Climate
Mental Health
Network

Climate Grief:

Activities Guide



BY NC SA

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Grief Activities

This activity is part of the Climate Mental Health Network's guide All About Climate Grief: What to Know and What To Do About It by Panu Pihkala with Anya Kamenetz and Sarah Newman. These resources are not a replacement for professional services when needed. In the US call or text 988 for a 24/7 crisis hotline. Outside the US, find emergency mental health numbers at findahelpline.com.

Activity: Tashlich

Tashlich is done as part of the Jewish New Year. Go alone or with a group to a body of water such as a river or lake, and fill your pockets with bread. As you turn out your pockets, and drop bits of bread into the water, name each piece of bread as something you want to let go of. For example "greed," "carelessness," "waste".



Activity: Self-reflection on anatomy of climate grief

1. Read slowly through the anatomy of climate grief above
2. What resonates with your experiences? Make notes; Drawing on paper might be useful
3. Think of the experiences of people you know and are close to. What types of loss and/or grief have they experienced? What kinds of combinations of them do you notice? What could be an emphatic reaction to those experiences?
4. Think also of coping. What has helped, or might help, in relation to your experiences?

This can be done alone or, after reflecting, you can share with a partner or group.



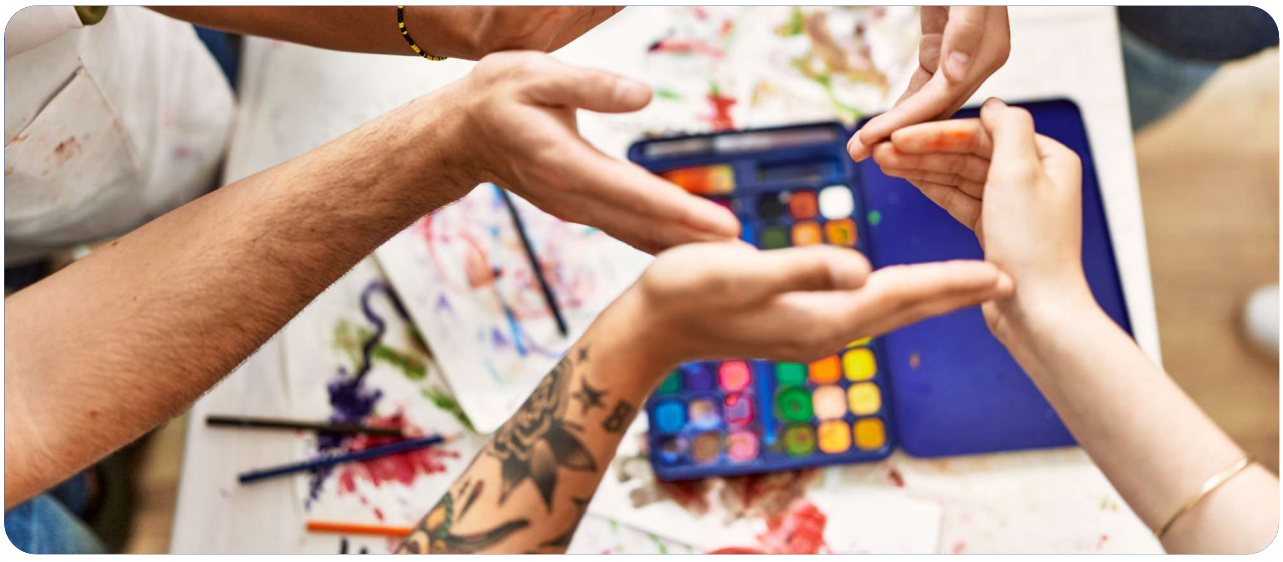
Activity: Grief map

Start with a large piece of paper, markers, paints, or a digital drawing tool.

- Draw a depiction of your path in the terrain of climate grief. How did it start? What did you feel at various points? What kind of things burdened you and what kind of things or relations were helpful? What types of loss and types of grief have been involved, and have they changed?

Think about depicting the phases and dimensions (e.g. Awakening, Coping and Changing) in the Process Model of Eco-anxiety and Ecological Grief.

- How do you currently feel about the balance between climate grief and other areas of life? If needed, what could be helpful for gaining more balance?
- If you wish, you can draw a map of a future terrain of climate emotions that represents a positive dream or goal.



Activity: Using the Climate Emotions Wheel To Understand How Grief Connects To Different Emotions

Discuss with the group, perhaps starting from a pair discussion or small group discussion:

What emotions in the wheel might be connected with a particular type of loss or grief, within or outside of the Sadness quadrant?

Examples (don't say these right away to people, but let them think themselves first):

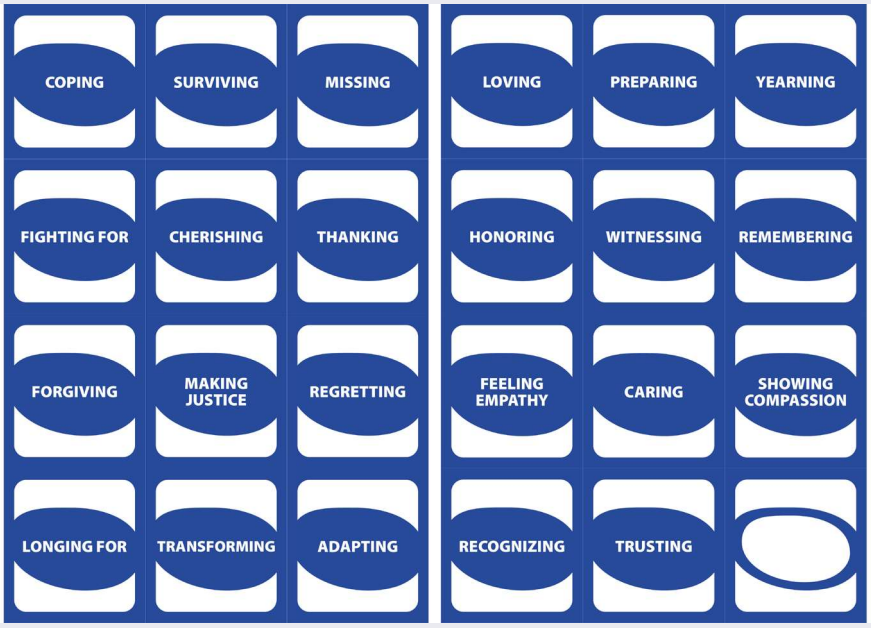
- Disenfranchised grief can leading to loneliness and/or feeling betrayed
- Nonfinite loss and Chronic sorrow evokes anxiety
- Lifeworld loss producing depression
- Shattered dreams of others evoking empathy
- Anticipatory grief increases worry, but proactive anticipatory mourning increases empowerment
- Meaning reconstruction interlinked with empathy, hope, and gratitude

Then discuss ways to engage with these issues and feelings constructively.

Activity: Print, Choose, Discuss

Another option is to have the types of loss and grief, or a selection of them, printed on a paper. Then people can walk around the words and choose one that they feel drawn to. People can discuss the content of these words briefly in pairs (or groups of three), and share thoughts about why this particular word interested them. Then the types can be discussed one by one with the whole group.

It is then possible to continue this exercise by using a second set of words. These words have names of important actions and dynamics in ecological/climate grief:



Invite people to choose words in relation to the types of loss and grief that they have chosen, and invite them to discuss things which feel important for them.

Activity: Re-Enfranchising Grief

(adapted from Coming Back to Life, Joanna Macy & Molly Young Brown, New Society Publishers 2014)

An important first step is to realize how much we can be burdened by disenfranchised grief. Then we can seek validation, at least from trusted others. It may be helpful also to think about what exactly is disenfranchised the loss, the relationship, the griever, or some ways of grieving? After identifying this, it is easier to see what might help in relation to validation.

Find a trusted person who is willing to share with you. Do some grounding and speak about the following prompts one at a time, for example for 3 minutes per prompt. After one has spoken, the other says: "I hear you", and then shares from their own perspective.

- Some things which I am grateful about are...
- Some things caused by humans to the more-than-human world (/"nature") which make me really sad are...
- Ways of support and recognition that I would like to receive include...

Discuss ways in which you and other caring people could support each other.

Reflections

- Has someone dismissed or downplayed your experience of grief about ecological destruction?
- Do you ever feel like downplaying or dismissing your own feelings about the climate?
- Has somebody provided you recognition and validation of your grief?
- How could you provide support for others who feel dismissed in their ecological/climate grief?





Activity: Engaging With Anticipatory Grief



- Please do suitable grounding; feel your connection to the ground/floor.
- Think of an earlier time and someone relatively close to you who you have realized will perhaps not live long anymore. How did it feel to realize this? What reactions did this cause in your behavior?
- Read grief researcher Therese Rando's definition of anticipatory mourning: "the phenomenon encompassing the processes of **mourning, coping, interaction, planning, and psychosocial reorganization** that are stimulated and begun in part in response to the awareness of the impending loss of a loved one and the recognition of associated losses in the past, present, and future". There's a lot here, and you can read this several times. According to this, what are the important tasks in anticipatory mourning?
- Think about ways to respond to challenges:
  - How to engage in anticipatory mourning, instead of running away from it, so that we can prepare for losses? If you think of an aging relative: why is a good kind of anticipatory mourning beneficial for them and for you as their close ones?
  - How to avoid catastrophizing? And how to maintain an ability to cherish the present moment and what still exists, instead of losing this ability because we mourn in advance?

- How to both be grateful for what is and has been, and to have the determination (e.g. anger) to fight against negative changes which can be prevented? (e.g. just accepting a relative's cancer or trying to fight together against it?)
- When you think of the ecological and climate crises, what could all this look like?



Activity: Rite of Transition

How do aging people make meaning amidst their transitions into elderhood? What elements help people in traditional rites of passage? We could search for guidance to ecological transitional loss and grief from examples like these. We need to mourn what is left behind, and give space to what comes. Renewal is possible, although difficult.

Choose symbols (and/or symbolic movement) to mark transitions.

- a symbol for that which is being left behind.
- a symbol for the future: preferably something which signals also openness
- some space between these
- for reflection, you can sit/stand between the symbols, voicing (internally or out loud) your thoughts and emotions, starting from the symbol about the past (and/or present).
- voice your intention: e.g. "I give thanks to that which has been, and I commit to being open to the future."



Activity: Growth via grief

Open sentences: in addition to all the possible pain, ecological grief has taught me...

has brought me...

has motivated me to...

Possible answers:

- has taught me to be more grateful for things that we might lose
- has clarified my deeper values
- has motivated me to work on behalf of Earth and all its inhabitants
- has increased a sense of meaning in efforts to care
- brought a deeper connection to others (human / more-than-human)
- has taught me to appreciate more each day that we live
- has informed my decisions in life

