Climate Doom to Messy Hope: Climate Healing & Resilience

A Practical Handbook for Climate Educators and Community

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About the Resource

This handbook is grounded in a commitment to fostering deeper understandings and connections to how we can support magnifying climate change impacts on individual and community mental health and wellbeing.

The goal of this resource is to offer an accessible, easy-to-engage touchpoint for people looking to connect with climate wellbeing information, strategies and pathways to action in their own lives, networks or communities.

This resource is for everyone looking to create space to talk about climate change, as well as anyone interested in bringing climate justice, trauma-informed pedagogy or a resilience lens into their network or practice.

This handbook is not the beginning nor the end of what is out there on these important and ever-pressing issues. Many are urgently and thoughtfully working on these climate challenges. More resources can be located in the Toolkit and Resources sections.

Hopefully, this guide offers a gentle and helpful stepping stone to building and expanding agency, care and hope while we navigate and support each other through the many impacts and challenges of climate change.

Image text: Orca with a city on their back, swimming with babies amid large seaweed

Some Terminology

Climate Anxiety: a state of fear, stress or nervousness resulting from past, present or future climate drivers, processes and impacts.

Climate Grief: deep distress, sadness or sorrow as a result of climate change processes or impacts.

Climate or Eco-denial: unconsciously or actively blocking out, rejecting or repressing negative or difficult climate or environmental news. Or, actively working to spread climate mis or dis-information.

Climate or Eco-dissociation: a perception or feeling of not being part of or connected to nature and natural systems.

Climate Trauma: direct or indirect trauma(s) stemming from intense mental, emotional, physical or metaphysical experiences and/or consequences of climate change. Climate trauma can also intersect with other forms of preexisting trauma.

Eco-Anxiety: heightened or prolonged distress, worry or guilt related to environmental and ecological harm and degradation stemming from human action.

Eco-Grief: emotional sadness or despair for environmental and ecological degradation like rapid biodiversity loss, deforestation and the pollution of ecosystems and landscapes.

Eco-Rage: deep anger at systems or entities perceived as responsible for ecocide or climate crisis. Frustration or anger at not being able to stop harmful actions or practices.

Solastalgia: pain or distress caused by the loss of a place you feel deeply connected to. A sense of desolation people may feel, consciously or unconsciously, when their home or land is lost through processes of climate change like magnified fires, flooding or sea-level rise.

Image text: Painting of a baboon screaming out bubbles of colour, sitting on a hill looking over an old fossil fuel emissions stack.

Introduction

Background

Communities, cities and entire nations are increasingly recognizing and prioritizing the severity and scope of climate change impacts on people's mental and physical health and the critical need for nurturing collective climate care, wellbeing and resilience.

Climate change is causing social, economic, political and physical upheaval. It is magnifying heatwaves, wildfires, air pollution, sea-level rise, flooding, disease spread, drought, food/water insecurity and ecosystem degradation. This is causing increased experiences of anxiety, fear, distress, loss, grief, hopelessness, frustration, anger, PTSD, trauma, depression and suicidal ideation. Physical climate change impacts may also include:

- cuts
- broken bones
- heat stroke
- respiratory ailments
- viral illness
- sleep disorders
- cardiovascular issues
- neurological illnesses
- preterm birth
- kidney stress
- premature death
- increased sexual and gender violence
- domestic abuse

Experiencing climate change is intrinsically linked to our overall wellbeing.

However, due to historical and ongoing systems of oppression (i.e. Imperialism, colonialism, enslavement, white supremacy, capitalism, neoliberalism), the physical, mental and emotional impacts of climate change are not equally or equitably experienced depending on social determinants of health like race, gender, age, class, education, income or disability.

Unaddressed systemic inequalities across communities and globally can also lead to a significant increase in vulnerabilities to the consequences of climate change.

When exploring climate change impacts on mental health and wellbeing, it is important to acknowledge mental health is more than the absence of disease. Mental health includes sustainable, holistic, physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural and place-based wellbeing.

Communities that provide consistently equitable access to services, opportunities and infrastructure that promote individual and collective wellbeing and resilience increase our overall ability to navigate the pressures and challenges of climate change.

In light of the growing scope and scale of climate change impacts on mental, emotional and physical wellbeing, it is critical to advance clear and meaningful climate health and wellbeing literacy and practices through bottom-up, top-down, and horizontal messaging and policies that mobilize agency, hope and action.

Image text: Drawing of a happy doe in a meadow of flowers with houses in the background

Why We Need to Talk About Climate Change and Wellbeing

Building welcoming and supportive space to explore how climate change makes us feel is essential. This requires leaning into sharing and caring about vulnerability.

It is important that we take time to acknowledge and process how experiencing and learning about the facts and realities of climate change can be emotionally difficult, traumatic and overwhelming.

How we support ourselves and others in navigating climate change is part of a wider need to address global climate mental health and wellbeing impacts.

We need to actively prepare and support all people for the realities of navigating climate crisis information and associated emotions in the short and long term.

Due to their age, youth also face unique challenges of having to navigate aspects of "locked-in" climate challenges and impacts for years to come - a daunting prospect in the face of consistently insufficient climate action and policies from local to global levels.

Creating supportive and meaningful spaces for climate communication will be important to support youth in navigating the complex pressures and realities of climate change.

Making Space for Climate Conversations

Be clear and explicit that holding complex feelings stemming from climate change processes and impacts can be a normal and rational response to climate threats.

Non-positive climate feelings like anxiety or grief are not innately unhealthy and can be a valid response to a legitimate threat.

Convey that being open to talking about difficult climate emotions can help us collectively process heavy issues or content in supportive ways and feel less alone in navigating our emotions.

Stress the importance that though everyone experiences climate change impacts, not everyone experiences climate change impacts equally or equitably due to systems of colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, neoliberalism, patriarchy, ableism, gender, class, age, income, etc.

Be respectful and supportive of where people are in their climate learning journey.

Be curious. Ask questions about how people make connections between climate change and their lived experiences.

Build trust. Talking about the mental health and the wellbeing impacts of climate change requires trust-building, so as they say, "move at the speed of trust."

Image text: Abstract drawing of a bird with a city on their back standing on a branch with cream blossoms.

Why engage a climate wellbeing framework?

"It is important to meaningfully pair coping strategies, solution-based thinking and pathways to action as part of climate change communication."

As noted above, escalating and inequitable impacts of climate change are magnifying mental health and wellbeing challenges globally, particularly in youth.

The Lancet, American Psychological Association and other recent research have highlighted how youth are experiencing increased anxiety, grief, anger, hopelessness and helplessness due to preventable climate change.

Teaching and learning about the processes and impacts of climate change can raise awareness of magnifying climate threats and risks to fundamental human-built and natural systems.

This can simultaneously foster feelings of alarm, dread, anxiety, grief, helplessness, hopelessness, anger, disassociation, paralyzing fear and a host of other emotions in all ages. This is why it is important to meaningfully pair coping strategies, solution-based thinking and pathways to action as part of climate change communications.

It is also important to note that even though a network, organization, institution or classroom may not directly address climate change, people are regularly living through and bearing witness to mass climate change-induced trauma locally and globally. This means individuals are often holding forms of mental, emotional and physical climate trauma, anxiety, grief or distress whether we are addressing climate change in our spaces or not.

Proactively weaving more sustainable whole system thinking and hope-filled solution-based thinking into our planning and practices through climate justice, trauma-pedagogy and resilience lenses can offer powerful support and constructive pathways of action to meet growing climate and eco anxieties and expanding experiences of climate trauma.

Lastly, though not everyone may notice or care about issues of climate change, most people deeply care about their health, wellbeing, family, loved ones and their wider community. Identifying shared factors of care can be a powerful way to frame climate issues to bring people together for action.

Identifying and talking about causal relationships between climate change, systems, and public wellbeing can also help build awareness and personal investment in policies and needed systemic changes that mitigate risks associated with climate change processes and impacts.

Image text: Abstract painting of scarlet poppy buds in a row.

What types of lenses can help us navigate climate change impacts and wellbeing?

A climate justice lens

There is no singular theory or explicit set of principles that neatly clarifies or categorizes climate justice. Climate justice frameworks have evolved out of past and ongoing grassroots movements and activism fighting persistent and systemic impacts of environmental racism.

This activism has and continues to be driven by Indigenous, Black and People of Colour communities, equity-deserving communities, as well as disability and gender non-conforming activism.

Climate justice action and principles have evolved into a way of signifying, recognizing, accounting for and responding to complex moral, ethical, historical, ongoing and intersecting harms, inequities and oppressions.

Climate justice as a concept acknowledges how race, gender, class, age, ableism, wealth, power and other systemically induced vulnerabilities intersect with causes, processes, impacts and solutions associated with climate change.

Climate justice is also considered in the context of multiple intersecting crises of racial injustice, gender injustice, food injustice and more.

As we witnessed in the Covid pandemic, historical and ongoing legacies of colonialism, enslavement, white supremacy, capitalism, neoliberalism and growing wealth inequity systematically situate certain populations to be more susceptible to harm and risk.

Climate justice acknowledges the systemic and disproportional impacts of global climate change and that those most harmed and at risk have contributed least to global emissions and the processes behind human-caused climate change.

There is an urgent need to boldly support grassroots leadership and sustainable, decolonized systems. Justice and equity are not guaranteed as part of climate action if we do not address and rectify the root causes of systemic climate injustice.

Image text: Drawing of two made up creatures holding red heart shapes out to each other.

Climate justice through Indigenous pedagogies

Indigenous Peoples are responsible for protecting 22% of the planet's surface and 80% of biodiversity. It is also well documented that levels of biodiversity are often higher with greater Indigenous presence and where Indigenous languages are spoken.

When engaging a climate justice lens, it is paramount to uplift Indigenous frameworks of climate justice that stem from diverse Indigenous Knowledges and ontologies. Indigenous-led climate justice frameworks can offer invaluable pathways to land-based, interconnected approaches to climate change issues and solutions.

An example of this is linking water justice, land justice and rights of nature to understand climate justice, rather than engaging hierarchical and siloed human-centric approaches to rights and nature.

Meaningful climate action must take active steps to tangibly support and uplift Indigenous-led frameworks of climate justice and environmental leadership.

Among other actions, this includes:

- respecting Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty
- upholding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- honouring land rights and title through tangible Land Back actions
- uplifting Indigenous grassroots initiatives

ALT Text: A polar bear standing on a small ice hill against a bluish grey sky with flowers and leaves next to it, looking for the sea ice.

How might we understand Climate Justice through Distributive Justice, Procedural Justice, Restorative and Transformative Justice lenses?

Distributive Justice

The equitable distribution of burdens and benefits of climate change and climate action:

- **Address** disproportionate impacts of past and ongoing fossil fuel extraction and disproportionate consequences of climate change on vulnerable groups.
- **Mitigate** inequitable impacts of current and future climate actions to ensure just energy transition and access to resources for marginalized groups.
- **Assign** costs of climate mitigation, adaptation and damages to countries and groups that have contributed to and profited most from the expanding climate crisis.

Procedural Justice

Highlights the right to a fair process for stakeholders to take part equitably in the decision-making process:

- **Those** most impacted by climate change and climate action are given decision-making power, especially around issues that affect them directly. Decision-making processes should be representative of marginalized communities.
- **Procedural** justice is not just about giving communities a seat at the table. Communities need actual power over decision-making processes.
- **Foster** reciprocal relationships built on trust with Indigenous communities will take time given ongoing and violent histories of colonialism. We need to be prepared to take the time to build trust and be open to engaging in complex and, at times, uncomfortable conversations.

Restorative Justice

Aims to repair interpersonal harm and relations with individuals & groups.

- **Amplify** IBPOC leadership and community action.
- **Uplift** Indigenous knowledge systems and solutions.
- **Address** wealth and racial inequalities (e.g. reparations to IBPOC communities and nations impacted by colonialism).
- **Governments** pay fair share to those who've suffered, including costs of mitigation, adaptation, loss and damages.

Transformative Justice

Addresses underlying conditions, inequalities & systems of oppression.

- **Transfer** power and autonomy to local communities over corporations, respect self-determination for Indigenous Peoples & supporting community based climate solutions.
- **Prioritize** people and nature over profit.
- **Move** toward a circular, sustainable economy.
- **Actively** advance collective health and wellbeing.
- **Improve** inclusion & accessibility for disadvantaged groups, such as immigrants & people with physical and mental disabilities.

Framework from the UBC Climate Emergency Climate Justice Backgrounder. For more insight on this approach to climate justice, see the climate justice backgrounder in the 2021 UBC Climate Emergency Final Report and Recommendations

Strategies for integrating Climate Justice principles in our work and networks

Understand Your Community

- **Engage** in deep consultation with your community to identify the needs unique to your community network and systems.
- **Launch** community asset mapping to help identify the strengths and vulnerabilities of your community, group or organization and how they relate to issues of climate change.
- **Explore** how climate change processes and impacts intersect with race, gender, disability, age, class, income, education, geography etc.

Who is Helped, Who is Harmed?

- **Engage** in analysis that asks who is helped or harmed by a given action, policy or outcome.
- **Prioritize** actions that mitigate vulnerability for equity-deserving individuals and communities disproportionally harmed by climate change processes and impacts.
- **Create** meaningful space to talk about the disproportionate impacts of climate change with a focus on the systems and policies that uphold and perpetuate such harms.
    - For example. Imperialism, colonialism, enslavement, white supremacy, capitalism, neoliberalism, patriarchy, gender binary.

Are We Adapting to Climate Needs?

- **Develop** proactive, equitable and accessible resources and networks to support climate mental health and wellbeing.
- **Keep** cultural nuances in mind, and how culture may influence how climate justice is navigated and made tangible.
- **Advocate** for funding and capacity building in your workplace and network to work on climate action using a climate justice lens.

Do Policies and Plans Integrate Climate Justice Language and Principles?

- **Create** pathways and opportunities to integrate climate justice principles and frameworks into existing documents, plans and policies.
- **Ensure** diverse input, feedback, and voice to integrate climate justice into documents or frameworks.
- **Build** capacity and supportive infrastructure for equity-deserving members working on climate justice integration.
- **Be respectful** and mindful of burnout. Pay individuals from equity-deserving groups justly and adequately for input and consultation time.
- **Advocate** for fossil fuel divestment in your network's policies due to fossil fuel's primary role in driving climate change.

A trauma lens

Much like climate justice, there is no universal definition of trauma. Trauma work may draw from a variety of definitions to operationalize a trauma-informed practice, depending on need, context, culture and systems impacting a population.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Canada frames trauma as: *"the lasting emotional response that often results from living through a distressing event. Experiencing a traumatic event can harm a person's sense of safety, sense of self, and ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships. Long after the traumatic event occurs, people with trauma can often feel shame, helplessness, powerlessness and intense fear."*

The American Psychological Association frames trauma as: *"an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer-term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea."*

In a climate context Gillian Caldwell notes: *"people, repeatedly experiencing, witnessing, or learning about life and humanity-altering climate impacts and doomsday scenarios can be understood as a form of 'climate trauma.'*

Image text: Painting of a cardinal looking at Ridley turtles tangled in nets with houses on their backs.

The processes and impacts of climate change have the potential to cause both direct and indirect forms of trauma via flooding, wildfires, heat domes, drought, forced climate migration, gender violence, biodiversity loss and impacts on core food, water, transportation, and energy systems.

An example of climate trauma is the climate magnified heat dome event in B.C. that caused over 600 premature deaths in just six days.

The severity of the extreme heat event overwhelmed first responder systems. This meant emergency services and medical support were unavailable or significantly delayed, compromising the security and safety of thousands, and leaving people in serious or mortal distress with no immediate help in sight.

We might also reflect on the November 2021 climate-magnified atmospheric river and flooding event that displaced thousands, destroyed homes, farms, crops, killed over 600,000 farm animals and damaged core transportation infrastructure across southern BC.

There is also the Lytton wildfire tragedy that saw the town of Lytton burned off the map in just 30 minutes after a week of punishing extreme heat. The event created hundreds of climate refugees.

While some directly experienced these traumatic events, others vicariously bore witness to the trauma.

Decolonizing Trauma

When mobilizing a trauma lens, it is critical we make connections to the ways climate and environmental trauma specifically intersect with colonialism, enslavement, white supremacy, capitalism and other systems of oppression. This is because such systems were designed to target and undermine IBPOC community health, well-being, rights and life.

The histories, legacies, intentions and ideologies that built and inform colonialism and enslavement are deeply "baked" into modern-day systems and perceptions of "normal" or "status quo."

Systems like capitalism and neoliberalism are also fundamentally dependent on IBPOC marginalization, oppression, extraction, land dispossession and dehumanization.

These systems remain ongoing conduits for generating and perpetuating many forms of trauma that also intersect with and include forms of climate and environmental trauma.

This is why ***"systems change, not climate change,"*** is a powerful and important slogan in global IBPOC and youth-led climate movements.

Without fundamentally changing systems, we continue to uphold the dehumanization of billions of people and systemically situate equity-deserving communities to face the most immediate and severe impacts of climate change.

As we work to support climate trauma, we can simultaneously work to understand how history and systems fundamentally interconnect with ongoing oppression and how this relates to trauma.

We can support trauma work by uplifting IBPOC voices and work on decolonizing trauma concepts and frameworks, such as the work by Rene Linklater.

Renee Linklater on Indigenous Approaches to Decolonizing Trauma Work:

"cumulative trauma" and "historical trauma" are synonymous and refer to "collective and compounding emotional and psychic wounding over time, both over life span and across generations."

"It is important to recognize that colonization, through outlawing ceremonies, eroded Indigenous Peoples' ways of resolving grief."

"Historical trauma and historical trauma response have been the stepping stones of other theories intended to capture the impacts of colonization and the transmission of intergenerational trauma."

"developing the field of Indigenous trauma theory will help improve healing and health services, which will create a wider range of healing options for Indigenous peoples."

Quotes from: Decolonizing Trauma Work, Indigenous Stories and Stratagies.

Supporting Climate Trauma Work

Overlapping global crises can also mean overlapping traumas that may foster strong feelings of danger, insecurity and a heightened need for protection. Some individuals may also be experiencing and navigating pre-existing sources of trauma due to systems of oppression and inequity or other social determinants of health.

While for others, climate change may foster new experiences and feelings of grief, anguish, anxiety, loss or trauma as well as experiences of violence, abuse or complex social isolation from peers and community.

Supporting people through trauma-informed lenses and strategies can help create more trust, reliable spaces and methods for processing and navigating climate impacts. This may help foster increased feelings of safety, support and an ability to access comprehensive mental health and wellbeing.

Using a trauma-informed lens may mean creating a network of awareness and engagement that acknowledges and responds to the traumas of a particular population you are working with. Weaving trauma knowledge and strategies into practices, programming and policy can help to promote physical, mental and emotional security, wellbeing and sustainable opportunities to thrive.

How might we mobilize a trauma-informed lens for climate change educators?
Climate communicators, educators, researchers, knowledge holders, experts and activists can face raised climate anxiety, grief, frustration or feelings of hopelessness as they work to convey the complex facts and realities of climate change.

Collaboration and care should be taken to develop a trauma-informed practice and framework that is relevant and meaningful.

Mobilizing a trauma framework

- **Develop** a trauma-informed network and organizational culture. This might mean trauma-trained staff, sourcing relevant and available trauma resources, embedding trauma knowledge into policies and creating capacity for knowledge building on trauma-informed practices.
- **Create** a culture where educators and support workers have the capacity, time and agency to maintain their own mental health as climate educators, researchers and communicators.
- **Build a culture shift.** Practice resilient mental health and wellbeing as an active, intentional and ongoing process
- **Get informed** about the relationships between climate change and trauma impacts. This is also important to prevent secondary trauma in support staff.
- **Connect** with other climate support workers to network and share trauma-informed knowledge and strategies.
- **Develop** a meaningful plan based on the needs and dynamics of your community or population.

Image text: Drawing of a zebra with houses on their back standing in a green field.

Creating trauma-informed spaces, habits of mind and engagement for youth and community

Educate

- **Proactively** address climate wellbeing by confronting it and making space to talk about the realities and dynamics of climate wellbeing impacts.
- **Empower** people by highlighting strategies, skills and strengths they can draw on and how those strengths are important for navigating climate change.
- **Highlight** the importance of seeking out and acknowledging hopeful or positive climate news and achievements towards the topic(s) being navigated.

Engage

- **Provide** opportunities for people to connect and networks that can help support and expand their need for security and safety.
- **Collaborate** with communities to foster action, agency and awareness to address the interconnected and interdisciplinary nature and processes of climate change.

Emotional awareness

- **Mobilize** and share accessible, inclusive coping strategies that help to identify and process complex emotions like anxiety, grief, anger, sorrow, dread or fear.
- **Keep** cultural nuances in mind and how culture may impact how trauma, security and wellbeing are perceived.
- **Encourage** emotional intelligence that nurtures empathy and mental flexibility.

Cognitive Coping

- **Foster** an awareness and understanding of metacognition—the importance of thinking about our own thinking—to help recognize and manage internal dialogue and how our feelings influence our choices and actions.
- **Cultivate** habits of mind that critically assess and reframe climate challenges to solutions-based thinking and problem-solving.
- **Be mindful** of workloads and how times of increased anxiety and trauma can reduce our capacity to think clearly and work effectively.
- **Remind** ourselves to extend self-compassion and acceptance—a small but important gesture. We can't be all things all the time, and that's okay!

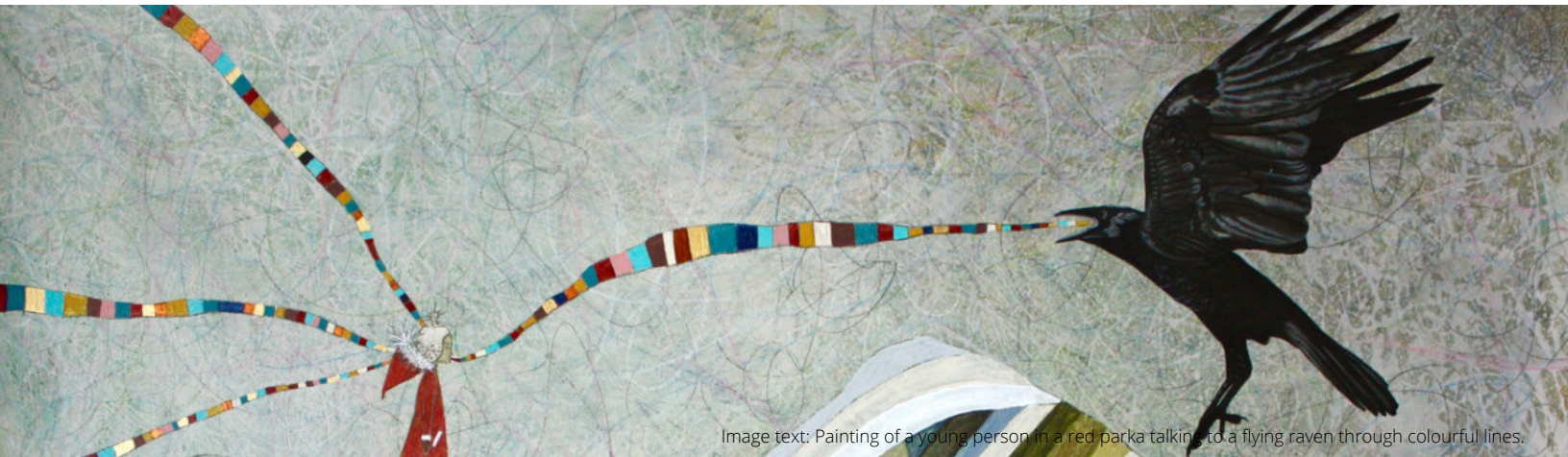

Image text: Painting of a young person in a red parka talking to a flying raven through colourful lines.

Resilience Lens

Resilience is a verb

Proactive resilience planning and action are becoming increasingly central to community planning, policies and future wellbeing to effectively withstand growing risks and challenges of climate change.

Although there is no universal definition for what resilience is, it is important to conceptualize community resilience as a flexible, evolving, ever-in-motion ***verb.*** Resilience is an ongoing interconnected process of natural, built and sociopolitical systems—rather than a noun, static thing or endpoint.

Resilience is never done, finished or attained as a final product. Resilience is ***experienced*** and should always be morphing, priming and evolving as communities grow and change over time.

If the systems, processes, actions or mindsets that foster resilience stop, become stagnant or out of touch with community needs, pressures, threats, risks or vulnerabilities, the capacity for and access to resilience in those communities also declines.

Resilience and Climate Justice are connected

To tie back to a climate justice lens, an important perspective that tends to be lacking in community resilience theory is how systemically marginalized and racialized communities are often negatively affected by the praising of the ability to keep "striving" despite the pervasive systemic challenges and hardships that destabilize lived experience and generational wellbeing.

Systemically marginalized communities being lauded as resilient in spite of oppressive systems often functions to deflect focus away from changing the systems and sources that are inflicting ongoing harm.

Promoting resilience without equitably working to address societal conditions and systems that make climate resilience necessary is only a partial response to community resilience building and can actually undermine needed climate action.

Failure to address inequities that co-inform resilience capacities can fundamentally undermine resilience initiatives.

Image text: Painting of young people surrounded by toxic smoke rallying for climate justice and systems change.

Resilience Lens

How might we mobilize resilience?

Image text: Drawing of a pinkish red octopus surrounded by flowers and a large mushroom holding up a sustainable city with a windmill.

Resilience is fundamental for communities amid climate change. But what actions, mindsets or processes can help to give rise to community resilience?

Due to the diverse ways resilience is defined and theorized in relation to communities and climate change, there is a wide range of actions, processes, concepts and principles employed across resilience literature that can meaningfully feed into resilience building.

One way to operationalize community climate resilience is to engage a resilience principle framework. Such a framework can offer common community resilience language, actions, organization and potential for measurement or assessment of resilience building.

Below is an example of a climate resilience principles framework that can support communities in identifying what overarching resilience principles they may need based on their unique context and the types of sub-action categories that can be engaged to expand or deepen an overarching principle.

Climate Resilience Principle Framework

Principle	Brief Summary of Guiding Principle	Subcategories
Whole Systems	A comprehensive and inclusive way to think about the interdependencies and interactions of elements, resources, systems, people, and wider species. Whole systems thinking moves away from silo thinking to a cyclical, interconnected, and interdependent focus on understanding linkages, cause and effect, and as a way to identify leverage points and influence change-making.[27] This may involve a circular economy and sustainable systems practices. Equitable distribution of resources and economic investment is used to address short-and long-term community needs, demands, and vulnerabilities.[28]	• Interconnectedness • Interdependence • Redundancy • Resources • Circular Economy Thinking • Renewable Energy • Food Security • Natural and Built Environments • Measurement • Linear to Circular
Cohesive Community	Community mental health and overall community wellbeing are improved when there is strong community cohesion, and respect for diversity of experiences and perspectives about community life, systems, and resource allocation and use. Identify who or what functions as community catalysts for bringing people together (e.g. cafes, faith centers, schools, industries). Use social hubs as leverage points for inclusion and diversity building. Bring community together around important community issues, like climate action initiatives, to generate solidarity in a common beneficial cause.[29]	• Diversity • Inclusion • Solidarity • Shared Values • Bonding • Trust Building
Engagement	Resilience is an outcome of successful, deep community engagement processes and involvement. Meaningful opportunities for communication, participation, collaboration, and partnerships about climate issues builds local to global understanding of climate impacts, fosters community trust, and expands community capacities to deal with a range of social, economic, political, and environmental impacts from climate change.[30] Meaningful community engagement on climate issues can also increase community sense of efficacy and ownership over the responsibilities and challenges facing a community.	• Incorporation of community Voice • Collaboration • Partnerships • Communication • Internal and External • Local to Global • Participation
Future Thinking	Getting ahead of complex issues by working out detailed plans of action in advance promotes ongoing mitigating and adaptive strategies in just and equitable ways. Proactive investment and actions are taken that generate sustainable community systems, processes, and capacities. Resources, equipment, infrastructure, the natural environment and community members are physically, economically, socially, politically, mentally, and emotionally prepared to withstand unforeseen shocks and disruptions.[31]	• Preparedness • Sustainability • Recovery • Persistence • Striving • Mitigation
Mental Health and Outlook	Includes community attitudes, views, feelings of unease, stress, or uncertainty before, during, or after a climate crisis or shock. Mental health also has a spectrum of positive and adverse aspects. Mental health and outlook are an important point of leverage for building community confidence, hope, optimism, and coping capacities to face ongoing, multifaceted, intersecting climate impacts.[32]	• Mental Health • Coping • Optimism • Hope • Self-efficacy

Resilience Lens

Climate Resilience Principle Framework

Leadership	Leadership is considered legitimate, trusted, respected, courageous, ambitious, and climate aware by the community. Leadership and community hold a shared and just vision of community. Leadership and governance are collaborative and distributive. Leadership works to direct finance and resources to local entities to implement the agreed-upon vision. Leadership works to ensure infrastructure and services are effective, efficient, agile, capable, equitable, and sustainable in crisis. Community empowerment can evolve out of collaborative, shared leadership.[33]	• Governance • Shared Vision • Foster Productive Emergence • Recognize Complexity • Inspire • Aspire • Agility
Knowledge Building	Knowledge building processes are consistent, factual, non-alarmist, decolonizing. Causal connections between climate change and local community impacts are an ongoing part of the knowledge building and knowledge sharing process. Inform and educate on how addressing existing community vulnerabilities builds community-wide resilience. Centre Indigenous and local knowledge. Train, educate, research, collaborate on climate impacts and issues at the individual, community, regional, and global level. Use knowledge systems as community empowerment to promote community confidence and ability to endure and respond to climate shocks.[34]	• Information • Education • Indigenous Ways of Knowing • Local knowledge / Memory • Asset Mapping • Research • Transformative Learning
Connectivity	Well-connected communities tend to generate positive outcomes during crisis and act as a cohesive whole. Leverage community networks as pathways for bonding, building and bridging networks, linking issues, organizing, and mobilizing action. Understand the different ways a community is connected to place, and the ways climate events may socially, physically, mentally, and emotionally rupture community connectivity to sense of place. Foster external connections with other communities and build global partnerships to learn, share, and expand networks and connections.[35]	• Sense of Place • Personal / Social / Political • Social Networks • Internal / External • Local / Global
Flourishing	A community is flourishing when it regularly experiences positive social functioning, mental health, and wellbeing. This includes transcending existing ineffective and inequitable systems and behaviours to increase community wellbeing and improving conditions of the natural and built environment.[36] Identifying, understanding, and acting to address historical and ongoing social, economic, political, and environmental inequities embedded within a community is a foundational priority. To flourish as a whole community, prioritize empowering marginalized groups and voices, creating dignity preserving systems rooted in principles of social and climate justice, and address inequities for long term generative wellbeing.	• Empowered • Equity • Dignity for all • Climate Justice • Social Justice • Generative Wellbeing
Adaptive	Communities are more resilient when they are flexible, use resources creatively, and find ways to be innovative across community systems.[37] Adaptive processes allow for community to re-organize, evolve, change and learn from past experiences and ongoing risks or threats in ways that promote inclusive community wellbeing and reinforce mitigation of current or future harms.[38]	• Elasticity / Flexibility • Resourceful • Innovative / creative • Proactive and responsive • Efficiency • Resistance • Transformation

Framework from, "*Community Resilience and Wellbeing Amid Climate Crisis,".* 2020

The Importance of "Messy Hope"

Messy Hope as a practice

Hope, joy and optimism play an essential role in climate work and communication.

This is not to say we should try to just "replace" climate anxiety or grief with platitudes of hope.

Instead of using zero-sum understandings of climate anxiety OR climate hope, we should think of climate emotions as both, AND—meaning we can hold many difficult and even contradictory emotions at the same time. It is normal and expected to hold a complex spectrum of feelings about climate processes, impacts and solutions.

We must also work to reframe climate narratives from doom, gloom and defeatism to ones of "messy hope" and solution-based thinking.

Research indicates that climate challenges framed through hopeful, solution-based narratives can be more effective for mobilizing individual and collective climate interest and action.

Making room for collective hope and joy in our climate work is also a more sustainable emotional pathway through daunting climate challenges. Mariame Kaba writes, “Hope is a discipline,” which frames hope as not just a feeling, but as a verb and practice that we keep in motion.

In many ways, hope is an invaluable form of climate action. Hope is a defiance of defeatism. But it can be “Messy Hope," and that’s okay and normal!

Hope is a discipline.
~ Mariame Kaba

Image text: Drawing of a pink flower with a speckled yellow centre, connected to a stem with large bright green leaves.

Messy Hope

Nurturing Messy Hope

- **Don't dismiss**, downplay, deny or minimize anyone's climate fear, anxiety, grief or trauma. We are all in different stages of our climate grieving and anxiety. Acknowledgment and validation are important parts of helping to move through climate anxiety into a more hopeful understanding of agency.
- **Don't try to "replace"** climate anxiety or grief with platitudes of hope, optimism, joy etc. Climate emotions are NOT binary or zero-sum. Feelings are messy. Conflicting feelings are normal and deeply co-informing forces in how we respond to complex, interdisciplinary climate issues.
- **It is okay** to feel joy and sorrow or hope and fears about climate change. One way to navigate climate anxiety is to find ways to redirect our anxieties and grief into actions that lead to more hopeful and just communities and futures.
- **Connect people** with events, resources and initiatives working to advance climate action, community justice building initiatives and hope. Taking action is restorative for climate anxiety and wellbeing.
- **Avoid centring doom and gloom** narratives and issues. We are not doomed, we face challenges that need solutions.
- **Center solution-based thinking** and successful climate action case studies when discussing climate change.
- **Research indicates** that highlighting and pairing solution-based thinking with challenging climate issues can motivate more meaningful and effective climate mindsets and engagement.

Image text: Drawing of a bison standing in a meadow of wildflowers and green grasses.

Theory to Practice Strategies

This section is dedicated to outlining strategies and activities for engaging and embedding climate mental health and wellbeing as part of climate communication or education work.

This document is not prescriptive or exhaustive. What this handbook hopes to achieve is offering a suite of tangible and accessible starting points to expand climate mental health and wellbeing conversations and practices.

Sharing knowledge and strategies that support individual and community mental health and wellbeing amid climate change can be a powerful way to collectively and swiftly move the needle towards meaningful and just climate momentum.

How this section is structured

This section is structured to present a small sample of climate mental health and wellbeing strategies or actions that build from easy, low-barrier actions to more involved forms of engagement.

It is up to educators and climate communicators to draw on the strategies that feel the most relevant and significant given their circumstances and context.

These exercises are not one size fits all. Finding ways to adapt or evolve a given strategy to better suit a given group and context is welcomed and encouraged. Engaging Climate Justice, Trauma-Informed or Resilience lenses can also help to underpin processes and engagements.

Low Barrier Strategies

Invite in Workshops

Hold a climate mental health and wellbeing workshop or invite guest lectures on climate wellbeing.

There are different one-off climate mental health and wellbeing workshops and expert presentation opportunities educators can connect with to support students, staff or faculty. For example, the Climate Hub at UBC runs 30, 60 and 90 mins workshops.

Climate Feeling Check-Ins

Note: Climate feeling check-ins *don't* need to be done every class.

In fact, doing daily check-in can sometimes have the opposite intended effect by creating pressure on students to constantly articulate their climate emotions. Use a mindful and balanced approach to engaging check-in questions.

Use check-ins strategically, like before or after doing a particularly intense climate-focused lesson.

Scattering check-ins throughout a course, program, or year can help offer people time for cognitive reflection on where their climate emotions are at.

Check-ins may also offer an opportunity to watch for individuals consistently noting that they are really struggling with climate mental health and wellbeing.

Check-In and Discussion Prompts

Prompt: If you were a song that reflected your climate emotions today, what is the song or type of music we would hear?

- In-person: this could be a round table check-in to just signal to the room where everyone is at that day.
- Virtual: answers can be put into a Zoom chat or entered in a Menti response platform.
- If enough songs are listed, the facilitator could make a Spotify list out of the songs identified to share with the group as a way to build community connection.

Prompt: If you were a meme, what meme best captures your climate emotions and feeling over the past week or month?

- This is a good one to give in advance so students can find a meme to share if they want.
- Offer some time at the start of class to go around and share which meme and why.

Prompt: What is one hopeful climate solution-focused news story you heard this week?

- How did it address a climate fear or anxiety you have been carrying?

Prompt: At the start of class, draw on a post-it the emoji that best represents your current climate feeling.

- At the end of class flip over the post-it and draw the emoji that now best reflects how you feel.
- If virtual, have them post emoji reactions at the start and end of class.
- Take a moment to think about why it may or may not have changed.

Prompt: I used to think or feel, but now I think or feel, reflection opportunities can be paired with a particular theme from the class or week.

- For example, if the class theme is plastics, students might be asked to say, “I used to think ____ about plastic, but now I think ____."
- Or, “I used to feel ____ about food security, but now I feel ____."

Prompt: Ask students, “Was there a new idea or information from today that made you reassess your climate emotions or thinking?”

- Ask students to offer a quick sentence as to why or how this new information shifted emotions.

Reflective Climate Activities

#1 - Self-Reflective Climate Letter: Climate Fears and Reimagined Futures

Activity: 6 - 10 mins

Purpose

The goal of this activity is to give individuals a chance to check in with themselves to validate and acknowledge the complexity of climate change emotions they might be experiencing at the time and what they wish, hope or desire to see in their future regarding climate change.

In a course context, it can also offer a benchmark of where individuals are situated in their climate emotions at the beginning and end of term, program or event.

The letter can be reflected on after moving through and learning about climate-related content.

Prompt 1

- Take 3 mins to write a candid stream of consciousness letter to yourself about how you feel about climate change.
- There is no right or wrong for the letter.
- Just write about how climate change makes you feel continuously for 3 mins.

Prompt 2

Now take 3 mins to finish the letter by letting yourself dream of a climate future that feels joyful, nourishing, supportive and just.

- What does this future look like, feel like and function like?
- Encourage individuals to dream big and lean into radically reimagined hopeful futures.

Seal and Collect

- No one reads the letter except who wrote it.
- Have individuals put letters in a sealed envelope addressed to themselves or with a student number.
- Facilitator collects and keeps letters in a large envelope to return at a later date to engage in reflection.
- Prepare some reflection prompts like the last two check-in prompts from above.

Options for follow-up immediately after letter writing

Follow up with round table prompts or small circle discussions. Remind the group this is a judgment-free space for listening and supportive community building.

- ***Was there anything you wrote that surprised you?***
  - Why or why not?
- ***Was there anything you wrote about that addressed solutions?***
  - If so, what was it?
  - If not, why not?
- ***What was one difficult and one positive theme you identified in your letter?***
  - A goal here might be to see if common themes arise across individuals.
  - Noting shared themes can reaffirm that though our lived experiences can differ in many ways due to how we all situate in relation to systems of racism, colonialism, power, gender, class, age, etc., there are some common lived experiences and feelings we can find a sense of solidarity in.

#1A - Activity for When the Letter is Returned

Activity: 10 - 15 mins

Give students 3-5 mins to re-read their letters.

Offer discussion prompts to explore as one large group or smaller breakout groups.

The letter can be used to prompt reflection after a class, a program, or at the end of a term, after learning about climate change-related processes, issues or content.

Prompt

- Given the letter you wrote yourself, take a moment to think about what you used to think or feel, and how you think or feel now. Has there been a shift?

Potential follow-up questions

- If so, what are those shifts in your thinking or feelings?
- What has contributed to a change in how you think or feel over this course?
- Would you write yourself a different letter now? What would you want to focus on if you had to write it again now?
- Is there a solution-based thinking approach you learned over this term that helps to address one of the climate fears you identified?
- Would you add anything new to your climate future narrative?
    - If so, what is it?

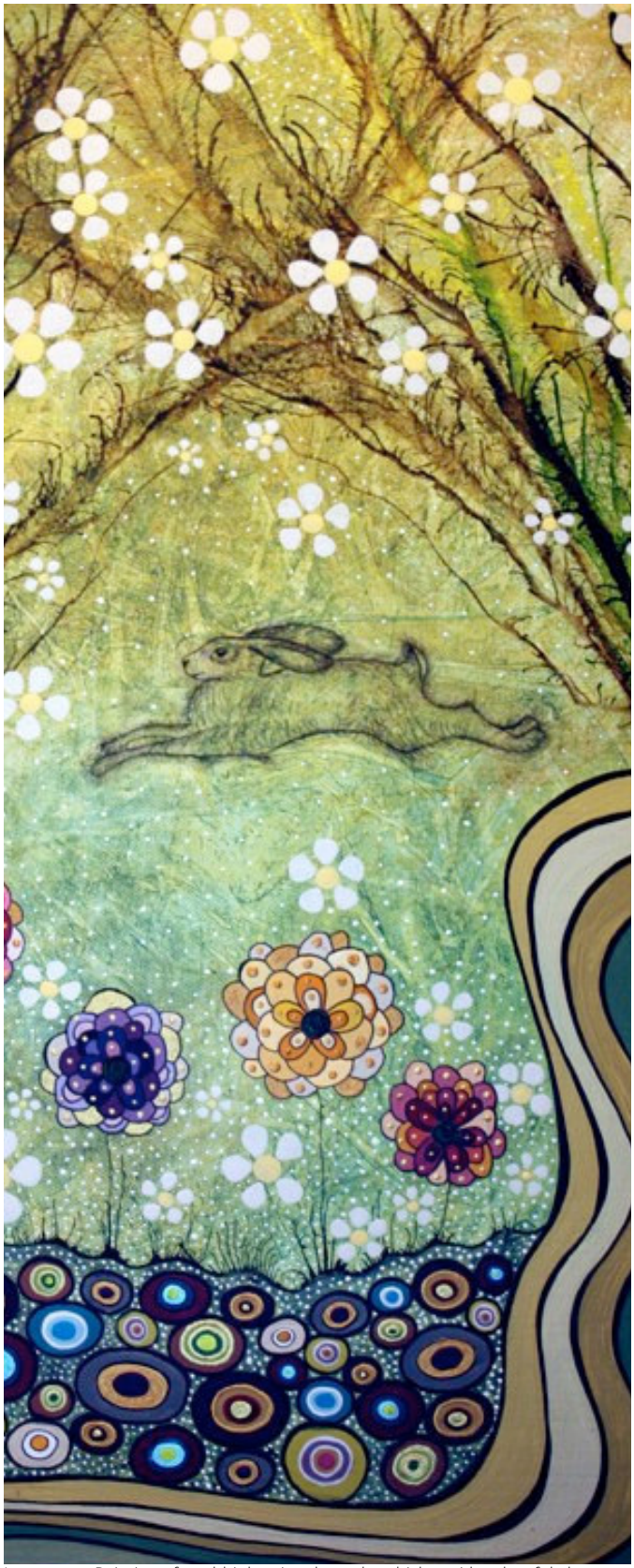

Image text: Painting of a rabbit leaping through a thicket with colourful abstract flowers underneath them.

Art-based activities

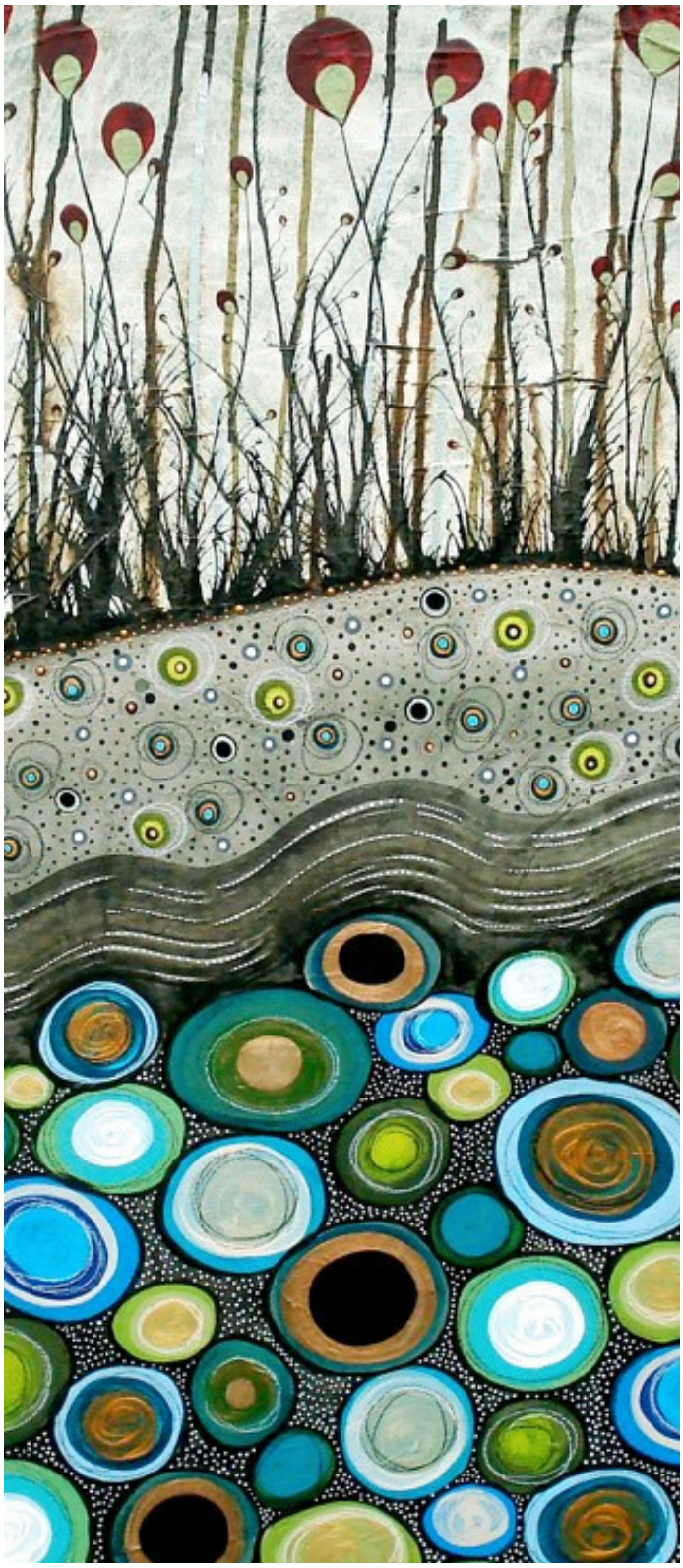

Image text: Abstract painting of scarlet poppy buds atop a hill of abstract soil and colourful rocks in shades of blue.

Exploring climate change through art

Purpose

Art holds a critical role in processing and communicating climate challenges like anxiety, grief, solastalgia, frustration, anger, sadness, loneliness and depression.

Research has found engaging with The Arts can improve mental health and wellbeing by fostering community connection, belonging and a sense of meaning and purpose.

Research has also found art-based experiences that present hopeful climate solutions and highlight the interconnectedness of human and natural systems are more effective for inspiring action and mobilization than just doom and gloom narratives.

Encouraging engagement with The Arts to:

- Interpret and reflect on climate research
- Tell climate stories
- Process climate trauma
- Share reimagined futures and systems
- Build community connections
- And challenge unjust ideologies

These can offer pathways for claiming agency, taking action and creatively asserting one's voice and experiences around difficult and seemingly insurmountable climate or environmental issues.

#2 - Connecting to Place, Climate and Community

Activity: 8 - 10 mins

Purpose
This activity can be an art-based or written activity. It seeks to weave a personalized storyline that highlights sense of place, understanding of climate impacts and solution-based thinking at community levels.

This process is designed to move through a thought process of individual connection to place, recognition of climate impacts and how they make us feel, into identifying and acknowledging community-based solutions and actions being mobilized to help advance climate action and community wellbeing—further, how that ties back to the places we love within our community.

Materials
- Paper
- Drawing/writing tool
- Can also be done just as a writing activity on laptop or paper

Prompt 1
What is a place in your community that you feel connected to?
- Facilitator can note this may be a park, a tree, building, a beach, a trail, a store, a home or business etc.
- Any place the individual feels a sense of connection to.
- Remind the group there are no right or wrong answers.

Action
Take 2 mins to draw or write about this place.
- Add images and symbols to help express what it is and what it means to you
- If writing, describe what it is and why it is important to you

Prompt 2
What is a climate change process or impact that is affecting this place you feel connected to?
- Facilitator might support the group by offering examples of heatwaves, drought, water or food insecurity, climate displacement, wildfire, air pollution, failure of effective climate policy etc.

Action
Take 2 mins to draw or write about a climate change issue, process, or impact disrupting or unsettling the place you feel connected to
- Add images, symbols and words to express this
- If writing, describe what is happening

Prompt 3
What is a community or local action, process, policy, group or organization helping this place to mitigate or adapt to the climate impact you identified?

Action
Take 2 mins to draw or write about a solution-based approach taking place in your community on a small or large scale to address the climate impact you identified.
- Add images, symbols or words to express who, how or what is advancing this climate mitigating or adaptive action.
- If writing, describe what is happening, who is doing it, how it is being done etc.

Ideas of wrap-up:
Identify themes across group reflections
- Types of spaces we feel a connection to
- Themes of climate impacts
- Types of solutions we see taking place

Shared worries and places of connection can help remind us we all exist within a shared community of feelings and beloved spaces with desires to protect our community from impacts of climate change.

Climate Anxiety and Pathways to Action

Individual Level

Though individual action is not a replacement for needed systemic changes, individual strategies still offer important actions and mindsets that can support our own agency, awareness and wellbeing. Strategies may include:

- Nourish your mind, body and spirit to foster sustainable capacity for long-term advocacy and activism
- Step back from doom scrolling. Prioritize stories highlighting climate hope and solutions
- Reach out to talk about complex climate feelings with friends and people you trust
- REST. Rest is necessary for sustainability and resilience
- Remember it's okay to not be all things all the time. Embrace guilt-free breaks and replenish yourself
- Make room for embracing hope and joy with friends, family or community
- Spend time in nature. Research indicates spending time in nature can improve wellbeing
- Engage different forms of art to help process climate feelings
- Connect with groups, actions or organizations supporting climate, sustainability, ecological or public health issues you feel passionate about
- Engage low emissions actions that make sense for you that hold larger impacts (i.e. eat less beef /lamb/dairy, fly less if possible, walk, bike or public tranist if possible, vote in climate leaders).

Community Level

Community-level action can help to build connections and cohesion that help to shift social norms and behaviours toward climate futures that foster justice, equity, empathy, dignity and radical care.

- Talk about the mental, physical, social, political, economic and ecological impacts of climate change
- Develop share hubs and circular economy networks
- Share coping strategies and resources that can advance climate action, equity and justice
- Join campaigns calling for influential leaders, institutions and corporations to take bold climate action
- Lobby for policies that align with climate science and climate justice principles
- Support and amplify Indigenous leadership and initiatives on climate and environmental issues
- Join local or global climate movements or groups working towards climate justice, sustainability, divestment and equitable community resilience
- Foster mutual aid networks that focus on trust building, deep care, equity and uplifting human dignity

Systems Level

Systemic-level action is where we need vigilant focus and attention to ensure climate change is meaningfully and urgently addressed. We cannot fix climate change with the same systems that created climate change and mass socio-political injustice. We require system change to mitigate and avert the worst impacts of climate change.

- Call on governments and leaders to prioritize climate action policies and decision-making through a climate justice lens
- Prioritize reducing community inequality (i.e. poverty, racism, houselessness, wealth inequity) that leads to disproportionate climate risk and impacts on equity-deserving and racialized community members
- VOTE to empower Climate Leaders committed to boldly and justly addressing climate change
- Find creative and tangible ways to get communities off fossil fuel dependence
- Call for rapid expansions of RENEWABLE energy grids at all levels and spaces
- Support and advance anti-racism work
- Support Indigenous-led initiatives to decolonize systems and practices
- Advocate for rapid divestment from fossil fuels
- Advocate for total fossil fuel divestment from all levels

Toolkit of resources

Books

- Climate Anxiety: A Field Guide, By Sarah Jaquette Ray
- How to Change Everything, By Naomi Klein
- Revolutionary Power, By Dr. Shalanda Baker
- The Care Manifesto, By The Care Collective
- Saving Us, By Dr. Katharine Hayhoe
- Generation Dread, By Britt Wray

Futurisms

- Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures
- Grist: Imagine Climate Futures Stories Gallery
- Rootbound Collective

Podcasts

- HOT TAKE
- Métis in Space
- A Matter of Degrees
- Anthropause
- TIL Climate
- Mongabay Newscast
- How to Save a Planet
- Outrage & Optimism

Toolkits

- Climate Hub Climate Justice Concepts and Context Guide
- Climate Wellbeing Resource Kit

Websites

- Indigenous Climate Action
- Climate Hub at UBC
- Good Grief Network
- The Existential Toolkit

Zines

- Collective Arts For Climate Justice, By Hannah Gelderman
- Berea College's Hutchins Zine Library, Environment and Sustainability Issues

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