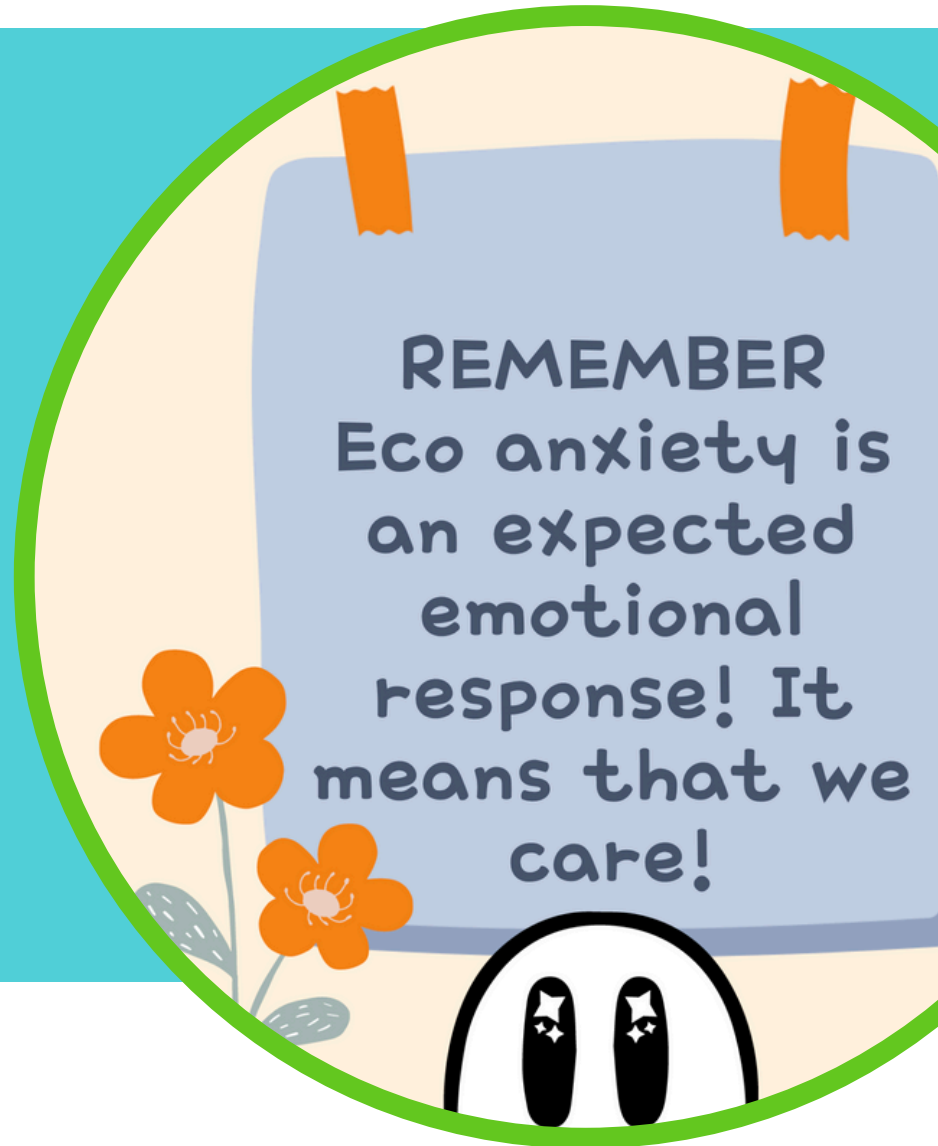


WHAT IS CLIMATE DISTRESS AND HOW CAN EDUCATORS SUPPORT THEIR STUDENTS?

**A Book for
Educators**



REMEMBER
Eco anxiety is
an expected
emotional
response! It
means that we
care!



WHERE TO BEGIN

***ADDRESSING CLIMATE DISTRESS
AND OTHER EMOTIONS IN CLIMATE
CHANGE EDUCATION***

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ABOUT THE BOOK

With the effects of climate change projected to increase in frequency and intensity, educating children while navigating the impacts of climate change on students, families and communities can be challenging.

Research has shown that when it comes to climate change, there are some sectors of society that are more vulnerable to its effects. Because of their size and developing bodies and minds, children and youth are especially impacted by climate change both physically and psychologically.

Children and youth spend most of their time at school and educators are in a privileged position to support students' learning, but challenged to deliver education for sustainable development that also addresses the psychological and emotions needs of young learners faced with the task of surviving an extreme weather event or growing up during a climate change crisis.

This book does not have the pretence to answer all your questions, but rather, we hope it will help you gain a general understanding on this complex phenomenon and motivate you to continue learning about how to address it in your practice.

This book was created by Stefania Maggi and McKenna Corvello with support by Mochi4ThePlanet, a research and knowledge mobilization project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). For more information about MOCHI, please visit www.mochi4theplanet.com/



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WHAT IS CLIMATE DISTRESS?



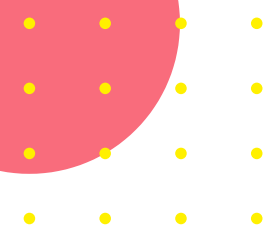

Climate distress is a psychological response to the growing concerns about environmental issues, such as climate change, pollution, and the loss of biodiversity. People who experience climate distress may experience anxiety, feel overwhelmed, helpless, and disoriented by the magnitude of these problems and the potential impacts they may have on the future of the planet and human society.

You may have heard the term eco-anxiety. Eco-anxiety and climate distress are sometimes used interchangeably, however the consensus is that anxiety is only one dimension of the complex emotional response that we may experience when faced with climate change.

It is important to remember that **not** everyone experiences climate distress or **eco-anxiety**... even if they are concerned about climate change.

Here are some examples of situations that may trigger climate distress or eco-anxiety in your students:

- Watching news reports about natural disasters such as wildfires, hurricanes, or floods and linking their cause to climate change.
- Seeing images of plastic pollution in the oceans or witnessing the destruction of natural habitats due to deforestation.

- 
- 
- Experiencing extreme weather events such as droughts, heatwaves, or storms that are becoming more frequent and recognizing that they may be due to climate change.
 - Hearing about the negative health effects of air pollution and water contamination caused by human activities.
 - Feeling like individual actions to mitigate environmental problems are not enough to make a significant impact on a global scale.
 - Feeling overwhelmed by the complexity and scale of the problem, and feeling helpless to effect change.

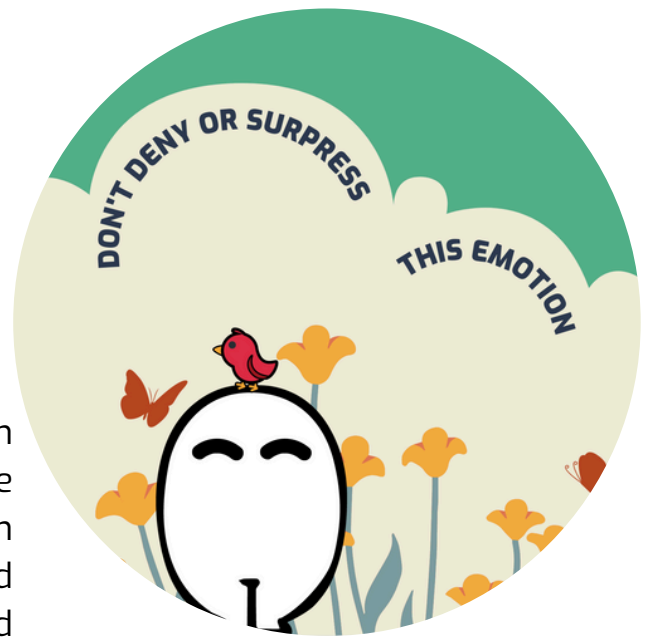
These are just a few examples, but there are many more situations that can trigger climate distress and eco-anxiety.

It is important to recognize that anxiety caused by climate change is a **real** and **valid** concern, and given the gravity of the climate change crisis, it is also **expected**.

At the same time, when climate related anxiety and distress is not addressed with effective coping strategies it has the potential to become a **mental health concern** and support from mental health professionals or environmental organizations can be helpful in managing these feelings.

OTHER CLIMATE EMOTIONS

Anxiety is not the only emotion we feel in response to climate change. In fact, there are **many** different climate emotions that can range from positive feelings like hope and inspiration to negative emotions like fear and despair.



Some examples of climate emotions:

Hope

Feeling optimistic about the future and the potential for positive change in response to climate change. For example, feeling inspired by the growth of renewable energy technology or the actions of environmental activists.

Anger

Feeling frustrated or outraged by the lack of action on climate change by governments, corporations, or individuals. For example, feeling angry about the continued use of fossil fuels despite the known risks to the environment.

Fear

Feeling anxious or afraid about the potential impacts of climate change on the environment and society. For example, feeling afraid of the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events.

Grief

Feeling sadness or mourning for the loss of species and ecosystems due to climate change. For example, feeling grief for the loss of coral reefs or the decline in polar bear populations.

Guilt

Feeling a sense of responsibility or guilt for contributing to climate change through personal actions or lifestyle choices. For example, feeling guilty for using a car instead of public transportation or for consuming meat products.

Despair

Feeling overwhelmed or hopeless about the scale of the problem and the lack of action to address climate change. For example, feeling despair about the slow progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

These are just a few examples of the range of emotions that people may experience in response to climate change.

It is important to recognize that these emotions are valid and understandable given the magnitude of the issue.

Sometimes, students may feel that their day-to-day functioning is compromised because of the **intensity** and **pervasiveness** of these emotions. Educators can help their students by being

active
&
empathic
listeners



and, when appropriate, connecting them with mental health professionals or environmental organizations can be helpful in managing these feelings.



HOW TO BE AN ACTIVE & EMPATHIC LISTENER

Active-empathic listening happens when we give students our full attention, we respond with warmth and compassion and we make them feel safe.

‘listening’ is a process that can take place even in the absence of spoken language

It is a **multi-sensorial activity**, involving empathy, memory, language processing, perception, and social skills.



‘Active-empathic listening involves listening in three stages:

SENSING

PROCESSING

RESPONDING

WHY ARE POSITIVE EMOTIONS IMPORTANT?

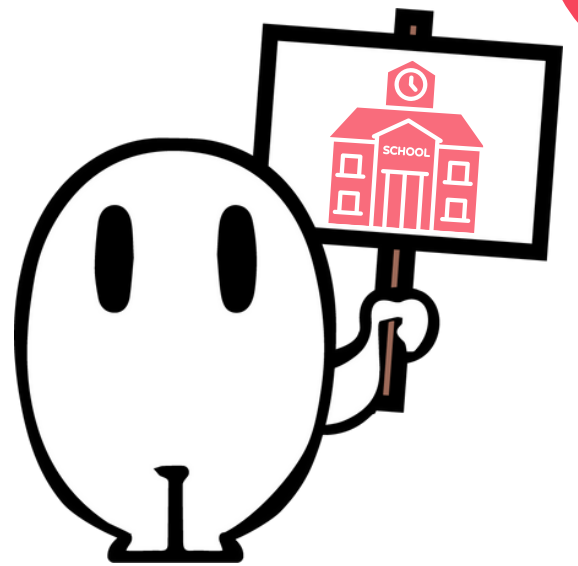


Even when we feel overwhelmed by negative climate emotions such as anxiety, frustration or powerlessness, we still have the potential to experience positive feelings about the climate change crisis. Nurturing our capacity to experience positive climate emotions, such as hope and inspiration, is fundamental because positive emotions can motivate us to take climate action.

When we feel positive about the potential for change, we are more likely to engage in meaningful and sustainable actions that can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Positive climate emotions can also help to counteract negative emotions such as fear, despair, or guilt. These emotions can be overwhelming and lead to a sense of helplessness, making it difficult for people to take action. Additionally, positive climate emotions can help to build social connections and foster a sense of community around climate action, and this is key because when we come together to work towards a common goal, we can create a sense of belonging and purpose that can help us sustain motivation and engagement over time.

ADDRESSING CLIMATE DISTRESS AND OTHER CLIMATE EMOTIONS IN CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION



Start your own journey of self-transformation

To play influential roles in the lives of young people, we must first achieve resiliency **within our own selves** and **become the change** we want to see in our students.

A starting point is to gain clarity about the **values, attitudes and beliefs** you hold about climate change and the **barriers you face** in engaging with meaningful and sustainable climate action.

The next page consists of some suggestions on how you can get started in your own journey of **self-transformation** to better equip yourself for the achievement of your educational goals.

- Practice self-awareness through mindfulness or meditation. Ask yourself and be accepting of how you truly feel about climate change and what what may be limiting you to stay engaged with this issue
- Maintain or rekindle your connection with nature
- Make gratitude a staple of your daily routine
- Do something that brings you joy or makes you feel good at least once a day
- Learn to put yourself first...burning out won't help anyone
- Sit with your emotions and learn to live with them and put them to good use



- Be mindful of how your attitudes and beliefs about climate change may influence your actions in your private life and professionally
- Surround yourself with supportive and compassionate people who will truly listen to you, including like-minded colleagues
- Create opportunity for dialogue and conversation about what matters the most to you and keep an open mind to valuing different points of view

- Let go of the drive to want to 'do it all' and trust that others will be taking care of 'it'
- Learn to be patient and accept that you might not live to see the outcome of your work
- Practice future foresight to keep you motivated and grounded by envisioning a future you thrive for and being inspired by it

Ways to Improve Your Self-Efficacy

1. Set achievable goals: Start with small, achievable goals and gradually work your way up to bigger goals. This will help build confidence and a sense of accomplishment.
2. Focus on strengths: Identify your strengths and build on them. This will help you feel more confident and competent.
3. Practice positive self-talk: Use positive affirmations and self-talk to reinforce your belief in your abilities. This can help you overcome self-doubt and negative self-talk.
4. Seek feedback: Seek feedback from others, such as friends, mentors, or peers. This can help you identify areas where you are doing well and areas where you can improve.
5. Learn new skills: Continuously learning and developing new skills can help you feel more confident and capable.
6. Take risks: Step outside your comfort zone and take on new challenges. This can help you overcome fears and build confidence in your abilities.
7. Visualize success: Visualize yourself achieving your goals and succeeding in tasks. This can help build confidence and motivation.
8. Celebrate successes: Celebrate your successes, no matter how small they may be. This can help reinforce your belief in your abilities and build momentum for future success.
9. Surround yourself with positive influences: Surround yourself with supportive people who believe in you and encourage you to pursue your goals.
10. Keep a journal: Keep a journal to track your progress, celebrate successes, and reflect on areas where you can improve. This can help you stay motivated and focused on your goals.

Understand the Difference Between...

...is action that
maintains the
status quo

TOKENISTIC ACTION

VS.

MEANINGFUL ACTION

*...is action that
changes your
relationship with the
world around you*

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS CLIMATE EMOTIONS IN EDUCATION?



Addressing climate emotions in education is important because it can help students...develop emotional intelligence, build resilience, foster a sense of agency and empowerment, and build empathy and understanding for those affected by climate change.

By equipping students with the socio-emotional skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities associated with climate change, we can help to create a generation of climate leaders who are prepared to take meaningful action to address this critical issue.

Students who understand the emotional impacts of climate change and develop coping skills to manage these emotions, are more likely to feel a sense of agency and empowerment in their ability to take action to address climate change, which in turn improves their mental health and wellbeing.

Furthermore, addressing climate emotions in education can help to build empathy and understanding for those who are most affected by climate change. This is important because it fosters a sense of global citizenship and motivates students to think about climate change through a community lens and to take action to address climate change both locally and globally.

HOW TO

Address Climate Distress Other Psychological Dimensions in Climate Change Education

- » Educate students about the psychology of climate change (e.g., risk perception; how the brain works under threat; social norms etc.)
- » Combine research and future foresight to discuss scenarios of possible futures
- » Design cross-disciplinary projects with your colleagues
- » Teach climate change through the arts (e.g., music, poetry, drama, visual arts, film)
- » Teach climate change in the humanities (e.g., philosophy, literature)
- » Embed climate change education in career guidance (e.g., Green Guidance)

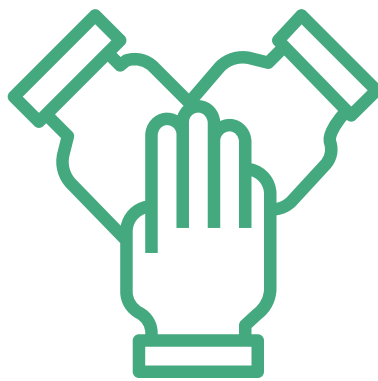


HOW TO ADDRESS CLIMATE DISTRESS IN THE CLASSROOM?

- Create a safe and supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing their feelings and concerns about climate change and related issues.
- Incorporate positive stories and examples of climate action and solutions to inspire hope and action.
- Provide accurate and reliable information about climate change and its impacts to help students understand the scope and scale of the issue.
- Offer opportunities for students to take action and make a difference, such as participating in climate activism or community service projects.
- Encourage open and respectful dialogue about different perspectives and opinions on climate change and related issues.
- Provide access to mental health resources and support, such as counselling services, mindfulness exercises, or relaxation techniques.
- Create opportunities for students to connect with nature and the outdoors to foster a sense of connection and belonging.
- Foster a sense of agency and empowerment by helping students develop the skills and knowledge they need to take action on climate change.
- Encourage positive self-talk and resilience-building strategies to help students cope with feelings of anxiety and stress related to climate change.
- Regularly check in with students and provide opportunities for them to share their thoughts, concerns, and ideas related to climate change and related issues.

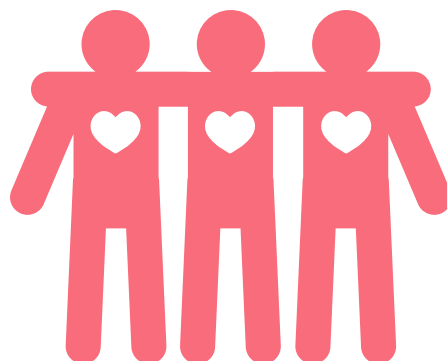
Other ways to address the psychological dimensions of climate change:

Involve students in program and course **development**



Have one or more students be part of your **community of practice**

Create opportunities for students to advocate for changes at the **school or institutional level**



RESOURCES



- 19 | Tip Sheets
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TIP SHEET

Creating a Community of Practice (CP) at your school or institution

1. Identify the topic or interest that will be the focus of your CP (e.g., cross-disciplinary climate change education).
2. Recruit interested teachers or staff members to participate in the CP.
3. Set a schedule for regular meetings.
4. Determine the goals and objectives of your CP.
5. Establish guidelines and expectations for participation and collaboration.
6. Identify resources that could be useful for members of the CP and to the achievements of your goals.
7. Encourage members to share their expertise, experiences, and challenges.
8. Foster a culture of inclusion, respect, inquiry, reflection, and learning.
9. Develop a system for researching and sharing knowledge and best practices.
10. Evaluate the effectiveness of your CP and make adjustments as needed.

TIP SHEET

Addressing Students' Climate Emotions

- » Know how to recognize it within yourself and others
- » Pay attention to students' reactions (e.g., body language) when teaching climate change
- » Remember that some students may experience this emotion but others may not...and that's ok
- » Create a safe and open space for students to share with you and other students how they feel
- » Offer solution-oriented advice
- » Help students find the kind of climate action that suits them and that they can sustain
- » Remind your students to start with small actions and help them gradually build on them
- » Aim to support meaningful and sustainable climate action (i.e., beware of 'tokenistic' behaviours)
- » Equip yourself with resources to share

Inspirational Initiatives & Projects



An Existential Toolkit for Climate Educators

<https://www.existentialtoolkit.com/>

Good Grief Network

<https://www.goodgriefnetwork.org/>



Gen Dread | <https://gendread.substack.com/>



All We can Save

<https://www.allwecansave.earth/>

Drawdown Project | <https://drawdown.org/>



Project InsideOut

<https://projectinsideout.net/>



Mochi4ThePlanet -

<https://mochi4theplanet.com/>

BBC Climate Emotions

<https://www.bbc.com/future/columns/climate-emotions>



Youth Climate Corps

<https://www.youthclimatecorps.com/>

Yale Climate Connection

<https://yaleclimateconnections.org/topic/education/>



Resources for Lessons & Activities



#ESDfor2030 Toolbox -
<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/toolbox>



Ten Strands – Climate Change and
Environmental Justice Program -
<https://tenstrands.org/work/climate-change-and-environmental-justice-program/>



Climate Mental Health Network
K-12 Education
<https://www.climatementalhealth.net/education>



Learning for a Sustainable Future
<https://climatelearning.ca/>



NPR: A Kid's Guide to Climate Change
<https://www.npr.org/2023/01/17/1144849154/climate-change-kids-guide>



Re-Imaginary: Cultivating Cultures of
Sustainability
<https://www.reimaginary.com/methods/postcards-from-the-future>



InTeGrate Teaching Materials
https://serc.carleton.edu/integrate/teaching_materials/index.html



Books

- » Communicating Climate Change: A Guide for Educators. Cornell University Press. Armstrong, A. K., Krasny, M. E., & Schuldt, J. P. (2018).
- » Teaching Climate Change in the Humanities. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. Stephen Siperstein, Shane Hall, Stephanie LeMenager. (2017).
- » Facing the Climate Emergency: How to Transform Yourself with Climate Truth. Margaret Klein Salamon, Molly Gage. (2020).
- » Teaching When the World Is on Fire: Authentic Classroom Advice, from Climate Justice to Black Lives Matter. The New Press. Lisa Delpit (2021)
- » Teaching Climate Change for Grades 6–12 Empowering Science Teachers to Take on the Climate Crisis Through NGSS. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group .Kelley Le. (2021)
- » The Climate Change Playbook: 22 Systems Thinking Games for More Effective Communication about Climate Change. Chelsea Green Publishing. by Dennis Meadows, Linda Booth Sweeney Ed.D. , Gillian Martin Mehers. (2016).
- » All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis. Penguin Random House. by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson (Editor), Katharine K. Wilkinson (Editor). (2020)

Books (cont.)

- A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety: How to Keep Your Cool on a Warming Planet. California University Press. by Sarah Jaquette Ray. (2020).
- Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think Is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis. Greysotne Books. Elin Kelsey (2020).
- Active Hope (revised): How to Face the Mess We're in with Unexpected Resilience and Creative Power. New World Library. by Joanna Macy, Chris Johnstone. (2022).

Braiding Sweetgrass

- INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS. MILKWEED EDITIONS. Robin Wall Kimmerer. (2015)
- Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants. Zest Books. by Robin Wall Kimmerer, Monique Gray Smith, Nicole Neidhardt (2022)

Podcasts

- Dragons of Inaction <https://www.futureecologies.net/dragons>
- Climate Change and Happiness <https://climatechangeandhappiness.com/>

