

Growing Through the Crisis



Coping with Climate Anxiety
Learning Methods for the
Mental Health of the European Youth

**A Handbook for Youth
and Youth Workers
Facing Climate Anxiety**

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Access the full interactive version online:

→ calm-ey.eu/handbook (also available in the Estonian, German and Danish languages)

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Introduction

“What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

– Jane Goodall, scientist & activist

This handbook is for you if you work with young people affected by climate anxiety or eco-anxiety. Or, in broader terms, people who have a climate worry experience a wide range of different emotions like grief, anger, helplessness, hope, etc., not always only anxiety. The handbook explores the terms, the different emotions and the body experiences that climate worry provokes. But it also contains some suggestions and practical exercises on how to accompany young people and move forward from anxiety or other strong feelings to coping, action, and joy.

The project grew out of a practical need. While climate change was already first recognized as a potential future problem over a century ago and political talks to mitigate its effects have been going on for over 30 years, it has been in the past decade that the impacts of climate change have become clearly felt by most people around the globe. Although awareness has gone up, international action hasn't changed accordingly. Naturally, this can create a lot of negative feelings, especially among younger people who are most up to date with both science and social media. The wave of climate worry is thus growing and we may find ourselves not only talking about it at the therapist's office, but also in the classroom, cafeteria, on the bus or on the street.

NB!

This book does not provide the skills to be a mental health professional or to solve other mental health issues. If you happen to work with someone who shows signs of other disorders such as depression (a constant feeling of sadness and lack of interest that interferes with daily activities), suicidality (usually indicated by suicidal thoughts and/or plan), etc., help that person immediately—contact a mental health specialist (psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor) or an e-consultation center. However, the provision of help for mental health problems is dictated according to the mental health support services available in your country.

Try to be aware of your own knowledge, skills and emotions related to climate change and the climate anxiety/concern that it brings. Make sure that you are able to manage what the young people bring up in such a way that it does not harm you. It is highly recommended that you first test the good practices found here on yourself.

Who knows about climate change?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), made up of 782 scientists from around the world, has concluded that global warming is real and is clearly caused by human actions. These activities include burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes, which raise greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere. Despite rising temperatures, the world is not successfully reducing emissions. (IPCC, 2023)



Climate change impacts are seen throughout every aspect of the world we live in. The impacts of climate change on different parts of society are interconnected. (NOAA, 2021)

Societal consequences:

- + Food shortages
- + Energy poverty
- + Increasing overall poverty
- + Climate refugees
- + Mental health crisis
- + Wars over resources
- + Impacts on health (extreme heat, allergies, diseases etc)
- + Global pandemics

Environmental consequences:

- + Rising temperatures
- + Heat waves
- + Droughts and wildfires
- + Extreme weather events
- + Sea-level rise in coastal areas, floods
- + Biodiversity loss
- + Impacts on marine environment
- + Soil erosion and degradation
- + Lack of clean/fresh water

There is plenty of information on climate change, its impacts, and solutions. The issue isn't a lack of knowledge but rather the challenge of "not knowing how to know": (Hine, 2020)

"Knowledge is what we hold out there—the arm's-length facts, the wealth of information, the fruits of scientific knowledge production—and **knowing** is what happens when the distance is gone, when we let the knowledge in. I've come to think that this matters more than our culture lets on, that this is the other half of the knowledge work: **the work that remains when science has done its part.**"

– Dougald Hine

Climate change awareness profiles

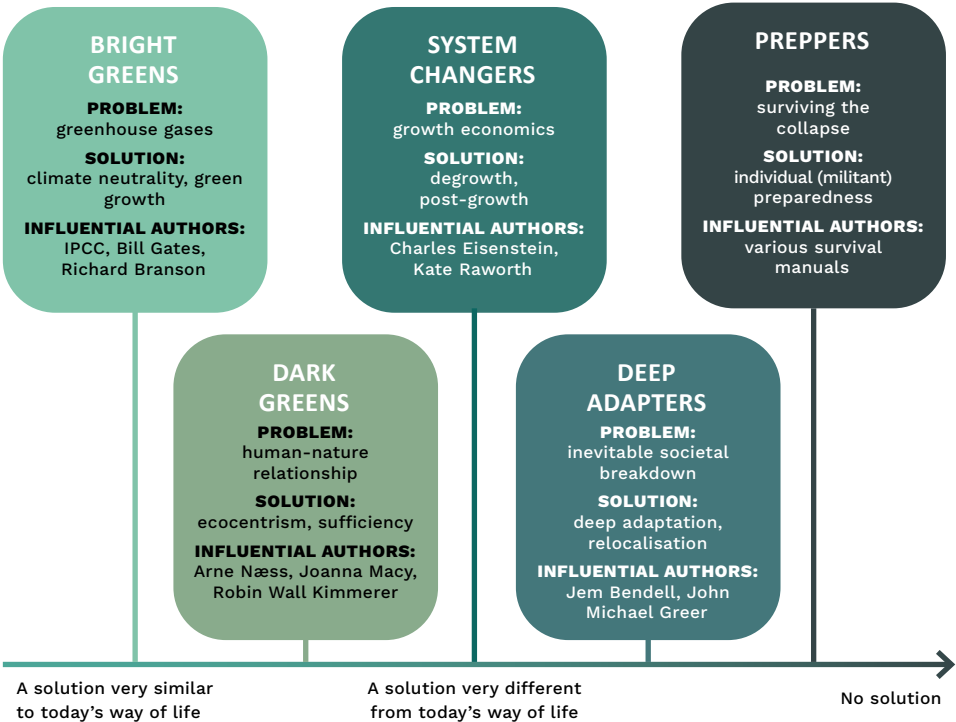
When you think about your own opinion regarding climate change solutions, do you think there is a solution very similar to today's way of life, a solution very different to today's way of life or no solution?

There is a spectrum of answers among people experiencing climate anxiety. According to this, Estonian psychologist and environmentalist Madis Vasser (PhD) has put together a hypothesis of 5 types of climate change awareness profiles.

When a young person experiences climate anxiety, their views and beliefs can vary widely. Understanding these different perspectives is important, as it helps you to recognize that people experience

climate anxiety in unique ways based on what they see as the main problems and solutions. When a young person reaches out to you for support, it doesn't matter what climate awareness profile they fall under and it should not impact upon how you respond. Your support should always be consistent and empathetic, regardless of their background or beliefs. **Keep in mind that this is a hypothesis, and collaboration and support are essential regardless of differing viewpoints.**

Take a look at the table below. These are, of course, only profiles of real individuals who are often a mix of the different facets outlined above. Thus it might be worthwhile to explore these model personas further.



BRIGHT GREENS are the mainstream climate activists who follow climate science, technology, and policy closely. They may talk about the 1.5-degree goals of the Paris Agreement, the efficiency of solar panels and the decoupling of the green growth economy. Their anxieties may stem from the relative inactivity of national governments and larger unions in addressing the urgency of the climate crisis. Yet they believe that incremental change is more realistic than the revolutions envisaged by dark greens and system changers. Adaptation sounds to them like giving up on the fight and prepping even more so.

DARK GREENS are the ecophilosophers, indigenous people and wildlife lovers, who have a strong connection with the outdoors, although they would call such an artificially constructed separation of nature as something “out there” and away from humans absolutely absurd. They see climate change as only a symptom of a much larger and deeper problem with our modern way of life, with the logical solution being to strive towards harmony with the more-than-human world. Aside from sustainable forms of energy production, they ask how much energy we, as human beings, really need. They may be more grieving rather than anxious, as the world they love is actively being destroyed before their eyes. Bright greens seem ignorant to them, and system changers too idealistic, while deep adapters may be reasonable and preppers misguided.

SYSTEM CHANGERS are all about macro-economics, criticizing the growth-at-all-costs model of Western societies, with all the social and ecological harms it produces. They are most likely anti-capitalist, opting for some other more sustainable ideology, such as degrowth, post-growth, doughnut economy, etc., happily discussing the differences between these theories. Their anxieties are opposite to the bright greens—worrying that governments will indeed act on the mainstream green deal, thereby worsening the unsustainability of the whole system on climate, ecological and social fronts. They may find dark greens too primitive, deep adapters too depressive and preppers too individualistic.

DEEP ADAPTERS are informed about the latest science and believe that societal breakdown due to severe climate change is already inevitable. So societies must ask themselves how to adapt—what to let go of, what to keep, what new social practices to implement, etc. The key difference with mainstream adaptation is the severity of climate change impacts assumed—they are not talking about slightly more rainfall in the winter, they are talking about collapsing infrastructure and widespread famine. Plenty to be anxious about. A sub-genre here is “collapsology”, the technical study of how everything can collapse. Bright greens are seen as dealers of “hopium” with no real solutions. Deep greens are considered inspirational. System thinkers are seen as being good, but too late to implement the huge changes needed in time. And preppers are deemed anti-social and give deep adapters a bad reputation.

PREPPERS may be well-informed or very conspiratorial, but either way they have reached the conclusion that the “shit hits the fan” sometime soon, after which everyone will be on their own to survive. They may possess or plan to get survival skills, equipment and a bunker to hold out as long as possible when the need arises. Guns are a must for some. Tinned food as well. People in this group are probably also the best prepared for any other emergency not related to the climate, so their overall anxiety level might be quite low. All other groups are seen as wasting their time or as competition for resources when the time comes to it.

Is a sensible discussion between such varied groups of people even possible? What if some parts of all of them are represented in a single person? Maybe they ought to be? Uncovering and working through these conflicting beliefs is the first step towards mapping out the individual and collective feelings related to climate change. To quote Britt Wray, the Director of Stanford Medicine’s Special Initiative on Climate Change and Mental Health—welcome to “Generation Dread”.

Another way to cluster people concerning their perceptions of climate change is offered by Pew Research (2023):

ALARMED

Individuals who are fully engaged and deeply concerned about climate change. They are actively involved in advocating for climate action and are alarmed by the current state of environmental affairs.

CONCERNED

Individuals who are worried about climate change and its impacts. They acknowledge the issue and are open to taking action but may not be as actively engaged.

CAUTIOUS

Individuals who are aware of climate change but are not as convinced about the severity of the issue. They may have some concerns but are more hesitant in their approach.

DISENGAGED

Individuals who are not actively involved or concerned about climate change. They may lack awareness or interest in the topic and are not engaged in discussions or actions related to climate issues

DOUBTFUL

Individuals who are skeptical or doubtful about climate change. They may question the scientific consensus on climate change or believe that the issue is exaggerated or not a significant concern.

Before continuing, it is advisable to take a moment to think about where you fit in this picture.

Climate change doesn't affect everyone equally

Climate anxiety, an indirect mental health consequence of climate change, is real and must be acknowledged. However, climate change has always been an issue of inequality, with marginalized groups—such as low-income people, indigenous communities, and those marginalized by race, sexuality, language, or socio-economic status—being disproportionately affected. (Pratt & Folver, 2022) **People with higher levels of neuroticism—who tend to worry more and struggle with uncertainty—may also be more likely to experience climate anxiety.** (Boehme et al., 2024) The impact of this inequality varies across regions and countries. While those with fewer financial resources are generally more vulnerable, some environmental changes will also directly affect broader populations and economies.

There are four main inequalities of climate change—economic, racial, regional and generational.

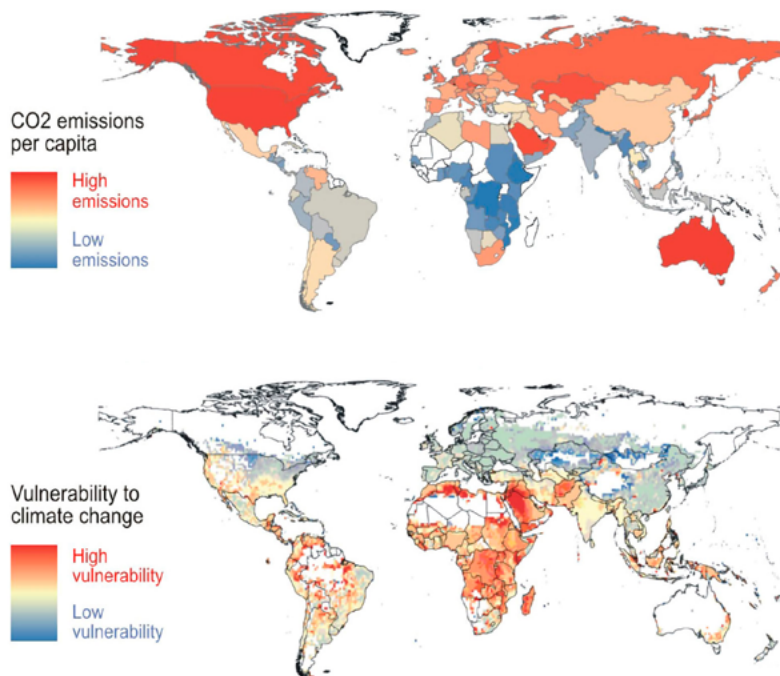
Marginalized groups, particularly racial and socioeconomic minorities, are disproportionately affected by climate change due to greater exposure to extreme weather and fewer resources for adaptation. (Berberian et al., 2022) They also have little influence over decisions that impact their lives, worsening existing socioeconomic and health inequalities. (Levy & Patz, 2015)

For example, in Hong Kong, many low-income residents live in subdivided flats without adequate ventilation or air conditioning. As temperatures rise—reaching a record 41.5°C on May 31, 2023 (Wikipedia, 2024)—the city's unaffordable housing market forces poorer communities into unsafe living conditions. (Encompass, 2022)

Secondly, racial disparities amplify the impacts of climate change, as pollution, natural disasters, and contaminated resources disproportionately affect marginalized groups. In the U.S., environmental racism is evident, with people of color facing greater environmental injustices. A study found that Hispanics and African Americans inhale 63% and 56% more pollution than they generate, while Caucasians are exposed to 17% less than they produce. (Tessum et al., 2019)

Thirdly, CO₂ emissions are unequally distributed across regions, with wealthier nations contributing far more to climate change. (Encompass, 2022) The richest half of the countries produce 86% of global emissions, while the poorest half account for just 14%. (Worldometer, 2016) Despite having minimal responsibility, many low-emission countries face the worst climate impacts. For example, the Philippines, home to 1.41% of the world's population, generates only 0.35% of global CO₂ emissions (USAID, 2017) yet suffers severe climate disasters like typhoons, floods, and landslides.

Finally, generational disparities in climate change are significant. As later chapters will discuss, young people's mental health will decline, and those in agriculture-dependent countries like Mali, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau will be especially vulnerable. Increasing extreme weather—floods, fires, storms, and droughts—will devastate agriculture, directly impacting their livelihoods and forcing them to bear the costs of climate change in their lifetimes. (Encompass, 2022)



Graph: Samson et al, 2011

In *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety*, Sarah Jaquette Ray suggests reframing our questions. Instead of asking, “How can I ease my anxiety?” or “What hope is there?”, those with privilege should ask,

“How am I connected to this?”

These reflections may reveal our deep interconnection with the well-being of all life on Earth. (Ray, 2021)

The interconnected world: understanding our global connections

Although we see ourselves as individuals, we do not live or evolve in isolation. We shape and are shaped by our environment and those around us. While climate crises may seem distant, many people experience their impacts daily. Recognizing both our privilege and responsibility is essential, even amid our own challenges.

Life on Earth is interconnected through ecological networks, where species interact to maintain balance. Energy and nutrients cycle through systems like the carbon, water, and nitrogen cycles. Our access to water, food, and essential products depends on global systems, highlighting our reliance on nature's stability.

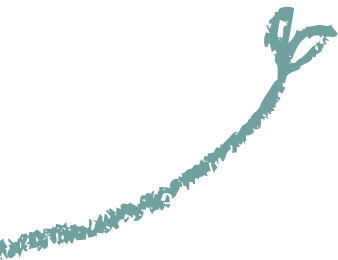
Caring for nature is vital for human well-being. Biodiversity strengthens ecosystems, making them more resilient to climate change, disease, and habitat loss. The decline of a single species, like bees, can disrupt entire ecosystems and food production. Every disruption has cascading effects, emphasizing the urgency of sustainability and conservation.

Our actions are shaped by the systems we live in, not just individual choices. While capitalism limits options individuals making the choices offered are not the ones to blame or put responsibility on, though we still contribute to global suffering. This connection affects our well-being, as seen with climate anxiety.

For instance, Amazon deforestation—driven by cattle ranching and soybean farming—impacts the entire planet. (Haywood, 2024) Forest loss destroys biodiversity, accelerates climate change, and disrupts weather patterns, causing droughts, wildfires, and agricultural losses globally. (FAO, 2020)

Similarly, cotton production requires massive amounts of water, depletes water sources and pollutes rivers in regions already suffering from scarcity. Textile dyeing releases toxic chemicals into rivers, affecting local communities. While consumers in wealthier nations enjoy cheap clothing, workers and ecosystems in developing countries bear the consequences. (Chico & Aldaya, 2023)

Raising awareness of this interconnectedness, especially among young people, fosters responsibility and empathy.



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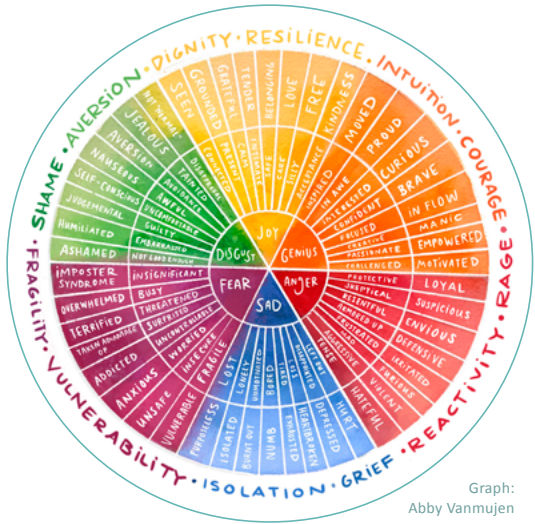
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How to normalize emotions

Emotions are the body’s way of letting us know that there is something that needs our attention, something that we care about and is important.

Emotions offer insight into values and boundaries. They indicate changes in the environment and motivate action in response. Emotions serve as instincts in otherwise novel situations. They also provide a universal language for expression and foster connection with others. (Mohamedali, 2023)

Emotions are generally often categorized as a wheel. There are different versions of this wheel and different approaches to emotions. Psychologist Robert Plutchik believes that there are 34,000 unique emotions, but, ordinarily, 6–8 primary emotions are experienced. (Plutchik, 1982)



Theorists don’t agree on which emotions are the basic ones. Classically, there are the categories of joy/happiness, genius/surprise, anger, sadness, fear, disgust), while contempt and trust/anticipation are sometimes also distinguished. Recent studies show that there are 27 distinct emotions. The other emotions are believed to be nuanced variations of basic emotions. (Cowen & Keltner, 2017)

Emotions as messengers

1. **Emotions are a source of information.** They give information on how to stay safe, survive, and thrive in an ever-changing environment and they motivate a behavioral response.
2. **Emotions help us interact with others.** This means emotions enable others to understand you better and allow us to gain a deeper understanding of them. When interacting with people, it is important to give cues to help them understand how you are feeling.

These cues might be through body language, such as facial expressions, connected with the particular emotions you are experiencing.

3. **Emotions prepare us for behavior.** Different emotions correspond to different patterns of action.

When triggered, emotions lead systems such as perception, attention, inference, learning, memory, goal choice, motivational priorities, physiological reactions, motor behaviors, and behavioral decision-making.

In our society, it is common for both parents and professionals to dismiss, minimize, or try to change young people's difficult emotions. Many of us have heard phrases like "don't cry," "cheer up," or "there's nothing to worry about." These are examples of invalidating statements that can make us feel like our emotions and reactions are not justified.

But why do so many people say things that invalidate feelings? Often, it's because it can be uncomfortable to have to sit with someone else's emotions. Through empathy, we may feel compassion, which can, if not handled carefully, become painful for us. This may also lead to misguided attempts to "fix" or change someone's emotional experience.

When a young person shares their feelings about environmental issues or climate change, the best thing you can do is **listen with care** and **accept both their emotions and your own**, just as they are. Even if this is all you can do, you've already done something incredibly meaningful.

If you do feel the need to say something, here are a few examples of validating statements you could use. Feel free to adapt these or come up with your own:

- "It is understandable that you feel like this [name the emotion]."
- "This sounds like a normal reaction to an abnormal situation."
- "You have every right to feel that way."
- "You are not alone." ("Many young people feel similarly about climate issues and it is very brave to be able to face these difficult things without turning away.")

It is essential to begin by **validating and normalizing** the young person's feelings so they feel understood and heard. Without this foundation, the techniques in this manual will not be effective.



Once you have **listened empathetically** and **acknowledged** their emotions, you can begin to **support** and **connect** with them. You might ask if they would like to learn more about managing difficult emotions.

It can also be helpful to clarify that **the goal is not to eliminate their emotions but to regulate their intensity**—making them manageable for constructive action while allowing space for rest and relaxation between stressful periods.

Emotional skills



Emotional skills are the abilities that enable individuals to recognize, understand, manage, and express their emotions effectively. These skills are essential for personal well-being, effective communication, building relationships, and making informed decisions.

Environmental emotions can be overwhelming, with the brain overloaded by information and thoughts shifting between past and future. Strengthening internal security through emotional skills, supportive relationships, and well-being practices can help. Daily routines, proper nutrition, exercise, and rest are especially vital during crises.

(Finnish Eco-Anxiety Project, 2023)

Emotional skills include the ability to:

1. Detect, recognize and name different emotions
2. Regulate emotions
3. Express and understand different emotions

1. **Detecting emotions.** This skill involves being attuned to one's own emotions and recognizing them in others. It requires attention to the physical sensations, thoughts, and behaviors that accompany various feelings. Developing a nuanced emotional vocabulary aids in accurately identifying and naming these emotions. Practices like mindfulness and reflection can enhance this. (Šimić et al., 2021)
2. **Emotional regulation** is the ability to manage emotions constructively rather than feeling overwhelmed. Healthy regulation also means knowing when to seek support, take breaks, or engage in activities like journaling, physical activity, or creative expression. It involves strategies like deep breathing, cognitive reframing, grounding techniques, and distress tolerance to prevent emotional outbursts, chronic stress, or suppression. (Wilms et al., 2020) **Connecting with nature** supports emotional regulation by reducing stress, enhancing well-being, and stabilizing the nervous system. It fosters self-awareness, and empathy while strengthening resilience for challenging times. (Finnish Eco-Anxiety Project, 2023) It deepens our understanding of natural cycles and fosters a sense of belonging to the Earth.
3. **Effectively expressing emotions** means communicating feelings clearly, respectfully, and appropriately through words, facial expressions, and body language. Understanding emotions involves empathizing with others, essential for strong relationships. Skills like active listening, perspective-taking, and emotional literacy help develop this ability. (Nook et al., 2021)

Grief

As climate change accelerates, many people experience ecological grief—a profound emotional response to environmental destruction, biodiversity loss, and uncertain futures. Ecological grief can arise in three key contexts:

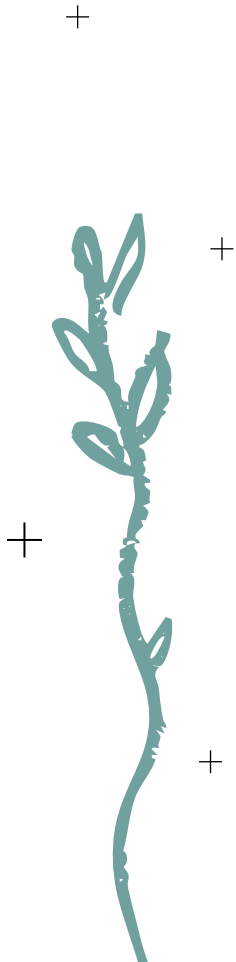
1. Grief from physical ecological losses and the impact on ways of life and culture;
2. Grief from disruptions to environmental knowledge systems, leading to a loss of identity;
3. Grief from anticipated future losses of place, land, species, and culture. (Pihkala, 2024)

This grief is not just an emotional burden; it can be a transformative force. The *Handbook of Climate Psychology* (Climate Psychology Alliance, 2018/2020) emphasizes that working through grief is essential for meaningful engagement in addressing climate change. Without acknowledging grief, people may become stuck in denial, anxiety, or despair, leading to paralysis instead of action.

Joanna Macy, a deep ecology philosopher and environmental activist also underscores grief as a necessary part of what she calls *The Work That Reconnects* (Macy & Brown, 2014), which is explained below. She sees grief as integral to moving from despair to empowerment, helping individuals reconnect with their love for the Earth and find the courage to act.

William Worden (1983) addresses **grief as a series of tasks** that can either be embraced or rejected. He emphasizes that they are unlikely to follow in a particular order, as the grieving person goes back and forth, sometimes embracing the tasks, sometimes rejecting them, failing, trying again, revisiting, reprising and reworking until somehow, meaning, purpose and creativity are restored. When applied to ecological grief, Worden’s model provides a framework for understanding how people emotionally process environmental loss and eventually find ways to engage constructively.

The following table summarizes Worden’s model:



EMBRACING THE TASKS OF GRIEF

Accepting the reality of the loss, first intellectually and then emotionally

Working through the painful emotions of grief (despair, fear, guilt, anger, shame, sadness, yearning, disorganisation)

Adjusting to the new environment, acquiring new skills, developing a new sense of self

Finding a place for what has been lost, reinvesting emotional energy

REJECTING THE TASKS OF GRIEF

Denial of the facts of the loss; the meaning of the loss; the irreversibility of the loss

Shutting off all emotion, idealising what is lost, bargaining, numbing the pain through alcohol, drugs or manic activity

Not adapting, becoming helpless, bitter, angry, depressed, withdrawing

Refusing to love, turning away from life

Adapted from Worden, 1983

From grief to action

Processing ecological grief does not mean simply accepting environmental collapse, it means finding ways to act despite uncertainty. Studies (e.g. Ojala, 2016) show that **active hope—the ability to acknowledge distress while still working toward solutions—is crucial for long-term resilience**. Indigenous perspectives (Whyte, 2017) also highlight intergenerational and cultural grief as central to understanding environmental loss, reinforcing the need for collective healing.

Ecological grief is painful, but it is also a testament to deep care for the world. As Ashlee Cunsolo (2018) notes, grief is not just about loss, it is about love. By embracing grief rather than suppressing it, individuals and communities can transform their sorrow into creative action, advocacy, and restoration. In this way, grief becomes a powerful force for healing both people and the planet. Researchers argue that acknowledging and working through grief is essential for long-term resilience and meaningful engagement in climate activism. (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018)

A helpful practice for working through grief is Radical Joy, which focuses on finding beauty and meaning in wounded places. More information can be found here: [Radical Joy Practice](#). Additional practical exercises are available in the [workbook](#).

We will explore ways to move from climate emotions including grief to meaningful engagement in Chapter 3.

The Radical Joy practice

1. Go, alone or with friends, to a wounded place.
2. Sit awhile and share your stories about what the place means to you.
3. Get to know the place as it is now.
4. Share with the others what you discovered.
5. Make a simple gift of beauty for the place.

Adapted from: radicaljoy.org/practice

The Work That Reconnects

Philosopher and activist Joanna Macy, a pioneer in coping strategies for climate anxiety, introduced *The Work That Reconnects* in the 1980s. Drawing on Buddhism and deep ecology, this model helps individuals process ecological emotions through a structured, transformative arc. Macy and Molly Young Brown's guide elaborates on the approach and includes immersive exercises, such as ecological grief rituals. (Macy & Brown, 2014)

Macy observed a significant amount of depression and discouragement among environmental activists due to the daily challenges and bleak news they face.

She also noted that, in many societies, there is little space for acknowledging sorrow or pain, as critical environmental issues, such as animal extinction, ocean acidification, and widespread death, are often met with indifference.

Macy believed that creating space to acknowledge our despair is necessary for empowerment. As she put it, "It is in the darkest place that you can find the brightest sun." *The Work That Reconnects* is a spiral process of four stages designed to help individuals reconnect with their emotions, nature, and deeper selves.



The main stages of the Macy model are:

1. **Coming from Gratitude**—Practicing gratitude, which fosters the mental resilience needed to confront difficult issues.
2. **Honoring Our Pain for the World**—Acknowledging and respecting the pain tied to global crises, with exercises for managing difficult climate emotions.
3. **Seeing with New/Ancient Eyes**—Gaining a deeper, focused perspective of oneself and the world.
4. **Going Forth**—Moving forward with renewed strength and purpose.

These four stages are interconnected and most effective when experienced in sequence, helping individuals realize they are greater, stronger, and more creative than they have been led to believe. (Macy & Brown, 2015)

"The central purpose of the *Work That Reconnects* is to help people uncover and experience their innate connection with each other and with the systemic, self-healing powers of the web of life, so that they may be enlivened and motivated to play their part in creating a sustainable civilization."

— Joanna Macy

What is anxiety and how does it work?

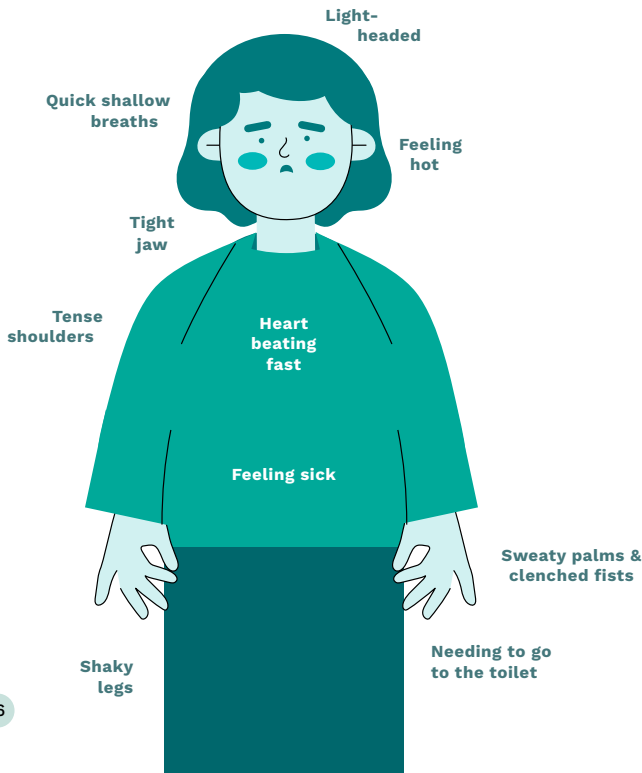
Anxiety is a natural and essential emotion that helps us respond to **perceived threats or uncertainties**. When we feel anxious, our sympathetic nervous system activates, part of the autonomic nervous system, which we can influence voluntarily only indirectly.

Anxiety affects not just our thoughts but our entire body. Common symptoms include light-headedness, muscle tension, rapid shallow breathing, changes in body temperature, a racing heart, nausea, sweating, shaking, and an urgent need to use the toilet. These physical reactions prepare us to fight or flee, helping us respond to perceived threats.

When the sympathetic nervous system activates, it triggers the **fight-flight-freeze response**, a survival mechanism that prepares us to confront danger. We have three instinctive options: fight the threat, run away, or freeze (play dead).

While these responses were crucial for survival in the past and still serve us in some situations, modern threats—like the ecological and climate crises—are not easily escaped or fought in a traditional sense. This can lead to a prolonged stress response, which, if left unchecked, can be harmful.

However, the goal is not to eliminate anxiety entirely. Emotions drive action, and in the face of climate change, the most constructive response is to “fight” in a way that channels our emotions into meaningful action. Young activists should stay committed to their goals and values while also learning to regulate their emotions to avoid burnout.



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What to know about climate anxiety?

Climate anxiety refers to feelings of anxiety triggered by environmental threats to our planet, such as climate change, ecosystem destruction, and increasing natural disasters. It is a term used to describe emotions tied to a sense of powerlessness and inevitability in the face of ongoing ecological crises, particularly climate change and biodiversity loss.

(Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018)

This emotional response includes a range of feelings like desperation, anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, guilt, grief, shame, hopelessness, and disempowerment.

These emotions are often caused by the perception that actions taken—whether by governments, organizations, or individuals—are insufficient to address the magnitude of the challenges, leading to a sense of inaction or inadequacy in protecting the planet. (Ojala, 2016; Pihkala, 2020)



Climate anxiety is a natural and normal response to the significant and dangerous changes occurring in the Earth's climate and ecosystems. It arises from the awareness of the ongoing environmental crisis, which not only impacts the planet but also the future of humanity. This anxiety is a form of adaptation to a rapidly changing world and should not be viewed as pathological. Rather, it reflects a deep connection to the world and the injustices being inflicted on the planet and its inhabitants. (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Pihkala, 2020)

To have any meaningful, behavior-changing reaction to climate change, it is necessary to first possess awareness and understanding. A structured and systemic worldview is essential to comprehend the full scope of the crisis and its long-term consequences. (Arro, 2021) This awareness makes it possible to identify how individual and collective actions can influence the future, even in the face of overwhelming challenges. Climate anxiety emerges when people feel powerless to solve the problem at the individual level or to grasp the sheer scale of the crisis, often described as a “hyperobject”. (von Gal, 2024) A hyperobject refers to an object or event whose dimensions are so vast—spanning time and space—that they are difficult for the human mind to fully contain, such as the climate crisis or the global ecosystem. (Morton, 2013)

CLIMATE ANXIETY:
forward-looking emotions and
uncertainty related to the global
climate crisis and the threat of
environmental catastrophe

- Normal natural adaptation response to what is happening
- Emotional, mental and physical expressions in response to dangerous changes in the Earth's ecosystem
- Awareness of global and systemic problems, overcoming the abstract of climate changes

Importantly, climate anxiety is not a mental illness. A person with climate anxiety might also have other anxiety or mood disorders like depression or bipolar disorder, since these often overlap. However, climate anxiety can also exist on its own. Rather, climate anxiety is deeply rooted in external circumstances—it arises in response to the realization of how massive and intractable the problem is. It represents the emotional and intellectual challenge of confronting a crisis that seems too big to address on an individual level. (Clayton et al., 2017; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018)

In essence, climate anxiety is a sign of one's connection to the world. It is a healthy, normal reaction to the environmental injustices being inflicted

upon the planet. This awareness evokes a sense of responsibility to act, not only for the benefit of future generations but also for the well-being of all living beings and ecosystems today. To healthily feel, recognize, and accept these emotions, it is crucial to have a functional connection between one's emotions and the body. This includes self-care and the recognition of our interconnectedness with other living beings and the planet as a whole. (Pihkala, 2020)

The *Handbook of Climate Psychology* suggests that attentiveness to what is happening is healthier than turning away in denial or disavowal. (Climate Psychology Alliance, 2021) By embracing and understanding climate anxiety, individuals can begin to transform it into a force for action. This process requires cultivating awareness, fostering a sense of connection, and nurturing the responsibility to act for the planet's future. (Ojala, 2016; Clayton et al., 2017)

The incessant flow of anxiety-provoking information about climate emergencies can create a vicious circle of swirling thoughts. We are in an in-between period, where old habits coexist with insistent, worrying signals. These contradictions can lead to a deep sense of unease. Eco-anxiety is much more than a simple worry; it's a heightened awareness that urges us to take action for a more sober future. At the heart of this anxiety and in the face of environmental concerns, **action is the ultimate remedy.**

Climate emotions

Climate anxiety is a term that covers the difficult emotions we experience when thinking about environmental degradation and the climate crisis. These emotions—sometimes called “climate emotions”—are closely tied to the climate crisis itself, though other factors can influence how we feel at any given moment. (Pihkala, 2022)

When we don't address our emotions, especially in response to the climate crisis, it can make things worse. For example, unaddressed feelings like grief can increase distress. (Ojala et al., 2021) Other common emotions like guilt and shame also come up, especially when we feel like we haven't done enough. (Jensen, 2019; Fredericks, 2021) Even people who are actively working on climate issues can struggle with feelings of not being enough. (Nairn, 2019; Coppola & Pihkala, 2023)

Researchers have identified several key climate emotions, including fear, worry, anxiety, sadness, grief, guilt, shame, anger, and frustration, but also hope and belonging. (Pihkala, 2022) These emotions can sometimes feel overwhelming, and many of them are described as “moral emotions.” This is because they often involve feelings of responsibility, right or wrong, or the suffering of others, especially when it comes to guilt, shame, anger, and grief. (Antadze, 2020; Pihkala, 2020)

Marczak et al. (2023) developed a questionnaire that includes eight different climate-related emotions: anger, contempt, enthusiasm, powerlessness, guilt, isolation, anxiety, and sorrow. These emotions can occur together—for example, someone might feel both anxious and relieved when positive change happens. The list isn't final, but this is the first questionnaire to collect large-scale data on a wide range of climate emotions, not just anxiety, worry, or anger.

One of the first international studies on climate emotions, which surveyed over 10,000 young people aged 16–25, found that more than half of them

Climate Emotions Wheel



Graph: Panu Pihkala

Observing your emotions

For those experiencing climate anxiety, it's important to process and sit with emotions rather than suppress them. When hopelessness arises, instead of distracting yourself, observe how the emotions feel in your body, what thoughts come up, and how they affect your actions. Avoiding emotions can affect mental health substantially and increase distress, like unresolved grief (Ojala et al., 2021), and can lead to feelings of guilt and shame. (Fredericks, 2021)

experienced climate anxiety. For these young people, the most common emotions were anger, fear, anxiety, hopelessness, disempowerment, guilt, grief, and shame.

(Hickman et al., 2021) Other studies have shown that strong emotional reactions like shock, trauma, anxiety, stress, and even depression often come up alongside climate anxiety. (Pihkala, 2021)

In short, climate emotions are a mix of feelings we experience when we confront the reality of the climate crisis. They are normal and natural, but it's important to recognize and address them in order to take care of our mental health, keep the meaningfulness of life and stay motivated to act.

Living with your emotions

Climate emotions need to be accepted and channeled constructively, not repressed. In order not to fall into feelings of inadequacy, powerlessness and alarmed aloneness*, it is necessary to provide young people tools to set their responsibility into context, in order to avoid the negative consequences of the pressures that they feel. (Coppola & Panu, 2023)

* Alarmed aloneness: feeling like going insane and seemingly being the only one who takes the situation seriously while society continues to do business-as-usual.

Difference between climate anxiety and other forms of anxiety

Climate anxiety refers to diverse emotional responses like fear and uncertainty about the future. Unlike other anxieties, climate anxiety is: 1) rooted in real, 2) evolving threats which are, 3) globally shared. (Clayton, 2020) The changes we face are inevitable and harmful, like concerns about access to clean water and food in 20 years, unlike the uncertainty of future events like exams. (Zhang et al., 2011)

Unlike other anxiety-inducing stimuli, climate anxiety cannot be reframed by minimizing the threat. Instead, it requires coping strategies and reframing how to live and manage in this situation.

While general anxiety is subjective, climate change impacts everyone similarly, such as experiencing heatwaves, though perceptions may vary. Climate anxiety may also lead to more environmentally conscious behaviors. (Sangervo et al., 2022) It can challenge life's fundamental aspects, making

daily activities like education or retirement planning feel futile due to an uncertain future. (Dodds, 2021)

Climate anxiety is influenced by societal and systemic factors, including government policies, connecting it to social, environmental, and psychological issues. (Whitmarsh, 2022) Its intensity is affected by societal responses—higher anxiety from denial or indifference, and lower anxiety when society acknowledges climate change's impact. (Crandon et al., 2024)

Clinical psychologist Sarah Lowe suggests that mindfulness and acceptance approaches can help manage climate anxiety: "It's not about accepting that you shouldn't do anything about climate change, but rather acknowledging someone's anxious feelings and helping them harness it for something good." This encourages individuals to use their anxiety to take positive action.

General anxiety Climate anxiety

Can't be entirely sure in upcoming negative changes

The magnitude of the threat can be reframed

The anxiety is a subjective fight or flight reaction to situations, real for one person but not real for others

Usually doesn't challenge societal structures, growth economy and justice etc.

It is known that negative changes are coming, only the volume of them is unknown

The magnitude of the threat is real. One has to learn to deal with climate anxiety and reframe how to live and function in this situation

Climate anxiety is a societal problem that is shared globally

Challenges societal structures, growth economy, justice and capitalism, which may lead to disillusionment

Positive impacts of climate anxiety

Climate anxiety is not a disorder but a natural response to environmental crises. However, it can become problematic if it intensely disrupts daily life. While overwhelming, it can also be a valuable resource when individuals have the right conditions to process their emotions and take meaningful action. (Pihkala, 2019) Both action and coping skills are needed. This can be called meaning-focused coping.

For climate anxiety to become a positive force, three key conditions must be met:

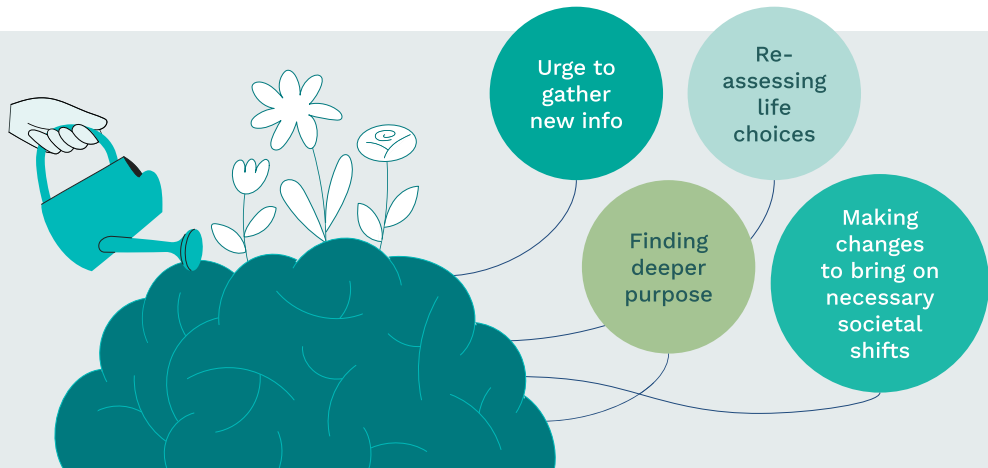
- 1. Time and space to process emotions**
- 2. Engagement in constructive action**
- 3. Support from others**

1. EMOTION-FOCUSED COPING

Emotional and mental health skills are essential for managing climate anxiety in a way that preserves hope and vitality. Strong emotions, including anxiety, can serve as powerful motivators, helping individuals recognize threats and adapt their behavior accordingly. However, when anxiety is not effectively managed, it can become overwhelming and disrupt daily life. (Pihkala, 2021) Healthy processing of climate anxiety—through reflection, dialogue, and action—can foster personal growth, a sense of purpose, and emotional resilience. (Pihkala, 2020) A deeper exploration of emotions and emotional skills is covered in Chapter 2.

2. PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING

Rather than leading to denial or apathy, acknowledging climate anxiety can help individuals to cope in productive ways, such as participating in community-based solutions and environmental education. (Clayton, 2020) Research links eco-anxiety to increased engagement in climate movements like *Fridays for Future*, which drive systemic change. (Stanley et al., 2021) On a broader scale, collective anxiety can generate political pressure, influencing policy decisions. Shared environmental concerns also inspire community-led sustainability efforts, including urban greening projects, permaculture initiatives, and climate adaptation strategies. (Ojala et al., 2021) A deeper exploration of meaningful actions will be covered in Chapter 3.



3. SUPPORT

A sense of community and shared purpose helps individuals feel less isolated and more empowered to act. Research shows that social support can reduce feelings of helplessness and despair common in eco-anxiety. Connecting with others who share environmental concerns provides emotional strength and validation, lightening the psychological burden. (Ojala, 2016)

Social support can range from informal networks to structured climate movements. Collective action fosters belonging and purpose, which is essential for emotional well-being. (Clayton, 2020) Working together on climate issues also creates opportunities for problem-solving and reinforces the sense of being part of a larger movement, reducing feelings of helplessness. (Pihkala, 2021)

Some academics suggest that eco-anxiety may be linked to a healthy understanding of climate change. (Cunsolo et al., 2020) Terms like “**practical anxiety**” have been introduced by climate emotion scholars to highlight the constructive potential of emotions typically seen as negative, such as anxiety. (Kurth, 2018)

While climate anxiety can be distressing, it can also act as a catalyst for individual behavioral change and collective action, ultimately fostering a more sustainable society. When young people have the right support, emotional regulation skills, and meaningful outlets through action, experiencing climate anxiety can be valuable. It encourages them to seek new information, reassess life choices, and find deeper meaning, all of which drive the necessary changes for building a more just and livable future.

Youth are particularly affected

The mental health impacts of climate change are often seen as an ‘invisible’ injustice, particularly for socially vulnerable communities (such as those with pre-existing health conditions, young people, and indigenous groups), who are more affected but less visible. (Ingle & Mikulewicz, 2020)

Today’s youth have grown up in a world where species and ecosystems are constantly threatened by climate change. They have been exposed to different environmental issues for a long time now. This has shaped their childhood and adolescence, with climate change being a key factor in their lives. (Pickard, 2019)

Younger people are more affected by climate anxiety, as they are more aware of environmental issues and feel the weight of a future at risk. Additionally, their emotional regulation skills may not be fully developed, making it harder to process and cope with these strong emotions. Young people’s brains are still developing until at least age 25, making them more vulnerable to mental health challenges triggered by environmental stressors. This can be due to direct events like extreme weather, as well as ongoing stress from environmental degradation. (Kidd et al., 2023)

Chronic exposure to these stressors is linked to anxiety and depression in young people. Given their vulnerability during this critical stage of development, it’s crucial for adults to provide support and resources to help them cope with climate anxiety in a healthy way. (Sampaio & Sequeira, 2022)

Additionally, certain groups, such as those who rely on nature for their livelihoods or lifestyle—like farmers, fishermen, and indigenous communities—are particularly vulnerable to climate anxiety. People who have directly experienced extreme weather events are also at higher risk, even if their jobs aren’t tied to nature. (Boehme et al., 2024, Asgarizadeh et al., 2023) These individuals have a deep connection to ecosystems that are changing. Climate professionals, such as climatologists and environmental activists, are also more affected. (Pihkala, 2019)


The emotional coping trajectory of climate anxiety	
avoidance	→ facing the situation
denial	→ acceptance
anxiety	→ fear (i.e. experiencing healthy fear)
sadness	→ courage, unlocking resources
trauma, great shock	→ post-traumatic growth
feeling of inadequacy	→ accepting incompleteness
paralysing guilt	→ animating guilt
incapacitating shame	→ feeling one is good enough
anger, frustration	→ action against injustice
helplessness	→ empowerment
meaninglessness	→ meaningfulness

Adapted from Pihkala (2019)

Ecologically maladaptive and adaptive coping responses


When it comes to dealing with climate anxiety, different responses can emerge, some of which help individuals cope in healthy and effective ways, while others can make things worse or prevent meaningful action. Understanding these responses can guide in supporting young people as they navigate the emotional toll of climate change.

The Climate Psychology Alliance has outlined two types of responses: adaptive (helpful) and maladaptive (harmful). The goal is for youth to move from maladaptive responses toward more adaptive coping mechanisms, ultimately enabling them to address their anxiety in a way that empowers them to take action and make a positive impact on both themselves and the planet.



Ecologically maladaptive coping responses could include:

- denial or disavowal of ecological crisis (e.g. rejecting, deflecting, ignoring)
- distortion of facts (e.g. reducing the size of the threat, putting the threat into the future)
- shifting responsibility (e.g. blame-shifting, denial of guilt, splitting, projection)
- avoidance of difficult emotions (e.g. suppression, escapism, numbing, pleasure-seeking)
- diversionary activity (e.g. minor behavior change or displaced commitment)
- non-action (e.g. resignation, passivity, lazy catastrophism)
- self-deception (e.g. wishful/magical thinking, unrealistic optimism)
- active catastrophism and self-destructive acts
- self-enhancement values orientation (e.g. materialistic behavior to enhance self-esteem, or self-protection to enhance a sense of security and being in control)



Ecologically adaptive coping responses could include:

- seeking information and engagement with facts about the ecological crisis
- engaging with and regulating associated emotions (e.g. through mindfulness)
- compassion, self-transcendence, values orientation (care for humans and non-humans)
- connecting with nature
- considered reflection on death and impermanence
- collaborative problem-solving

What are healthy ways to navigate climate anxiety?

One way to support youth with strong climate anxiety is to help them channel it into climate action while fostering hope, confidence, and a sense of purpose. (Doherty, 2025) This also strengthens resilience. **There need to be four main factors present:**

Support from others

Support from others is crucial in life, and, given the severity of the climate crisis, feeling understood and heard is especially important for coping with climate anxiety.

Emotional skills and/or tools

Emotional skills, as those discussed in the chapter Emotional Skills, play a key role in managing climate anxiety. Strong emotions can be a powerful resource and source of motivation. Anxiety itself acts as a signal, helping us recognize threats and adjust our behavior. For example, feeling anxious about an approaching deadline encourages action to complete a task on time. However, if anxiety is not managed well, it can negatively impact daily life and mental health.

(Pihkala, 2021)

Meaningful action

Taking action can help reduce feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and disempowerment. However, action should focus on systemic change rather than individual lifestyle adjustments framed as “saving the planet.” Instead, personal actions should be about embracing new ways of living as part of a broader cultural shift. **The most meaningful actions are those that align with a person’s capacity and life situation.**

Distancing—self-care and avoidance

Distancing can involve both self-care and a healthy avoidance of the constant presence of ecological crisis. Self-care here is not just an individual practice but is influenced by support systems. This could include taking offline breaks from the news on weekends or, to some extent, downplaying the severity of the crisis as a coping mechanism.

(Pihkala, 2022)



The responsibility for large-scale action lies primarily with those in power, not with young people. So the key question is: **What actions can young people take that are meaningful without placing an undue burden on them?**

(Pihkala, 2024)

Going offline

The modern world keeps us glued to screens, consuming vast amounts of digital content, often leading to “inf overwhelm”, “doomscrolling,” or “infobesity” where we feel overwhelmed by information, including about climate change. Given that key facts about climate change are widely known, more information may not make things easier to handle.

Do Not Disturb



Photo: Unsplash

Misinformation, disinformation, and false balance (e.g., presenting climate change deniers alongside scientists) contribute to confusion and inaction (Imundo & Rapp, 2022). Public health experts suggest media should balance the bad news with positive stories, ideally one good for every three bad (VanderWeele & Brooks, 2020), though this is rarely followed.

There are several solutions to cut down on the constant flood of information.

- **Disable the notifications** on specific apps or your whole phone or turn off internet connectivity at least for a part of the day. When trying to focus on some activity, constant interruptions cause task switching, which is very tiring.
- **Visit social media only on a computer.** This already means that you cannot do it everywhere and all the time.
- **Set a time limit** before opening social media. The platforms are designed to be irresistible, so plan ahead!
- **When doomscrolling**, the moment you realize that you’re doing it, stop. Redirect your attention to something else on the web or simply put down your phone or log off.
- **Take a social media detox.** Maybe first only for a day, then longer. See what happens to your mental health over that period. Perhaps at one point, you will only feel the need to visit social media on one day of the week. Let friends and family know beforehand, so they would not be concerned, but rather helpful and supportive.
- **Establish good sleep hygiene**—this means sleeping in a dark and quiet room where a smartphone does not belong.
- **Seek out reliable, empowering climate information**—Katharine Hayhoe’s newsletter “[Talking Climate](#)”, Britt Wray’s newsletter “[Unthinkable](#)”. By gathering a mix of the reality we need to face and the solutions we can contribute to, such sources can help ease climate anxiety, instill hope and inspire action.

Meaningful actions

One key way to cope with climate anxiety in a healthy manner is to take meaningful action. These actions can be taken at various levels and through different approaches, depending on each individual's strengths, needs, capacity, accessibility, and other factors.

While we all influence the world around us—whether we realize it or not—there is power in consciously choosing to make a difference. Taking action not only benefits the world but also empowers and uplifts those who engage in it, reinforcing a sense of purpose and resilience. Broadly, there are three key ways to create a meaningful impact on the future: through **individual choices**, by **influencing societal structures**, and by **shaping mindsets and worldviews**.

(Finnish Eco-Anxiety Project, 2023)

Below is a diverse list of actions that are based on the 52climateactions.com list of climate actions and Regenerate Nexus world's most comprehensive list of Solutions and Challenges.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: ACTIONS

Grow

climate-tolerant plants

Examples of plants that grow well in the climates of Estonia, Denmark, and Germany:

- Sea buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*)
- Hardy varieties of apple (*Malus domestica*), e.g. Antonovka (in Estonia), Ingrid Marie, Filippa (in Germany)
- Plum (*Prunus domestica/cerasifera*)
- Hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*)
- Lovage (*Levisticum officinale*)
- Kale (*Brassica oleracea var. sabellica*)
- Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*)
- Jerusalem artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*)
- Blackcurrant (*Ribes nigrum*)

Examples in southern European climate (Malta):

- Tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*, local varieties)
- Eggplant (*Solanum melongena*)
- Zucchini (*Cucurbita pepo*)
- Sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*)
- Chickpeas (*Cicer arietinum*)
- Almond (*Prunus dulcis*)
- Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*)
- Pistachio (*Pistacia vera*)
- Walnut (*Juglans regia*)
- Fig (*Ficus carica*)
- Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*)
- Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)
- Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)

See more: [Gardenia.net](https://www.gardenia.net)

Enjoy simple things

- Walk barefoot, read a book, grow your own food, spend time with the people you enjoy to be around
- Get lost/take new routes, forage for wild food, dance like no one is looking, take pauses throughout your days, breathe
- Go wild: camp overnight; lie on a blanket under the stars; walk in forests; learn the skills of our ancestors such as fire-making
- Create something (story, article, poem, painting, pottery, crochet etc)
- Grow onions, microgreens, pot of herbs on your windowsill

Spend time in nature

Being in the wilderness can be a good reminder of what we're fighting and loving for

Build and use an outhouse in your garden

A compost toilet conserves water and allows waste to return to the soil, enriching it naturally

Prepare for extreme weather conditions (helps to ensure less anxiety)

- Windproof your home and land—use permaculture design tools for climate resilience
- Learn to survive an emergency—plan for temporary grid collapse when you have no electricity, heating or water

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: ACTIONS (cont.)

Garden

This structured way of getting in touch with nature is helping to find joy in growing food and flowers and getting more in tune with the seasons

Make compost

Learn, identify, plan

Learn more about the diversity of fungi and their roles in a regenerative future

Share your ride

Eat the food you buy / reduce food waste

Minimize

Buy less and instead make more things yourself; work less, have more time

Ride your bike in shorter distances

Use efficient appliances

Wash clothes with warm water, air dry, boil water you are going to use, turn off appliances when unused, LED lights, etc

Avoid seasonal / holiday-based overconsumption and excesses

Give thoughtful gifts, have mindful meals, reuse and DIY decorations

Build with green materials

See if you could use other natural materials for building like old structural elements, sheep wool, expanded clay aggregate, ferrock, grasscrete, hempcrete

Eat less meat and dairy

Prefer pasture-fed high-welfare local farms, bring variety into your menu and add lentils, peas, beans, tofu, nuts and seeds to enrich your meals

Prefer local and seasonal food with a fair price

Farmers' market, farm shops, local producers' events, vegetable boxes

Manage water in the landscape

Assess, design, plan

Insulate your home

Good insulation keeps your home temperature stable for both winters and summers. Consider well insulation when choosing or planning moving to/renovating your home. Have a look at different structural ways to insulate your home.

Think through how you use water

(the necessity is based on location)

Adapt your home for hot summers

Work out how to manage summer heat without energy-hungry air conditioning when possible. Instead use trees for more shade, blinds, insulate, use ventilation, etc.

Extend the life of your clothing

Wear it, fix it, reuse it, recycle it

Choose renewable energy

Depending on where you live, choose your energy supplier and package that source your electricity from renewable sources

STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY: ACTIONS

**Participate in the development of
10 Theses Towards Transformative
Community-Led Local Development Policies**

**Join advocacy and
policy campaigns of
communities for future**

Vote

**Campaign for local
adaptations**

**Campaign for a just
and livable future**

**Sign the
“TIME FOR
COLLECTIVE
ACTION
MANIFESTO”**

**Join an existing environmental organization
or establish a new one**

Groups like Fridays For Future and Extinction Rebellion offer local chapters where young people can meet, plan actions, and support each other. For those who prefer less visibility, there are roles in arts, communication, logistics, and more. Larger NGOs like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace provide opportunities for both protests and advocacy, including policy feedback and report writing

**Protect and restore
forests**

Deforestation is the main cause
of climate change

**Start on-campus
composting
at your school**

Have a look at the
Campus Composting Manual
to find ways to start

**Plant an edible
forest garden**

**Protect and
restore wetlands**

**Plant and
nurture trees**

**Build
soil health**

**Farm regeneratively
(or support it)**

Harm-reducing, restorative, holistic

**Have good
relationships
with your
neighbors**

It fosters community
resilience and support

Care for others

This not only supports individuals but also contributes
to the health of our communities, ultimately impacting
the planet

MINDSET AND WORLDVIEW: ACTIONS

**Imagine the possibilities from
“what is” to “what if”**

**Think from extraction
and infinite growth-
based worldview toward
care and wellbeing**

**Challenge
discrimination and
stereotypes**

**Cultivate
compassion in
your daily life**

Toward yourself, to
others, learn how
compassion is the natural
state of the human heart

Hold a party

Celebrate life together,
have a community
work day

**Learn more about
the traditions,
customs, and
worldviews of
Indigenous
Peoples**

**Care for the
places you visit as
if the whole planet
is your home**

Keep your
environment clean

Speak up

**Reflect on
your values**

Consider what matters most to
you and the principles you want
to uphold in your life

Practice self-awareness

Cultivate self-awareness and mindfulness
to develop a deeper understanding of
your thoughts, emotions, and actions.
Regularly evaluate your motives,
intentions, and the impact of your
behavior on others

Consider consequences

Assess how your decisions may affect
yourself, others, and the broader
community. Strive to make choices that
promote well-being and minimize
harm to others

**Refuse, reduce, reuse, repair &
recycle**

Put simple systems in place to have always reusable
bags, appliances, etc. easily accessible

**Build
community**

Network and
community make
life much more
enjoyable with
both mental and
physical support

**Take care
of yourself**

Choose actions
which produce
visible change.
Avoid burnout
with teamwork,
regular breaks
and recognizing
your limits

**Challenge
the current
normal**

**Act with
integrity**

Cultivate honesty,
transparency and
consistency in your
words and actions

**Listen, share
and learn**

**Follow your
passion**

Find the pride, satisfaction
and joy in taking climate
action on the form that
sparks your joy

**Start a
conversation**

Bond, connect,
inspire

**Study permaculture and the
regenerative way of working with land**

Care for the Earth, care for the people, fair share

Join a climate action group

For example transition towns, permaculture,
ecovillages, community energy, the social solidarity
economy, and environmental NGOs/initiatives

**Embrace lifelong learning
and growth**

Stay open to new ideas, feedback, and diverse
perspectives, recognize it is a conscious effort

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How to support youth in navigating climate anxiety

“You got to tell me the truth. Otherwise you are lying to me. If you lie to me, I won’t trust you. If I can’t trust you, I can’t talk to you about how I feel. Anyway, I am not a baby.”

– 8 year old Sophia

As humans, we can only experience life emotionally. Without understanding how our emotions shape our thoughts and decisions, we distance ourselves from ourselves, our experiences and others. (Brown, 2021) It is very important to keep feelings and emotional responses at the heart of the conversations about the climate crisis.

The importance of talking to youth about the environmental crisis

Discussing honestly and openly about the climate crisis with young people can be challenging, as we naturally want to shield them from distressing information in order to have what we think is a normal life. The need to protect them is understandable. However, **rather than protecting them from the truth, we should ensure they don’t face it alone.**

Keep in mind that before discussing the climate crisis with young people, it’s important to first teach methods that help them cope with climate anxiety in a healthy way. This can include age-appropriate environmental activities and simple techniques for managing anxiety or strong emotions—practices children can start using immediately. Once they are familiar with these coping tools, it’s more appropriate to begin conversations about climate change. (Crandon et al., 2022)

As trusted figures, parents play a key role in discussing the climate crisis, ensuring children receive accurate information in a safe space. Avoiding the topic may signal indifference or cause feelings of betrayal. Open conversations strengthen resilience and help children navigate challenges.

Honest conversations about the climate crisis show children they are supported and not alone. Tailoring discussions to their age and thoughts helps them feel understood, empowered, and prepared to act. Awareness is crucial, but so are well-being and action; the three must go hand in hand.

Emotional responses are central to climate conversations. The crisis is a lived reality, not just an educational topic, and young people's feelings must be taken seriously and met with empathy. In order to be able to do that, adults need support and emotional regulation skills to navigate their own distress and guide these discussions effectively. (Royal Museum Greenwich, 2021)

Managing your own emotions in the face of the climate crisis

Staying regulated and calm is essential to support young people and their emotions. Self-care is our responsibility, ensuring we don't project our struggles onto others. Processing emotions means fully experiencing them, finding meaning, and choosing how to respond.

Seek support from a community, group, or friends—no one should navigate life's challenges alone. A strong sense of belonging improves mental health, while isolation can weaken it. (Michalski et al., 2020) Community support is especially vital in coping with climate anxiety, enhancing both emotional resilience and overall well-being.

When facing the climate crisis, the best response isn't to act alone but to connect with others. Despite being brought up in a society where we think of ourselves as self-reliant individuals, we are deeply interconnected, influencing and being influenced by those around us.

(Maté & Maté, 2023)

The Climate Psychology Alliance offers climate-aware therapists, group cafes, and other resources for support. Learn more at [Climate Psychology Alliance](https://climatepsychologyalliance.org/).

Steps on how to process emotion

1. The first step in processing emotions is labeling them. Take deep breaths and **name your feelings**—an emotion wheel can help. (Fletcher 2023) Defining emotions makes them tangible and easier to observe.
2. The second step is identifying **where the emotion is felt in the body**. Recognizing its physical sensation strengthens the mind-body connection and can bring relief. Emotional work like this can improve the self-awareness of both our emotional and physical experiences.
3. Next, ask nonjudgmental questions to **understand the emotion's purpose**:
How intense is it (1–10)?
Is it familiar?
How comfortable is the feeling?
What triggered it?
What might it be telling me?
4. Finally, decide whether to let it go or act on it. Research shows emotions like anger, sadness, and grief can drive action (Lench 2016). Once labeled, felt, and understood, you can **choose your response**.

(Mohamedali, 2023)

Chapter 3 explores emotional regulation further.

Helping young people navigate climate anxiety: a roadmap

This roadmap, developed by psychotherapist Jo McAndrews, outlines **seven steps** to support young people in facing the climate crisis. The roadmap gives practical steps for having an honest, hopeful conversation about climate change while acknowledging its reality and scale.

1

You don't need to have all the answers, we're all learning together. Start by asking, "How do you feel about the climate crisis?" The focus is on understanding emotions, offering support, and creating a safe space for discussion. The goal of listening is to show them they don't bear this burden alone.

2

Listen with curiosity and empathy, not to fix but to understand. If they struggle to express feelings, acknowledge their emotions with phrases like, "That's a tough question" or "This is hard to deal with." Share information when appropriate and keep the conversation open. Afterwards, reflect on your own emotions and thoughts.

3

Educate yourself on the climate crisis so young people don't bear the burden alone. Awareness helps share responsibility and eases the weight of knowledge, especially in the Global North.

4

Connect young people with environmental groups or individuals who understand their experiences without alienating them. This support benefits both youth and adults.

5

Learn to handle your own difficult feelings so you can better support young people with theirs as mentioned in the previous section.

6

Learn to make room for young people's big feelings. A safe, supportive environment helps young people process climate anxiety and builds nervous system resilience.



Take action yourself and support youth taking action. Show youth they're not alone in addressing the climate crisis. Join local climate strikes or advocate for a livable future in your own life.

7

Adopt a relationship-based approach focused on connection rather than control. Avoid punishments and rewards, as research shows they foster fear and obedience, breaking trust. (Morris, 2017) Instead, non-violent communication builds resilience, adaptability, collaboration, and healthy boundaries.

8



How to listen: Reflective listening

Since listening is a major part of our lives, doing it effectively is essential. Your listening skills (or lack of them) impact friendships, work, and more (Bolton, 2009)—the same applies when supporting youth with climate anxiety. One key approach is reflective listening, which focuses on truly hearing, understanding, and ensuring the other person feels heard and understood.

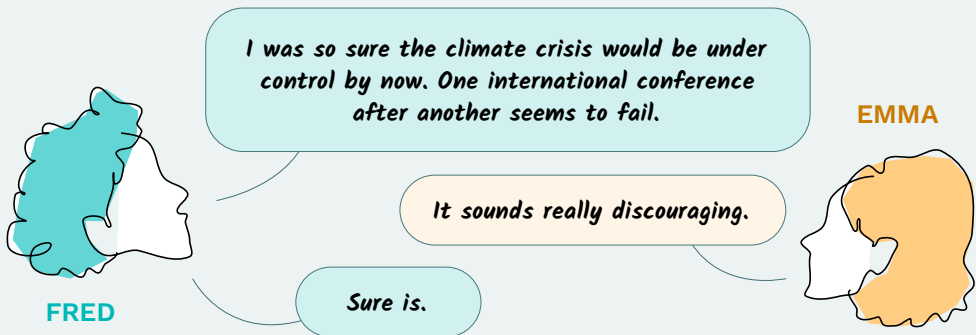
“...There is the semantic problem, of course. The words bear a different connotation for you than they do for me. Consequently, I can never tell you what you said, but only what I heard. I will have to rephrase what you have said, and check it out with you to make sure that what left your mind and heart arrived in my mind and heart intact and without distortion.”

– John Powell, theologian

Importance of reflective listening

Reflective listening is a special type of listening that involves paying respectful attention to both the content and emotions expressed in another person's communication. In a reflective response, the listener restates the feeling and/or content of what the speaker has said in a way that demonstrates understanding and acceptance.

For example, consider the following interaction:



Here, Emma recognized that Fred might be experiencing multiple emotions—anger, frustration, fear, discouragement, or a combination of these. As Fred spoke, Emma identified discouragement as the primary emotion.

Four kinds of reflection can be distinguished:

1. paraphrasing
2. reflecting feelings
3. reflecting meanings
4. summative reflections

Example sentence for reflection:



I feel overwhelmed because every time I read the news, there's another disaster happening. It makes me think that no matter what we do, things are only getting worse.

1. **A paraphrase** is a brief response that captures the essence of the speaker's message in the listener's own words. A good paraphrase focuses on facts or ideas rather than emotions.

It sounds like you're saying the news makes it seem like things are only getting worse and that real progress isn't happening.

2. **The reflection of feelings** involves mirroring back to the speaker, in succinct statements, the emotions which they are communicating. Focus on the feeling words. Note the general content of the message. Observe the body language. Ask yourself, "If I were having that experience, what would I be feeling?"

It sounds like you're feeling really overwhelmed and hopeless.

3. **Reflecting meaning** happens when feelings and facts are joined in one succinct response. Feelings are often triggered by specific events. "You feel ..., because ..."

It sounds like you're feeling really overwhelmed and hopeless because the constant news about disasters makes you think things are only getting worse.

4. **A summative response** helps the speaker gain an integrated picture of what has been said. It states the important emphases that have been repeated over and over again or that have been stated with the most intensity. A brief restatement of the main themes and feelings the speaker expressed over a longer period of conversation than would be covered by any of the other reflective skills.

It seems like you've been feeling overwhelmed by the constant stream of disaster news, which makes you feel like there's no progress being made.



How to have a conversation

Helping youth process world events and emotions builds resilience and helps them understand their role in the climate movement.

Here are some key points for discussion: (Kennedy-Woodard et al., 2022)

1. **Be truthful:** Provide age-appropriate explanations to empower them without overwhelming them with difficult emotions. Don't sugarcoat things but don't bombard them with overwhelming and very difficult emotions.
2. **Choose the right time and space:** Try to make sure there is time for you both to process the conversation afterwards by starting the conversation earlier in the day and ensuring everyone feels calm and prepared. Avoid reactive moments, like before an exam, and revisit if met with dismissal.
3. **Start the conversation with open-ended questions** such as:
(in no specific order)
 - Do you worry about climate change? Why/why not?
What would you like to see done about it?
 - Do you think you have ever seen or directly experienced climate change?
 - What motivates you to care about the environment?
 - What are some ways to feel better when you're stressed about climate change?
 - How do you stay informed about the environment without feeling too overwhelmed?
 - What are some good things happening in the world that help the environment?
 - What does a healthy, livable future look like to you?
 - How can talking and connecting with others about climate change help us feel less alone?
 - How do you think we ended up in this climate crisis?
What actions do you think led us here and why?
 - What is your relationship with nature/the climate?
What do you think that relationship will look like in the future?
 - What do you think humanity's future on Earth looks like?
 - What's more important for tackling climate change—individual behavior change or broader policy change? Do we need both?
 - Do you feel guilty about doing anything which is bad for the environment?
What do you think fair and equitable solutions to the climate crisis look like?
 - What do you think your individual role is in taking action against the climate crisis and caring about the environment?
What changes would you need to make?
How can these changes benefit your life?
 - In addition to individual choices, what actions can we take as communities to fight climate change?

What not to do

While keeping in mind how to listen and talk, it's important to know to avoid certain behaviors that could undermine trust and honesty. (Eklund & Nylén, 2021)

AVOID:

Talking without action

When knowledge of the climate is not matched by the actions of adults around them, frustration, powerlessness, loneliness, and hopelessness can arise. That is why it's important for adults to show young people that we are acting—with or without them.

Placing too much responsibility on the individual

Avoid placing all responsibility on individuals as consumers; climate action isn't solely personal. Guilt and shame aren't productive for empowering youth. That said, small changes at home can be a meaningful first step, signaling a commitment to larger solutions.

Saying that everything will be fine

Rushing to find solutions can leave young people feeling unheard or misled. Give them time to reflect. They deserve the emotional, practical, and educational tools to navigate a climate-changed future.

Believing that new technology solves all problems

Technology plays a role but won't solve the crisis alone, we must cut emissions fast. We need to change our way of life, no technology will be able to help us continue in this way. Conscious youth may feel hopeless when presented with unrealistic solutions. They deserve to be taken seriously, though some may still find innovation discussions exciting.

Saying that young people solve the climate crisis

Avoid framing youth as the ones who must “save the world”—adults created this crisis and must lead the way. That said, climate action can help young people manage anxiety, and normalizing sustainability early is valuable.

Further support measures

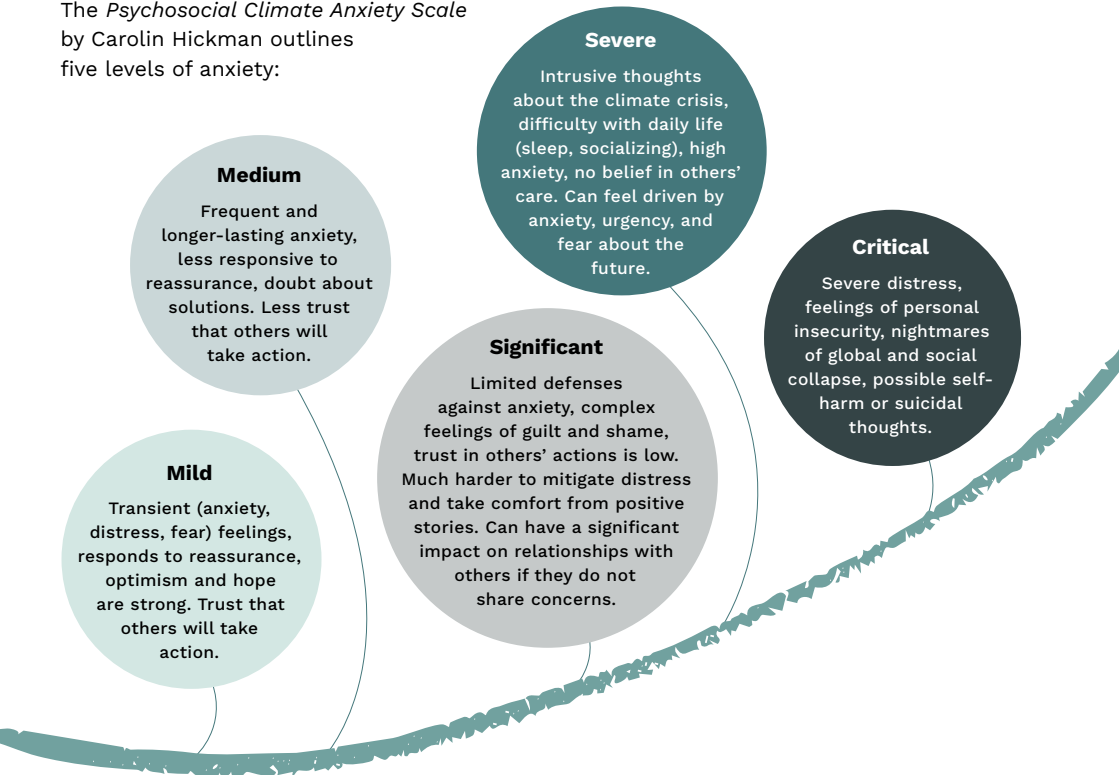
Currently, there's no golden standard for effective therapy interventions, since it's a newer concept compared to depression disorder or anxiety disorder. However, experts see promise in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which is proven to work well for anxiety, and in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), especially because of its focus on mindfulness. (Boheme et al., 2024)

When counseling youth on climate anxiety, support is needed in two key situations. **First, if the anxiety is severe or critical, immediate intervention from a mental health professional is necessary.** Recognizing these situations and knowing where to refer the person is crucial.

Second, after a few sessions, the young person may feel better, but climate change continues to affect them. **Ongoing, less structured support can help prevent a return to despair.** This chapter offers recommendations for both scenarios.

Recognizing Severe or Critical Anxiety

The *Psychosocial Climate Anxiety Scale* by Carolin Hickman outlines five levels of anxiety:



Thus **it's helpful to ask about sleep, rest, leisure habits, and beliefs about others' support.** What do they think and believe about others around them, do they have a support network, someone to rely on?

Even without visible signs of self-harm, thoughts of it signal the need to refer to a specialist.

Self-harm includes: (Mental Health Foundation, 2021)

- **Physical self-harm:** Cutting, scratching, or burning the skin (often on the arms, hands, thighs, chest, or stomach), poking needles through the skin, hitting oneself, preventing wounds from healing, or swallowing harmful objects or substances.
- **Reckless and risky behaviors:** Engaging in dangerous activities such as reckless driving, binge eating, substance abuse (alcohol or drugs), and unsafe sexual encounters.
- **Self-destructive thought patterns:** Persistent self-criticism, negative self-talk, and feelings of worthlessness or guilt.
- **Emotional avoidance and repression:** Avoiding people, situations, or responsibilities to escape distress, leading to isolation; suppressing emotions rather than addressing them, which can cause emotional numbness or breakdowns.
- **Toxic relationships:** Continuously engaging in harmful or abusive relationships that reinforce feelings of inadequacy or emotional harm.
- **Perfectionism:** Setting unattainable standards and being overly self-critical when failing to meet them.

When identifying self-harm, **avoid asking the young person to promise to stop** or conducting a full check-up, as this may damage the trusting relationship. Self-harm is often tied to shame and guilt, and making promises can increase feelings of failure if not kept.

While self-harm is not necessarily an attempt at suicide, it can indicate a risk of future suicidal behavior. If the young person has suicidal thoughts or plans, or has previously attempted suicide, immediate action is needed. If further support can't be arranged immediately, consider creating a "contract for safety" with the youth, such as agreeing to speak with a specialist and contact you if their situation worsens. This may help if there is an established trusting relationship but doesn't guarantee safety. (Hollis & Crick, 2020)

Possible signs of self-harm:

- Blood spots on clothes or handkerchiefs
- Sharp objects (razor blades, knives, needles, shards) among everyday belongings
- Claiming to frequently bump into things or being clumsy with a knife to explain the scars
- Covering the affected body parts even in very warm weather
- Spending a long time uninterrupted and alone, especially in the bathroom or bedroom
- Social withdrawal or avoiding interactions with others
- Disinterest in usual activities
- Sudden mood changes, especially intense sadness or irritability
- Frequent mention of feeling worthless, hopeless, or overwhelmed

In the case of a critical situation, refer to the following instances:

- Child helpline
- Emotional support helpline
- Suicide prevention helpline
- Local Psychiatry Clinic (for emergencies)
- Ambulance

Find location-based mental health contacts here:

calm-ey.eu/mental-health-emergency-contacts

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Positive stories, experiences, resources

Environmental degradation and crises are frequently highlighted in the media, but that's only part of the story. In reality, countless people are engaged in beautiful, meaningful, and compassionate efforts all around the world to care for the planet and for all living beings. Here are just a few inspiring examples.

International

Clean Clothes Campaign—A global network of over 200 organizations in 45 countries which works at ensuring fundamental rights for workers and empowering workers to improve the working conditions of the global garment and sportswear industries.

→ cleanclothes.org/about

Green Belt Movement in Kenya—This movement was founded by Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai and has planted over 51 million trees since 1977 and trained more than 30,000 women in areas such as forestry, food processing and beekeeping.

→ greenbeltmovement.org

Rewilding Europe—This is a conservation initiative that aims to restore wild landscapes and ecosystems across Europe. The project focuses on reintroducing species, such as European bison, and supporting natural processes to promote biodiversity and climate resilience.

→ rewildingeurope.com

La Via Campesina—A global peasant movement that promotes agroecology and regenerative farming as a way to ensure food sovereignty, social justice, and environmental restoration.

→ viacampesina.org/en

Land Back Movement—This movement restores ancestral lands to the indigenous peoples of America, allowing them to heal and combat climate change through traditional stewardship. The Northwestern Shoshone, for example, repurchased 500+ acres of the Bear River massacre site in Idaho and are restoring the land with native trees and wetlands.

→ vox.com/down-to-earth/386056/land-back-movement-climate-change-tribal-sovereignty

Uru Uru Team—In Bolivia's highlands 50 Indigenous individuals, mainly women, work to clean the heavily polluted Lake Uru Uru from plastic waste and industrial contaminants. Using totora plants and recycled plastic rafts, they reduce pollution, restore wildlife, and empower their community.

→ uruteam.org

Germany

The Bahnstadt neighborhood (in Heidelberg)—

This is home to 6,500 residents and consumes 80% less energy than average thanks to energy-efficient buildings. This model serves as inspiration for similar projects worldwide.

→ time.com/7200318/the-rise-of-carbon-neutral-neighborhoods

Netzwerk Blühende Landschaft—The network inspires and empowers people to support flower-visiting insects by creating and maintaining habitats, strengthening ecosystems for a healthier world. Partnering with the Elobau Foundation, they hosted "Grassland Day" on June 5, 2024, in Leutkirch-Balterazhofen, showcasing biodiversity on agricultural land.

→ bluehende-landschaft.de/unsere-leitmotive



Photo: Hamburg.de

Green roof strategy—Hamburg was the first major German city to launch a comprehensive green roof strategy. The aim is to green at least 70% of both new buildings and suitable flat or low-sloped roofs undergoing renovation.

→ hamburg.de/politik-und-verwaltung/behoerden/bukea/themen/hamburgs-gruen/gruendach-und-gruene-fassaden/gruendachstrategie-hamburg-281226

GermanZero—Since 2019 this climate protection organization fights for climate neutrality in Germany by 2035, anchored in law with the power of civil society. Their fields of activity form the roadmap to a climate-neutral Germany: a 1.5-degree legislative package, policy discussions and the constantly growing LocalZero network.

→ germanzero.de/ueber-uns

Climate Protection Act—This law that came into force in July 2024 is the centerpiece of national climate policy. Germany has set international standards with legally binding national climate targets. It aims to be greenhouse gas neutral by 2045.

→ bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/klimaschutzgesetz-2197410

Labor Tempelhof (C2C NGO)—The aim is to show how existing Cradle to Cradle solutions can lead to a circular economy that offers economic, ecological and social added value for society as a whole—and how, based on this, major events with a positive impact on people and the environment can also become the standard.

→ c2c.ngo/en, labor-tempelhof.org

Im Grunde gut—In his compellingly written, convincing book, Rutger Bregman presents ideas for improving the world. They are innovative, courageous and inspire hope.

→ rowohlt.de/buch/rutger-bregman-im-grunde-gut-9783499004162

Malta

Voluntary Organizations Directory—The online Directory contains all registered VOs in Malta—the directory allows you to search according to sector (for example: Environmental)

→ maltacvs.org/vo-directory

Friends of the Earth Malta (FoEM)—A non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting environmental sustainability, social justice, and the protection of natural resources. FoEM works on a range of issues, including climate change, biodiversity conservation, waste management, and environmental policy advocacy. The organization engages in campaigns, educational programs, and grassroots initiatives to raise awareness and encourage action for a greener, more sustainable future in Malta. A youth section is currently being set up.

→ foemalta.org



Malta Farm Map—An interactive map that supports local farmers and connects customers directly.

→ maltafarmmap.org

Volunteer Malta—A website to support both volunteers and organizations seeking assistance.

→ volunteers.mt

Aġenzija Żgħażaġh—The Maltese Youth Agency encompasses youth-led organizations and organizations working with and for young people can benefit from this support.

→ youth.gov.mt

Malta Youth Services and Organizations

→ servizz.gov.mt/en/Pages/Education_-_Science-and-Technology/Education-Services/Youth-Services-and-Organisations/default.aspx

Estonia

Vara küps (2024)—This documentary explores Estonia's forests and their future, bringing together experts, environmentalists, and policymakers to find solutions beyond the “forest war” debates, inspiring hope for sustainable forest preservation.

→ kultuur.err.ee/1609335144/kultuuriportaali-soovitab-martti-helde-dokfilm-vara-kups-jupiteris

Sõrve Nature Reserve—The creation of this nature reserve near the capital is a significant environmental achievement. As the last intact green space surrounding Tallinn, it provides a habitat for over 100 endangered species and more than 800 plant and animal species in total. It supports the biodiversity strategy goal of protecting 30% of land by 2030.

→ kaitsealad.ee/et/uudised/vabariigi-valitsus-kinnitas-sorve-looduskaitseala-moodustamise

Ban on fur farming—In 2021, the Estonian parliament passed a ban on fur farming where fur production is the sole or main purpose. The law, which comes into force on 1 January 2026, makes Estonia the first Baltic country to ban fur farms.

→ err.ee/1608232770/riigikogu-keelustas-karusloomafarmid

Rimi—This grocery store chain removed all endangered fish species and unsustainably sourced seafood from its stores. It aligned its selection with the Fish Guide for Responsible Seafood Consumption, making it the only supermarket chain in Estonia to take this step.

→ eko.org.ee/uudised/keskkonnateoks-valitsohustatud-kalaliikide-muugist-loobumine-kirve-sai-loodust-kahjustav-kuivendamine

Fridays For Future Estonia—Young activists basically sued the government, claiming its building permit violated international climate agreements. The court annulled the permit, ruling the municipality hadn't properly assessed the

environmental impact. This was Estonia's first climate lawsuit, arguing that climate change threatens human and children's rights.

→ fridaysforfuture.ee/en/news/press-release-climate-youth-of-estonia-took-the-state-funded-fossil-fuel-plant-to-court-again

Teeme Ära (Let's Do It)—This international volunteer initiative in Estonia has significantly boosted environmental awareness and community engagement. Since 2008, it has mobilized millions to clean public spaces, forests, and coastlines, raising awareness about waste management and sustainability.

→ letsdoitfoundation.org



Photo: TERRA

TERRA Low-Technology Theme Park—an experimental project focused on discovering, reviving, and testing low-tech tools and techniques. TERRA explores heritage and DIY technologies, off-grid, and natural engineering solutions, examining how they perform in the Estonian climate.

→ terrapark.ee

Denmark

Makværket—This is a cultural and environmental collective focused on societal transformation through cultural, social, environmental, and economic change. It has been transforming the 2,000m² former Knabstrup Teglværk ceramics factory into a hub for sustainable development, ecological awareness, art, education, community service, and activism.

→ makvaerket.org

Jord i hovedet—NOAH's podcast on environmental justice.

→ noah.dk/podcast

Landsforeningen mod Svinefabrikker—Local environmental groups organized against factory farming of pigs.

→ landmodsvin.dk

La via Campesina Denmark—Frie Bønder Levende Land is a network of small-scale farmers who work for a new agriculture policy that centers on diverse and healthy farming.

→ friebonderlevendeland.com

Green Youth Movement—Den Grønne Ungdomsbevægelse is a youth-led movement working for a just and green future.

→ dgub.dk

Mosegården Farm—A community-supported farm based on regenerative practices.

→ mosegaardenjordbrug.dk

Grønt Marked—a non-profit farmers' market organization in Copenhagen. The intention is to make local, fresh and seasonal food more available to everyone while building a stronger connection and community between farmers and eaters.

→ groentmarked.dk/english

Klimapsykologisk ungdomsforening—An offspring of the green youth movement led by psychology students, the organization offers talking sessions for climate activists on their well-being.

→ klimapsyk.dk

Fossilfri Fremtid—an inclusive protest movement built to create family-friendly actions against laws and companies promoting fossil fuels.

→ instagram.com/fossilfrifremtid

Flor—A youth movement working for more biodiversity in Denmark. They have volunteers and organize events all over the country.

→ dn.dk/bliv-frivillig/flor

Repair café Danmark—Repair Café is a sustainable community concept where volunteer enthusiasts (fixers) assist local citizens (users) in repairing faulty items that would otherwise have been discarded.

→ repaircafedenmark.dk



Photo: Klimapåmindelsen

Klimapåmindelsen—Every Thursday activists of all ages meet in front of the parliament to remind the politicians about their duty to protect the climate and environment.

→ klimapaa mindelsen.dk

Climate anxiety experience stories

Tormis, 19, Estonia

At 14, I experienced severe climate anxiety for the first time, feeling helpless in the face of seemingly unsolvable problems. Over time, I have learned to accept climate issues, understanding their complexity and layered nature. My awareness of climate change grows with time, revealing ever-new challenges, particularly regarding micro-plastics and pollution—I worry deeply about how to remove existing contamination from nature.

I am amazed that many people seem unaffected by environmental issues. I often wonder if society has any real chance of overcoming this crisis. There might be a small possibility, but I do not rely on it. I have come to terms with the fact that human systems are temporary, which has deepened my connection to nature. I frequently reflect on the consequences of climate change. I hope for the best but believe that nature can regulate itself—the real question is whether humans can adapt.

I have found that how one approaches climate anxiety makes a significant difference: at first, I tried to ignore the problems, but that only intensified my anxiety. Eventually, I realized that acceptance, processing emotions, and adapting would be a better approach. Now, I strive to do my best without sacrificing myself in the process—this way, I avoid a disconnect between my actions and beliefs.

The past five years have brought many changes worldwide, reinforcing my need to reflect upon my choices and care for both myself and the environment.

Madis, 36, Estonia

My journey through climate anxiety can be summarized by these lyrics: “Know the wolves that hunt you. In time, they will be the dogs that bring your slippers. Love them right, and you will feel them kiss you when they come to bite.”—Kae Tempest, *Hold Your Own*.

Everything unfolded in 2019. I was just becoming aware of the environmental crisis and joined a green NGO. I still had hope, which can be defined as a wish for a future that I myself have no control over. I attended many events, talks and conferences on environmental topics and most were very bleak. The chances of humanity getting through this possible ecological collapse were small, but I needed to hear that. Know the wolves that hunt you.

I read extensively and stopped hoping: “When hope dies, action begins” (*Endgame* by Derrick Jensen). I channeled my new-found action potential to organizing political panels and engaging in non-violent civil disobedience with Extinction Rebellion—though neither seemed to have much impact. Still, I found others who shared the worry in the Fridays For Future chapter. I watched, wrote, and shared my thoughts—some even got mildly popular. In time, they will be the dogs that bring your slippers.

I also got into discussions on deep adaptation—what can we do, if there’s little we can do about the climate chaos? As Dougald Hine put it: “On a scale not seen before, people are encountering climate change not as a problem to be solved, but as a dark knowledge that ... burns away the stories we were told, the entitlements we believed we had, and our assumptions about history and the kind of world we were born into and our place within it”. Hold your own.

By the end of the intense year my mind was settled: no more hoping, no more grieving. Instead, working one way or another on deep adaptation, just transition and degrowth—trying to cover topics before, during and after the coming reckoning. Love them right, and you will feel them kiss you when they come to bite.



Karola, 30, Estonia

In 2020, I was overwhelmed by undefined thoughts and emotions. Studying nature tourism and natural sciences deepened my understanding of ecosystems, while the IPCC's 1.5°C report shattered my worldview. I plunged into climate anxiety, consuming endless information and chasing a self-sacrificial mission to save the world.

Facing environmental collapse, I knew the only way forward was to live with purpose and meaning. Everything and nothing gained significance. Endgame by Derrick Jensen exposed capitalism's core—profit over all else. Environmental destruction is merely small sacrifices on the altar of profit after all... The cultural and societal norms I had taken for granted crumbled, exposing a hollow framework designed to seemingly fulfill human needs by selling insatiable pleasure in a bottle. The values of consumer society faded, and, in their place, emerged connection, inner richness and appreciation for nature's beauty, and a sense of purpose.

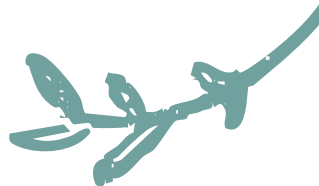
I felt grief, sadness, anger, fear, helplessness, numbness, disappointment, and disgust. Five years later, I still do—but also hope, belonging, determination, dedication, courage, love, empowerment, and presence. True fulfillment and deep satisfaction do not drive consumption; contentment doesn't sell products. Life can be enjoyed just as much—if not more—without destroying nature.

Thor, 17, Denmark

I have been concerned about the climate for as long as I can remember. It has always been on the news and as a kid it made me feel really scared. But my parents never really seemed to care. When I was 15 I decided to stop eating animals, but my parents did not support it. They think I am silly when I talk about the issues with climate change and how humans play a role in it. It makes me really frustrated and angry.

My reason for not eating animals is because I want to take care of the planet because if we don't I am not sure about my future. I know that some of my friends have similar experiences which makes me feel less alone with my choices.

I recently started volunteering at a local NGO where I shared some of my frustrations with the adults there who all eat vegan or vegetarian and it was very nice to meet some adults who take my choices seriously. I don't really know what to do about my parents though, I think it is very tricky...



Ida, 27, Denmark

I started climate activism a few years ago, initially keeping it hidden from my friends and family because I thought they wouldn't understand or care—I used to feel the same way. That changed one summer when I visited an untouched forest in Poland and later a forest in Denmark. The silence in the Danish forest struck me; it felt eerie compared to the Polish forest, and I was scared. The absence of insects and birds felt like the ultimate consequence of human behavior. That's when I got into activism, but I still felt ashamed of caring so much, even as I struggled with anxiety about climate change and environmental degradation.

Joining a climate grief group was a turning point for me. I felt relieved to meet others who shared the same conflicting feelings of shame, anger, and anxiety. It helped me so much that I eventually opened up to my friends and family about my activism and climate anxiety. To my surprise, they were all very supportive and expressed that they understood these feelings. It was a huge relief, and that's why I continue to join these groups—they really can make a difference in people's lives.

Chamssane, 29, Malta

I come from an island where overconsumption is deeply ingrained in the culture, whether during weddings, gatherings at home, or even in daily life. Those who do not overconsume are sometimes seen as stingy. As a result, I have always tended to consume excessively without much concern. After all, even when we hear about climate change, it is hard to feel personally affected if those around us don't. We end up becoming fatalistic, thinking that it's already too late.

Today, I am a student, but just a few months ago, I had a permanent contract at Engie, where I had been working as a billing analyst for five years.

In June 2025, my perspective changed after participating in the 2tonnes workshop. This immersive and engaging workshop allows participants to simulate the world's evolution until 2050 by making individual and collective decisions to reduce their carbon footprint. This experience opened my eyes to how we can effectively engage people in climate awareness, even those who usually don't feel concerned about these topics because of it.

Following this experience, I decided to leave my job and return to school for two years to transition into sustainable communication and CSR. However, beyond a career change, this is also a personal commitment. I am the mother of a one-and-a-half-year-old daughter, and I want to equip her from an early age with the knowledge and tools to make informed choices for the future. If she can, in turn, inspire those around her to adopt positive changes, that would be a great achievement.

My goal is to develop effective communication strategies and compelling arguments to raise awareness among my family, friends, colleagues, and beyond. I strongly believe that there is always a way to reach the right person with the right message, and I am eager to learn as much as possible to refine my approach and actively contribute to meaningful and lasting behavioral change.

Today, I'm not perfect, I still have a lot of bad habits, but I'm working on them.

Claire, 24, Germany

I grew up pretty sheltered and didn't think much about climate issues for a long time. During school, my parents criticized climate activism, and, not knowing any better, I either agreed or stayed quiet. Deep down, I felt like those speaking up had a point, but I never acted on it.

After moving out and shaping my own views, I realized how much I care about the planet and the damage we're causing. I am struggling with climate anxiety, feeling like I'm never doing enough. I try to fix things instead of buying new ones, take public transport, and avoid plastic where I can. But the worries don't just disappear, and sometimes I get overwhelmed by doomsday thoughts.

Talking about it helps. Hearing different perspectives reminds me that I'm doing what I can right now—and that's already a meaningful step.

Beth, 45, Malta

I recall an incident where I was listening to the cars whizzing by my apartment window on the busy road I lived on, and just feeling totally overwhelmed by realizing that they were all just burning fossil fuels and would be filling up gas tanks over and over, though we are being told how critical it is to stop it. And the feeling was further worsened when I tried to explain this sense of overwhelm/dread/outrage to friends and they could not relate, which felt further isolating. Political realities can also be overwhelming and depressing. So these feelings are real, and these tools taught at the Calm-ey sessions are very much needed in order to reframe the situation and cope so we can individually and collectively continue to move forward and be productive.

Berra, 27, Malta

The Climate Emotion Discussion Sessions provided me with a space to observe how my emotions are influenced by my environment in daily life and to talk about these experiences. I had the opportunity to practice coping strategies for situations that negatively affected me, both within the group and individually.

These sessions helped me develop practical examples that I can apply on my own. I have started incorporating the techniques that I learned into my daily life to strengthen my mental well-being and resilience.

Tobi, 19, Germany

I'm Tobi, 19, and I don't talk much about it, but climate anxiety has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. I guess I always cared about the planet, but these last couple of years have been different. I live in Saxony, and, after seeing the extreme weather patterns in recent years, something shifted in me. It wasn't just the idea of rising temperatures; it was the realization that this is real, right here, right now.

My friends joke about how I became a "green freak" because I started composting, biking everywhere, and getting involved in environmental activism. They don't understand that it's not just about saving the planet, it's about me trying to manage my own fear. I remember when I first got really anxious about the future. It hit me when I was walking through the city, seeing all the plastic waste, and I thought, "What if it's too late?" The overwhelming thoughts of wildfires, droughts, and species disappearing almost paralyze me at times.

But activism helps. It gives me something to focus on, a way to feel like I'm not powerless. I wouldn't say it takes away the fear completely, but it makes it more bearable. Being involved in local environmental efforts helps me to channel my worries into something positive!

Mille, 22, Denmark

I grew up in a forest in a rural part of Denmark. I never really gave it much thought as a child or teenager, the forest was just a part of my daily life. It wasn't until I started doing climate activism and focused my attention on the impacts of deforestation that I started noticing how much this particular forest means to me and what nature in general means to me.

Through my activism, I increased this knowledge and my general knowledge of climate change, especially through the IPCC reports. This knowledge kinda developed into feelings of anxiety. I remember having days where everything ceased to matter to me, because it [climate change] is so big. Days where I felt I did not matter at all, and that death was the better option for me... It is painful to me that I have felt like that.

I started opening up about these feelings to my fellow activists, which really helped me. The sense of community around climate anxiety and grief is really important to me. And now I make sure to visit my forest often in order to feel more grounded and hopeful. I also process my emotions with poetry. Writing angry poems to politicians is really healing for me.



Commonly asked questions

Is climate anxiety real?

Yes, climate anxiety is real and recognized by psychologists as a **valid emotional response** to the environmental crisis. It is characterized by different emotions such as **distress, fear, and uncertainty** about the future due to climate change. (Clayton, 2020)

What is climate anxiety?

Climate anxiety is a chronic fear or distress related to climate change and its consequences. It can manifest in many emotions, like worry, sadness, guilt, or helplessness, impacting mental well-being. (Pihkala, 2020) It refers to anxiety caused by environmental threats, such as climate change, ecosystem destruction, and increasing natural disasters. It also includes forward-looking emotions and uncertainty about the global climate crisis and the threat of environmental catastrophe.

Is climate anxiety a mental illness?

No, climate anxiety is **not classified as a mental illness**. It is a **rational response** to a real crisis, but in severe cases, it can contribute to anxiety disorders or depression. (APA, 2021)

Who experiences climate anxiety?

Climate anxiety **affects people of all ages and backgrounds**, but it is most common among **young people, climate scientists, activists, and those living in vulnerable regions**. (Hickman et al., 2021) Also people who have been in contact with extreme weather events (Boheme et al., 2024, Asgarizadeh et al., 2023, Gibson, et al., 2020), people who care about nature (Helm, et al., 2018), people with previously higher stress or anxiety levels. (Crandon et al., 2024)

Can climate anxiety be productive?

Yes, climate anxiety can be a **motivator for action**, pushing individuals and communities to engage in climate activism and advocacy as well as prompting a reassessment of life choices and the search for deeper purpose. (Ojala, 2012)

How is climate anxiety treated or managed?

Climate anxiety can be managed through **mindfulness, social support, activism, therapy, and focusing on solutions**. (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020) Additionally, distancing from overwhelming information and concentrating on meaningful actions are key strategies.

Can children experience climate anxiety?

Yes, children and teenagers can experience climate anxiety, particularly due to feelings of **powerlessness and fear for the future**. (UNICEF, n.d.)

How does climate anxiety affect daily life?

Climate anxiety can lead to sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, avoidance of news, changes in lifestyle, and emotional distress. (Stanley et al., 2021)

How do social media and the news contribute to climate anxiety?

Constant exposure to **doomscrolling** and sensationalized media coverage can heighten climate anxiety by **amplifying fear and urgency**. (Schäfer & Painter, 2021)

Is climate anxiety an individual problem?

No, climate anxiety is not just an individual problem. It is a collective issue linked to shared concerns about environmental degradation and societal impact and it influences communities globally. It is influenced by broader systemic issues like climate change, environmental policies, and socioeconomic inequalities and alleviated through community support and collective action. (Hickman et al., 2021)

How can educators or parents help with climate anxiety in children?

Educators and parents can help by **validating emotions, encouraging action, teaching resilience, and fostering hope.** (Kennelly Associates, n.d.) Before talking about the climate crisis, we should first teach methods that help relieve climate anxiety. For example, introduce age-appropriate environmental activities and simple strategies for managing anxiety or strong emotions—things children can use right away. Once children are familiar with these tools, it's more appropriate to begin discussing climate change. (Crandon et al., 2022)

Is it wrong to feel climate anxiety if you're not an activist?

No, feeling climate anxiety is a **natural response** to the crisis, regardless of activism. Acknowledging emotions can lead to **meaningful engagement at any level.** (Eklund & Nylén, 2021)

How does climate anxiety differ from other anxieties?

It differs from other types of anxiety in its cause, scope, and chronic nature. Unlike personal anxieties, eco-anxiety stems from concern about large-scale environmental threats, such as climate change, and is linked to real-world events. (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020)

Cause: It is triggered by climate change, making it a rational response to scientific evidence, unlike other anxiety disorders, which often stem from irrational fears. (Pihkala, 2020)

Scope: While personal anxieties focus on individual concerns, eco-anxiety is global and persistent, driven by ongoing environmental issues. (Hickman et al., 2021)

Impact on agency: It's linked to feelings of helplessness and guilt, as individuals feel they can't stop climate change, unlike personal anxieties that can often be managed through action or therapy. (Ojala, 2012)

Potential for positive action: Unlike other anxieties, eco-anxiety can sometimes be alleviated through activism and community engagement. (Stanley et al., 2021)



Resources

Here is a small list of resources we believe are helpful, empowering, and can add value to your journey in navigating today's world.

International

NETWORKS & COMMUNITIES

Platforms for networking & support

Communities for Future—A network taking action for a healthier, fairer and more sustainable world.

→ communitiesforfuture.org

International Compost Alliance—A voluntary partnership to advance awareness and understanding of the benefits and use of compost on a global scale.

→ r-e-a.net/international-compost-alliance-launched

European Compost Network—A membership organization that includes European biowaste organizations and their facilities, research, policymakers, consultants and authorities.

→ compostnetwork.info

The Work That Reconnects Network—This network nurtures a regenerative and thriving world for all beings by providing support, connection and inspiration to the global Work That Reconnects community.

→ workthatreconnects.org

Climate Psychology Alliance North America—

A list of essential starting points for learning about climate psychology.

→ climatepsychology.us/essentialreading

Generative Somatics—A list of GS practitioners who work with organizers, member leaders, and others in social and environmental justice movements who are seeking this kind of healing and support either one-on-one or in healing groups.

→ generativesomatics.org/resources

The Good Grief Network—10 Steps to Resilience & Empowerment in a Chaotic Climate

→ goodgriefnetwork.org

Climate Mental Health Network—The community-based strategy creates emotional resilience programming primarily for youth, parents and educators.

→ climatementalhealth.net/resources

BOOKS, E-BOOKS & GUIDES

Reading material with in-depth information

Dragon Dreaming eBook—The methods, philosophy and background knowledge of Dragon Dreaming support people who want to make our society more eco-social.

→ dragondreaming.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/DragonDreaming_eBook_english_V02.09.pdf

Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Crisis by Britt Wray, PhD (2023)

→ brittwwray.com/books

Grassroot Wisdom Book—It creates a written record, to collect and save individual and group responses to the needs that we see right in front of us.

→ charterforcompassion.org/grassroots-wisdom-book/wisdom-book.html

A brief guide to eco emotions—A small guide which offers tips on how to cope with the global environmental crisis, designed for anyone working with young people.

→ ymparistoahdistus.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/A-brief-guide-to-eco-emotions.pdf

Process model of eco-anxiety and ecological grief—

This can be used for self-reflection and in efforts to better understand people's various reactions to the ecological crisis.

→ mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/24/16628

Surviving Climate Anxiety Coping, Healing and Thriving on a Changing Planet by Thomas Doherty (2025)

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013)

→ bookshop.org/p/books/braiding-sweetgrass-robin-wall-kimmerer/16712606?ean=9781571311771&next=t&aid=86677&listref=robin-wall-kimmerer&next=t

TOOLKITS & ACTION GUIDES

Practical tools for engagement and change

Energy Citizen Empowerment Toolkit—To support the planning and implementation of more diverse and inclusive community energy initiatives.

→ communityenergyacademy.eu/energy-citizenship-empowerment-kits

Stories of Collective Action Storytelling Toolkit—Helpful resources to inspire and write stories of collective action.

→ ecolise.eu/publications/stories-of-collective-action-storytelling-toolkit/

Futuremaker's Toolbox—The toolbox helps to recognize trends and emerging phenomena, imagine alternative futures and link future-oriented thinking to change-making.

→ sitra.fi/en/projects/toolbox-for-people-shaping-the-future/#what-is-the-future

Unthinkable—A growing repository of the most celebrated climate- and eco-distress resources that emphasize coping, acting, and psycho-social-spiritual resilience strategies, alongside community support.

→ unthinkable.earth/resources

Eco Anxious Stories—Tips and tools to help you share stories, normalize climate anxieties, and spark solutions.

→ ecoanxious.ca

SCIENTIFIC & PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Research, articles & academic insights

Greater Good Magazine—A science-based insight for a meaningful life.

→ greatergood.berkeley.edu

Psychology for a Safe Climate—A range of publications, podcasts and papers which offer strategies to understand the psychological factors impeding engagement and to address psychological distress related to the climate crisis.

→ psychologyforasafeclimate.org/resources

Ecopsychepedia—A source for current research and thinking on how psychological factors drive the climate crisis, how the worsening crisis affects us psychologically, and what we can do about it.

→ ecopsychepedia.org

Climate and Mind—Resources and ideas from a range of disciplines (including social work, psychology, public health, education, anthropology, disaster mental health, and more) to help improve understanding and discussion about how humans cope with climate change and other ecological crises.

→ climateandmind.org

PODCASTS & MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Podcast about climate emotions—International podcast with pioneering environmental psychologist Dr. Thomas Doherty.

→ climatechangeandhappiness.com

Estonia

Estonian Green Movement—Environmental protection NGO with the aim of improving the situation of the Estonian environment and directing our society to healthy and driving ways of living.

→ roheline.ee

Paranduskelder (Repair Café in Tartu)—They want a world that is wholesome and free from trash. To approach this, they have created a place where everyone can acquire the skills and willingness to take the act of repairing the world into their own hands.

→ paranda.ee/en

Kopli 93 Community—Kopli 93 has been revitalized as a community center, a training school, a beehive and a repair workshop.

→ facebook.com/Kopli93, instagram.com/kopli_93

Fridays For Future Estonia—Fridays For Future is a group of active youth who fight against climate change every day.

→ fridaysforfuture.ee

Eesti Keskkonnauhenduste Koda (EKO) / Estonian Chamber of Environmental NGOs—The EKO is a non-legal, politically independent cooperation network that helps environmentalists work together to achieve environmental protection goals.

→ eko.org.ee/eko

Keskkonnauiguse Keskus (KÕK) / Estonian Environmental Law Center (EELC)—An independent expert organization, whose aim is to shape environmental law rules and their application in a manner that takes due account of public interests (health and well-being of citizens, biodiversity).

→ k6k.ee/k6k

Eesti Looduse Fond (ELF)—This is a non-governmental organization dedicated to nature conservation that uses the best expertise, innovative solutions and the help of all in its work.

→ elfond.ee

Germany

Saxony in Climate Change—This educational project has been offering various modules (seminars, excursions, reforestation campaigns and teacher training) for schools since 2008 to inform pupils about climate change, biodiversity and sustainability.
→ sachsen-im-klimawandel.de

Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung Sachsen / Education for sustainable development—The portal primarily supports teachers in gaining access to extracurricular ESD programs and materials for lesson planning.

→ bne-sachsen.de/alle-angebote
→ bne-sachsen.de/veranstaltungen/?start_display=&start=&end_display=&end=&action=search_items&post_type=event&sortation=date&layout=grid&search_term=&spage=4

BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany) Sachsen—BUND is committed to all environmental and nature conservation issues—from the critical debate on nuclear power to the preservation of biodiversity, the energy transition and issues relating to the agricultural and transport transition.
→ bund-sachsen.de
→ bund-dresden.de/bundjugend/workshops-und-festivals
→ bund-sachsen.de/bundakademie

Forststeig Elbsandstein (Forest management of Elbe Sandstone mountains)—The Trail is characterized by extensive, contiguous forests, unique rock formations and mighty table mountains. Visitors can hike the route through the forests along the German-Czech border region and spend the night in trekking huts and at bivouac sites.
→ forststeig.sachsen.de/en/index.html

Fridays For Future Dresden—A broad alliance of people joining forces and demonstrating on the streets for climate justice.
→ ffdd.de

Naturschutzbund Sachsen / Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU)—This stands for practical nature conservation work on the ground and lobbying at a national political level.
→ sachsen.nabu.de

Naturschutzjugendbund (NAJU) / Nature Conservation Youth Union—Young people who meet regularly for nature conservation activities and organize different camps, holiday camps, project days and seminars for families, children and young people every month.
→ naju-sachsen.de/ortsgruppen/dresden

Umweltzentrum Dresden / Dresden Environmental Centre—A non-profit organization dedicated to the environment, nature and climate protection and good coexistence in Dresden that offers a wide range of activities and events, including workshops, seminars and lectures.
→ uzdresden.de/#%3A~%3Atext%3D%C3%BCber%20Ihre%20F%C3%B6rdermitgliedschaft.%2CVeranstaltungen%2C-Mai%202024

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*“Hope for the best,
prepare for the worst.”*

As the climate continues to change, anxiety about it will only spread more widely. Even if the issue feels rare in your area right now, still work through this handbook as, unfortunately, this will change. It may start as a trickle, but soon it will become a flood.

As noted in Britt Wray’s book *Generation Dread*, the demand for climate discussions will far exceed what trained therapists can manage on a one-to-one basis. Therefore, other professionals will need to engage with the topic as well. While this is a challenging task, it is one that can make a profound difference and save lives.