

Six tips for coping with climate anxiety

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Climate change has led to more frequent and extreme weather events, including floods, storms, droughts and wildfires. As we continue to live through and witness these events, many people are more likely to be

exposed to traumatic incidents, such as destruction, loss of communities, serious injury or death. As a result, many people may start to experience higher levels of distress and anxiety.

Here are some tips you can use to cope with climate anxiety.

What is climate anxiety?

Climate anxiety, also referred to as eco-anxiety, refers to distressing feelings related to the impacts of [climate change](#). This type of distress is often rooted in feelings of uncertainty, lack of control and concerns over well-being or safety. Unlike other stressors, which are often personal, climate change can be more universal, chronic and often intangible. Because of this, climate anxiety has the potential to impact a large number of people. In fact, according to a [survey by the American Psychological Association](#), more than two-thirds of Americans experience some form of climate anxiety.

How can climate change impact mental health?

Climate change can elicit a variety of emotions including grief, anger, shame, loss, guilt, hopelessness and fatigue, among others. These feelings can stem from a number of factors including direct impacts (e.g., loss of housing or livelihood), vicarious experiences around the globe or distress related to future or existential threats.

Learning how to cope with climate anxiety can help us:

- Sit with our feelings and the issues facing us
- Avoid becoming overwhelmed by our feelings
- Avoid burnout or fatigue
- Continue to function and find joy in our everyday lives

- Stay engaged in climate action
- Instill hope for the future

Here are some tactics that can help you develop healthy coping skills around climate change.

1. Focus on what you can control

Climate change is a complex issue. That's why it's important to remind yourself that climate change cannot be solved by any one person, organization or government on their own. While this may feel disheartening, it's also a good reminder to focus on what is within your control rather than what isn't.

Here are some examples of things that are within your control:

- Participating in climate change initiatives
- Writing or calling legislators to encourage them to take action
- Building more sustainable habits around [energy use](#), composting, recycling, consumerism, etc.
- Selecting food options that have less environmental impact (e.g. reducing the amount of meat you consume each week, growing your own vegetables, etc.)
- Changing the way you commute to campus
- Engaging family and friends in meaningful conversations about climate change
- Donating to organizations or causes you care about

No matter how you choose to take action, it's also important to remember that we each play a small part in a larger puzzle. For instance, if you are concerned about water conservation, it may be helpful to remember that 80% of the Colorado River Basin is used for agriculture. Instead of being hard on yourself over the occasional long shower or

brushing your teeth with the faucet on, try to view your actions as a way for you to practice the habits that we will all need to develop in order to create a more sustainable future.

2. Avoid overload

Working on too many climate projects or advocating for too many causes can be unwieldy and is more likely to lead to burn out. Instead, try to narrow your focus, energy and efforts towards projects and issues that mean the most to you. For instance, you may choose to rally around greenhouse gasses, sustainable agricultural practices or [water conservation](#). Focusing on a select number of issues can help you reduce your overall stress, find balance and maintain gusto.

When choosing what issues you want to engage in, it's also important to let go of the urge to say yes to everyone and everything. Instead, prioritize activities that you feel are most meaningful for you. This could mean that you choose to participate in a rally or march, but decline to be one of the main organizers for the event. Similarly you may choose to call specific representatives to encourage them to take action on certain bills rather than trying to reach every possible person.

3. Practice compassion

Whenever we approach painful situations or emotions, it's important to do so with kindness and compassion for ourselves and others. For instance, it may not always be feasible to recycle every item that you can. Beating yourself up about it or worrying that you could be doing more can actually fuel more emotional turmoil, which can be particularly unhelpful as you try to move forward.

Instead, remember to take care of your own [mental health](#) and give

yourself space to sit with painful emotions in a non-judgmental way. Acknowledging and naming the specific emotions you're currently experiencing can help. For instance, it can be helpful to say things like "I am feeling disappointed" or "I am feeling hurt." This can help you clarify what you're feeling, especially if you're experiencing a variety of emotions all at once.

It can also be helpful to practice validating your feelings with affirmations like:

- "It's okay to feel stressed about climate change."
- "I can make a difference, and big changes are going to take time."
- "I can take a break. This issue is important to me, and so is my mental well-being."

4. Take a break from climate news

Following climate-driven accounts or scrolling through social and news posts about climate change all the time can impact your mental health. If you start to feel overwhelmed by [news updates](#) or events happening around the world, it may be a good time to take a break. If you feel pressured to stay informed, remind yourself that all of those news stories, updates and information will be there when you return. It's also important to keep in mind that even if you step away for a few hours, days or weeks, it won't change what happens, and you don't need to be plugged in 24/7.

Taking a break from climate change can look like:

- Engaging in other activities or hobbies you love
- Catching up with friends or family (without climate change as a topic of conversation)

- Turning off your news feed or muting accounts for a while
- Spending time in nature by walking, hiking, bird watching or other outdoor activities
- Taking a day off to practice self-care
- Enjoying time with a supportive community

5. Remember that you're not alone

It's easy to get caught up in all of the "bad" news surrounding climate change, but it's also important to remember that there are a lot of people working to solve this issue and positive change can and will happen.

Finding a community of people who understand how you feel and what you're passionate about can help you feel more supported, connected and encouraged to continue to take action. Connecting with others can also help you cultivate a sense of hope for the future. Having hope and seeing that others believe change can happen is necessary to carry on the work that needs to be done.

6. Talk to someone about how you're feeling

Climate anxiety is a very real experience, and it's not something you have to go through alone. If your feelings start to affect your life or ability to cope day-to-day, it can be helpful to talk to someone about it. Reaching out to a friend, family member or counselor can help you work through your feelings and practice coping skills.

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder

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