

# Rebel Responders Online Outreach Handbook (Troll Patrol)

We are not here to fight, but achieve XR's demands (Tell the Truth, Act Now, Beyond Politics). We use honesty and wit, de-escalating arguments and distracting people from causing misinformation and public harm. The goal of this document is to list common negative people & negative responses to XR, and provide possible ways of addressing them. Later we aim to add real world experiences of this (negative and positive) to learn from. These pages are currently (August 23 and on) being updated by Fergus (Mattermost Fergu5) who is keen to get feedback on the contents from any part of XR.

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# Rebel Responders - a How To Guide

These pages are currently (August 23 and on) being updated by Fergus (Mattermost Fergu5) who is keen to get feedback on the contents from any part of XR.

**These pages are based on the following document: [Rebel Responders Handbook](#)**

[Rebel Responders](#)

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**Here is the list of Contents within the Handbook:**

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# Strategy

What are we commenting for? Where are we commenting? How should we go about it?

# What are we commenting for?

Before typing, it can be helpful to think about what you are trying to achieve through engaging in conversation online. There are different types of conversations to be had, and different ways in which these can contribute to the overall aims of the movement. Here are a couple (although there will be others):

- **Telling the truth.** This is core to both XR and the purpose of this group. While a single comment might not result in someone who isn't facing up to the climate emergency doing an instant u-turn, it may chip away at these views. Perhaps more importantly is the effect it could have on others viewing the conversation.
- **Amplifying action-specific messages.** If people are discussing an action and its effects, if at all possible, we can try to bring the conversation around to the intended message of the action.
- **Explaining and defending the movement itself.** XR does not need everyone to agree with our tactics - previous successful social movements have attracted criticism. However, if we alienate too many people, this could undermine our message so it is worth listening to people's concerns and explaining the reasoning behind our actions.

# Where are we commenting?

To actively look for people on social media to respond to, you can search for Extinction Rebellion or #extinctionrebellion on social media. If there are action-specific hashtags (eg #ChangelsNow #MakeHistory #CitizensAssembliesNow) search for these. On X (Twitter) some people mis-spell rebellion with one 'l' (i.e. #extinctionrebelion) so try this too.

You can also create new social media content. However, the focus of this group is largely on responding to existing comments as this is a way of engaging with people who are already discussing climate change and XR.

The comments sections of newspapers are also very important for Rebel Responders Online Outreach. These can have a lot of comments and very large numbers of people reading them. Sometimes comments are very negative - especially in articles about disruptive XR actions - and a few positive comments can really change the overall feel of a thread.

For news articles, you can search for 'extinction rebellion' in google news or within any newspaper's own website.

Here are some further, more specific suggestions. Feel free to add to these, but please only add locations you've tried and tested.

## **Personal vs Official Social Media Accounts**

Most people involved in Rebel Responders are using their personal social media accounts. There are of course 'official' XR accounts for geographical areas and interest groups. But the intended audience for this guidance document is people who want to help the movement using online engagement without necessarily having an organising role. Often it is a way of contributing to actions for people who would love to attend but can't. When speaking on behalf of XR, using an official account, it's important to be respectful to the range of views but when responding as an individual we can be more personal and only have to represent ourselves.

## **XR news on Facebook**

As XR activists take action they'll get featured in local and national media. Many outlets have a Facebook page where they post their stories. These attracts comments we can engage with.

### **London media:**

[BBC London](#)

[Metro](#)

Evening Standard

### **Other local news outlets**

Oxford Mail

Bristol Live

Yorkshire Evening Post

### **National Media**

BBC

Sky

ITV

### **Ads**

Where XR use Facebook adds people can, and will comment. Look at your own timeline - you'll likely see some.

# How should we go about it?

Social media does not always bring out the best in us. Don't lose your cool, we are not necessarily aiming to win the argument, we want to win the person. Social media is usually not a private conversation so what really matters is how XR supporters come over to all the people reading the thread later on.

Take a breath. Take three breaths. Walk the dog. Then respond with truth and respect even if the other person shows none. Surprise people with stories, wit and charm. Nobody ever changed their mind because of a Facebook response from a stranger beginning "Well, actually..." -- remember that people operating with incorrect information are victims of media **gaslighting**. We've provided some ideas and information below, but don't just cut and paste things, speak truthfully in your own voice. Listen to the story of the other person, if possible, and find points of agreement.

If you are very new to XR, please read key parts of the website, including the **demands** and our **Principles and Values**. Try putting these into practice, for example thinking of: 'We welcome everyone and every part of everyone'. Speaking from personal experience and showing the different backgrounds and stories of those involved might be as important as the discussion itself. The climate crisis is an issue for every single person on Earth and no individual is responsible for it.

## **Engage with people**

Be friendly, polite, and witty. This is important for everything else to work. Having a curious and open attitude are key. Genuinely listening to people and their concerns about change with curiosity is helpful. People find it hard to accept change about things that are widely accepted to be harmful even when misinformation is not a widespread issue (think smoking in western countries) let alone an issue where ignorance, fear and misinformation from key figures are widespread. It also can help you to empathise with them.

## **Listen**

Genuinely listening means holding space. It means not formulating a response until the person has said what they need to say, then deciding how to respond when they are done. Open questions such as 'what is important right now?' 'how should these issues be addressed?' 'how can the way we address things improve?' (you never know, you may come across some helpful ideas)

**Be reflective** Acknowledge that this is a difficult reality to face for a lot of people. Simple reflection involves stating a person's concerns back to them e.g.

Them: What is the point?

You: 'you don't believe we can address this?'.

More complex would be:

E.g. You are concerned that we're in a situation that we cannot deal with for our future so would rather focus on what is important here and now

The point is to infer the rest - they will let you know if you are mistaken, but if you're right they will carry on the conversation. Educate but don't keep trying to force people to accept your reasons for change; plenty of people know smoking can be harmful to their health, but if you keep telling them why they should quit they will automatically take the other side of why they should/want to keep doing it/can't stop unless they are already motivated to make changes (however they are most likely ambivalent about this because they're not sure how). Same with engaging with climate activism (and that involves many changes at individual and system levels), not just one by an individual).

It can be better to ask 'what positive social changes would you like to see', 'if we were to have a magic wand which addressed these issues what changes would have happened, in your view', ask for an elaboration.

Then think about what XR are trying to achieve in relation to that and link the two, and even if it's not but it's relevant to the campaign then make a note to pass it along. If the change is not relevant in some way, then acknowledge it, thank them for sharing it and leave the door open for if they want to discuss what change in relation to climate action might look like. Not everyone is ready or motivated, but you've opened that door to further engagement.

We have some ideas of what can make change difficult so use that. Ask the person, what they feel are the 2 most difficult obstacles then say something like 'you want to see positive change happening in xyz area and ABC makes that tricky' (do not use the word "but" in place of "and", as people will not listen to anything before that word). A "pros and cons" list of change can be helpful to acknowledge ambivalence (but not too long!). Then ask for a bit more elaboration on what desired change looks like.

Even if they say 'xyz makes it difficult', they're imagining it. Ask them what would help. Gain permission before you provide any suggestions and find out what, if anything they know about your suggestion before elaborating on it. E.g. can I make a suggestion about what might help? Them: okay. You: The UK has a lot of wind power available, which you might have heard about before. Can I ask what you might have heard about this before Them: rattle

it off You: Fill in gaps, address misinformation etc

Then you, this is what we would like to achieve with our movement. Would you like to ask me any questions about this and what we do/why we do it this way?

This is a more digestible and collaborative way to share information

Ask people what they value Most people value their security, family, ambitions etc. Then link what you are aiming for to those values. Also talk about what XR values to build their empathy towards you, e.g. a safer and healthier future for everyone, particularly younger generations.

Also ask if they prefer subsidies going to fossil fuels or building more sustainable infrastructure for example. Most people want that. Building empathy for others including younger people may also help. Remember to show that you are concerned for everyone's welfare including theirs and that we are open to doing things better to achieve change. Remind people of what we want to achieve. Sometimes people will not want to listen though and it can help to check in with yourself to be able to sustain efforts.

Example from Apple training Apple stores have scary training on how to deal with customers, but a really important bit is about empathy. For example;

Customer: This Mac is just too expensive. Apple store staff member: I can see how you'd feel this way. I felt the price was a little high, but I found it's a real value because of all the built-in software and capabilities.

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Invalidating someone's feelings and experience means they won't listen to anything you say. They may have badly incorrect information but there's a lot of it out there and we can help with that, if we show respect and empathy even for people with very toxic views. Don't give people the argument they want.

Don't insult people even if they are very very wrong or mean. Don't always feel the need to reply, trolls are in this for fun - often responding to a troll with a reasonable comment and then not engaging in an argument will look excellent in the eyes of other people reading your interactions.

Sometimes it might be easier to link to a blog or youtube video and say "this explains it much better than I can".

Note for XR social media moderators While this document is aimed at people commenting, and responding to comments on any platform, some of those platforms are ones where XR has moderation powers.

When in doubt, just follow the guidelines in this doc. As moderators we often have to distance ourselves from our personal opinions and in a way totally ignore the topic itself to just focus on whether or not the "rules" are being followed. So even if you don't like someone's comment or the way a thread is developing, if it doesn't violate our guidelines, just let it be.

# Personas

# People you may meet and people you may be

No two people are the same, but we can define broad groups of people who comment negatively about XR on social media, and look at their motivations and how to deal with each in a positive and productive way.

- **Edgelord.** Contrary people, troublemakers, winders uppers. Their ambition is to provoke reaction. This person uses both sides' talking points. Debating an Edgelord seems pointless BUT it's still worth keeping them busy. Time spent arguing means no harm elsewhere. Ideally via direct message to keep toxic discussion away from everyone else.
- **Tabloid Talking-Point Talker.** This person is absorbed in talking points against XR or climate change. It's easy to get sucked into an argument throwing cliches at each other. Surprise them: listen. Ask questions about why they feel the way they do instead of trying to win logically. Nobody (except maybe a well trained scientist) ever changed their mind because of a logical argument. Find common points and be sympathetic to their concerns. They may be a future ally.
- **Hypocrite Hunter.** This person will find a way in which the environmentalist is flawed and use that as an excuse to dismiss their message. This may well be a sign of an underlying sense of shame or guilt. They find flaws in the halos of people taking action to excuse themselves for doing nothing.
- **Nihilist / Climate black-pilled.** This person is dealing with the truth about the climate crisis with fatalism. They ask why bother, it's too late already what about CHINA? And is humanity dying out even such a bad thing?

[Click to read a rebel's comment...](#)

I felt like this until seeing XR actually start to shift public opinion. 100 years ago women couldn't vote and "right thinking" people thought that was a good thing. There's still a huge range of possible futures, and it's worth fighting now to avoid the worst case scenarios. We can slow the speed the ship sinks and buy future generations time to act. If you don't like what humans are doing, hopefully we can agree that it's still not good for billions

to have their lives cut short by war or food or water shortages.

- **The Keyboard Warrior.** This person is on a mission to discredit XR or climate change science. They Cut-paste the same long statement again in many threads. They might even be, in rare cases, paid opposition. They are not worth engaging directly, but may give an opportunity for XR members to look good in responding. Remember that you are not just responding to the comment but for the benefit of other people reading the thread.
- **Single Issue Soldier.** This person only cares about one thread of the broad climate and environmental issues and want XR to focus on that over everything else. They are tricky as they are potential allies but need to respect XR's mission and principles. Eg. Chem Trails, 5G rollout, animal rights, over-population or conspiracy theories.
- **The Contrarian.** This person has a knee-jerk disbelief in climate science because it is becoming accepted by the mainstream. This person is similar to the talking point person, however they are unlikely to be convinced by quoting facts and figures. It may be useful to others watching to counter their misinformation, but resist getting sucked in.
- **Concerned Citizen.** This person has honest questions or concerns about how XR operates. Very much a possible future ally or even activist if handled well. XR is still a new movement and many people still haven't made up their minds what to make of it.

## How people emotionally process the climate crisis

In many ways the way people react to the crisis are similar to how people cope with change or grief. Realising this can help you have empathy (understanding how they feel) and compassion (wanting to help them with their suffering) for some of the toxic ways people talk to and about us. These help explain some of the personas described above.

- **Denial** - it's comforting to decide it's not real and so no change is required.
- **Anger** - blame the messenger and other countries (what about CHIIINA?)
- **Bargaining** - technology will fix things, I don't need to change or worry
- **Despair** - it's already too late so there's no point caring about it or changing


When dealing with toxic people you can try to think more like a grief counsellor than a preacher. Nobody enjoys being told they are part of the problem and need to change.

There's lots of articles online about grief [[1](#), [2](#)] and dealing with change in business [[1](#), [2](#)], you may get inspiration from them.

# General Criticisms of XR, and possible responses

Here's a bunch of the usual things people say and some ideas for coping with each. Please suggest more, and better ideas for how to respond. Responding with personal experience can be helpful too e.g. your own motivations for taking part in XR or your personal fears about the future that aren't listed here.

Please don't feel constrained by what's suggested below - they are just ideas and things that have worked for other rebels.

 Overall one of the most powerful responses to "I don't agree with your methods" or "you are all hypocrites" is to ask for advice. "What would you do differently" can seriously change a conversation thread for the better, and to see things from our perspective without feeling attacked. It can be a way to explain citizen's assemblies and sometimes we might even get new ideas!

**Most importantly, please *don't* cut and paste the same response again and again into social media as it makes us look bad and makes you look like the troll.**

# Negative comments on XR / rebels / Greta

This section gathers together some ideas for responding to regular negative comments. As ever, never copy and paste.

## Unwashed hippies...

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Unwashed hippies

We're all sorts of people - including scruffy anarchists. but we're also:

XR Grandparents <https://www.facebook.com/XRGrandparents>

XR Youth <https://www.facebook.com/XRYouth/>

XR Doctors <https://www.doctorsforxr.com/>

XR Lawyers <https://www.lawyersforxr.com/>

XR Farmers <https://twitter.com/XRFarmers>

XR Jews <https://www.xrjews.org.uk/>

XR Buddhists <http://xrbuddhists.com/>

Some of us dress smart, some dress “scruffy”, some turn up in scrubs, some in costumes. Some work flexible hours, some are unemployed, some use their annual leave to be able to come.

We’re a real mixed bag!

We really do have plenty of alternative looking people which isn't always good optics, but they are the most visible and keen.

Don’t judge a book by its cover

You want people to ignore the demand for a future in which people and other life on Earth can survive because you don’t like the outfits of some of the people in a protest?

Sure, there’s a few hippy types, but there’s also a surprising number of scientists and doctors.

Can you tell which of those hippies is the surgeon, ex-policeman, head-teacher, re, psychologist, mother, designer, musician, nurse, engineer, lorry driver, scientist?

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I've been following up such comments to say my coworker used up much of his annual leave for the April protest.

I have a good job doing XYZ.

Many of the XR supporters work, either part-time or full-time, donating their spare time to help raise awareness and engage with people

Sure there are homeless and jobless people in XR, but there's also lawyers, doctors, plumbers and single mums. Most of the people at the protest are using up their leave instead of having a holiday.

Use this as an excuse to tell something about the humans of XR; That's what I thought initially, but it turns out lots of members are parents and Grandparents. I met one couple who'd just had their first baby and they told me that it was the moment that they realised they really wanted grandchildren that they felt they had to take things seriously and make sure those future grandchildren had a good world to be born into.

Many people in XR are employed full time, they're using their annual leave to fight for a cause they believe in. (Almost) everyone in the UK is entitled to paid time off, what we do with it is up to us.

XR is broadly a cross-section of pretty much any community; a mix of professions and trades, and of course some people may not currently be employed. Everyone volunteers their time to support XR, a cause that they believe in.

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# Other materials

I'll put together links to resources that might be helpful here.

Other materials

# Training sources

[How to do Digital Outreach and Troll Patrol](#) Web site, XR Scotland

[The Nervous Rebel's Guide to Social Media](#) Document XR Scotland