

COPING WITH CLIMATE ANXIETY

What is climate anxiety?

Also known as eco-anxiety or climate distress, The American Psychological Association describes climate anxiety as a chronic fear of environmental doom.

It is the emotional and psychological distress individuals may experience in response to the current and anticipated environmental challenges and crises facing the planet. It is a specific form of anxiety related to concerns about climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, deforestation, and other ecological issues.

Societal impact

Climate change has many people on an emotional rollercoaster.

In fact, 64% of Americans are worried about it and 75% of youth worldwide are worried about their future. Whether you've experienced the effects directly by extreme heat, hurricanes, fires, or drought or indirectly with knowledge and awareness of its impacts, connecting with your feelings may be a place to start the process of getting to more even ground.

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are concerned about climate change

75% of youth worldwide

are worried about their future

Signs and symptoms

People with climate anxiety often feel overwhelmed, helpless, or deeply concerned about the state of the environment and the potential consequences for future generations.

Climate anxiety can present in many ways, including feelings of sadness, fear, guilt, anger, and a sense of hopelessness. It may also lead to physical symptoms such as headaches, sleep disturbances, and other stress-related ailments.

Eco-anxiety can be triggered by exposure to news and information about environmental issues, individual experiences with environmental disasters, or a general sense of powerlessness in the face of large-scale ecological problems.

“Mental health is not about feeling good or calm or relaxed . . .

It's about having feelings that fit the circumstances you're in and then managing those feelings well, even if those feelings are negative or unpleasant.”

– Lisa Damour

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Check in with yourself

If you have feelings of anxiety, grief, dread, or other types of stress reactions, where would you put yourself in the eco-anxiety range of feelings below?



Mild

Feelings of upset are transient, focus on optimism, and have hope in others



Significant

Minimal defense against anxiety, harder to mitigate distress, guilt, and shame, little faith in others to act, significant impact on relationships



Medium

Feelings of upset occur more frequently, doubt in “others” capacity to act



Severe

Intrusive thoughts, sleep affected, anticipates of human extinction, no belief in others’ ability to care, loss of personal security, may be unable to work, thoughts of dying or suicide

What you can do

For most people, feeling stressed about climate change is an appropriate response to an existential threat. This kind of response can be productive, so trying to eliminate these feelings is not the goal.

So, how can we cope and what should we do to care for and restore ourselves? In brief, core components to address climate anxiety and grief are:

1. Acknowledge and validate your feelings
2. Use emotional coping tools (e.g., reframing; cultivating meaning, hope, and optimism; and mindfulness)
3. Maintain social connection
4. Connect with nature
5. Engage in climate action and/or climate justice awareness
6. Practice self-care

Resources

If you find it difficult cultivating healthy processing of these emotions, reducing stress, and effectively handling life’s disruptions, call the EAP. Counselors are available 24/7 and can help you with these areas and offer approaches to foster resilience. See below for additional resources.

Books

The Story of More: How We Got to Climate Change and Where to Go from Here. Jahren, H. (2020)

All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis. Johnson, A. and Wilkinson, K. (2021).

The Climate Book. Thunberg, G. (2023).

Videos

What to Do When Climate Change Feels Unstoppable
ted.com/talks/clover_hogan_what_to_do_when_climate_change_feels_unstoppable

3 Questions to Build Resilience and Change the World

ted.com/talks/sister_true_dedication_3_questions_to_build_resilience_and_change_the_world#t-981323

Support Websites

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988lifeline.org

Climate Awakening: climateawakening.org

Climate Mental Health Network: climatementalhealth.net/resources

Eco Anxious Stories: ecoanxious.ca

Gen Dread: gendread.substack.com

Good Grief Network: goodgriefnetwork.org

Work That Connects: workthatreconnects.org

*Listed resources are suggestions only; FOH does not endorse any content or material provided.