonly understood ideas and then explain how degrowth is different. For example, “degrowth is similar to sustainable development . . . but degrowth questions sustainable development’s naïve hope that long-term environmental sustainability can be achieved alongside infinite economic growth ”

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Avoid individual critique and shaming

Avoid the trap of preaching or critiquing someone's way of life. Degrowth is not about each of us overcoming our individual shortcomings and acting better, it's about struggling collectively for new structures in society. I may be vegetarian and cycle a lot, but I also flew across the Atlantic to see my family for the holidays. Always remember these tensions and contradictions in yourself (and in society) when talking with others.

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Highlight the positives

The holidays should not be a time for doom and gloom, so tell a story of success or hope. While the examples may be limited, incomplete and/or partial, it can show a way forward and even give your family/friend an idea of how they can get involved and affect change.

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