

Responding to Climate Anxiety

Are you feeling overwhelmed or anxious about the climate crisis? This likely means that you care and are paying attention. Climate anxiety is a fear of the current environmental disasters and their consequences. With the impacts of global heating, ecosystem collapse, and the extinction of animal and plant species, many people struggle with grief and despair for the future of our planet. Climate anxiety is sometimes called ecological grief or eco-anxiety, which disproportionately affect people that are younger, Indigenous, and have strong connections with the nature. Experts say that in the face of environmental destruction it is natural to feel numbed and disconnected.

The good news? There is a path forward.

What You Are Feeling is Valid

Feeling angry? Helpless? A sense of despair? Beneath these feelings is often something you care about. It is important to allow yourself to feel your grief. By making room for this, and not judging it, you can recognize what matters to you. If you are disconnected from your emotions, you may struggle to adapt and respond. To move forward you first need to feel the pain.

Leslie Davenport's five tools to face climate grief (adapted from Bryant, 2019):

1. **Trust in the grief process** – Grief is a natural process but different for each person. There is no specific way for you to feel. Let yourself feel the hard parts in an authentic way.
2. **Kind curiosity about our feelings** – Be kind with yourself. Explore what's really happening. Ask the questions "How am I connected to the climate crisis?" and "How am I connected to climate solutions?"
3. **Somatic awareness** – Notice your body and where you hold tension. Movement and exercise can help.
4. **Knowing the story** – Try and shift the narrative from "There's no hope" to "I can make a difference." The stories you tell have a real impact on how you feel and act.
5. **Creative expression** – Humans are inherently creative. Tap into your creativity through music, writing, dance, science, art or other ways. Davenport suggests striving to shift from "What have we done?" to "What can we do?"



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Turn off the News Feed

Social media and news feeds are often filled daily with catastrophes and other doom and gloom stories. Too much of this can overwhelm. If you notice yourself being triggered by news stories and see changes in how you study or work at your job, you might need to focus more on self-care and less on the terrible things happening in the world. Reduce your screen time and spend more time outdoors and talking with family and friends.

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Nature is Medicine

Get outside! Spending time in nature reduces stress, decreases risk of various diseases, helps us with anxiety and depression, and improves student success in their studies. Canada's national nature prescription initiative, PaRx, promotes spending at least 2 hours in nature each week.

Further, spending time outdoors can foster a deeper connection with the natural world.

Harness Your Feelings into Action

Remember, your feelings of climate anxiety and despair are often connected to being empathetic: you care about the Earth. If you deny your feelings of sadness, helplessness, guilt or frustration these can lead to numbness or instability.

Here's what you can do: acknowledge that confusion and uncertainty are part of this journey and use climate anxiety to spur you into action. This might include changing your lifestyle (e.g., diet, transportation, buying habits), engaging in self-care (e.g., exercise, mindfulness, nature), and finding people that have similar climate concerns.

Collective Action

There are many groups that engage in important work related to the climate emergency, including the Climate+ Challenge team here at KPU. By joining a group you can engage in work that holds meaning for you and brings forward hope and empowerment. This can take many forms: a group that advocates education about the climate crisis, recycling and waste reduction initiatives, intentional outdoor gatherings (e.g., ecosystem restoration or nature groups) or artists including messages in their work.

Being part of a team can give you purpose.

Talk with Someone

Grief is a communal process. Do you have a friend, family member, or classmate that you feel comfortable speaking with? Climate therapists speak to the importance of talking about what you are feeling.

Here are some support networks you can access:

Good grief network: <https://www.goodgriefnetwork.org>

Work that Reconnects: <https://workthatreconnects.org>

KPU Counselling: <https://www.kpu.ca/counselling>



Photo by Li-An Lim on Unsplash

References.

Bryant, A. (2019, August 25). What is Climate Grief? Climate & Mind.

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<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667278221000444> <https://www.parkprescriptions.ca/en/whynature>

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