

CLIMATE WELLBEING SERIES



Climate Anxiety

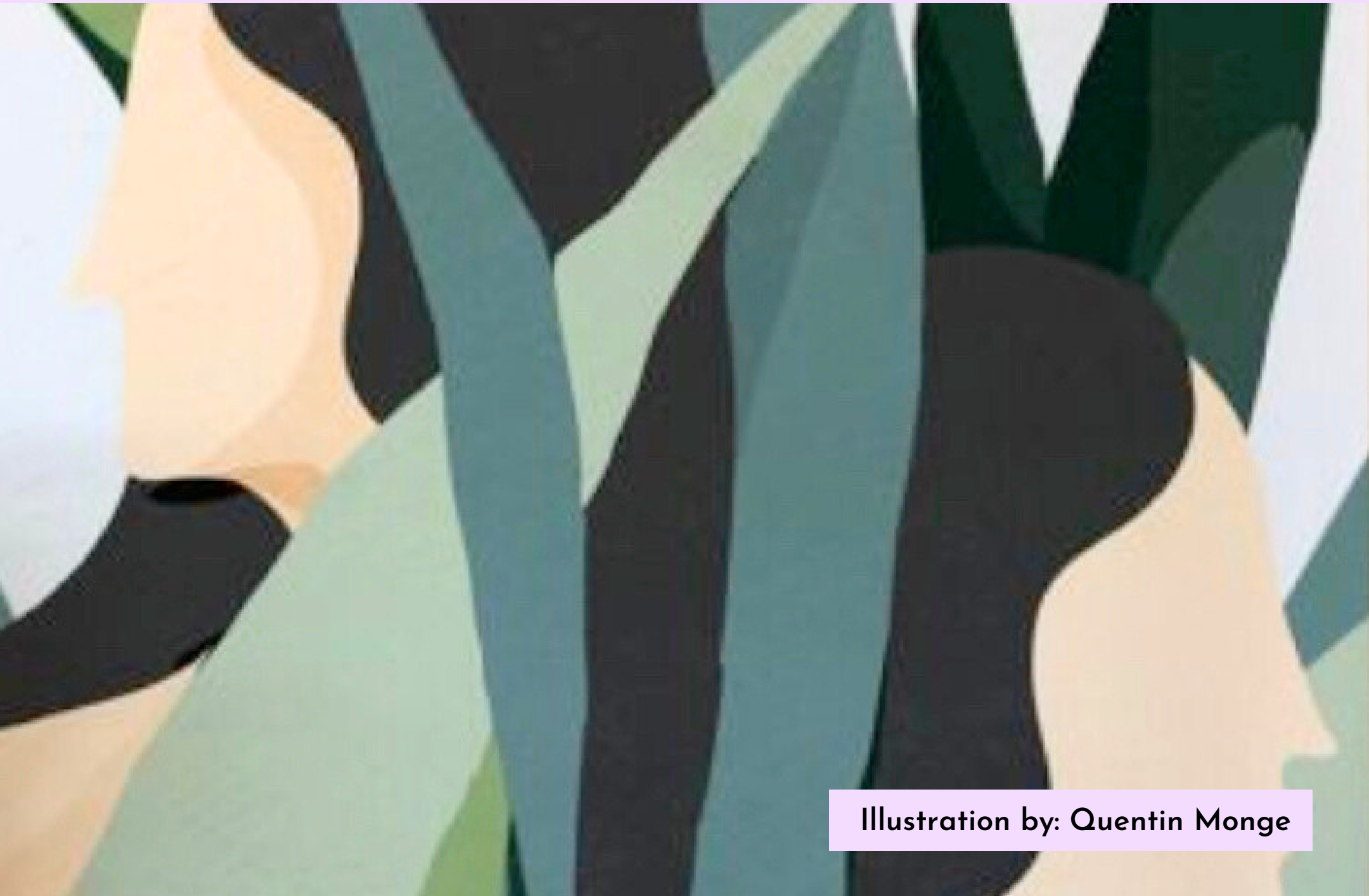


Illustration by: Quentin Monge

What is climate anxiety?



- A state of ongoing fear, stress, or worry stemming from a sense of impending climate change impacts and processes
- A sense of threat and uncertainty about environmental doom
- Though one may not have experienced direct climate related disasters, we may fear we will soon experience it
- Climate anxiety can be mental, emotional and physical
- Climate work and organizing can also generate climate anxiety via grief, frustration, helplessness stemming from a lack of political action and significant changes needed

How might climate anxiety impact our health and wellbeing?



Mentally

- Anxious
- Stressed
- Worried
- Overwhelmed



Emotionally

- Fearful
- Lonely
- Helpless
- Frustrated
- Angry
- Guilty



Physically

- Muscle tensions or aches
- Sleeplessness
- Chest tightness
- Upset stomach or digestion issues
- Restlessness
- Tension headaches

And yes! Experiencing climate anxiety is normal.

Climate anxiety is a valid response to experiencing or witnessing difficult or traumatic climate change issues. “Negative” or “non-positive” mental and emotional responses to climate change are not innately pathological or unhealthy.

Validation and acknowledgement of such feelings is an important step in helping to process and move through these feelings, rather than getting stuck in them.



Though climate change impacts everyone, everyone is not equally impacted by climate change, which can generate different and disproportionate experiences of climate anxiety and impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

In Canada and globally, community systems, institutions, and infrastructure must recognize and address historical & ongoing injustices that continue to generate inequitable mental health and climate anxiety burdens and community experiences.



How do inequitable systems generate disproportionate experiences?

Colonialism, enslavement, white supremacy and capitalist systems have and continue to direct a disproportionate share of adverse climate impacts and vulnerabilities on Indigenous, Black, racialized, disabled, LGBTQ2S+ communities, as well as women, girls, elderly, unhoused, and low-income folks.

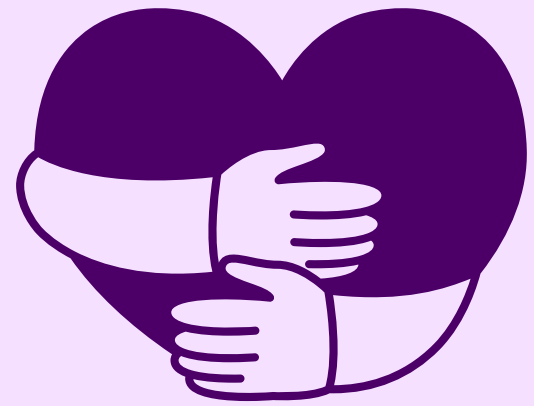
Yet, narratives often prioritize or center privileged voices, perspectives and stories rather than those most impacted and at risk of climate harms. Climate anxiety, mental health and wellbeing discourse and policies need to be inclusive and equitable.

Strategies to Move Through and Beyond Climate Anxiety

Sharing knowledge and coping strategies can empower and prepare people and communities to navigate complex mental health and wellbeing impacts of climate change.



Self Care Approach



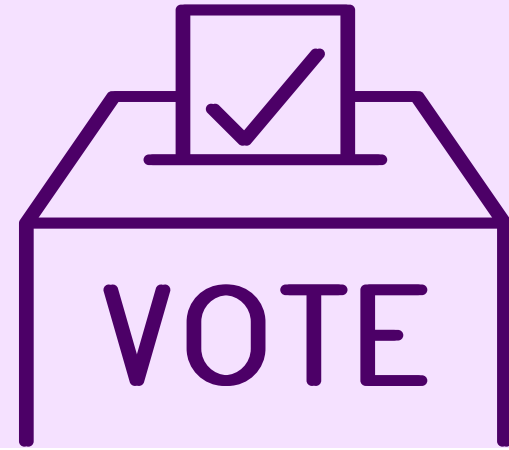
- Take care of your mental health and prioritize wellbeing by nourishing your mind, body, heart, and spirit
- Acknowledge and identify your climate emotions as valid reactions to loss, injustice, and catastrophe
- Reach out and share your feelings with folks you trust; connect with family, place, culture, community, nature
- Step back from doom scrolling and seek out stories that highlight climate justice, community resilience, environmental wins, and momentum for climate action
- Maintain or take up practices / hobbies that bring hope, joy, meaning, and purpose into your life



Activism and Advocacy Approach

- Be a leader in educating about the mental health and wellbeing impacts of climate change and coping strategies in your networks
- Use the social change ecosystem map and climate action venn diagram to reflect on what you are good at, what brings you joy, and what work needs doing
- Join local groups or global climate movements working towards climate justice, collective liberation, divestment, community reinvestment, and/or climate resilience
- Get involved in campaigns that lobby politicians, industries, and businesses to implement policies that align with climate science and centre a just transition

Systems Change Approach



- Vote for community leaders committed to addressing mental health and wellbeing impacts of climate change
- Address the interconnected nature of climate inequities by tackling issues like poverty, racism, unaffordability, exploitation, inaccessibility, and more
- Demand a just transition to renewable energy systems and regenerative economies that phase out of fossil fuel dependency and create meaningful green jobs
- Call for institutional accountability & action that prioritizes collective wellbeing, community resilience, and climate justice

Remember: this is a collective effort!

We all have different capacities, resources, and challenges. Do what you can, when you can, as you can.

No act is too small to make a difference.

Build community trust and cohesion through acts of community care and collaboration!

What you feel does not exist in isolation. You're not alone in feeling climate anxiety, grief, or frustration.

References

Coping With Climate Change Distress

Australian Psychological Society

A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety

Sarah Jaquette Ray

What is Climate Anxiety and What Can We Do About It?

Climate Reality Project

Climate Change and Mental Health: A Systemic Approach to Action in Post-Secondary Education

Jenalee Kluttz

Community Resilience and Wellbeing Amid Climate Crisis

Meghan Wise