



INFORMATION BRIEF

**An Introduction to Efforts Aiming to Address  
the Mental Health Effects of Climate Change**

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## Introduction

Climate change invokes a wide range of existential, emotional, and psychological responses. These responses can severely reduce an individual's quality of life. As such, it is important to support individuals who experience adverse effects as they learn about and grapple with the realities of climate change.

This brief aims to provide a short introduction to intervention to interventions targeting the adverse mental health effects of climate change. We have divided this report into two sections.

- **Section 1** introduces broad categories of mental health interventions specifically tailored to address the effects of climate change on mental health.
- **Section 2** introduces key principles and concepts that underlie these interventions.

## Section 1. Key Principles of Climate Mental Health Interventions

### *Fostering Inner Resilience*

Inner resilience refers to the individual's ability to adapt and bounce back from adversities, including the mental stressors associated with climate change. Interventions fostering inner-resilience to facilitate cognitive adjustments that move individuals away from catastrophizing thoughts. They also employ existential approaches to help individuals contextualize the systemic dimensions of climate change. This category encompasses meaning-focused interventions, emotion-focused interventions, and self-care techniques. Fostering inner resilience is effective because it equips individuals with the psychological tools needed to cope with the stress and anxiety that climate change can induce. By focusing on cognitive adjustments, individuals are better able to manage their emotional responses and engage in problem-solving behaviors. Existential approaches allow for a broader understanding of climate issues, reducing feelings of isolation and helplessness.

### *Facilitating Social Connection and Emotional Support*

This principle emphasizes the importance of social networks and emotional support in mitigating the mental health effects of climate change. It involves joining established groups or participating in group rituals that offer emotional sustenance. Humans are social beings, and social support is a well-documented buffer against mental health challenges. Group cohesion and emotional support can offset feelings of isolation and despair, providing a communal coping mechanism that strengthens resilience against climate-induced stressors.

### *Encouraging Climate Action within People's Sphere of Influence*

The principle of "Encouraging Action within People's Sphere of Influence" aims to empower individuals and communities to take proactive steps in addressing climate change within their immediate environments or social circles. This can range from individual lifestyle changes aimed at reducing carbon footprints to community-led initiatives such as local conservation efforts or advocacy. One of the key strengths of this principle lies in its ability to reinstate a sense of agency, a crucial factor often diminished by the overwhelming nature of climate change. This empowerment serves to counteract feelings of helplessness and futility, emotional responses that are commonly triggered by the immense scale of

climate-related challenges. Furthermore, when individuals witness the tangible outcomes of their efforts—whether it's a successful community recycling program or a personal reduction in energy consumption—they experience an increase in self-efficacy, or the belief in their ability to effect change. This heightened sense of self-efficacy not only improves mental well-being but also perpetuates a positive feedback loop, where initial actions lead to small successes that, in turn, boost morale and inspire further action. Additionally, the principle fosters community cohesion by promoting collective action, thereby strengthening social bonds and providing invaluable emotional support. In summary, the principle of encouraging action within people's sphere of influence serves as a multifaceted strategy that addresses the mental health impacts of climate change while also contributing to broader climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. It offers healthcare practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders a practical approach for designing effective interventions.

### ***Helping People Connect with Nature***

The principle of "Connecting with Nature" underscores the therapeutic value of interacting with natural settings as a means to mitigate the adverse mental health effects induced by climate change. One key mechanism through which nature contributes to mental well-being is stress reduction. Natural environments have been empirically shown to lower cortisol levels, thanks in part to sensory stimuli such as bird sounds, earthy smells, and the sight of green landscapes. This aligns with the Attention Restoration Theory, which posits that nature's ability to captivate our "soft fascination" helps replenish cognitive resources, thereby enhancing cognitive function. Concurrently, exposure to natural settings has been linked to elevated levels of mood-regulating neurotransmitters like serotonin and endorphins, offering a natural counterbalance to climate-induced anxiety and depression. These effects may be rooted in evolutionary biology, as suggested by the Biophilia Hypothesis, which proposes that humans have an innate affinity for nature that promotes psychological well-being. Moreover, the physical activities often encouraged by natural settings—be it walking, hiking, or swimming—have their own established mental health benefits. Nature-based activities also tend to be communal, fostering social bonds and emotional support, which are crucial for mental resilience. Finally, the sensory richness of natural environments can facilitate a form of mindfulness, anchoring individuals in the present and reducing tendencies for rumination and anxiety. Thus, the principle of "Connecting with Nature" offers a multifaceted approach that not only provides immediate psychological relief but also synergizes well with other therapeutic interventions. This makes it a versatile and effective strategy for healthcare practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders aiming to address the mental health implications of climate change.

### ***Helping People Develop Grounding and Presencing Skills***

Grounding and presencing skills refer to mindfulness-based techniques aimed at anchoring individuals in the present moment rather than focusing on the long-term or broad effects of climate change. Grounding techniques often engage the five senses to pull attention away from distressing thoughts or sensations. Presencing, on the other hand, involves a conscious awareness and acceptance of one's current emotional and physical state. These techniques serve to regulate emotional responses and facilitate a focused, present state of mind. Grounding and presencing skills are particularly effective for emotion management in the context of climate-induced stress and anxiety. They act as immediate stabilizers, offering a form of emotional "first aid" that mitigates overwhelming sensations or thoughts. Grounding techniques can interrupt the cycle of rumination or catastrophizing that often accompanies climate-related distress. Presencing skills help individuals become aware of, and thereby manage, their emotional states, creating

space for more adaptive coping strategies. Incorporating grounding and presencing skills in climate mental health interventions serves a dual purpose. First, they provide immediate relief from acute stressors, allowing individuals to regain emotional equilibrium. Second, the state of focused awareness facilitated by these skills can make individuals more receptive to other forms of intervention, thereby enhancing the overall efficacy of a multi-faceted treatment approach.

### ***Applying Trans-therapeutic Principles***

Trans-therapeutic principles refer to a range of therapeutic techniques that are effective across various health conditions, not just those specific to climate change distress. This approach integrates elements from multiple therapeutic traditions, including Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Furthermore, these techniques also focus on validating and normalizing experience, and providing individuals with necessary psycho-education to understand and contextualize their responses.

Trans-therapeutic approaches are effective because they offer a flexible and comprehensive treatment strategy, capable of addressing the multifaceted nature of climate-related mental health issues. By incorporating principles that have demonstrated efficacy in a wide range of mental health conditions, this approach provides a robust framework for intervention. Techniques such as mindfulness practices or cognitive restructuring can be readily adapted to tackle the unique stressors associated with climate change, thereby enhancing the overall adaptability and efficacy of the intervention strategy.

### ***Preparing Healthcare Providers***

Equipping healthcare practitioners with the knowledge and tools to address ecological grief and climate-related mental health issues is another important principle. It involves raising awareness and offering tools for self-reflection. Healthcare practitioners are at the frontline of mental health care. By increasing their awareness and understanding of climate-related mental health issues, they are better prepared to guide their patients through effective interventions.

## **Section 2. Examples of Interventions**

To date, efforts to address the mental health effects of climate change have focused on (1) the creation of educational platforms and resources that serve as self-help tools for individuals with climate anxiety, (2) the facilitation of social support for individuals with climate anxiety, and (3) the provision of specialized training resources to help educators and counsellors.

### ***Educational Platforms and Resources***

The majority of interventions available include some component of education and information sharing. Platforms range from web-based, to pamphlets, to books. There are also many podcasts and other resources out there and articles are frequently included in the news.

['My Climate Story'](#) serves as an educational platform for youth and government agencies, focusing on empowerment and climate action. [Climate Doom to Messy Hope: Climate Healing & Resilience](#) is a theory-to-practice handbook grounded in a commitment to fostering deeper understandings and connections

to how we can support mindful and proactive navigation of magnifying climate change impacts on individual and community mental health and wellbeing. [Hold This Space](#) is digital tool designed to help users process difficult emotions, imagine a better future, and learn more about the impact of collective climate action. Hold this space is designed for young adults and provides a self-guided journey that aims to restore hope, agency, and ambition towards a sustainable future. [The Climate Wellbeing Resource Kit](#) by The UBC Climate Hub is a 15-page toolkit guides readers through a multi-step process for understanding their values, emotions, and behaviours related to climate change and the environment. [Coping with Climate Distress Booklet](#) by The Australian Psychological Society is 12-page overview of strategies for coping with climate distress covers behavioural, relational, cognitive, and emotional coping strategies for managing your feelings about climate change. [The Climate Change Empowerment Handbook](#) by the Australian Psychological Society This 39-page handbook provides psychological strategies to tackle climate change.

### ***Support Groups and Systems***

Providing social support has been identified as a key strategy for supporting mental health. The UK-based '[Resilience Project](#)' uses circles that integrate psychology and neuroscience to promote action, rest, and joy among 18-27-year-olds. [Work on Climate Slack Channel](#) is a slack community that provides action-oriented opportunities for taking on climate change. [The Climate Journal Project](#) is an online community that provides guided reflections and challenges, designed to help you build resilience against eco-anxiety so you can live with greater joy and purpose as we face major environmental changes ahead. [The Good Grief Network](#) is a 10-week group-style intervention for climate-related distress. [All We Can Save Circles Project](#) by Dr. Katherine Wilkinson is a group meeting that provide people who are hungry for a deeper dialogue about the climate crisis. Eco-Anxious Stories is a website that provides an opportunity for people to share stories about their experiences with climate distress. [Climate Tic TALK Circle](#) is a free peer-to-peer emotional support group for people who want to build personal resilience and share visions for sustainable future. '[Youth4Nature](#)' is a youth-led organization that combines science-based solutions with traditional, local, and Indigenous knowledge and aims to support exposure to nature. '[Preparing Our Home](#)' and the [ResiliencebyDesign](#) lab aim at empowering Indigenous youth and other young adults as change leaders in their communities.

### ***Provision of Training Resources***

A variety of provider training programs aim to equip mental health and other professionals. [Emotional Resilience Toolkit](#) for Climate Work provides handbook designed to provide emotional support, resources, and tools for eco-anxiety, grief, and the range of feelings that accompany climate work. [Ecotherapy and Climate Conscious Therapy Training and Consultation for Mental Health Professionals](#) is a 10-session online group, presented in English, open to participants worldwide. The group meets weekly for 60 minutes with optional 20-minute debrief and discussion.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing the mental health ramifications of climate change necessitates a nuanced and multi-faceted strategy. As outlined in this report, a variety of intervention methodologies and key principles, ranging from enhancing individual resilience to utilizing trans-therapeutic approaches, offer promising avenues for mitigating climate-related mental health challenges. Importantly, these interventions must be conceived and implemented through an equity-oriented lens that acknowledges the differential vulnerabilities across populations.

A one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient and potentially exacerbates existing inequities. Vulnerability to climate-induced mental health issues is not uniformly distributed; it is particularly pronounced among those already at risk for general mental health problems and those facing social and health inequities. This includes specific groups such as older adults, the homeless, and communities more intimately connected with the environment, such as rural and Indigenous populations, farmers, and hunters. Therefore, interventions must be tailored to be culturally sensitive and adapted to the unique needs and vulnerabilities of these diverse groups.

The effectiveness of any intervention is also closely tied to its timeliness. Early interventions, ideally introduced at the stage of climate education, are pivotal. This is not merely a task for the healthcare sector but demands a broad societal effort, where mass media can play a significant role in disseminating preventive strategies.

In sum, mitigating the mental health impacts of climate change requires an integrated, multipronged approach that is both equity-oriented and sensitive to the varying degrees of vulnerability among different populations. By incorporating these considerations, healthcare practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders will be better equipped to address the complex mental health challenges precipitated by our changing climate.

## **About the Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance**

The Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance is a community of interdisciplinary researchers, healthcare providers, and community organizers committed to identifying and addressing the adverse impacts of the climate crisis on mental health.

As a Canadian Not-for-Profit organization incorporated under the Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, the MHCCA's purposes are to (1) conduct equity-based climate distress monitoring, (2) incubate novel interventions and policy ideas to address the mental health impacts of climate change, and (3) facilitate knowledge exchange and mobilization to support Canadian's experiencing climate-related ecological distress.

Visit [www.mhcca.ca](http://www.mhcca.ca) for more information.

