



Climate
Mental Health
Network

Climate Change and Kids' Well-Being:

A Guide for Parents and Other Caring Adults





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This resource does not replace professional mental health care. In the US, text or call 988 for a 24/7 crisis hotline. For emergency mental health in other countries, visit: findahelpline.com If you need support during a disaster and have a disability, call or text The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies Disability & Disaster Hotline at +1 (800) 626-4959 or email hotline@disasterstrategies.org for assistance.

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I Don't Know Where to Start

How Does Climate Change Affect Children's Well Being?

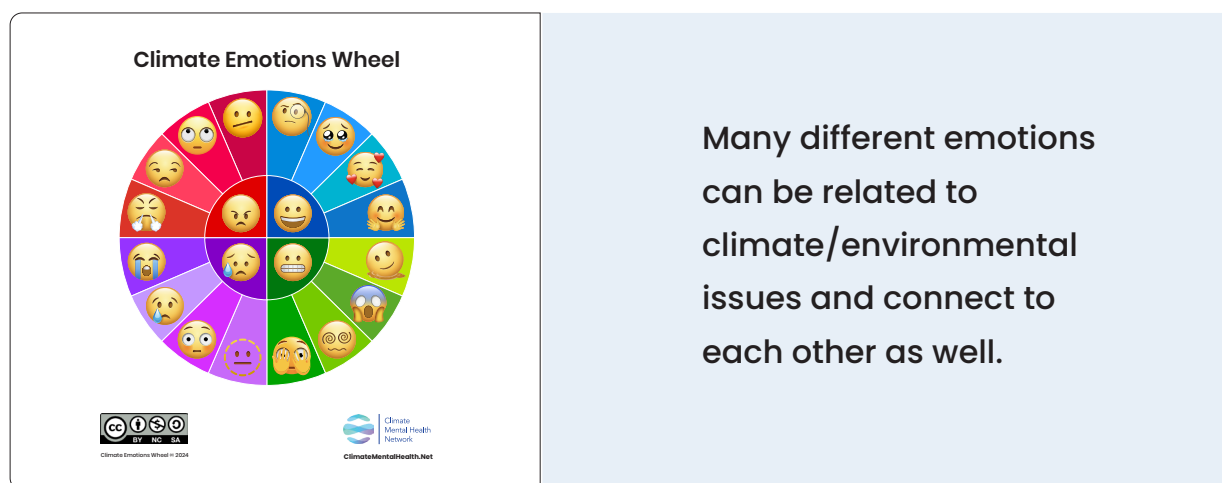


Climate change and extreme weather are affecting our children's physical and mental health.

People of all ages experience climate emotions like anxiety and sadness when we hear about, or live through, events like drought, heat waves, hurricanes, wildfires, or flooding, or everyday pollution.

School lessons and media can trigger climate emotions too.

The Climate Emotions Wheel develops skills in observing different forms of emotions. It's based on research by Panu Pikhala from 14 different studies asking what emotions people report in relation to climate change.



Download the wheel in 30 languages and an emoji version here: [Climate Emotions Wheel](#)

These feelings intersect with other hard things children face in their lives, like racism, homophobia, transphobia, poverty, violence, loneliness, and housing insecurity.

All of these climate feelings are valid. And caring adults are best positioned to help young people handle them.

Climate Mental Health Network interviewed parents across the country about climate emotions. You will read their comments throughout this guide.

"We need to have these conversations about climate change."

Bethany, Vermont

Key Findings

- Three out of five (61%) parents of children under age 6 have already experienced at least one extreme weather event in the past two years.¹
- 84% of parents reported that their own physical health and emotional well-being is being negatively affected by extreme weather.²
- More than half the parents (56%) report their children's physical health and emotional well-being is being negatively affected by extreme weather.³
- In a 2021 survey of 10,000 teenagers and young adults worldwide, 75% said that they think the future is frightening because of climate change.⁴
- In a 2024 survey of 16,000 US Gen Zers in all 50 states,
 - 86% are worried about climate change;
 - 75% of youth reported anxiety, depression or stress from consuming news about climate; and
 - 52% do not want to have children because of climate change.⁵
- In a 2024 study, American teenagers who had lived the most days under a federal disaster declaration were 20% more likely to report mental distress up to five years later.⁶
- A 2023–2024 Climate Mental Health Network study of parents nationwide found that 100% of parents had experienced climate-driven extreme weather and all reported their children noticing direct effects, such as wildfire smoke and heat waves. The top emotions parents reported were anxiety/worry (59%); frustration/anger/indignation (25%) and guilt (15.8%). The top emotions parents reported on behalf of their children were anxiety/distress/concern (66.7%); frustration (19.6%) and curiosity (13.7%).

1. Heating up: Extreme Weather is Increasing Stress for parents and child care providers <https://rapidsurveyproject.com/article/heating-up-extreme-weather-is-increasing-stress-for-parents-and-child-care-providers/>

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00278-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00278-3/fulltext)

5. Climate emotions, thoughts, and plans among US adolescents and young adults: a cross-sectional descriptive survey and analysis by political party identification and self reported exposure to severe weather events [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(24\)00229-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(24)00229-8/fulltext)

6. Adolescent mental distress in the wake of climate disasters <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38405174/>

But surveys show fewer than half of parents have talked to their children about climate change⁷ and fewer than half of teachers have touched on it in the classroom.⁸ When teachers do engage their students on climate change, they are often unprepared to address its emotional dimensions. National research conducted by Climate Mental Health Network found that 98% of middle school teachers reported encountering emotional reactions from students when teaching about climate change, but only 7% reported having resources that provide guidance on addressing these emotions.⁹

"I think parents sometimes respond to emergencies ... but we don't respond to the emotions that these emergencies cause in our children."

Milka, Oregon



7. Think of the Children <https://capita.org/publication/think-of-the-children/>

8. Most Teachers Don't Teach Climate Change; 4 In 5 Parents Wish They Did, NPR <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/22/714262267/most-teachers-dont-teach-climate-change-4-in-5-parents-wish-they-did>

9. Climate Emotions in the Classroom: Research Findings from U.S. Public Middle School Teachers https://www.climatementalhealth.net/_files/ugd/be8092_abe3208219da427f834d66e831e28963.pdf; Climate Emotions Toolkit: Findings from a Nationwide Pilot https://www.climatementalhealth.net/_files/ugd/be8092_e05c4c7d28774ea6bab8768035e0dc13.pdf



I Have Young Kids — or I Don't Have Kids Yet

"Last week when I picked him up from school, my son asked me, 'Why is the sky gray?' and it was something out of nowhere. It struck me because he's 3 years old."

Elizabeth, Oregon





For ages 0–4

Becoming a parent—and even preparing to become a parent—marks the acute onset of climate anxiety for many. Learn about climate, including climate emotions, and seek out support so you can be there for your kids from the start.

This is also the time to learn more about and prepare for extreme weather hazards in your area.

National Risk Index: search your zip code [here](#)

The good news is that the foundations of extreme weather safety, climate literacy and climate emotions support are things every young child needs to grow up happy and healthy.

Early Childhood Climate Resilience Skills

- Regulation and co-regulation of emotions, soothing
- Basic social-emotional literacy which is the ability to recognize, understand, express, and manage emotions, naming feelings
- Care of self (including safety in extreme weather, like hats and hydration in the hot sun)
- Care of environment (not wasting water or food, cleaning up after oneself)
- Regular nature time & outdoor play
- Empathy for all living things

All of these lay the groundwork for being resilient to climate impacts later.

Starting The Climate Conversation With Young Kids (5–10)

By school age, children are already hearing messages about environmental threats and most US children have already experienced some extreme weather. When they become curious to know more and connect the dots, here are some ways to begin.

This “script” is not intended to be a single conversation. Give information at a time and pace that your children can take it in. And adjust this suggested wording as you like.

1. Have you ever thought about how amazing the Earth is? What are some things you LOVE? Everything that you love—your favorite food, our family, your friends, animals, toys, —out of the whole universe, these things can only exist here on Earth! We are so lucky to get to live on this planet. It gives us everything we need to stay alive in a way that no other place we know of in the entire universe does.
2. Earth is changing. One of the ways that Earth is perfect for living things is that it has AIR we can breathe. Other planets in our solar system don't have this! The air on Earth is invisible, but it's made up of different kinds of gas. These include oxygen that people and animals breathe, and carbon dioxide that plants breathe. Carbon dioxide is a little, tiny part of the air, just a little tiny trace. But it is so powerful! It wraps the Earth like a blanket and keeps the planet warm enough for animals and plants to live. (You can show this, with a tissue wrapping around a globe).
3. The right amount of carbon dioxide is like one blanket that keeps you nice and comfy. That's one of the things that makes the Earth a special planet where people and animals can live. But if you piled too many blankets on top of your bed what would happen? It would get WAY TOO WARM. You would sweat and might even get a fever. The same thing, too much carbon dioxide and other gases like methane, makes it WAY TOO WARM or even HOT.

And that's what's happening on Earth right now. Those blankets are piling up. And not only is the whole planet getting hotter, in some places it's too dry, so there's not enough rain; there are bigger storms and hurricanes; not enough snow in the winter; big wildfires. Where do we live, what kind of weather do we have?

4. We know why. These blankets are piling up because of something called EMISSIONS. EMISSIONS happen when people burn oil, coal, or gas to drive cars, fly in airplanes, heat

and cool houses and other buildings, cook food, and make things in factories. These old fossil fuel ways of making energy by burning fuel are adding to the blankets. It's a really big problem!

5. It's okay to be upset!

This is a lot of information and some people find it scary or sad to learn about. That is totally normal and I am always here if you want to talk about these feelings.

6. The good news is that we have LOTS OF solutions. We can have the things we need. We can get where we need to go. We can keep ourselves safe and comfortable without adding to EMISSIONS and making the planet hotter.

Do you know about choices that help the Earth? Plant trees, save water, turn off lights when not in use, ride bikes instead of driving, waste less food, eat less meat.

And just as important, there are things we can tell the people in power to do and help us do. Like put more solar panels on buildings and houses, offer composting to everybody, build safer streets to ride our bicycles, and make electric cars, trains and buses to get around. A really big problem means you need lots of helpers. And I want to be a helper. Do you?





I have older kids (10–18)

In middle and high school, the climate change conversation connects to developmentally appropriate concerns about fairness and justice, their individual interests and emerging awareness of identity. Parents, caregivers, and teachers have an important role in providing context to information young people are already finding online.

Your talking points:

- Burning fossil fuels is changing the climate.
- The effects are serious and unequal.
- There are many available solutions, and we can join the growing momentum for change.
- Climate emotions are real and valid.
- Coping with climate emotions is important.
- This includes self-care and acting to be part of the solutions.

1. **Burning fossil fuels is changing the climate.**

The release of greenhouse gas from burning fossil fuels started hundreds of years ago, in the Industrial Revolution. When people began using coal, oil, and natural gas for heating, cooling, lighting, manufacturing, and transportation, pollution was released. These so-called greenhouse gases—carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, refrigerants—together act like a blanket, covering the Earth and trapping heat in the atmosphere around Earth.

As they increase, more and more heat from the sun is trapped, causing warming. Since the late 1800s, human activities have raised the level of carbon dioxide—just one of these greenhouse gasses—in the atmosphere by 50%.

Questions: What do you see happening to the landscape and air where we live? Have you experienced a big storm, a heatwave, a wildfire, wildfire smoke, a flood, or other severe weather event?

2. The effects are serious and unequal.

Climate change doesn't just mean hotter summers and warmer winters. Because of greenhouse gasses warming our planet, hotter air increases the evaporation of moisture from the Earth's surface. This means that more water is available in the atmosphere for big rain and snow events and floods. Oceans hold more heat energy than land, energy that feeds bigger hurricanes and typhoons. Increased evaporation also means more drought. Dry plants and trees catch on fire more easily, which means more and bigger wildfires.

In short, burning fossil fuels raises the likelihood of many different extreme weather events. At the same time, human activities damage and destroy natural habitats, causing the extinction of many other species, and raising the chance that new diseases will evolve and spread.



Climate change can force people from their homes because of disasters like hurricanes or wildfires. Droughts and big storms can kill people and food crops and destroy homes, schools and buildings. All of these changes can lead to conflict and even war when people are forced to move to new places because of extreme weather or drought. These impacts are felt unequally depending on factors like race, how much money you have, if you live with a disability, and where you live on the planet.

Just 100 fossil fuel companies around the globe have been the source of 71% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 1988.¹⁰ Some people are getting very wealthy making climate change worse. Politicians have not done what is necessary to stop them. And young people and future generations will feel even more intense impacts.

Questions: What are some of the ways you describe your identity? What do you know about how climate change specifically affects people like you and your family? How does climate change affect you differently as a young person?



10. The Carbon Majors Database CDP Carbon Majors Report 2017 <https://climateaccountability.org/pdf/CarbonMajorsRpt2017%20Jul17.pdf>

3. There are many available solutions, and you can join the growing momentum for change.

People and communities across the globe are working hard to address climate change. This includes meeting human needs without making climate change worse, and restoring land, air and water so more living things can thrive and so the land can store more carbon. This shift to sustainable and restorative ways of living is one of the most dramatic changes to our civilization in history. And you have a chance to be a part of it. Change happens through individual actions done together to shift systems—how our food is grown, how we get where we’re going, how we heat and cool homes and buildings, and the decisions made by our leaders.

Some of the important ways this is happening:

- Shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy like solar and wind
- In 2024, the US solar industry installed nearly 50 gigawatts direct current (GWdc) of capacity, a 21% increase from 2023. This was the second consecutive year of record-breaking capacity.¹¹
- A 2025 United Nations Report found that worldwide:
- Clean energy investments hit \$2 trillion in 2024.
- Solar is now 41% cheaper than fossil fuels while wind power is 53% cheaper.
- 90% of new renewables beat the cost of fossil alternatives.
- Renewables now generate nearly a third of the world’s electricity.¹²
- Changing how we grow food and use land; preserving natural ecosystems and living things. Billions of trees are being planted every year in reforestation efforts.
- Electric cars, public transportation, bicycling, and living in walkable neighborhoods to reduce pollution from transportation. Electric car demand is booming. More than one in four cars sold worldwide in 2025 is forecast to be electric.

11. US Solar Market Insight Executive Summary 2024 year in review <https://seia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/USSMI-2024-YIR-ES-Embargoed-with-Watermark.pdf>

12. United Nations. Seizing the moment of opportunity: Supercharging the new era of renewables, efficacy, and electrification. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un-energy-transition-report_2025.pdf

- Electrifying buildings, electric or induction stoves, LED lights, and using electric heating and cooling. The number of heat pumps, which warm and cool buildings using electricity without needing to burn fuel, is on track to double worldwide between 2023 and 2030.
- Millions of people are working in politics and in communities to make these shifts faster, and make the Earth safer and more fair for everyone.
- Working in science and engineering to develop new technologies that produce less pollution and waste and restore natural systems.
- Working in education and mental health to raise awareness of climate change, the solutions, and to help people feel empowered to contribute to making a difference.

The road ahead is hard, but we have made a huge amount of progress in the past few years. “Thanks to astonishing declines in the price of renewables, a truly global political mobilization, a clearer picture of the energy future and serious policy focus from world leaders, we have cut expected warming almost in half in just five years.” New York Times reporter David Wallace-Wells wrote in 2022.

Questions: What actions do you see people taking around you in response to climate change? What changes are you interested in making? What solutions do you want to learn more about?



4. Climate emotions are real and valid.

As we've been talking about this, you've probably realized climate change isn't just a set of facts. It usually comes with feelings. Young people are especially concerned. In one big survey, across 10 countries, more than half of young people reported feeling each of the following emotions: sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and guilty. And, in another survey of 16,000 US Gen Zers, 85% said they are worried about climate change. And that makes sense, because the effects of climate change are expected to get worse than they are today, at least for a little while, even as many people do everything we can to fix it.

All of these feelings are valid and rooted in reality, and you are not alone. Finding ways to work with climate feelings, usually with support from friends, family, and community, can help us be more resilient in the face of this challenge. And when we do this kind of work, we might experience other climate emotions too: like gratitude, connection, joy, empathy, curiosity, and motivation.

Question: What emotions does climate change bring up for you?

5. Coping with climate emotions is important. This includes self-care and acting to be part of the solution.

Take collective action, like talking to people in your school or community about climate change, joining an organization, attending a protest, calling your elected official, writing a letter, posting on social media, planting trees in your area, raising money for an organization.

Take personal action, like using energy efficient appliances and lights, composting your food, picking a plant-based diet, growing food (home or community garden), cycling instead of driving, or choosing used clothes. And check out the take action section of this guide for more ideas and inspiration.

Question: What are ways our family could take action at home and in our neighborhood/ community?



I want to raise hopeful, thriving kids

We cannot protect our children from the truth of the climate crisis, or any terrible reality in the world for that matter. We can only protect them from being alone with the truth.

Climate psychologist Caroline Hickman says that for the children she studies and treats, by far the worst impact of their climate anxiety comes from adults not being honest with them about what's happening.

As you find outlets for your own climate anxiety, and it's no longer a taboo topic in the household, you might find your own, and your kids', mood lightening.

That said, it's equally important to make sure our kids have ample time to play, do the things they love, and use their imaginations—in other words, to be kids.

They need time in nature, art, music, humor and silliness, family traditions and celebrations, bonding time across generations, and opportunities to actively imagine a better future together.



I need to help my kids manage their climate feelings

"My oldest daughter, who's eight, is having climate distress. She's up at night with anxiety about, you know, 'the Earth is dying and other kids don't care as much as I care and people are not doing enough to help.'"

Anna, California

Humans are changing the climate. These changes are already affecting people's physical and mental health. Young people are the most affected by climate emotions. They need support from trusted adults, like family, teachers, and doctors, to understand these changes, handle their feelings about them, and act. But, only about half of parents say they have talked with their children about climate change. Here's how to start.

- Ensure they feel safe. Choose a quiet time of day when you can both be focused and present. If the conversation happens because of extreme weather near you or something on the news, try to pause and create a safe environment for them to share.
- Listen to them. Ask "What are you curious about?" Say, "I'm here to listen. Any feeling is okay." If you don't know the answer to a fact question, you can look it up together.

- Ask them, “What do you know about climate change?” Clarify when necessary, see the guide above. Build off the knowledge they already have.
- Ask them, “How are you feeling about climate change?” Be open to any words or non-verbal communication they use to describe their emotions. Depending on their age, draw a picture or use movement to express those feelings.
- Be authentic and truthful. “When I think about this, it makes me feel...” If you show openness and concern, then they will likely respond in a similar way. Share your own thoughts and feelings in a calm manner while taking into consideration your child’s age and sensitivities.
- Talk about actions you can take together. Some young people may be ready to act, while others will want to learn more or simply sit with their feelings. Let them know that every action, no matter how big or small they feel it is, makes a difference.
- Keep a balance and give them courage. Reassure them that you will always do what you can to protect them. We each can make a difference. Millions of people, youth and adults, are working hard to help address the problem. There are so many climate solutions. Look at Drawdown.org for ideas.

There are FIVE big ways that we learn to cope with big climate feelings. And they are all important.



EXPRESS: We can do something to help express our feelings: Write in a journal, play music that matches our mood and dance it out.



EXPLORE: We can talk to a friend, family member or a therapist about how we feel.



EXHALE: We can do things that calm us, lift our mood and bring us joy: Take deep breaths. Meditate. Spend time in nature. Move our bodies. Snuggle with a pet. Watch a funny video. Do something with our hands like crafting or cooking.



SPEAK UP: We can take action toward the problem.



REFRAME: We can focus on thoughts and ideas that help us put the problem in perspective (meaning focused coping).

My child is anxious/afraid

"Maggie, who is four years old, she was scared...the power went out ...it got very cold and she was scared to hear the sounds of the wind in the dark. What the child wants is that security that you always try to provide as a parent, and at that moment it is out of your reach."

Gustavo, Oregon

How do we hold space for our children and their fears?

By Steffi Bednarek, Centre for Climate Psychology

As adults, we often see ourselves as problem solvers. This can feel like an impossible weight, especially as we don't always know how to respond. So out of overwhelm we sometimes say something that is meant to be reassuring but that quickly puts a lid on any further expression. This doesn't make children's fear go away, they just learn that we are not available to hear them out.

It is so hard to sit with our children's fear, knowing that we can't solve it or fix it. But what children (and adults) need most in these moments isn't answers, but connection.



Here's how we can hold space for kids eco-anxiety amidst crises:

1. **Validate:** "Name it, to tame it" is a simple, science-backed technique you can use to calm spiraling negative thoughts or intense emotions.

Naming our emotional states re-activates the prefrontal cortex and calms us down, especially if our feelings are validated by another. You can say: "it sounds like you are really anxious about your future and I can understand why you worry when you see these images".
2. **Acknowledge the fear:** Avoid platitudes like, "It's going to be okay." Instead, meet their questions with honesty: "I don't have all the answers. I can't see into the future, but I'm here with you. You are not alone. We are a good team ..."
3. **Focus on shared values:** Talk about what you both care about—protecting nature, helping others, or standing up for what's right. Talk about what makes you angry and what feels unfair—and translate this into values you both hold. This helps children feel that your family has a moral compass and that this can give guidance on finding small and not so small ways to act on those values together.
4. **Provide stability in chaos:** Even when everything feels unstable, relationships can anchor us. Showing up—fully present and open—can make all the difference. By holding space for the difficult emotions, we can build a foundation of courage, care, and connection—qualities that will carry us and future generations through.
5. **Model resilience:** It's okay to say, "I don't know," or, "This is hard for me too." Showing children how we navigate difficult emotions teaches them that we can face challenges without losing hope.

And most importantly remember to prioritize connection over solutions: Children don't need perfect answers—they need to feel safe in their relationships. Being present, listening without judgment, and simply sitting with their emotions is often more powerful than making up solutions.

By holding space for difficult emotions and staying connected, we help children—and ourselves—develop the skills of psychological resilience that can carry us through an uncertain future.

My child is sad

"She has a lot of grief and a lot of anger, and it's not just at leaders, but at humans in general. She thinks humans have just like wrecked the life support systems of the planet."

Linda, California

13 Things To Try When Children Are Sad About The Earth

Panu Pihkala with Anya Kamenetz, Leslie Davenport

Grief is an inherent part of confronting the world's environmental crisis. Children today are exposed to this reality at a much younger age than before. They are feeling climate grief, and they are picking up on our grief. But parents, caregivers and educators don't have much support, space, or language for helping children process these emotions.

Recognizing eco-grief within ourselves and supporting children is essential for a healthy emotional life, strengthening our connections to ourselves, other people and the Earth, and inspiring positive action. Below, you'll find some simple guidelines to help with this process. When engaging with ecological grief and climate grief in practice, we recommend three basic ways and three basic modes: By thinking (cognition) With your body (somatics) Creatively (arts, imagination) Alone With one or a few trusted others in community.

1. **Get support** for your own emotions.
2. **Acknowledge their emotions:** "It's okay to feel sad, confused, or angry. You are not alone."
3. **Encourage open communication:** "Do you have any questions for me?" "I am here to listen."
4. **Play it out:** "Let's pretend we are snow bunnies missing the snow. What would you say?" Try using puppets or stuffed animals.
5. **Draw a picture together,** of a memory, a place, or a feeling. Or use natural materials for an artwork.

6. **Sing a song**, write a poem.
7. **Create a memory box**: Collect pictures, mementos, and meaningful objects related to what's been lost. This can help children feel a sense of connection to the experience they're grieving.
8. **Get outside**: Spend time in a park, forest, beach. Be quiet and listen to nature.
9. **Plant a tree** in honor or memory of a lost species.
10. **Create a ritual**: Make a grave marker and hold a funeral, giving a eulogy for something damaged; or light a candle for living things that suffer from environmental damage.
11. **Read a book together** about a character going through loss and coping with it.
12. **Use body expression**: Let your limbs sway, breathe deeply or slowly, make a dance; or find a safe space to let out furious grief, by pounding on pillows.
13. **Participate in community events**: Such as Remembrance Day for Lost Species on November 30th. If you belong to a spiritual community or congregation, explore options in your tradition.



My child/teen is angry

*"A little bit of like f*** it. Nothing I do matters...Resentment for the people who could have made changes and didn't. Anger at Gen X and the Boomer generation. 'Why didn't you do something when you could have done something. Why are you still not doing something?'"*

Lucia, Colorado

Out of all climate emotions, research finds anger is the most connected to action. It is important to be there to listen to children and teens' anger, which can be difficult because it might be directed at us!

As members of the older generation, we have contributed to a problem that they are inheriting through no fault of their own.

We can help them by:

- Listening and acknowledging their feelings;
- Suggesting outlets like loud music and dance, journaling, art, video making, or physical activity;
- Making sure there is a balance and breaks in their lives, with activities they enjoy, funny and escapist movies, books.
- Providing connections to action, particularly action that directs anger at targets in power.

Use our [Take Action and Self Care Guide](#) to help your teens identify the ways they want to take action in their school or community. They can get involved with an advocacy group at school or take them to a safe, nonviolent march or protest. They can write letters or make phone calls to elected officials. They can get involved with local activities like tree planting, citizen science, reducing food waste, habitat and land restoration, etc.

My child/teen seems indifferent

When parents are very climate-aware, some children will respond by going in the opposite direction. They don't want to hear about climate change, or they say they don't care. Sometimes this indifference is a cover for deep despair or resignation.

You don't need to force them or lecture them.

Instead, model your values through the choices you make as a family— being prepared for extreme weather, or reducing food waste, eating less meat and dairy, advocating for climate education in school.

Model emotional regulation. Let them see you de-stressing with a walk after work, or talk about taking a break from the news.

Let them see you making your voice heard as an advocate on issues you care about.

Call attention to climate solutions when you hear or read about them in the media.

Give them opportunities to fall in love with animals and nature.





We're facing extreme weather

"When we first moved to Washington State a few years ago, it was the first time in my life that I felt like I couldn't protect my kids. We dealt with wildfire smoke. We weren't prepared, we didn't have air filters, and you couldn't buy them at stores because they were completely out. The Air Quality Index was very high, like in the 500 range, and I had a toddler and a baby and my mental health... was very bad. I was just anxious, worried. That was devastating for me. In order to be a good parent, my mental health needs to be good."

Bethany, Vermont

By Dr. Emily Diamond

What are a few things that kids who have been through disasters want others to know? When asked what they hoped others could learn from their experience, hundreds of children in my study talked about the importance of being more prepared.

When we think about teaching children, we often think about having conversations. Yet the number one way to teach is by leading by example.

Show your kids you are prepared and have a safety plan. Assign your kid(s) roles in the preparation.

Talk about important values as a family. Many children in my study who are survivors, conveyed that they learned that things are replaceable, but people aren't. One thing that child survivors have talked about is the importance of being there for each other.

Know what things are special to your child. For photos, make digital copies. For special items, consider making a list in advance and keeping it on your phone to try to make sure you take them with you if there is a need to evacuate. This way, they are not left longing and missing things for years to come.

Use stories in the news or that happened in your community to talk about important things, like how communities can pull together and help one another. Many kids in my study talk about how their community came together after the disaster, sharing food, a place to stay, and cleaning up together. Show them how to build community, even when there isn't a disaster.

More tips:

1. Let them see you check for weather warnings or air quality alerts daily. Let them see you make disaster preparations, and if you can, include them in this.
2. Everyone with a cellphone should be signed up for regional emergency alerts.
3. Practice evacuation with all the health, medication and medical / safety equipment that is needed so the family can estimate how long it really takes to evacuate.
4. Pack a **go-bag** and involve your children in packing their own go-bags.
5. Keep non-perishable foods in the house, with calories for everyone for about 10 days.
6. ID bracelets for the whole family with contact information, including contact information for the regular doctor and/or write the name and contact info for your child onto their jacket with a permanent marker.
7. Consider smart watches, Tiles, or similar devices that can track the location of the child.
8. Ask your pediatrician about what first aid or medications should be kept on hand in the home in case of disaster.

9. If a parent has access to a driver's license, and vehicle consider keeping half a tank of gas/100 mile travel ability in a vehicle, that can increase safety.
10. Make a family agreement that in an evacuation, the family will leave early, to keep stress as low as possible.
11. Make contact with friends/family out of your area who are willing to host your family for a few days, or try to save and set aside money for a motel.
12. Making plans in advance to get your pets out of harm's way. Sometimes people put off evacuation because they don't have plans for their pets.
13. Keep a current photo of your child on your cellphone or in your wallet so in case of separation, search and rescue knows what your child looks like.

When you involve kids in preparation, or they see you doing it, it communicates that they are being protected and cared for. It also shows them that what they love is also important to you. What does your child want in their go-bag?

Preparedness Day

Think about starting a tradition by having a day that's set aside for preparedness. Summer is when there will be more serious heat waves, more fires, and in the Western Hemisphere, when the Atlantic hurricane season begins.

A calm day in spring or early summer can be a great time to set aside an afternoon to review preparedness issues, replace batteries for headlamps, restock the first aid kit, update the emergency contact list, ensure you have the best emergency notification apps, and make sure you restock enough non-perishable foods.

There's a chance your child will grow up to carry on the tradition, which might keep them safer their whole lives.





We survived extreme weather

Erica Solove, Extreme Weather Survivors

How do I try to maintain/restore a sense of normalcy for my kids?

- Our home burned down in a fire fueled by hurricane force winds on December 30th, 2021. We did not have time to put on shoes or grab even a wallet when we evacuated, and life turned upside down from that moment on. As we restarted our lives with zero possessions or stability, it became immediately clear that normalcy would need to be modeled.
- We prioritized recreating “normal” routines in a very abnormal existence in the months following the fire, cooking dinner together, playing our favorite games, meeting up frequently with beloved neighbors who were also all displaced, and doing our favorite activities together as a family. We kept our son enrolled in the same school and committed to a long school commute while we were displaced.
- In short, we modeled daily that one very scary experience would not take away our family’s joy.

How do I make sure myself as the caregiver has support?

- Disaster recovery and rebuilding is a relentless full-time job. Burnout is likely for parents in the midst of disaster recovery. The silver lining is that you are not alone. Seek out other disaster survivor parents and build community.

Check out the resources and community of [Extreme Weather Survivors](#).



Our family faces racism / other discrimination

Contributions by Dr. Jade Sasser

Both people of color and LGBTQ+ families have to navigate climate hazards alongside the realities of discrimination and unequal access to resources, which can compound the emotional stress.

Low-income families, Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous families, and families that include immigrants, are more likely to be exposed to the dangers of pollution and extreme weather because of housing discrimination and environmental racism.

They may also have more problems accessing aid after an extreme weather event, for example if they need documentation for shelter, or if they are renters with absentee landlords.

Parents of color who give their children “the talk” about racism, structural violence, etc. already have a good model for talking to children about climate change. They (and others who want to learn from them) can adapt the **racism talk** to fit the model of climate injustice, which is also structurally unequal and unjust, but more so focused on systems and not specific people.

Cultural solidarity, practices of mutual aid, institutions like places of worship, cultural practices that bring people closer to nature and the outdoors, and queer “chosen families”

are resources that can help children be more resilient.

Families are encouraged to seek out climate scientists and climate activists who provide “mirrors,” so that children can find inspiration in people seeking solutions who look like them.

Here’s a great YouTube video that explains climate justice and social inequality:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oq-14b18LNg>

ChildrenandNature.org is a website with tools for talking to children about racism, environmental injustice, and **how to take action**.





My child is neurodiverse, disabled, or learns differently

By Elizabeth Bechard with Dr. Emily Diamond

Every child is unique. Parents and caregivers know best how to communicate with their particular child. Neurodivergent and disabled children vary widely in communication, comprehension, and emotional regulation.

Take into account your child's individual processing style, how they best absorb information, and what is developmentally appropriate. Consider health and safety factors.

What is your child curious about? You can start a conversation based on what your child cares about and what is special to them, like electric cars or birds.

Trust Your Instincts as a Parent. Climate conversations may not be appropriate for all children, especially those who are nonverbal or when the family is in crisis or “survival mode.” If discussing the big picture of climate change doesn't feel appropriate, consider keeping the focus on safety and preparedness.

1. Put On Your Own Oxygen Mask

Parents of neurodiverse children often face higher daily stress. Before initiating conversations about climate change, it's important that parents seek emotional support for themselves, so they can approach the topic with clarity and calm.

Processing fears or practical concerns (e.g., medication, routines, sensory needs during

disasters) with other adults can help parents feel more prepared to guide their kids when the time comes, and can help build community.

2 Consider Diverse Climate Impacts

- Some children may have medical or sensory sensitivities that make them more vulnerable to climate impacts like dangerous heat.
- Parents should think through personalized safety strategies (e.g. managing heat sensitivity or routine disruption) so they can clearly explain these to their children in supportive ways (e.g. “One of your medications makes your body a little more sensitive when it’s hot outside—so we’re going to do XYZ to make sure you stay safe in this heat wave” or “It might feel overwhelming for you when it’s so hot outside, so we’re going to do XYZ to help you feel comfortable and safe”).
- Disabled people have a higher chance of dying in disasters, and part of this is because they will tend to be the last people to evacuate. Make a family agreement to evacuate early.
- Consider alerting local police and fire departments about a high needs child in case of evacuation, or search and rescue if they go missing.
- If the child has eating difficulty or restrictions, consider how this will impact their ability to eat during an emergency, such as a shelter, hotel, or someone else’s home.

3. Difference makes us stronger

Participation by, and consideration of the needs of, neurodiverse and disabled people makes a stronger climate movement, one that is attuned to our common human need for care and our interdependence.

Young people with intense topical interests, natural empathy and sensitivity for people or animals, and/or a keen sense of right and wrong, may have especially valuable roles to play in the climate movement, in spite of the challenges of having to navigate a world that isn’t designed for their unique needs. Scott Barry Kaufman, a positive psychologist who grew up with learning disabilities, includes “wisdom” in his definition of giftedness: “Wisdom is the use of one’s knowledge and skills to create a common good; by balancing one’s own, others’, and larger interests; over the long- as well as the short-term; through the influence of positive ethical values.”



My child struggles with mental health

Climate emotions are not in themselves pathological. They are a normal and healthy response to real threat and loss. However, there is correlation between clinical levels of anxiety or depression in general, and expressing difficult feelings in relationship to climate change in particular.

If your child shows signs of mental health struggles that impair basic functioning or enjoyment of their normal activities, make sure you seek out the support you need through school, pediatrician, or community. In an emergency, in the US, text or call 988 for a 24/7 crisis hotline. For emergency mental health in other countries, visit: findahelpline.com.

For children with a mental health condition, elevate the coping strategies discussed elsewhere in this guide when having conversations about climate or learning about it in the news or social media.

Consider the concepts of resourcing, titration, toggling, and the window of tolerance.¹³

The “**window of tolerance**” is the space in between numbing out/shutting down and freaking out/getting overwhelmed, where you are able to take in information and have a conversation about something on your mind. Doing things like resourcing, titration and

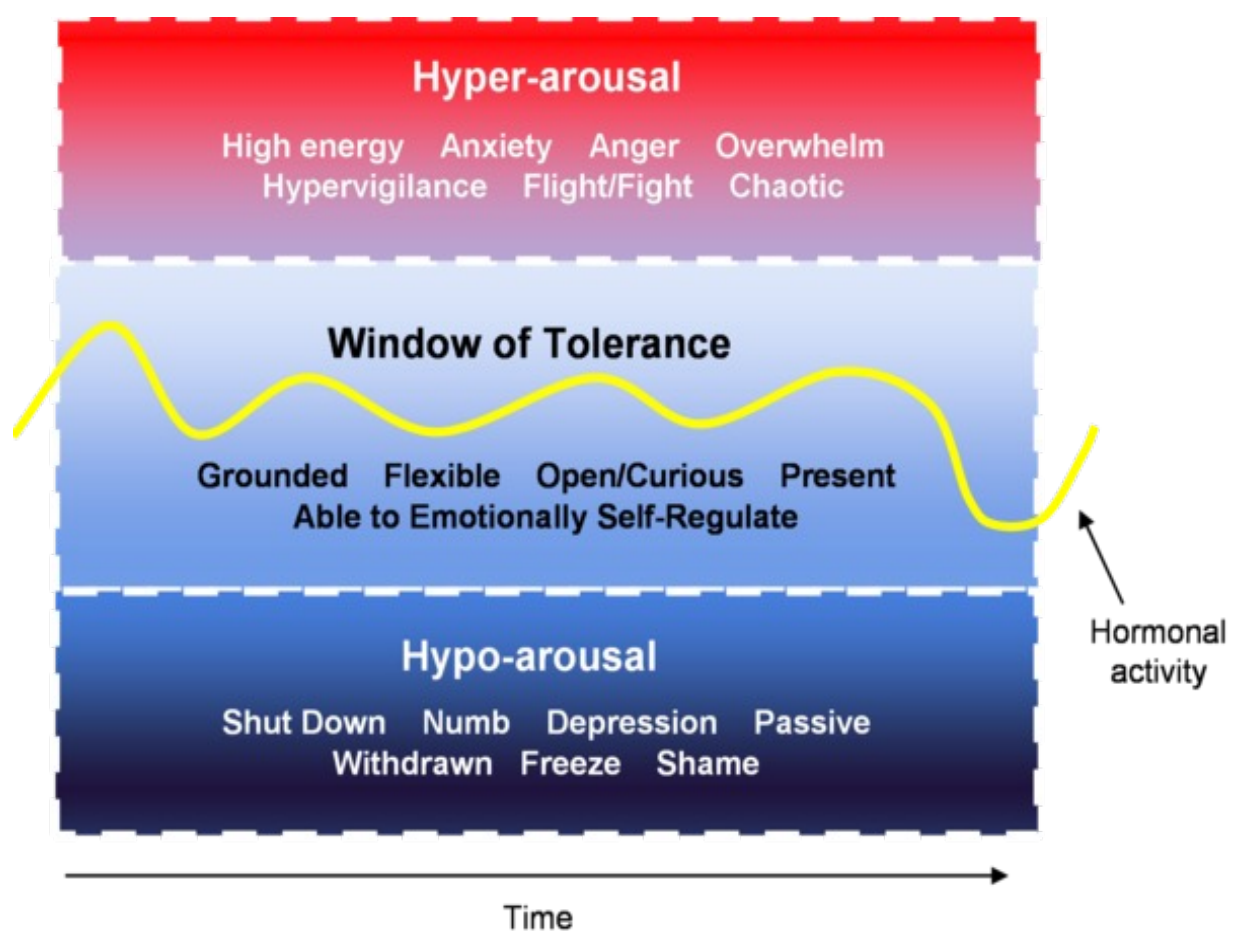
¹³ Expanding the Window of Tolerance <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/lifespan-psychology/202004/expanding-the-window-tolerance>

toggling as well as self care activities can help people be emotionally balanced in the window of tolerance.

Resourcing means consciously evoking things that make you feel safe and supported. You might want to have a conversation about climate change while snuggling a pet, cozy under a blanket on the couch, or outside in a beautiful space.

Titration means going slowly and taking in information about something like extreme weather a little at a time, to stay in the window of tolerance.

Toggling means switching back and forth between information or a conversation that is activating or upsetting, and something that is calming or lightens the mood. It's always ok to take breaks. You could even set a timer to remind you to switch.





I need more support for my own feelings

“One thing I feel a lot is loss. I’m losing an experience for my son. It’s pre-traumatic stress, like, I’m fearing something in the future, or I’m mourning something that hasn’t happened. So like when we have snow, which I love...I’m not enjoying it. I’m just wondering if this is the last time my son will see snow.”

Maria, New Hampshire

Research by Elizabeth Bechard, Jennifer Silverstein, and Jennifer Walke finds that in relation to climate change:

Parents experience emotional distress that can be described as moral injury (meaning, we feel implicated for leaving our children a messed-up world)

- Many parents use distancing strategies to cope (we try not to think about it). But this doesn’t really work long term.
- For some parents, embracing the challenges of climate change can be a catalyst for personal growth, meaning and hope.

How To Cope

1. Express our feelings
2. Discuss them with others
3. Practice self care
4. Take action together towards the problem
5. Focus on thoughts and ideas that help us put the problem in perspective (meaning focused coping)

Thanks to Maria Ojala!

1. First, give yourself time to reflect on your own feelings about climate change. Educate yourself, practice self-care, and prepare.
2. Move your body: Stretch, dance, or jump up and down to your favorite music.
3. Connect with nature: Spend time outdoors or bring nature inside with plants, photos and sounds of nature.
4. Quiet your mind and body: Take deep, slow breaths. We have some guided and sound [meditations](#) on our site.
5. Spend time in silence.
6. Listen to calming music and seek out positive media or news.
7. Express yourself: Through arts including dance, music, drama, drawing, or journaling. Check out our art therapy [resources](#).
8. Engage in play activities: they help to foster connections, resilience and joy.
9. Read and watch: Read [books](#) and watch movies that affirm loving and respectful relationships between people, living things, and the planet. Public and school libraries are a great place to start.

Then, build a supportive community:

Start conversations with friends, family, or peers who share your concerns.

Send them this guide and say “I got a lot out of this, would you be willing to talk to me about it?” Our research shows that parents want to talk with each other about what they are

going through and their kids' climate emotions.

Or just message a friend and say, "I'm feeling worried about climate change, can you talk about it with me?" Clarify that you're looking to have a conversation about feelings, not to problem solve.

Join a conversation group such as a [Climate Cafe](#), [Good Grief Network](#), or the [Work that Reconnects](#)

Start a peer support group with other parents and caregivers. Here are some tips to starting a peer group:

1. Is your goal simply to share feelings and build community? Do you want to combine community building and climate action?
2. Who can you invite? Kids' friends' parents, neighbors, worship community?
3. Who will facilitate?
4. How often will you meet?
5. Where will you meet? Library, community center, public school, participants' houses, on Zoom?
6. Establish facilitation and meeting ground rules

"I think I have a lot of grief, not being able to give them that 'the world is possible' sort of attitude.."

Lucia, Washington, DC



Get more tips from the
**Creating and Facilitating
Peer Support Groups.**



I want to take action

Not every person shares the same power or responsibility to address climate change, but we all play a role. Join hands with friends and neighbors and you won't feel so alone. Take action with others: community action is a building block of the change that is needed at all levels, from local to global.

Liat Olenick, [Climate Families NYC](#)

Liat has two young children and lives in Brooklyn, NY.

The number one thing I tell parents who are thinking about coming on board as activists is DO IT! Collective action is the best antidote to despair and overwhelm, and it sends a powerful message to your kids when they see you taking action.

Our activities range from creative and musical rallies, to tabling at school fairs, to story times, to petition drives and call relays to our local and state elected officials, to joining big marches resisting authoritarianism, to hosting climate playdates at local parks and even family beach days.

We work on campaigns focused on pushing our city and state elected officials to lead on climate, as well as campaigns targeting the companies on Wall Street propping up the fossil fuel industry.

Here's what I tell people about finding the level that works for them:

There are all different entry points. Whether it's coming to a playdate, joining a protest or writing a letter, every action matters. Drops of water turn the mill, and all parents and kids

can play a part in the climate movement.

The toughest thing about activism as a parent of young kids is knowing how grave the stakes are, and sitting with my fears about the future. My toddler loves going to protests and taking action, but he doesn't yet understand how serious the climate crisis is. My hope is that my actions help him feel safe and supported once he does start to understand what is really happening.

But the most rewarding thing about getting engaged in your community is forming friendships and connections with other families and parents who care and want to make things better! I love my climate community so much, I really don't know how I would parent without them!



Here are some places to start:

- [Climate Families NYC](#)
- [Moms Clean Air Force](#)
- [EcoMadres](#)
- [Our Kids Climate](#)
- [Children's Environmental Health Network](#)
- [Third Act](#) for grandparents and anyone over 60
- [Climate Cardinals](#) for youth
- [Climate Imagination](#)
- [Dear Tomorrow](#)
- [Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots](#)
- [Children and Nature Network](#)

Addressing Climate Emotions in Schools

Climate emotions impact students beyond the household. Schools are places where students may learn about climate change, and also where they may first experience its impacts, such as closures, evacuations, or other disruptions from extreme weather events.

A [national research study](#) conducted by Climate Mental Health Network found that 83% of teachers expressed concern that climate change would harm the mental health and wellbeing of their students. In the same study, 72% said that their students had expressed worry related to directly experiencing an extreme weather event. Teachers are uniquely positioned to help students process complex emotions when engaging in climate learning, which can orient them toward developing greater emotional resilience and a sense of agency.

How Can Schools Do This?

You don't have to be an expert— you just have to start the conversation! Parents can play a tremendous role in encouraging schools to start integrating climate emotions into their curricula. Here are some things you can do to advocate for schools to address climate emotions too:

- **Share Your Story:** Talk to your kids' teachers, school administrators and PTA about why this matters to your child or community using personal examples. If your community recently underwent an extreme weather event or disaster for example, you can cite this as an important teachable moment.



- **Share the Facts:** You can find helpful statistics in our report [Climate Emotions in the Classroom](#), “[The Issue](#)” page of our website, or in this [2024 study](#) on Gen Z climate emotions.
- **Identify Key Leaders:** determine who in your school community can help you bring climate emotions to the forefront. Check out the National Parents Union guide to [Connecting with School Administrators and Elected Officials](#).
- **Provide Resources:** Climate Mental Health Network has a breadth of free resources online; we also do professional development trainings for schools and school districts across the country including our evidence-based, teacher-tested [Climate Emotions Toolkit](#) for Middle School Teachers and our [K-12 activities guide](#).
- **Be a Partner:** Ask teachers at your child’s school what support they might need to integrate climate emotions concepts into their regular teaching. Offer to help source materials, connect with guest speakers, organize a book club, or facilitate a parent information session.
- **Work in Community:** Encourage other families to speak with teachers and school administrators. Gather a group of parents to speak at school board meetings and present a unified front; the more parents speak up, the stronger the case!

When parents and educators work together, schools can become places where youth climate emotions are met with understanding and care from adult allies. Parents can help create a learning environment that supports students toward a pathway to action.

