

ROADMAP TO CLIMATE CHANGE MENTAL HEALTH

As Earth Day approaches, climate change and the countless ways it impacts our life is top of mind. While we are just starting to realize the effects of climate change on mental health, this roadmap will help readers understand the steps they can take to care for their own mental wellbeing due to the climate crisis. Resources are also provided for further support.



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HOW CLIMATE CHANGE AND MENTAL HEALTH OVERLAP

Climate change and mental health go hand in hand. A changing, unstable world can create a great deal of stress, anxiety, dread, frustration, and other difficult emotional experiences. On top of this chronic sense of danger, mental health can be severely impacted after experiencing a climate change-related natural disaster such as a super-storm, blistering heat wave, severe drought, or flooding.

While we don't often talk about these topics together, understanding the impact of climate change on mental health can go a long way in preserving wellbeing in the midst of crisis.

WHAT ON EARTH IS ECO-ANXIETY?

While there are countless ways mental health is impacted by the climate crisis, here are some of the most significant ones. Having language to describe experience is important, so we've described some terms that can help give words to your experience. Although these are not diagnostic terms, they can help conceptualize some of the mental health challenges associated with climate change and related weather disasters. If you are not currently experiencing these, knowing about them is helpful so that if you ever do experience these, you can put words to it and know how to care for yourself.

More info: [Well Being Trust](#), [NAMI](#)



Term	Description	Common Warning Signs
Eco-Anxiety / Climate Anxiety	Understanding the state of our climate emergency can leave you feeling worried and uneasy in a way that is similar to anxiety-related conditions.	You might experience trouble concentrating or focusing on anything besides your current worry, thoughts that won't leave you alone, restlessness, physical tension, increased heart rate, trembling, sweating, or feeling weak or tired.
Eco-Numbness	The enormity of climate change can be completely overwhelming, leading to a shutting-off of feelings.	If you experience eco-numbness, you might feel disconnected from your emotions, shut down, or distant. You might also feel emotionally heavy, flat, or empty.
Climate Depression	Awareness of the urgency of the climate crisis mixed with feelings of hopelessness about it can leave you feeling down.	Mirroring clinical depression, you might experience low mood, loss of interest in activities, low motivation, frequent crying, impaired concentration, guilt, and sleep and appetite disturbances.
Climate Trauma and PTSD	Experiencing a weather-related disaster can be traumatic, and it can be difficult to process the experience of being in serious danger, loss of personal belongings, displacement, and other related forms of loss.	You could experience symptoms similar to those of PTSD that include recurring memories of or nightmares about the event, heightened reactions, anxious or depressed feelings, avoidance of things that remind you of the event, and emotional detachment.
Climate Grief	Concern about the phenomenon of climate change can lead to a sense of loss, especially for an imagined future. Natural disasters can also take the lives of loved ones, leading to large-scale loss and grief.	Climate grief can take various forms, and you might experience sadness or low mood, frequent crying, physical pain, difficulty sleeping, irritability, emotional detachment, and/or inability to think about anything besides the loss.

These experiences can range from daily minor stressors to clinical conditions.

Beyond these terms, common feelings related to climate change are those of hopelessness, uncertainty, dread, fear, guilt, nervousness, danger, and frustration. Take note — which of these do you feel when you think about climate change, or is there another feeling you have? Keep that in mind as you continue reading for tips on creating mental wellbeing in the face of climate change.

More info: [APA](#), [Child Mind](#)



CLIMATE JUSTICE & MENTAL HEALTH

While everyone is impacted by climate change, there are certain communities that are disproportionately affected. We've outlined some here.

COMMUNITIES OF COLOR:

Systemic racism impacts all areas of life, and climate change is no different. **Environmental racism** is a form of systemic racism in which communities of color are harmed by environmental policy-making. For example, certain practices often place communities of color in close proximity to toxic waste, leading to health hazards. The 2014-2019 Flint, Michigan water crisis is one such example of environmental racism. Additionally, when communities of color are not properly supported by natural disaster relief efforts, they are faced with more devastating physical and emotional outcomes from these disasters.

INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN POVERTY:

With fewer resources to escape or recover from climate disasters, those who live in poverty are often severely impacted and left out of relief efforts. Additionally, practices that harm the environment often take place within low-income communities, thus harming the individuals who live there. In a nutshell, the climate crisis is widening the gap between those who are highly resourced and therefore better able to protect themselves from fallout and those who are not.

THE DISABLED COMMUNITY:

Individuals with disabilities are among the most adversely impacted by climate change-related emergencies because, for example, crises can be difficult or impossible to escape when rescue services are only set up to accommodate those who are able-bodied. Another example: banning plastic straws, although intended to thwart environmental damage, does not consider those who cannot use cups. The term **eco-ableism** is used to describe this kind of discrimination.



CLIMATE JUSTICE & MENTAL HEALTH

THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY:

Higher unemployment, inadequate living conditions, and related social stigma can leave those in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual community more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Natural disasters, rising temperatures, and polluted air all have a greater impact on those who experience housing instability due to LGBTQIA+ discrimination.

WOMEN:

Globally, climate change impacts women more than men. International research shows that the equality gap between men and women is widened by climate change, as workloads become bigger for women, education services become more limited, occupational hazards increase, and higher mortality occurs among women due to climate change. Women represent the majority of the people living in poverty globally, which limits their access to resources needed during a climate crisis.

YOUNG PEOPLE:

Research shows that mental health concerns about climate change among youth have significantly risen and that climate anxiety is a major concern for many young people today. This might be because younger folks have received more messages about climate change than older generations and/or because they are the ones who will live the longest with the consequences of climate change.



WEATHERING THE STORM: HOW TO COPE WITH ECO-ANXIETY

To develop mental wellbeing during climate change, take note of which roadblocks are in your way and devise a plan to sidestep them. Below are some examples, but coming up with your own is even better.

Roadblock

A sense of powerlessness

How to sidestep it

Thinking about climate change can leave you feeling like you have no control. Instead of sinking into that, think of three things related to climate change that you can control, no matter how small. Then, focus on those three things.

Being overwhelmed

Check in with yourself on what aspect of climate change feels overwhelming. Acknowledge that that is normal; it is a daunting topic. Then, think of one aspect of climate change that gives you hope and focus on that one thing.

Feeling alone in your concern for the Earth

Reach out. Find friends, organizations, or communities that are passionate about addressing climate change in ways that are meaningful to you. Collective action can be healing. Take comfort in knowing that you are not alone in your fears.



WEATHERING THE STORM: HOW TO COPE WITH ECO-ANXIETY

Roadblock

Not having enough information

Distress about climate change news

Feeling paralyzed, outrage, or despair about the unjust aspects of climate change

How to sidestep it

Create a plan to learn more about climate change. Search online for two organizations that are fighting climate change, and then set a timer for reading through their resources. While it's important to learn, you don't want to burn out.

Take a break from eco-news. You can both stay informed and take care of yourself. It's important to take breaks to decrease feeling overwhelmed. Then make a clear plan for how much and when you will consume news.

Strong reactions are common when acknowledging the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized and minoritized communities. Start by writing down the feelings you are experiencing. Practice sending yourself compassion for these feelings. And then consider reaching out to someone in your community for support, since connecting to others about this can be cathartic.

If your concern about climate change is impacting your daily life, you might consider seeking support from a friend or clinician. Friends can provide support, and psychotherapists can assist in working through climate-related stress. If you are unsure of how to begin asking for support, take a look at The Mental Health Coalition's [Roadmap to Friends Supporting Friends](#).

If you are experiencing emotional distress due to a natural or human-caused disaster, the Disaster Distress Helpline provides 24/7, 365-day-a-year crisis counseling and support. Call or text 1-800-985-5990.



TWO EVENTS THAT CAN TRIGGER CLIMATE CHANGE MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS INCLUDE **NATURAL DISASTERS** AND **EARTH DAY.**

Knowing that these specific times can be difficult is important so you can plan ahead to foster mental wellbeing. Here are some ideas for what you can do when the time comes.

After a **natural disaster**, whether you experienced one yourself or are upset by learning about one, acknowledge that it is ok if your mental health is impacted. Seek out the support you need as soon as you can — the earlier the better.

Leading up to and on **Earth Day**, plan ahead for self-care. Earth Day can be a lovely celebration of our planet, but it can also stir up a great deal of climate change stress. Create intention around how you want to spend the day in a way that best supports your mental wellbeing.



RESOURCES TO CONTINUE LEARNING AND FIND SUPPORT

BEAM: A national training, movement building, and grant making institution dedicated to the healing, wellness, and liberation of Black communities and others who have been marginalized.

Climate Justice Alliance: A collective of community-based organizations focused on sustainability, race and ethnicity, and supporting underrepresented communities while addressing climate change.

Disaster Distress Helpline: A national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster. Counselors are available to support before, during, and after disasters.

Global Citizen: An international education and advocacy organization working to catalyze the movement to end extreme poverty with a focus on the way climate change impacts people's health, ability to access nutritious food, and livelihoods.

Child Mind Institute: An organization providing education, resources, and evidence-based care for children and their families. CMI has resources for discussing climate change with children and supporting them through their climate worries.

Climate Mental Health Network: An organization that harnesses the power of media and technology to address the mental health consequences of climate change.

ecoAmerica: An organization committed to leadership, policy, and advocacy around climate change solutions that provides resources to better understand climate change, solutions, and the effects it has on health and wellbeing.

United Nations: An intergovernmental organization that has a number of resources about global climate change and its impacts on different regions and communities.



This is a daunting topic, but remember the world is not on your shoulders — addressing the climate crisis is up to all of us. Focusing on your mental health in the context of climate change is essential.

YOU CAN'T TAKE CARE OF THE PLANET WITHOUT FIRST TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF.

