



Don't be a rubbish neighbour

A resource about plastic pollution
for churches and schools

Ages 7 – 11

A rubbish situation

Our world has an urgent rubbish problem, but people around the world are uniting to take action.

Two billion people – one in four of us – have no safe way to dispose of rubbish, meaning many are forced to live and work among piles of waste. This is making people sick, releasing toxic fumes, flooding communities and causing up to a million deaths each year. That's one person dying every 30 seconds. And the rapid growth of single-use plastics has made this worse.

During 2023 and 2024, nearly 200 governments are meeting to develop the first-ever agreement across the globe to deal with plastic pollution. But it's not a done deal. We need you to add your voice to thousands of others worldwide who are coming together to demand an end to plastic pollution and its impacts on people living in poverty.

Children care about this rubbish situation and want to do something about it.

The good news is that they can get involved to make a real difference.

This resource contains a range of options for use in schools, in an all-age church service, or in a children's church or children's club session. It's been written with 7- to 11-year-olds in mind but feel free to pick and choose the parts that will work for your group of children and adapt them for different ages or levels of knowledge. There are separate adult resources available too at tearfund.org/rubbish

Contact us on campaigns@tearfund.org if you have any questions or need any support. We'd love to hear from you.

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Children's talk

10- to 20-minute children's talk depending on how much audience interaction you include

Script

Slide 1

Today we're going to have a rubbish talk/assembly/Sunday school session!

[Use whatever description works best for your situation.]

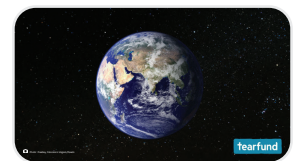


Slide 2

We have a beautiful world and it's our job to take care of it.

- Can anyone here give me some examples of how we can care for our world?

[Take examples eg conservation work, caring for beautiful places, litter-picks, gardening etc. Some people might suggest reducing plastic etc.]



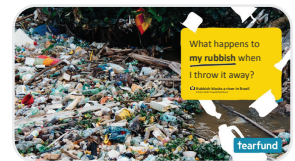
Slide 3

But we know that sometimes our beautiful world gets damaged.

- How do you feel when you see rubbish in your local area?
- Do you notice it?

I wonder how much you have ever thought about rubbish.

- When we throw our stuff away, where does it go?
- Where is 'away' exactly?
- What happens to it there?
- And what effect does it have on people and nature?



Slide 4

Did you know that in the UK we throw away enough plastic to fill a double-decker bus every 15 seconds?

So to fill this room, it would perhaps only take XX minutes.

[Or ask for guesses for how long it might take!]

Just think about that: it's a lot of plastic.
Much of it will have only been used once.

And I'm afraid there is more bad news...
The world's rubbish problem is hurting people,
particularly people where there is no rubbish collection.



Continued

Slide 5

Daiane [pronounced Diane] lives in Brazil, a big country in South America with beautiful beaches and nature. But in some neighbourhoods, like the one that Daiane lives in, there is no rubbish collection.



[If you have time you can read Daiane's quote, and explain that she is talking about single-use plastic bottles blocking the river. The bottles that are returnable in Brazil are glass ones.]

A quarter of all the people in the world do not have any rubbish collections or safe ways to get rid of their waste.

Imagine that.



Divide the room into quarters and indicate roughly how many people would not get their rubbish collected if that was the case here.

[Eg speak to the three quarters:]

You live in places where your rubbish is collected.

[Now speak to the one quarter:] But you don't.

- What would you do with your rubbish...?

In Daiane's neighbourhood there is no rubbish collection so people have no choice but to burn it or leave it piled up near their homes or throw it in the river nearby. You are probably thinking that it's not very nice to have to live like this. But actually it's worse than that: it's dangerous! Rubbish attracts flies, rats and mosquitoes: these all bring sickness to the family. Burning the rubbish creates harmful gases they have to breathe in, which again brings sickness. And when rubbish is thrown in a river, it causes blockages which have meant Daiane's home floods when it rains.

So rubbish is a big problem.



Jesus taught us to love our neighbours.

[If you have time and it's appropriate, you can include a Bible reading, either Luke 10:25-37 or Mark 12:28-31, and you could include a discussion around the question, 'Who is my neighbour?']

Jesus didn't just mean the people who live next door, or even just those in our town. Our neighbours include people like Daiane, people everywhere as well as animals and all the wider natural world. **We don't want to be rubbish neighbours polluting the world with plastic!**



Does anyone have any ideas of how we can be good neighbours, caring for the world and reducing our rubbish?

[Invite people to share ideas, or if time is short, refer back to some ideas people gave at the beginning of the talk.]

Together we can all make small changes to reduce our plastic use – at home and at school. Even making small swaps helps, such as buying vegetables loose, reusing bags or carrying a reusable cup or water bottle.

Continued

[If you have time, include the following story from Brazil...]

Optional slides 6 & 7

In Brazil where Daiane lives, the church is taking action to improve the rubbish situation. In the city of Recife, flooding is becoming more and more frequent. It is caused by a combination of heavy rains and rubbish clogging up the nearby river.

People from local churches have been tackling the problem from a number of angles:

1. They have been working on the rubbish issue, organising community litter-picking and also putting together a petition to the local government asking for them to clean the river.
2. They run disaster preparation training so that people in the community know what to do when a flood happens.
3. And their churches are going zero-waste, reducing all of their rubbish to set a good example and show people a practical way we can love our neighbours and the environment.

By doing all of this, they are responding to Jesus' call to love their neighbours in a very practical way.



Slide 8

The rubbish problem is so big though that we also need the governments of the world to work together on it. And thankfully that is what could happen over the next two years. [The talks are due to conclude at the end of 2024, so amend the time-scale depending on when you are giving the talk.] Almost 200 governments are meeting to develop the first-ever worldwide agreement on how we fix the plastic rubbish problem. This agreement will be called the global plastics treaty. But it's not a definite agreement yet.

So today, our church/school/group is going to prove we are not rubbish neighbours, and we're going to join Tearfund in asking our Government to stop the rubbish. Together we're going to write some letters which will ask politicians to do all they can to make the global plastics treaty happen. It's exciting that we can be part of seeing a solution to this rubbish problem!

[There are also postcards for adults to sign so it may be that you can tie this into whatever adults in church are doing if this is your context.]



We're going to watch a short film now to sum this up. [Show film.]

[Click here to view¹](#)

1 vimeo.com/791870301

Rubbish activities

Aimed at 7- to 11-year-olds, but could be adapted for other age groups

This selection of ideas is offered as a pick-and-mix: take what works for your setting and leave the rest. Please adapt these ideas to make them appropriate to the children in your group. You might want to start your session with the talk and then use some of the activities.

Through these resources we hope your children will understand the seriousness of this rubbish situation. But we want them to see that many people are doing something about it and that, excitingly, they too can be part of the solution. If your session is in a church setting, then there is also scope to show how responding to the plastic crisis is part of our faith and discipleship.

Activity 1 Persuasive writing



Activity 2 Rubbish hearts



Activity 3 Raise money for waste management projects around the world

Rubbish Appeal



Activity 1 - Persuasive writing

This activity will give children the chance to use their voice to influence policy-makers around plastic pollution. A good example to inspire them that speaking up can bring change is the story of sisters [Ella and Caitlin McEwan](#)² who petitioned McDonald's and Burger King to stop giving away plastic toys with their kids' meals. Never think you're too small to make a difference!

Materials needed

Paper, pens and coloured pencils etc, letter template (on next page)



Explore

Spend time as a group, in a lesson or assembly, learning about the plastic pollution issue. Encourage your young people to:

- Voice their own opinions on the problem and comment on the damaging impacts of single-use plastics. (You'll need to explain the difference between single-use and plastics which are meant to be used over and over again.)
- Talk about how some plastics are useful, including some single-use plastics (for example, in medical and safety settings).
- Discuss any efforts they are making in their own lives (recycling, litter-picking etc).
- Learn about the global plastics treaty.

As you explore, take ideas from our children's talk, PowerPoint and film. Go through the points in the letter below to explain what is needed.



Act

Get your young people to write to our Government.

(Note that the letters will be sent to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but for younger children this may be too much information. It's probably easier to just say they are writing to the people who will be deciding what goes into the treaty.)

Ask the Government to do all they can to make the global treaty work to tackle this rubbish problem (more details below). You could decorate your letters to make them stand out.

For younger children or groups, you might decide to write a joint letter or make a poster (possibly shaped like a bottle or piece of plastic rubbish) which everyone can sign or decorate.

If your children want to write letters but will struggle to write out the full text of the letter, you could print off the part about what we want to see included in the treaty so the children can stick it into their letter.



Send

Post your letters and posters to us:

Send us your letters and posters at Tearfund Rubbish Campaign, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE, so that we can hand them to the Secretary of State. Please include your contact details in a covering letter to us so we know who to thank and so we can let you know what happens with the treaty.

Please make sure your young people use the school or church address, not their own, and that they sign their first name only (not their surname).

Letter template

Simple suggested text for letters:

Dear UK Government,

My name is **[use first name only and include group/school if you like]** and I care about plastic pollution because...

I've been learning about the global plastics treaty. This treaty could help end the world's rubbish problem. With people around the world, I want the treaty to address plastic pollution by including:

Reduction: Stop making so much rubbish

Recycling: Recycle everyone's rubbish

Respect: Help for people who collect rubbish

Response: Make sure businesses and governments take action

Please don't throw away this opportunity!

Signed:

[Use first names only and add your age if you would like to; use the school/ church details for any response]

More information about the global plastics treaty

The United Nations Environment Assembly is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment, with a universal membership of all 193 member states.

The Assembly meets biennially in Nairobi, Kenya, to set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law. In March 2022 at the UN Environment Assembly, UN member states voted to establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) with the mandate of putting together a legally binding international agreement on plastics.

There will be five negotiation meetings before the end of 2024 where government representatives will come together to work out the details of what will go in the final treaty that countries will sign up to. For more information visit plasticstreaty.org

Activity 2 - Rubbish hearts

Background

About 6 billion packets of crisps are consumed each year in the UK: that's more than 16 million packets being thrown away every day. Currently in the UK, crisp packets cannot be added to our household recycling bins. Although the technology is there to recycle them, the process is considered too expensive. As a result, the vast majority of discarded packets have previously ended up in landfill. The plastic they are made from is so tough that they can last for many, many years. (Here's an example showing a [30-year-old discarded packet](#)³ found on a Cornish beach.) But it should be noted that even when packaging degrades, it hasn't disappeared: it's just broken down into smaller microplastics that stay in our environment.

Campaigners did not accept this situation and pressured the manufacturers to do something about it, resulting in [a Walkers pledge](#)⁴ to make sure that all their crisp packaging is recyclable, biodegradable or compostable by 2025. In the meantime you can now take your crisp packets, along with other scrunchy plastics, to many local supermarkets, so [find your nearest here](#).⁵

Raising awareness

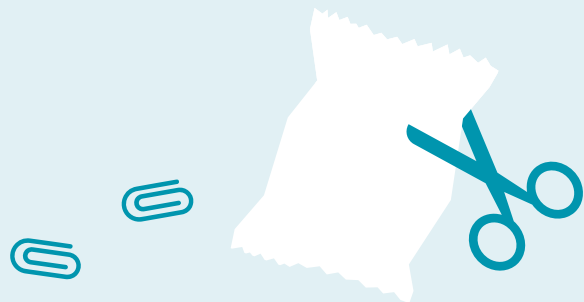
Part of the reason so many crisp packets still end up in landfill is lack of awareness of these newer recycling options. This origami heart activity will help you educate those around you about the rubbish problem by making a rubbish heart which you could wear as a badge or use to make a display for your classroom.

When anyone asks about your heart badge, you can engage them in a conversation about how they can recycle their crisp packets, or how they can get involved in seeing the global plastics treaty come to fruition.

If you are feeling really keen, you could make hearts and send them to people you would like to influence like your MP, local council or other leaders in your community.

Materials needed

- **Empty crisp packets** (start collecting these in the weeks beforehand: it's a good idea to wipe them out and dry them first)
- **Paper clips**
- **Stapler**
- **Tape**
- **Safety pins** (if you want to make badges)
- **Scissors**
- **Permanent marker pens**



3 cornwalllive.com/news/cornwall-news/boy-left-stunned-after-finding-1449127

4 theguardian.com/environment/2018/dec/10/walkers-recycle-crisp-packets-postal-protest

5 walkers.co.uk/sustainability/recycle/

Step 1

Take a clean, empty crisp packet and on a flat surface fold it horizontally twice to make a rectangle that is about a third the size of the original. We found it helpful to use paper clips to hold it in place before stapling.



Step 2

Fold this in half to find the midpoint as you are now going to fold the right side of the rectangle upward, aligning the bottom edge of the right side with the midpoint.

Repeat on the other side.



Step 3

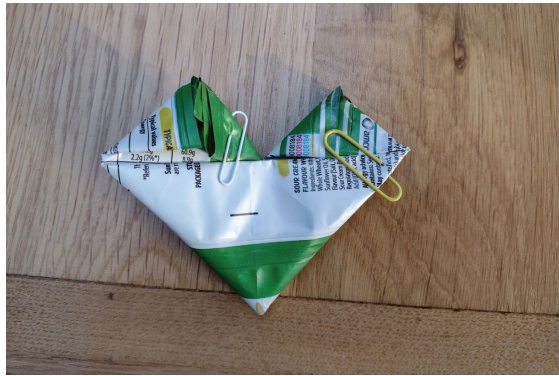
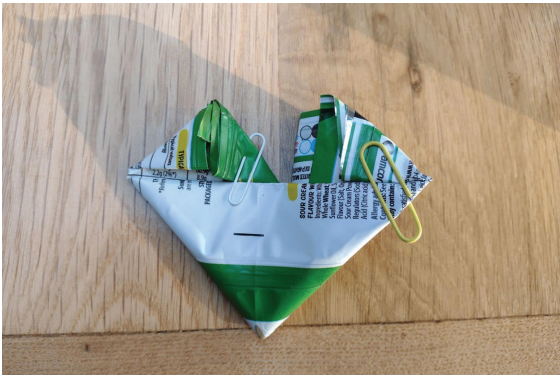
Turn the heart over and fold the righthand corner over towards you.

Repeat this on the other side.



Step 4

Now fold the inner corners down to complete the heart shape.



Step 5

Use 3 staples to hold everything in place, and trim the sides with scissors to give a more rounded heart shape if you prefer.



Step 6

Add your slogan. You'll need a waterproof permanent marker pen, and you might want to try writing on another crisp packet before committing your design to your badge.



Step 7

Finally, add a safety pin on the back using a piece of tape if you want to turn your heart into a badge. Wear it with pride.



Display ideas

All together

You could make a display with all your hearts together entitled 'Loving our global neighbours' or 'Don't be rubbish neighbours', and include some information about the global plastics treaty or actions you are taking together to reduce plastic pollution.

Paper river

Alternatively, you could make a paper river and get the children to stick some single-use plastics in it. As each piece of plastic is stuck on, you can help them think about how this makes it more likely that the river will get blocked and will then cause flooding when it rains. If you are doing this as part of a church activity, you could pause at this point to pray and ask God's forgiveness for the ways we are damaging our world.



Then take time to stick your origami hearts around the outside and think about the actions (such as our letters) we are taking to stop the rubbish and clean up our plastic pollution. Give thanks for all those working to improve this rubbish situation and pray for the global treaty to be successful.

Person outline

Another way you could use your hearts is by drawing an outline of a person as a reminder to love our neighbours. The origami hearts could be stuck inside this shape or around it. Or if you'd prefer not to make origami hearts, the children could colour in the person outline or draw/stamp/stick cut-out hearts onto it too.



We'd love to see photos of any displays you make. (Email them to campaigns@tearfund.org) If you want to send your colourful 'Loving our global neighbours' creations to us, we will endeavour to pass these on to the Secretary of State.

Activity 3

- Raise money for waste management projects around the world

A great project for schools or churches to do together

You can help people in poverty deal with their waste and recycle as much as possible, by supporting our [Rubbish Appeal](#). Your fundraising could support Tearfund's partners and local churches to address the rubbish problem with practical solutions that help people break free from poverty. Our projects offer many different types of support – from training that helps people lobby local governments for better waste management, to bicycles that enable waste pickers to collect more waste.



❏ Mismanaged waste, including plastics, which block waterways and sewers, causing flooding in the Tejipló River which runs through the Coqueiral community, Recife Brasil
Photo: Mocha Films / Tearfund

Contacting your local MP

Your MP is there to serve you as a constituent, and the way they hear what local people care about is through their postbag or by meeting people. Why not write a letter to your MP as a group to let them know what activities you've been doing as part of the *Rubbish Campaign*? You could make and send them a rubbish heart or invite them to come and meet you, especially if you are doing a fundraising activity or litter-pick like the ones suggested in the Bin Twinning resources.

If you are interested in reaching out to your local MP, please email us campaigns@tearfund.org as we'd love to support you in this. It could also be a great opportunity to get your young people writing a press release for your local paper and we can send you a template to help with this.

Walk the talk: Using less plastic in craft activities!

As leaders of young people (whether teachers in school, church or elsewhere), we can take a lead by thinking carefully about the plastic we use in the classroom. It can be tempting to use glitter, foam shapes, plastic beads etc in craft activities but sadly many of those items will then end up in bins at home and add to the plastic pollution in landfill.

The polar bear on the right was made by a five-year-old in five minutes. It sat on her desk at home for five days before her mum took it away. If it was thrown in the bin, and put into landfill, can you guess how long it would take to decompose? 500 years.

So when we're planning craft or buying craft items, let's think about whether we are contributing to our world's rubbish problem. Perhaps we can use things we already have at home or use little bits like googly eyes or buttons, over and over again. Or even better, make crafts out of things we can put in the compost or recycle in the UK once they've finished adorning the fridge at home!



Photo: Catherine Masterman/Tearfund

One resource that might be useful is ReusefulUK¹¹ where you can save craft resources from landfill. If there isn't currently a scrap store near you, perhaps you could start one!

Finally, try not to resort to buying 'natural materials'. (Bags of acorns, pebbles and shells packaged in China and shipped across the world don't really help.) Instead, can you integrate gathering natural materials as part of your session – even if you don't use them on the same day? Ideas for seasonal natural crafts can be found in Mud & Bloom,¹² Little Pine Learners,¹³ and Muddy Church.¹⁴

11 reusefuluk.org

12 mudandbloom.com

13 littlepinelearners.com

14 muddychurch.co.uk

Further resources

The Regenerators

BBC online resource hub which aims to inspire children and teenagers to live a greener life and encourage others to look after the planet

bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zppx2v4

Eco-Schools Green Flag Award

The criteria your school needs to meet to gain this award

ecoschools-ch.org/en/the-eco-schools-award

The story of a spoon

A short but challenging video about all the resources involved in creating a plastic spoon

youtube.com/watch?v=eg-E1FtjaxY

Global heroes: waves of waste

Science-themed adventure story for children aged 7+ about ridding the seas of pollution and waste

wob.com/en-gb/books/damian-harvey/global-heroes-waves-of-waste/9781445182988

Plastic Clever Schools

Curriculum resources and ideas to help children engage with the issue of plastics

plasticcleverschools.co.uk/resources/#primary

Tearfund is part of the Renew Our World and #BreakFreeFromPlastic coalitions



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