



EASING CLIMATE CHANGE-RELATED EMOTIONS

Peer-support group
guidebook

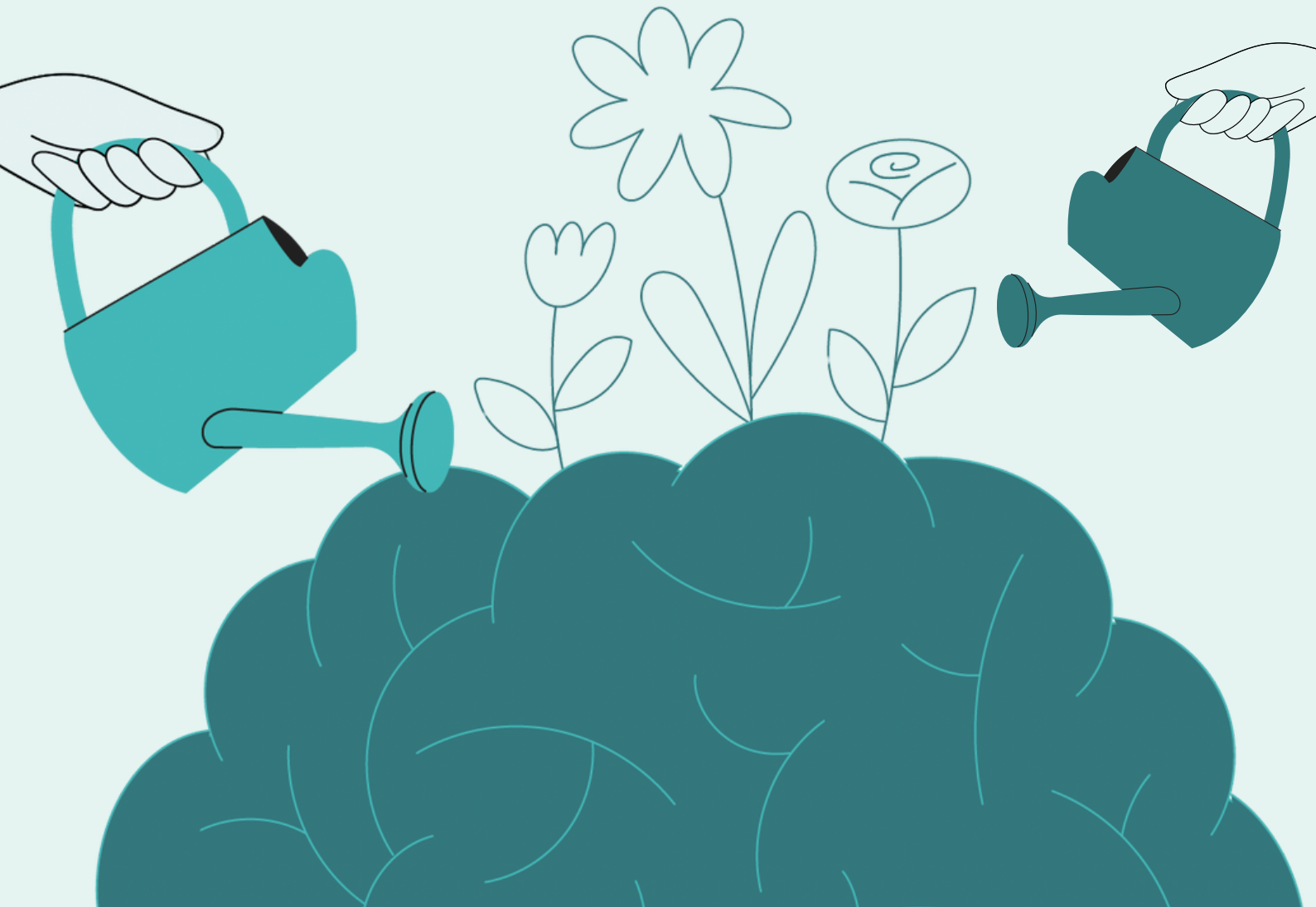


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INTRODUCTION

About this guide

Climate change is one of the most complex and multifaceted challenges we are currently facing. The availability of information regarding the topic is vast and has an impact on our well-being. Young people are the ones being affected the most and enduring the psychological and emotional toll, which increases the mental health burden of young people (Coffey et al., 2021). Young people should be encouraged not to feel paralysed by global challenges but instead to build resilience, which can be supported by increasing their socio-emotional skills or finding ways to act that are meaningful both for themselves and the planet. In developing such skills, the role of youth work is important, not only in supporting individual resilience, but also engaging community support and collective action, where one of the examples is a peer-support group (Stampleton & Jece, 2024).

There are several terms related to the impact of climate change on mental health, e.g. eco-anxiety and climate anxiety. Both are used in media and research, and several other terms are also related to the topic, e.g. solastalgia, climate grief, climate distress (Clayton, 2017; Pihkala, 2020; Helm, 2021) (read more in the chapter “Language and terms used”). This material uses the term **“climate emotions”** to indicate the variety of feelings a person might experience, ranging from anger, sadness and grief to hope and empowerment. The variety of emotional experiences is best described via the Climate Emotions Wheel by Pihkala (Pihkala, 2022). It is important to note that some of the emotions experienced, e.g. hope and empowerment, do not stem from experiencing climate distress, but are rather fostered when individual and community action is supported in the community (Schneider et al., 2021). Therefore, this guide material can also help young people expand their experience and emotional reactions regarding the topic of climate change.

Why group support?

One effective way to cope with climate-related emotions is through **peer-group** settings, where individuals feel sufficiently safe to express themselves authentically (Coppola & Pihkala, 2022). **These meetings promote a sense of interconnectedness, highlighting that no one is alone in this struggle.**

By sharing experiences and exploring collective ways to act for themselves and the environment, participants can foster resilience and sustainability (Cooper et al., 2025). As the saying goes, “A problem shared is a problem halved,” making the burden of difficult emotions lighter and creating a space for meaning, joy, and hope during distressing times.

In a support group, the focus extends beyond emotional processing to include actions for oneself, the community or the environment. Nonetheless, communication regarding climate change and climate emotions does not necessarily need to give rise to solutions or plans of action in order to be effective in providing social support (Coppola & Pihkala, 2022). By creating a space for young people to meet and share ideas, these groups can cultivate a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation (Card et al., 2022). Ideally, participants will leave with a stronger connection to their local community and one another.

Support groups help people to cope with the full range of emotions elicited by climate change, while not just focusing on anxiety or anger. Without proper support, young people (including other adults and youth workers) might feel overwhelmed or avoid the topic altogether to escape distressing emotions. Those already involved in environmental activism face the risk of burnout and need opportunities to process their emotions, ensuring they can sustain their engagement and continue to work for change on both an individual and collective level (Stapleton & Jece, 2024).

This guide aims to provide **resources for group meetings/sessions** to support the participants in coping with their daily lives despite the challenges posed by climate change. As youth workers and adults, we have both the opportunity and responsibility to guide young people in navigating their inner worlds, deeply impacted by the realities of climate change, so that they can feel less isolated and more empowered.

The aim of this material is to provide **guiding material** for youth workers to support individuals aged 16–30 who are experiencing climate-related distress by creating safe spaces for sharing experiences, while fostering peer connections.



For whom and by whom?

THIS MATERIAL IS DESIGNED FOR:

Youth workers or facilitators:

- who have previous group-leading experience, including the knowledge and skills to guide group processes (read more in the chapter “Facilitators”).
- +
- who have the motivation and confidence to lead a supportive youth group on the topic of climate change and how it has impacted the participants’ well-being and emotions.
- +
- who hold the values of youth work – where youth work is aimed at, with, for and by young people, holding the values of equality, tolerance and inclusion (COE, 2025).

THIS GUIDE PROVIDES:

- **Descriptions** of useful frameworks regarding peer-support groups for young people experiencing climate distress.
- **Steps** on how to organise a peer-support group for young people with climate distress.
- **Thoughts** and ideas for the facilitator(s) on what to keep in mind while running a peer-support group.

**BY USING THIS GUIDE,
YOUTH WORKERS AND FACILITATORS
CAN CREATE MEANINGFUL
SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE,
EMPOWERING THEM TO FACE
CLIMATE CHALLENGES WITH
RESILIENCE, HOPE AND ACTION.**

Sharing emotions, building community connections, and fostering resilience are essential for those experiencing eco-anxiety or climate distress (Stapleton & Jece, 2024). Balancing action for oneself and others is crucial. To complement this material, a **self-help workbook** is provided, which can be used individually or in group settings.

You can access the workbook here: [self-help workbook - https://calm-ey.eu/](https://calm-ey.eu/).

Hand in hand with this material and a self-help workbook, there is also a handbook on how to talk about climate anxiety with young people and a training programme for people working with youth, which can be accessed here: calm-ey.eu/hub/.

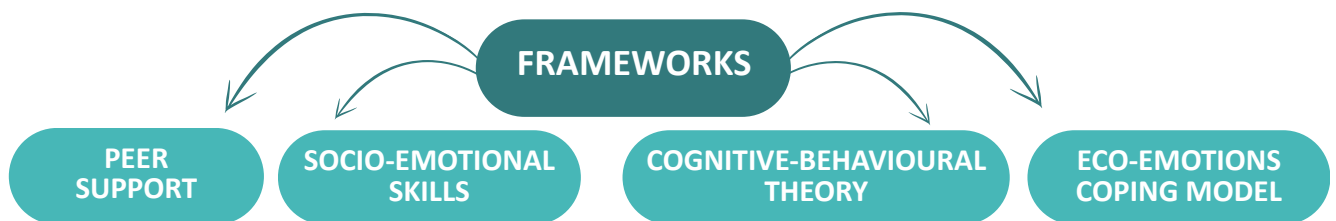
All of the materials have been produced within the project “Calm-ey: Coping with climate anxiety: learning methods for mental health for European youth” funded by the European Union, Erasmus+ youth programme.



FRAMEWORKS

Each peer-support group is unique regarding its participants, facilitators and what's happening in the local and global context at any point in time. To feel confident in supporting a peer-support group, facilitators benefit from having mental frameworks to rely on, as these serve as helpful support tools. Therefore, take the time to familiarise yourself with the proposed models.

This guide draws on [Mieli's](#) (Mental health organisation in Finland) eco-emotions coping model, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), socio-emotional skills, positive psychology, youth work principles of empowerment, and the practical experiences of running peer-support groups during the Erasmus+ funded "Calm-ey" project for youth workers on how to talk about climate anxiety with young people.



Peer support regarding climate emotions

Peer support plays a vital role in addressing emotions related to climate change. It provides a safe and supportive environment where participants can share their feelings and experiences, helping to validate and normalise their emotions (read more in the handbook, chapter 3 "How to normalise emotions"). This sense of validation reduces feelings of isolation and loneliness, as hearing others express similar fears, worries, and concerns fosters solidarity and mutual understanding ([Cooper et al., 2025](#)).

In addition to emotional support, group settings provide opportunities to learn and practise coping strategies collectively ([Ibrahim, 2024](#)). This shared learning helps participants build resilience via adaptive coping mechanisms in managing climate-related stress. Moreover, collective action and mutual encouragement often inspire participants to feel more empowered to address climate challenges. Peer support also cultivates a sense of community and shared purpose. By working together on solutions, participants can find meaning and optimism, enhancing their hope for the future ([Cooper et al., 2025](#)).

Further support for mental health

Young people who are directly affected by natural disasters or direct climate change aspects are more vulnerable to mental health struggles, as are those with pre-existing mental health issues (Stapleton & Jece, 2024). Group discussions and shared experiences can significantly alleviate climate-related distress for many and support their resilience regarding the topic (Cooper et al., 2025).

Still, some participants may need additional mental health support. Therefore, it's crucial for facilitators to recognise their own expertise and limitations. **If a participant struggles with their mental health to the point that it disrupts their daily life or there's a danger to their life or health, facilitators have to be prepared to refer them to professional mental health services.** To assist facilitators, a list of mental health support services in different countries (Malta, Estonia, Denmark, Germany) can be found here: calm-eu.eu/mental-health-emergency-contacts/.

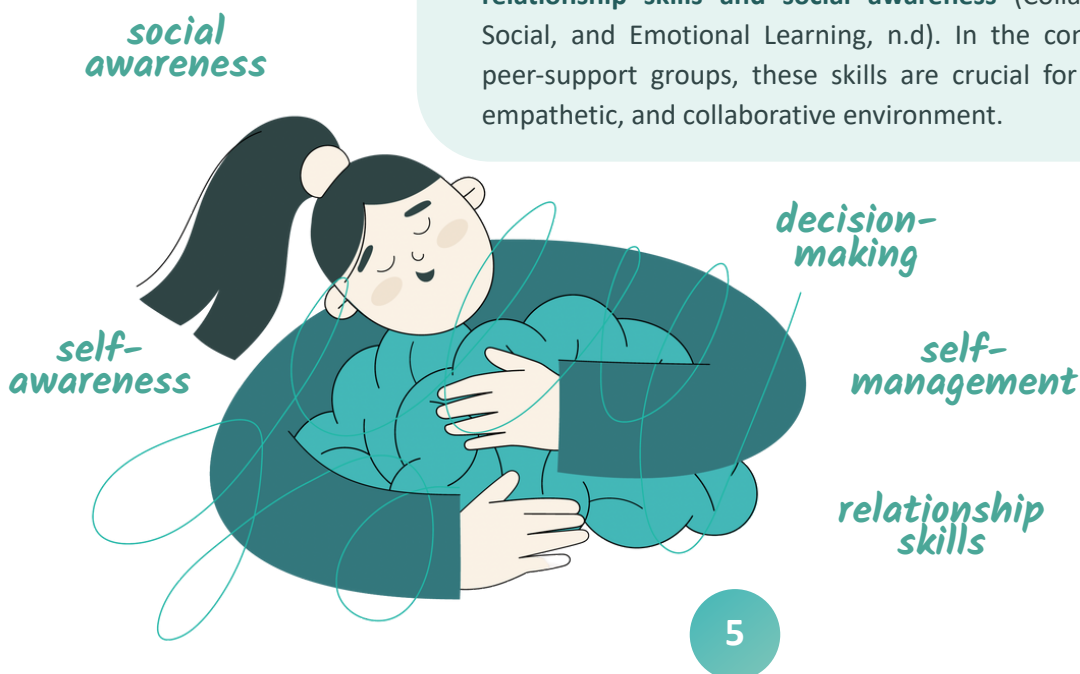
- **Group settings create a space** for like-minded individuals to come together to discuss topics they care deeply about, fostering connection and validation.
- **Peer support alone may not be sufficient** for everyone. Facilitators must remain aware of their boundaries and refer participants for further support when necessary.
- **Peer-support groups** are not only a space for emotional processing but also a platform for collective action and empowerment, enabling participants to feel hopeful and engaged in addressing climate issues.

By keeping these principles in mind, facilitators can ensure that **peer-support groups are a valuable and effective resource** for those navigating climate-related emotions. Further reading regarding peer support in a youth work context and facilitating peer-support groups can be found here: peersupport.training/.

Key Points for Facilitators

Socio-Emotional Skills

Socio-emotional skills are essential abilities that enable individuals to manage emotions, build relationships, and make thoughtful decisions. These skills include **self-awareness, self-management, decision-making, relationship skills and social awareness** (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d). In the context of climate-distress peer-support groups, these skills are crucial for fostering a supportive, empathetic, and collaborative environment.



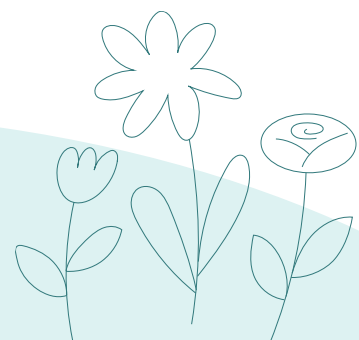
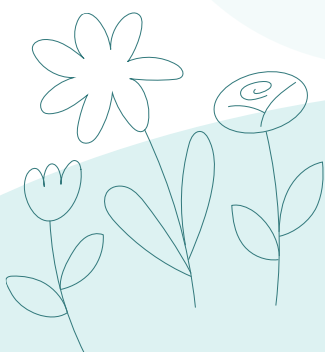
THE KEY SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS IN SUCH GROUPS INCLUDE:

- **Self-awareness** in recognising and understanding one's emotions, thoughts and values and their impact.
- **Self-management**, including managing emotions, thoughts and behaviours constructively, even in challenging situations.
- **Decision-making** to make empathic and constructive choices on how to act and how to be in a world experiencing a changing climate.
- **Relationship skills**, such as in establishing and maintaining supportive relationships through clear communication, active listening and collaboration to navigate settings effectively, including empathy towards the experiences of others.
- **Social awareness**, including awareness of and the ability to be empathic towards the experiences of others.

These skills are vital because they help participants build resilience, empowering them to manage their emotions and navigate the complexities of climate distress. Socio-emotional skills also foster a connection by encouraging active listening, mutual understanding, and a sense of community, which can significantly reduce feelings of isolation. Furthermore, they promote empowerment by combining emotional processing with actionable steps, enabling participants to feel more confident and capable of contributing positively to their communities and the environment (Cooper et al., 2025).

- **The facilitator's own skills** of using active listening skills and being empathetic towards others facilitate a supportive atmosphere in the group.
- **Focusing on how** the facilitator encourages building relationships amongst participants is important.
- **Focusing on how** the participants should express their emotions helps others to develop socio-emotional skills.
- **Knowledge about** emotional-regulation techniques is useful to have for the facilitators. Practical emotional-regulation techniques can be found in the self-help workbook and handbook, chapter "HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL" concerning emotions.

Key Points for Facilitators



Cognitive-Behavioural Theory

A very useful model for understanding how thoughts, emotions and actions influence us and our well-being is the cognitive-behavioural theory (CBT) model, which is the basis of cognitive-behavioural therapy. The theory is based on how our actions are influenced by our thoughts and feelings (Westbrook et al., 2011).

A simplified image to explain the process between our thoughts and feelings goes as follows.

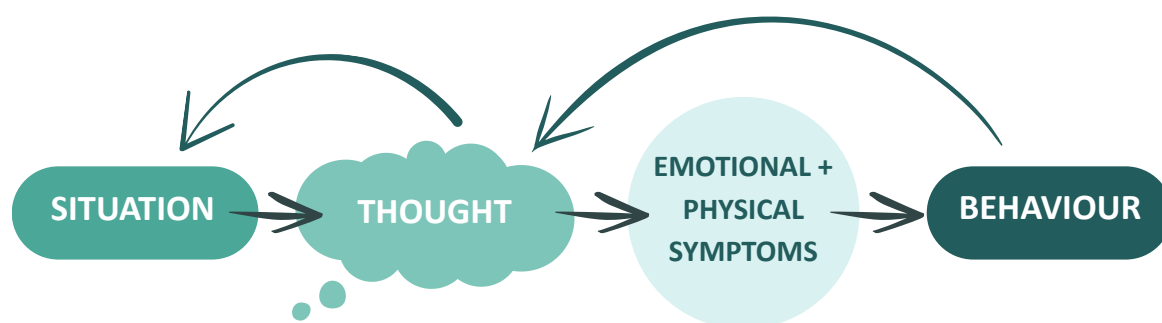


Image 1. Basic cognitive principle (from Westbrook et al., 2011).

Cognitive-behavioural therapy's approach is supportive for young people in helping them navigate various emotions related to climate change and challenging disturbing thoughts and behaviours that might exacerbate their climate distress (Doherty et al., 2024).

The following image is the CBT Five Areas model (Wright et al., 2018). It demonstrates how one can intervene to change one's **thoughts** (cognitive restructuring), **physical reactions** (through relaxation training) and **behaviours** (through learning coping skills and re-exposing oneself to situations to practise these skills) – with emotions, the main intervention is accepting them via naming or labelling the emotion that is being experienced.

The CBT Five Areas model

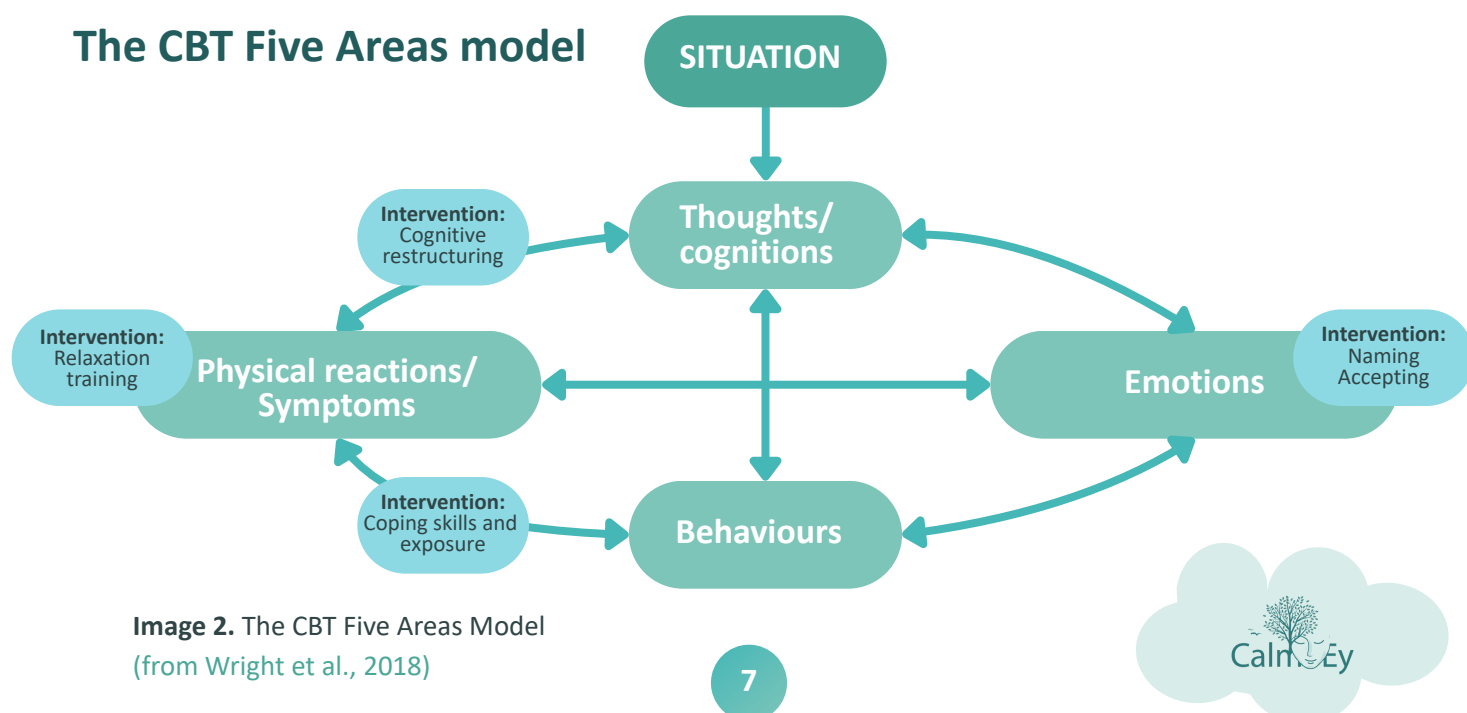


Image 2. The CBT Five Areas Model (from Wright et al., 2018)

HOW CAN WE INFLUENCE OURSELVES ACCORDING TO THIS MODEL?



As a facilitator, the CBT model can be used as a helpful tool in understanding what the participants might be experiencing regarding climate-related stress, but it also helps to structure discussions/conversations and follow the structure of thoughts-feelings-actions/behaviour.

Key Points for Facilitators

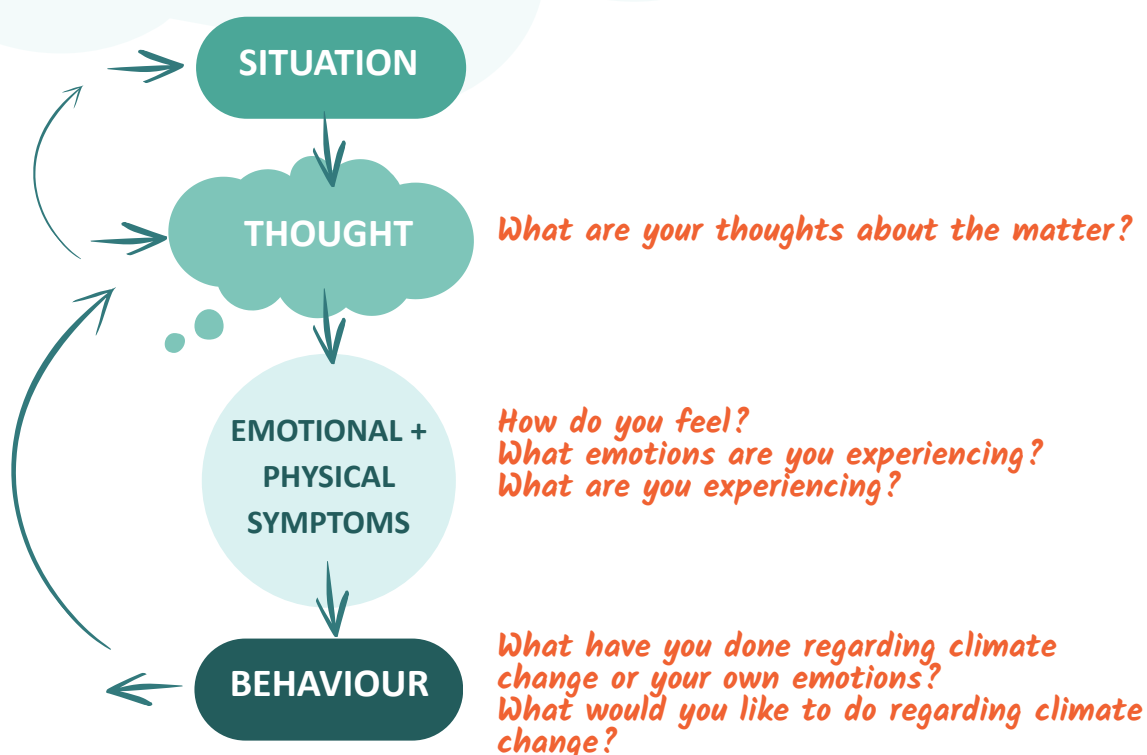


Image 1. Basic cognitive principle
(from Westbrook et al., 2011).

It's important to remember that distinguishing between thoughts and emotions, or even naming an emotion, can be challenging for many people. Providing participants with tools to identify and express their emotions can greatly enhance the group experience (Willcox, 1982; Pihkala, 2022). For instance, facilitators can use tools like the Climate Emotions Wheel (Pihkala, 2022, Climate Psychiatry Alliance, 2025), emotion metaphor cards or some other creative outlet, i.e. Dixit cards or even printed-out emoticons to support participants in understanding what they are feeling and give vocabulary or an aid to describe how they feel.

DURING PEER-SUPPORT GROUP SESSIONS, FACILITATORS CAN USE TARGETED QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES TO HELP PARTICIPANTS ACHIEVE THREE KEY GOALS:

- **Supporting participants in noticing their thoughts**

Encourage participants to reflect on their thoughts by asking open-ended questions such as, “What do you think about this?” or “How does this situation make you see the world?”

- **Accepting the emotions of the participants**

Support participants in identifying and expressing their emotions by prompting them with questions like, “How do you feel about this?” or “Can you name the emotion you’re experiencing?” This fosters emotional acceptance and validation.

- **Take action in new ways**

Encourage participants to consider alternative approaches by brainstorming solutions or trying new strategies. Questions like, “What could you try differently?” or “What small step could you take today?” can inspire creative problem-solving and action.

Balancing thought analysis, emotional acceptance, and action-oriented discussions helps the participants gain clarity, process their emotions, and explore meaningful steps forward.

Eco-Emotions Coping Model

As the environmental crisis deepens, more people are grappling with emotions linked to the changes occurring in the world. These emotions manifest on multiple levels: within individuals, in their personal lives and immediate circles, and in broader contexts such as workplaces, educational settings, and society at large. Media coverage and policy changes further shape how people experience and process these emotions.

This peer-support guide builds on the work of the Finnish organisations [Mieli](#), [Nyyti Ry](#) and [Tunne Ry](#) (2023), who propose a **three-step model** for addressing eco-emotions.

THE FOLLOWING IS A DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE INTERCONNECTED STEPS:

Face and process emotions

Acknowledging and exploring the full range of all emotions regarding climate change, including fear, grief, anger, and anxiety.

Without facing such feelings, it's impossible to cope with them effectively.



Take action guided by values

Transforming emotions into meaningful action aligned with personal or shared values. Taking action helps channel distress into empowerment. Action can be taken on a systemic level, but individual-level action is also still considered important and valuable.



Balance through rest and recovery

Sustain emotional and physical well-being by incorporating rest and moments of replenishment. This step is crucial for preventing burnout, a common pitfall in (environmental) activism. Combining balance between feeling emotions and taking action not only creates resilience, but is also a ground to foster hope.

These steps are deeply interconnected. Processing emotions enables action, while action provides a way to cope with feelings. Rest and recovery are essential to maintain the balance between feeling and acting, ensuring individuals remain resilient and hopeful (Hickman, 2022).

In group settings, discussions may naturally shift in various directions. Facilitators play a key role in ensuring a balance between talking about emotions and discussing actionable steps that participants can take in their daily lives or within their communities. When the focus leans too heavily toward emotions, the group atmosphere may feel overwhelming or “doom-laden,” which can diminish hope and resilience. Conversely, focusing solely on actions without addressing emotions may leave participants feeling disconnected or unvalidated.

Key Points for Facilitators

Therefore, a balanced discussion is suggested. Internal activism – as in paying attention to inner emotional landscapes and emotional engagement – should be balanced with external activism or action (e.g. protests, initiatives, activities), which helps create a sense of purpose and hope, which thus strengthens resilience (Cooper et al., 2025). Resilience is also built via positive psychology's PERMA model of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Sutton, 2016).

TO MAINTAIN A BALANCED DISCUSSION BASED ON HOPE AND STRENGTHS, FACILITATORS CAN:

- **Encourage participants to reflect** on positive emotions like gratitude and joy, fostering hope and resilience alongside heavier feelings.
- **Provide a space for brainstorming** actionable steps that align with personal or collective values.
- **Shift focus between emotions and actions** as needed to create a constructive and supportive group dynamic.
- **Balance is essential.** A healthy group dynamic requires a balance between discussing emotions and identifying actions. Neither aspect should overshadow the other.
- **Focus on hope.** While climate anxiety can dominate discussions, integrating emotions like gratitude, joy, and optimism can help sustain hope.
- **Prevent burnout.** Encourage rest and recovery as part of a sustainable approach to processing emotions and taking action for self and others.

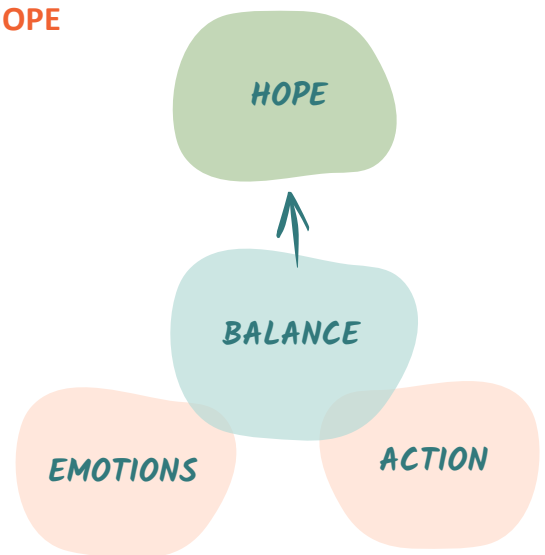


Image 4. Eco-emotions coping model (based on the Eco-emotions guidebook by Mieli & Tunne, 2023).

By incorporating these practices, peer-support groups can become spaces of validation, empowerment, and resilience, helping participants navigate eco-emotions in ways that foster personal and collective well-being (Cooper et al., 2025).





HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL

This material works as a guideline for facilitators to help young people in their community navigate their emotions related to climate change and, in a group setting, explore coping strategies that support their mental health and resilience when dealing with everyday issues.

THIS MATERIAL'S CONCEPT HAS TWO FOCUS POINTS:

1

Give the possibility for people concerned about the climate to **talk about and share their thoughts, feelings and ideas**, which is important in order not to feel alone and isolated, but rather validated, connected and empowered.

2

Learn socio-emotional skills for managing stress and dealing with various eco-emotions. This part goes hand in hand with the self-care handbook, which can be found here: calm-ey.eu/hub

This material goes hand in hand with other materials developed during the Calmy-eu project.

Self-help workbook. Each step has a part with references to the self-help workbook exercises, which can be used during the peer-support group.



Handbook "Growing through the crisis": a handbook for youth and youth worker facing climate anxiety," which contains a wide range of useful topics related to climate emotions, e.g. about climate change in general, about emotions and emotional-regulation techniques, how to support young people, and techniques and exercises.



Therefore, this material has the flexibility to use the materials and exercises from this self-help workbook together with the participants, depending on the target group and the nature of the group.

TO KEEP IN MIND

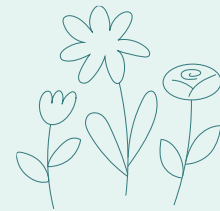
The language we use has an influence on group dynamics, the group's perceptions of the facilitator(s), and the participants' feelings of safety within the group. Since there are various terms regarding the topic, it's important to keep them in mind. The following is a glossary of various currently used terms.

Language and terms used

Climate change	This refers to long-term alterations in temperature, precipitation, wind patterns, and other elements of the Earth's climate system, primarily driven by human activities such as burning fossil fuels and deforestation (United Nations Climate Action, n.d.).
Eco crisis	A term describing a critical environmental situation that threatens ecosystems, species, and human survival, often involving the crises of climate change, pollution, habitat destruction, and unsustainable resource use (Mueller, 2009).
Eco-emotions	A broad category of feelings and psychological responses individuals experience in reaction to environmental issues, including worry, sadness, anger, and hope, among others, about the state of the planet (McCaffery & Boetto, 2025).
Eco-anxiety	The chronic fear of environmental doom or the persistent worry about climate change and ecological degradation affecting life on Earth (Clayton et al., 2017).
Climate anxiety	A specific form of eco-anxiety focused on the distress or apprehension related to climate change and its potential consequences for the planet and humanity (Kurth & Pihkala, 2022).
Climate distress	The psychological discomfort, sorrow, or anguish caused by awareness of climate change impacts, often tied to feelings of helplessness or grief over environmental loss (Doherty & Clayton, 2011).



Regarding mental health terms:



Mental health struggles and mental health challenges are proposed to indicate issues regarding mental health. **Regarding climate change-related mental health struggles, they are logical reactions to what has happened or what is happening around us**, instead of being a disorder or implying that something is wrong with the person (Marks & Cole, 2024).

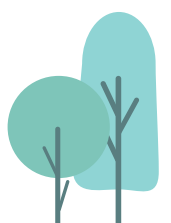
Facilitators

WHAT KIND OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ARE NEEDED FROM THE GROUP FACILITATOR(S)?

- Ideally, the group has **two facilitators**, but we also acknowledge how circumstances are different. We advise that, for a peer-support group, there should be no more than **15 participants**, even with two facilitators. A limited number of people would give time and space for the participants to share their thoughts and feelings and ensure that everybody will be heard and listened to.
- The facilitators have to have **relevant youth work training**, i.e. knowledge about group dynamics and how to handle group processes, the skills of active listening, asking questions, assertiveness and/or using other non-formal activity methods, which could be useful in a climate-distress peer-support group.
- **Skills in directing discussions**, especially when there is a diverse group with a diverse background – then the facilitators' role is to direct the conversations to be more constructive and empathic and less about proving a point.
- **Knowledge about climate change and its impact** on the well-being of people, including basic knowledge of mental health, emotions and emotional-regulation techniques. All the necessary information can be found in the handbook and self-help workbook.
- Possess knowledge about different **techniques on how to deal with difficult emotions** and skills in implementing those techniques, when needed. Some of these can be found in the handbook.

It's more important to talk about difficult topics, rather than not talk about them at all and keep them as taboos. Creating a space to talk about issues and emotions is just as important and empowering.

IMPORTANT!



ATTITUDE OF THE FACILITATORS

- **Interest in the topic.** The facilitator needs to be interested in the topic of climate change, environmental crises, and related emotions, thoughts and behaviours. The facilitator is also able to acknowledge the importance of individuals recognising and talking about their emotions about climate change, as it shows that they care about the state of the planet. The importance of climate emotion validation is to be upheld, alongside the need for a delicate balance between talking and acting.
- **Being mindful of the vocabulary they use.** There are different terms regarding the topic, and facilitators need to be aware of these terms and mindful of how terms are being used (read more in the chapter “Language and terms used”).
- **Flexibility** to respond to the needs of the group. Facilitators should not be afraid to improvise according to what the group needs at that particular moment. Creativity is a form of resilience practice!

Based on experience from running peer-support groups, the wider societal topics can also be discussed when talking about climate change, i.e. power and societal systems and systemic changes, gender, social inequalities, and the economy. Be prepared for participants to bring up a wider range of topics related to climate change, referred to as a polycrisis.

- **Openness** to listen to all of the experiences represented in the group. Through this skill, the facilitator models active listening and empathy to the participants.
- **Equality.** The facilitator is not there to educate about the topic of climate change. They can share information about it, but the main aim is to create a space for people to express themselves.
- **Respect.** The facilitators’ own attitude to respecting a variety of thoughts and ideas and respecting the participants’ willingness to open and share in a group setting.
- **A balance between an emotion-focused and solution-focused approach.** This can be done through meaning-focused approaches (Ojala, 2012), which involve acknowledging and validating distressing climate emotions while tapping into what participants derive meaning from. This can foster more empowering climate emotions, which can help them accept their distressing climate emotions and move forward through possible action.

KEEP IN MIND!

The focus of the peer-support group is for the participants to share their thoughts and emotions and less about the facilitators’ knowledge and skills.

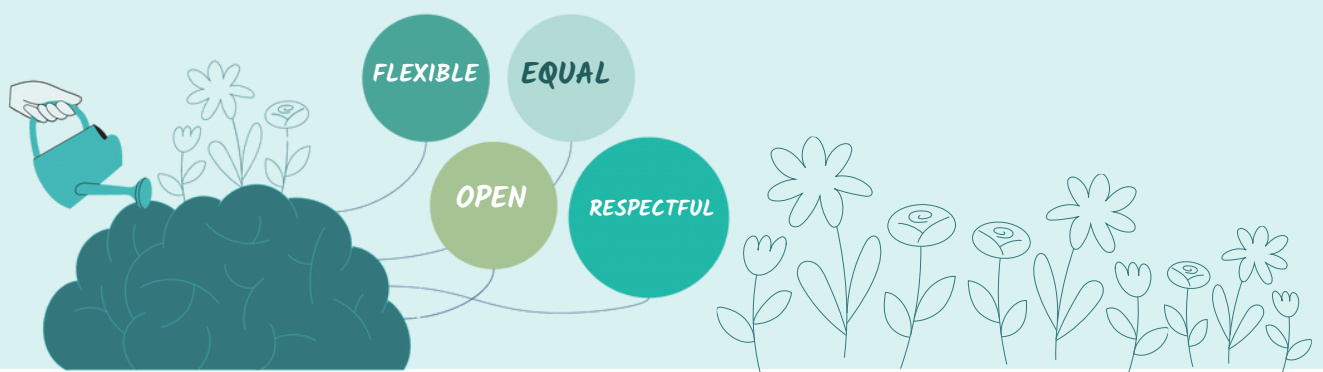


FACILITATORS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO MANAGE THE GROUP PROCESS, ESPECIALLY WHEN TALKING ABOUT A VULNERABLE TOPIC AND PERHAPS ALSO WITH A VULNERABLE GROUP, I.E. YOUTH.

POSSIBLE PITFALLS FOR THE FACILITATORS

It might happen that:

- **The facilitator doesn't give space** to all of the voices in the group and lets one participant (or the facilitator him-/herself) dominate the group session.
- **The participants are not willing to share** their thoughts and feelings, since they might not feel safe enough or just need more time to get adjusted to each other to share their thoughts and feelings.
- **The process of the climate discussion** leans toward doom talk and less toward a supportive and perhaps constructive climate conversation.
- **Wanting to jump to solutions and 'fix' emotions** without allowing space for being with the emotions of the participants and allowing time to process, acknowledge and validate them. Wanting to jump into action, such as "We need to educate more people" or "...use more bicycles than cars".
- **Shaming or judging** participants for not behaving pro-environmentally, or telling participants what they *should do*.
- **Not taking into account** how the previous relationships within the group might influence the process of the peer-support group meeting, i.e. there might be underlying conflict or a lack of trust to open up and discuss their thoughts and emotions regarding the topic.
- **Facilitators' own assumptions and fears** might interrupt the discussion and process.
 - "I have to be an expert in climate change"**
Nobody can fully know about all of the aspects related to climate change. So the facilitator doesn't have to have the full power and expert knowledge, more of an attitude of letting the participants share their knowledge amongst each other.
 - "I am not a mental health specialist"**
As a youth worker and as a facilitator, it is more important to create a self-reflective space for climate conversations. Prepare yourself with some knowledge about mental health and soothing techniques, but also know your limits regarding the topic.
- **Lastly, avoid** not finishing the group process and letting participants leave with a heavy emotion.





IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The next section provides a description of aspects to consider when implementing a peer-support group and guiding steps for a facilitator to frame a climate-distress peer-support group.

PREPARATION BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION

Analyse your conditions

LOCATION

Where will the group meet? If it's a recurring group, is it possible to use the same room/space?



On-site Physical room

- **Have enough space** for the participants, so people won't feel cramped in.
- **Try to avoid** a very clinical or official environment, i.e. a room without windows in the basement, which can cause stress in the participants when the topic and environment don't support each other.
- **Make the space as cosy** as possible, i.e. providing tea, water and refreshments.
- **If you want to use some materials**, i.e. if using creative methods, name tags, or paper and pens, have them ready in the room before the arrival of the participants.
- **Have chairs in a circle** ready before people arrive. Sitting in a circle creates equal positioning and neutral leadership, full visibility, shared focus and a collaborative atmosphere.

Online

- **What is the platform** you will use for online group meetings?
- **How can you make use of the platform's features** for the scope of the group, i.e. the possibility for smaller groups, use of interactive methods or some other possibilities.
- **Online facilitation** requires more directive communication from the facilitator.
- **When the group meets for the first time** online, it's important to agree upon agreements, i.e. how often to use the camera and/or microphone.
- **If it's a recurring group**, then at the beginning of each meeting, go over the agreements that were made by the group. If needed, then also see if the agreements are still needed, or perhaps some of them need to be changed to keep the flexibility and needs-based approach.
- There might be a possibility that some participants don't want to use their cameras, or they would prefer to communicate only via text, so **be ready for non-engagement or engagement in a different way** than you might expect.
- With online facilitation, it's also important to give opportunities for participants to connect and **share thoughts and ideas**, so having participants discuss in smaller groups is advisable.
- Finally, make sure that everybody is given the opportunity to **express themselves**.

IN ADDITION!

For both versions, it might be a good option to have a joint WhatsApp group to share thoughts and ideas regarding what's happening in the world. Such a group would need a facilitator, who would post something once in a while, i.e., a question or an article regarding climate change. This could be useful if the group meets more than once.

DURATION

Aspects to consider regarding the duration and time:

- **How long should the group meeting last?** Time-wise, it's advisable to allocate approximately 1.5 to 2 hours to allow participants to go through the full group process.
- **Consider when would be the best time for the participants to attend**, i.e. if the participants are students, ensure there won't be an overlap with the school timetable.
- **Facilitator's own time** and its possibilities.



TARGET GROUP

Since **the focus of this guide is on climate emotions**, it's important to consider whether the target group already has prior knowledge about climate change and its emotional impact, or whether they are simply curious about the topic without having personally experienced these emotions. Having information about the target group helps the facilitator to be prepared and ready to cater to the needs of the group.

Questions to consider:

- **Where will you find the participants?**
- **Will there be a registration form?**
- **What is the age group?**
- **What kind of group will it be?**
 - Do the participants know each other?
 - Is it a peer-support group for people experiencing climate emotions in any of their forms?
 - Will it have an educational component of informing what climate emotions are or what kind of climate changes are happening?
 - Will the group only meet once, or will it be a recurring group?
 - Will it be a closed group that consists of the same participants at every meeting, or will the participants change from one session to another?
 - Can new people join the group as drop-ins after the meetings have already started?
 - If the meetings are recurring, how many meetings will be held?
- **Do you already know the people joining the group?**
 - What is their previous knowledge about climate change or the environment?
 - Do you know if they have climate distress, or are they just curious about the topic?
 - Do you know if there's someone who might have struggles in their everyday life regarding climate change or is struggling with their mental health?



Answering these questions related to the target group gives important information regarding the group and catering to their needs. For example, if the group has prior knowledge about climate change, then there's less of a need to give much input about the topics, and the focus is more on how participants can share their experiences. If the group doesn't have knowledge of climate change, then the facilitator can give more input.

Knowledge about the group also gives a hint about group dynamics and how comfortable they feel with each other, and also with sharing their thoughts and ideas – that offers a chance for the facilitator to choose methods to support the process of the peer-support group.



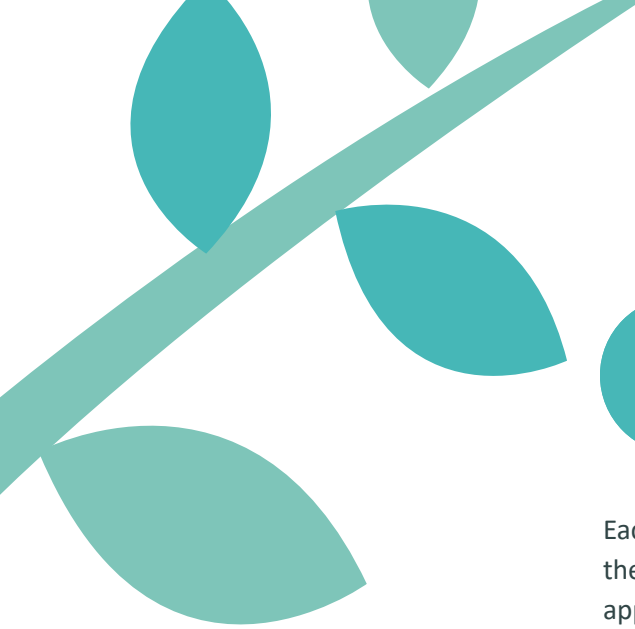
Creating a safe space

Creating a safe space is crucial because it fosters psychological safety, encouraging individuals to open up and share their thoughts freely. To achieve this, it's important to understand your target group and analyse the dynamics of the group you are working with.

For instance, in a group where all participants experience some degree of climate distress, there may be a sense of equality and shared knowledge or experiences. However, it's also possible that these individuals have been grappling with this anxiety for a longer time, which might mean they are facing ongoing challenges with their mental health in daily life.

On the other hand, in a group where participants are simply interested in the topic, you may encounter a wide range of perspectives on climate change, including varying beliefs about its depth, causes and implications. This diversity can lead to an imbalance within the group, as differing viewpoints may affect the group's cohesion and dynamics. Here, the role and responsibility of the facilitator are important in guiding the discussion to be empathic, constructive and to ensure emotional balance and hope regarding the topic and various opinions.

Read more about creating safe spaces in peer-support groups here: peersupport.training



Steps of implementation

Each group is uniquely shaped by its qualities of the target group and the skillset of the facilitators. Therefore, there could be two approaches:

Structured approach...

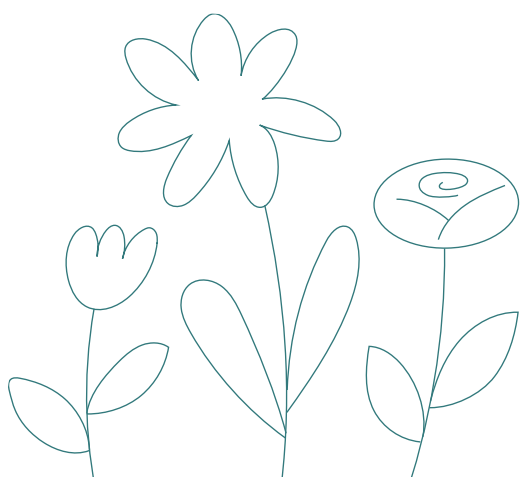
where the facilitators have a leading role in the activities and discussions. Such an approach has more of an educational aim, since the power dynamic is leaning towards the facilitator. This approach can be useful with participants who have not or are not experiencing climate distress and/or are just interested in the topic. Regarding the proposed framework of this guidebook and the 5 steps, it's advisable to have the theoretical input about climate change and climate emotions at the beginning in step 1 after the initial intro and agreements, so the participants will have a shared common understanding of the terms and topic.

Here you can look into other materials created during the Calmy-eu project: calm-ey.eu/.



Fluid/not structured approach...

where the focus is more on the participants of the peer-support group to discuss with each other, so they can share the thoughts, feelings and stories related to their experience. Such an approach can be more beneficial for participants who are knowledgeable about the topic and are experiencing various emotions regarding the subject.



Step 1 - Beginning/Start

IN A NUTSHELL

Coming together as a group in the same space. Introduction to what the group is about, introduction of the participants (including the facilitator(s)) in the group, and talking about the structure of the session and agreements to create a safe space for sharing thoughts and ideas.

AIM

Creating a relaxed, open, and safe space is important, so people will feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts and feelings.

How to

1. Have participants sit in a circle, where all of the participants can see each other, which creates equality.

2. Introduction by the facilitator(s), their background, and experience with the topic.

3. Explanation of the structure of the event, which creates safety and clarity amongst participants:

- Some information on why today's event is happening and what the aim is. Explaining the role of the facilitator and emphasising that it's not a training session where the facilitators are the experts in the field, but rather a process they are there to guide. Encouraging that the participants themselves are the experts in how climate change has influenced them.
- **Sharing information** about the duration of the peer-support group, and whether it will happen again, some practicalities or logistical information, i.e. where the restroom is, encouraging participants to take refreshment and ensuring how the participants can interact in a way that's comfortable for them.
- **Agreements** of the group. Depending on the group type and size, and whether the group is a closed or open one. The facilitators can ask what kind of group agreements are needed for the session(s), so everybody will feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts. (i.e. *What would you need to feel comfortable sharing your thoughts in the following hours?*). The facilitator can give a moment to the participants for reflection and then ask the participants to share what their needs are.
- **Information about confidentiality** and how everything that is discussed will remain in the same space – or, if needed to talk further, the stories would stay anonymous.

4. Provide a space for participants to introduce themselves by their name and answer a posed question, preferably something positive, to create an open and safe environment for expressing their thoughts and ideas. Examples of opening questions are given below.

It is important for the facilitator(s) to introduce themselves to foster equality. The facilitator(s) may start by providing an example of how the posed question can be answered.

Following these steps depends on whether the peer-support group has a structured approach or a fluid one. If following a structured approach, then step 1 is the part to give input and information about climate change and the related emotions it can cause. From the experience of running peer-support groups, it might be important for the participants to understand whether they have climate anxiety or not. However, this depends on the group and their previous knowledge and experience.

When structuring the theoretical input about climate change and related emotions, it's advisable to use the material from the handbook and training programme from calm-ey.eu/.

TO KEEP IN MIND

- **It is important to keep in mind** that you should let people share as much or as little as they want to share.
- **Facilitators are to ensure** that each participant has the time and space to express themselves one by one without people interrupting them. It is important for this to be verbalised with participants before any sharing.
- **Facilitators sharing their own thoughts**, concerns and struggles is helpful in creating a safe space for others to share their thoughts.

QUESTIONS FOR OPENING CIRCLE

These questions are proposed as recommendations, so you choose to use them or come up with your own:

- **What are you grateful for?**
- **What's your one win from the previous week?**
- **What's your favourite type of weather and why?**
- **If you'd describe your day as weather, what would it be?**
- **Describe your relationship with nature.**
- **What's the last thing that made you smile/laugh?**
- **Name a fun fact about yourself.**

RECOMMENDED EXERCISES FROM THE SELF-HELP WORKBOOK

Emotions: The What's, Why's, Where's and How's

- Exercise: Climate Emotions Wheel Prompt Questions – definition of gratitude and prompt questions
- Exercise: 'Here-and-Now Stone'

Connecting with Yourself: Cultivating Gratitude

- The Iceberg of Gratitude
- Exercise: The Gratitude Grid

Connecting with Nature: The Gift of Strawberries

- Exercise: The Gifts of Nature

Connecting with People

- Exercise: Open Sentences – Personal/Group Exercise

Step 2 - Emotion

IN A NUTSHELL

The focus of this step is to let participants express their emotions and feelings regarding the topic of climate change and how it has impacted them.

AIM

The aim of this step is to validate how all feelings are acceptable and valid, and a mix of emotions is also usual and understandable when it comes to climate change and climate distress.

TO KEEP IN MIND

- **Talking about emotions** can be difficult for people due to various reasons (i.e., they might not be self-aware, they might not have the vocabulary to express their emotions, they might experience emotions in different ways, they might not feel comfortable enough to express in a group setting).
- **It is important to validate** whatever feeling a person might be experiencing. When it comes to climate anxiety and distress, there is a bigger chance for mixed feelings, such as feeling both anger and hope (read more in the handbook's chapter about emotions).
- **The facilitators should emphasise** how talking and expressing feelings is already empowering.
- **A potential pitfall** that might happen during this process regards participants talking over one another. Here, the facilitator needs to keep in mind the balance of how much input each participant gets, so that the whole group will feel heard and seen.
- **Something else to consider** is whether the participants have any previous experience with climate anxiety or distress, and how willing they are to speak about their emotions in general.

IMPORTANT

- **This step concerning emotions might elicit an emotional disturbance** in the participant(s), so a facilitator has to be aware of how talking about meaningful and distressing topics can make people more emotional. As a facilitator, it is useful to have knowledge prior to the group on how to manage emotions (read the handbook chapter about emotions for this). When this happens during the peer-support group, it's also always good to ask the person what she/he would need the most at that moment.
- **If you notice that the experienced emotions are disturbing** the everyday life of the participant, then provide information about further support for their mental health, since it's a possibility that young people affected by climate change might be experiencing some mental health difficulties.

How to

After the participants have shared something about themselves, proceed with asking questions related to **feelings and emotions**.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

These questions are proposed as recommendations, you may choose to use them or create your own.

- How do you feel regarding the topic of climate change?
- How do you relate to nature?
- What's alive in you?
- What kind of emotions have you experienced regarding climate change?

Sometimes, it's difficult for people to distinguish what they are feeling, so it's helpful to use resources that would allow participants to choose something that reflects the emotions they are feeling, such as creative cards or the emotion wheel. Another way is to first brainstorm a number of climate emotions within the group, and then ask participants to identify which ones resonate with them.

Some ideas of creative ways to explore with the participants:

- Using metaphor cards (e.g., Dixit).
- Creating a representation of the feeling, such as by drawing, writing or creating sculptures (e.g., Playdough).
- Finding an item in the room to show how they are feeling.
- Further techniques and methods are in the handbook and training material, which can be found here: calm-ey.eu/.

RECOMMENDED EXERCISES FROM THE SELF-HELP WORKBOOK:

Emotions: The What's, Why's, When's and How's

- The Climate Wheel of Emotions
- Exercise: Climate Emotions Wheel Prompt Questions
- Processing our Emotions
- Exercise: 'Here-and-Now Stone'
- Exercise: Befriending Your Emotions and a Deeper Practice

Connect with People:

- Collective Emotions and Emotions Affected by the Collective



Step 3 - Act

IN A NUTSHELL

Step 3 in the structure of the group meeting is to move **from talking about emotions and feelings to doing**.

There are two types of action here:

- 1) Individual action – personal steps to relieve the emotions or to support oneself.
- 2) Community action and engagement – involvement in what is possible or needed in the community or society on a larger scale.

AIM

To bring participants from the level of feeling to acting, so that participants are not stuck merely at the level of feeling. Action can consist of a behaviour related to the climate, but also acting for oneself or the community.

How to

+ After going through steps 1 and 2, where participants have had a chance to express their emotions with other participants, the facilitators guide the discussion to the action phase.

+ Ask a general question of the participants, such as *“What has helped you in coping with the various emotions?”*

TO KEEP IN MIND

- **As facilitators, navigate the discussion** towards the future, purpose, hope, positive emotions and towards what they can do in their everyday life to support their emotional wellbeing.
- **A pitfall in this part** might be participants getting stuck in changes that can be made on a systemic level. If needed, probe participants to identify their circle of control, or introduce this concept as a separate activity. Detailed instructions for the activity can be found at positivepsychology.com/circles-of-influence.
- **Use the knowledge and experience** of the participants, and let them share with each other what has helped or supported them.

TECHNIQUES & TIPS

- **Making a list** of the things the person already does and what can be implemented in everyday life.
- **Exploring different initiatives** within the community where it's possible to join (e.g. community gardens or repair shops) to allow participants to practise active hope.
- **Further techniques and tips**, which can be useful to implement, can be found in the materials at: calm-ey.eu/.

RECOMMENDED EXERCISES FROM THE SELF-HELP WORKBOOK

Before We Dive In:

- Mental Health Vitamins
- Exercise: Mental Health Vitamins Quiz
- Exercise: Planning Your Mental Health Vitamins Intake

Connecting with Yourself:

- Self-Care Rituals
- Exercise: What are my self-care rituals?

Building Long-Term Resilience:

- Resilience Muscles
- Exercise: Evaluating your Resilience Muscles
- Exercise: How will I Strengthen my Resilience Muscles?

Emotions and Actions:

- Exercise: Climate Action Venn Diagram
- What else can you do?

Step 4 - Balance

IN A NUTSHELL

A balance between acting and feeling is important. If there's too much feeling or participants get stuck on their emotions, this can be detrimental to their mental health and well-being. Conversely, focusing too much on action is also detrimental to well-being.

AIM

Participants reflect on the things that have been talked about or done in the group setting.

How to

- As a facilitator, guide a small reflection exercise to allow participants to apply **what was talked about** during the peer-support group to their own lives.
- Share thoughts about **how and why balance is important** – how there can't be one without the other.
- Depending on the group and the methods previously used, the facilitators can use themselves as examples of **what helped them navigate their climate distress**.
- Give time for the participants to reflect on what their **key takeaway** from the meeting is.
- Depending on how much time is left, it would be good if all the participants share their key takeaways in the big circle. If time is limited, participants can share with a partner, or write down what they learned.
- Closing off the circle and group meeting by **being grateful** to the participants for sharing themselves with the facilitators and the other participants.

TO KEEP IN MIND

- **Fostering hope and a sense of ease** is essential. This can be achieved by validating the wide range of emotions participants may feel, emphasising that experiencing heavy emotions is a natural response to the state of the world, not an indication that something is wrong with them.
- **Encourage participants to maintain balance** within themselves, as this is key to sustaining the energy and resources needed to engage in meaningful activities, such as activism, caring for the environment, or other actions that resonate personally.
- **Normalise the idea that everyone's journey is unique**. For some, contributing to community change might be a priority, while for others, focusing on their inner well-being is more important. Both paths are valid and valuable in their own ways.
- **Groups and experiences are different**; it's possible that not everything goes as planned, but what is important is how the process of the group is finished with emotional ease. It might be an individual action the person can do after the group, it could also be a summary of the group and asking the participants to share their thoughts, or it can be an activity or exercise.

For example:

- **Share information** about how we can do a lot to help ourselves and our own well-being. Inform about **mental health vitamins** – what they are and how they can be useful in keeping balance. Moreover, consider a discussion about how mental health vitamins could be useful when dealing with climate emotions.
- **What is the one thing** you can do to nurture yourself in the following week, especially regarding your distressing climate emotions?

Thoughts and ideas for these can be found in the self-help workbook and from the handbook. You can also find our recommended exercises from the self-help workbook below.

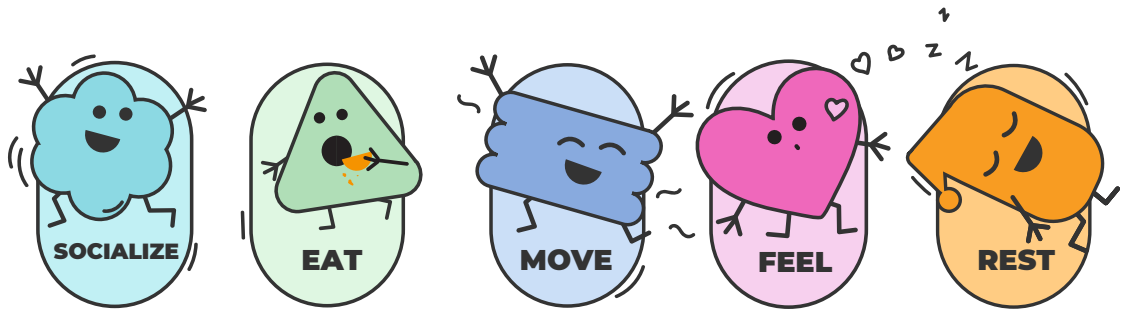
IMPORTANT

When you see a participant is still emotionally disturbed during and after the group, then it's important to **not leave the person alone**, but to notice and have a one-on-one conversation. If needed, give further contacts to get mental health support.

RECOMMENDED EXERCISES FROM THE SELF-HELP WORKBOOK

Before We Dive In:

- Mental Health Vitamins
 - Exercise: Mental Health Vitamins Quiz
 - Exercise: Planning Your Mental Health Vitamins Intake



Connecting with Yourself:

- Exercise: Breathing
- Exercise: Body Scan and Muscle Relaxation
- Exercise: Earth Anchoring
- Exercise: TIPP
- Self-Care Rituals
 - Exercise: What are my self-care rituals?
- Self-Compassion
 - Exercise: How would you treat a friend?

Connecting with Nature:

- Exercise: Meditation in Nature
- Exercise: Gardening
- Exercise: Sit-Spot
- Exercise: Slow Mindful Walk

Building Long-Term Resilience:

- Resilience Muscles
 - Exercise: Evaluating your Resilience Muscles
 - Exercise: How will I Strengthen my Resilience Muscles?
 - Exercise: Tracking Energy Levels
- The Matsutake Mushroom:
 - Exercise: Me as the Matsutake Mushroom
- Becoming Resilient in the Face of Climate Anxiety from the Media
 - Exercise: Media Diet for Climate Resilience

Step 5 - Debriefing

IN A NUTSHELL

Facilitating a group can be intense, and can provoke emotions and thoughts for the facilitator(s), so the focus of the fifth step is on (de)briefing and the self-care of the facilitators.

AIM

To ensure the sustainability of the facilitators, this part provides decompression after facilitating a group.

How to

It would be best if there are **two facilitators**, who could reflect with each other, but if there is just one, then they can find a trusted person with whom to talk to or write their reflections in a journal by themselves.

If you are experiencing (difficult) emotions or thoughts as a facilitator through the group process, or certain emotions or thoughts keep on lingering afterwards, then there are several practical exercises, which might be useful in the self-help workbook and handbook (chapter about “emotions”).

You can also go back to the CBT model and analyse your own thought-feeling-behaviour pattern:

- How do I feel? What emotions am I experiencing after the group?
- What are the thoughts (about the group, participant, myself)?
- What can I do? What do I need?
- Then you can proceed with choosing to do what’s best for you in the given moment.
- How can you deal with your own (difficult) emotions?

After the initial emotion has been identified and expressed to somebody else or in a written format to him-/herself, it’s good to analyse the process of the support group.

1. What aspects of today’s group session do you think went well, and what contributed to those successes?
2. Were there any challenges or difficulties during the session that you observed or experienced as a facilitator? What helped to overcome those challenges in the moment? How could we address these in future sessions?
3. Is there anything you would change or do differently next time to enhance the group experience for participants and improve the overall process?

EXTRA

The facilitator’s own attitude and perspective are important; thus, the following are some questions to reflect upon:

1. What are my own environmental emotions?
2. How can my own environmental emotions affect young people?
3. What are the environmental emotions of young people?
4. How can the environmental emotions of young people affect me?

METHODS FOR RELIEVING THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS:

Journaling. Writing down your own thoughts and feelings helps create space between them and gives the opportunity to look at the experience from a grounded perspective.

Talking and reflecting on the experience of facilitating a climate-distress group.

Doing self-care-related activities to fill the mental health vitamins of the facilitator(s).

Thinking about what would be the most useful and supportive thing to do for yourself or for others in the current moment and then actually doing it.

The self-help workbook and handbook have several easing exercises to use as a facilitator at the end of the group process.



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