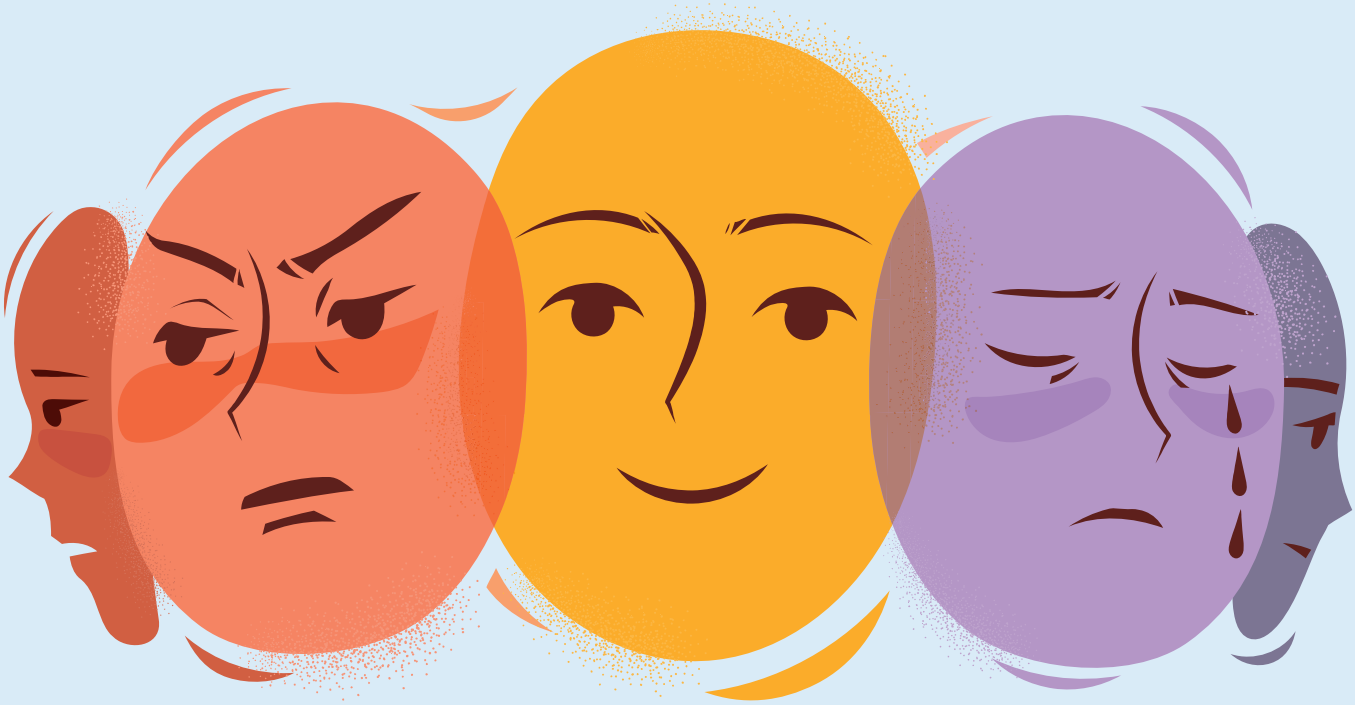
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A Guide To Climate Emotions

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Acknowledgements:
Inspiration from **Karla McLaren**'s work on emotions and **The Atlas Of The Heart** by Brené Brown (2021); gratitude to comments by Sarah Newman

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Table of Contents

Climate Emotions Wheel	Page 1
Key to the Wheel	Page 3
Fear	Page 4
Sadness	Page 8
Anger	Page 13
Positivity	Page 17
Reflection	Page 21
Dynamics of Climate Emotions	Page 25
Climate Emotions Wheel Activity	Page 34

Climate Emotions Wheel



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Climate Emotions Wheel

Emotions wheels have been a visual tool used by psychologists for decades to help people better understand and interpret their own feelings. This Climate Emotions Wheel is based on the research of Panu Pihkala at the University of Helsinki and particularly his 2022 paper **Toward A Taxonomy of Climate Emotions**. It is not intended to be comprehensive or definitive, and it is not to scale; positive emotions are not typically identified in most research as often as other emotions on this scale. Our hope is that looking at this wheel will help you identify your own emotions and work with them.

Key to the Wheel

This ‘key to the wheel’ will help you understand and navigate your emotions about the climate crisis. Each emotion is defined and accompanied by a key question that will help you respond skillfully.





Fear

Fear helps us to react to perceived threats.

In this segment, some emotions are closely related to experiencing threats themselves, and some emotions, such as powerlessness, are the cumulative results of having experienced climate-related threats.

Overwhelm

The climate crisis just seems too much.

Overwhelm is the feeling of having too much sensory input or other incoming information. It makes it hard to process or understand what is happening.

It's easy to feel at least moderately overwhelmed, because the climate crisis is so vast and difficult, and understanding it can require processing a lot of data. Strong overwhelm is an extreme level of stress, to the point of being temporarily unable to function.

When feeling overwhelmed, it's crucial to find safety and calm down one's nervous system.

? How do I slow down and take time to cope?

Panic

We're doomed!

Panic is a strong fear reaction. In relation to climate work, the challenge is to remain aware of the urgency while maintaining power to choose options. When urgency turns into panic, it's crucial to tune into one's internal sensory input–such as breathing, awareness of the body in space–to come back into the present moment.

? How to calm down and balance urgency with effective responses?

Powerlessness

It's impossible!

Feelings of powerlessness and helplessness are very common in relation to climate issues, because the problems need structural solutions. These emotions are especially widespread among people who have less power than others. It is important to receive support from others and to find at least smaller ways to achieve purpose and effect change.

? How to act with purpose?

Anxiety

My heartbeat goes up and my stomach tightens when I read climate news.

Anxiety is activating energy, produced in response to a threat or opportunity. It can be energizing or if it's too strong, it can be paralyzing. Climate threats are huge and hard to control or understand, which produces climate anxiety. It's important to be able to feel a suitable amount of climate anxiety, so that it sparks us into problem-solving but does not paralyze us.

? How to channel climate anxiety constructively?

Worry

I can't stop thinking about what will happen as a result of these climate predictions.

Worry can be a rational response to potential threats, but if it dwells repetitively on negative outcomes, it can also become overly strong rumination. Climate worry is very common and it is linked with a desire to make things better. It's problematic if it leads to a tendency to focus on the worst possible outcomes.

? What level of worry is constructive, and when am I slipping into excessive rumination?





Sadness

Sadness helps us to react to losses and to cherish what remains.

In this segment, some emotions are more closely connected to sadness and some are “close relatives” but distinct emotions, such as guilt and shame.

Despair

It feels so dark and my strength is becoming depleted.

It is understandable to feel climate despair because the problems are so immense. Despair can connect us to our powerful wish for change.

It is important to remember that despair is not the same as total hopelessness: despair can be a part of mood changes in an otherwise resilient person. If despair persists or becomes hopelessness, psychological help is needed.

? How to make space for my despair, allow it to flow, and continue to work for a better world?

Loneliness

It feels like no-one else cares so deeply.

Solitude is the neutral or positive state of being alone; loneliness is feeling disconnected, alienated or misunderstood by others, whether or not you are around other people.

It is very common to feel loneliness because of your climate emotions and attitudes. This may happen because of a lack of public recognition of climate emotions in your community or because the feelings associated with climate change seem too dark to share with friends or family. The good news is that climate feelings in fact are widespread, and if you start to name

them, it is likely you will find others who feel the same way. Try climate psychology organizations or groups as a place to start.

? How, and to whom, can I speak aloud what I'm feeling?

Loss

It feels terrible to lose this.

Climate crisis includes a profound array of various losses, both tangible and intangible, certain and uncertain; like the extinction of species, or the loss of snow in winter. Some losses are invisible to others, such as the loss of personal dreams for the future.

It is important to honor what is lost and celebrate what is not yet lost.

? How could I pay respect to my feelings of loss?

Depression

Life seems to be without meaning and I loathe my inability to make big-enough changes.

Depressed moods can have many shades. Clinical depression is characterized by long-term low mood and/or loss of interest in essential activities.

If your climate depression interferes with your everyday activities and close

relationships it's crucial to seek professional support.

? What is an achievable action –whether outward directed, or self-care– I can take today to improve my state of mind?

Grief

I am mourning all these losses related to climate change.

Climate grief is very common. It can be related to global news of climate change or its local manifestations that we are personally experiencing.

It's crucial to engage with the tasks of grief and give them time: to accept the reality of losses and to adjust to our changing reality.

? What must be mourned, and what are the constructive tasks in climate grief?

Shame

I feel shame because humanity is destroying our biosphere. People can feel either individual or "species shame" because of climate damage.

It is important to resist being paralyzed by shame. If we can speak about it, our shame can direct us towards acting in accordance with our values.

? How could we transform climate shame into energy for more honorable lifeways?

Guilt

I feel bad for having made this choice.

Feelings of guilt tell of our sense of responsibility, but they are not always at scale with our position.

It is important both to carry one's responsibility and to avoid being paralyzed by guilt. Our choices are circumscribed by unjust structures.

? How can I behave more responsibly given my power and position in the world without losing too much energy to my feelings of guilt?





Anger

Anger helps us to protect boundaries. It is highly important emotional energy, but sometimes it can become overly strong and we need skills in channeling it. Various forms of climate anger or rage are crucial energies behind activism.

Indignation

This is unfair!

Climate change includes a wide array of injustices; feelings of indignation show that we perceive them.

Climate indignation is ethically important, but we need to engage with it constructively–directing our actions toward those who hold responsibility and power, for example.

? What climate injustices spark indignation in me, and how can I channel its energy for justice work?

Outrage

This is totally outrageous!

Outrage is a powerful form of anger that results when boundaries are crossed and harm is done.

Climate outrage is generated by profound injustices, making it different from aggressive rage or primal fury. It can give us energy to serve and commit to a higher purpose.

? How to channel outrage into determined resistance?

Frustration

The slowness of climate politics is so frustrating.

Frustration tells us that something important to us is not happening as we would like it.

Frustration can either give energy to make an extra effort or it can disperse our energies.

? When can we exercise patience, and when is it important to articulate frustration?

Betrayal

As young people, we feel betrayed by older generations' climate inaction.

We can feel betrayed when somebody has not kept their promises or done what they should have done. There are lots of feelings of climate betrayal towards decision-makers and fossil fuel companies.

? How to recognize valid feelings of betrayal and use them to fuel our determination to speak the truth?

Disappointment

I felt so disappointed by this climate decision.

We feel disappointment when actions don't match our ideals, whether they are stated or unstated. Amidst climate work, there are both disappointments and, sometimes, positive surprises.

? How to allow disappointment to inform our vision of what we would like to see in the world?





Positivity

Many emotions in this segment are related to climate action. Some are fundamental motivations, based on caring. All kinds of emotions are needed, but positive emotions keep us bonded to each other, committed to action, and enjoying the pleasures of life.

Interest

I am wondering how I can make an impact.

The size and complexity of climate change represents a historic and unprecedented global challenge. Millions of people with scientific and curious minds are following their fascinations to work on mitigation and adaptation.

? How can we continue to grow our curiosity about climate change, its impact, and focus on solutions as well?

Empowerment

After what we did together, I felt really empowered.

Climate change is the biggest challenge ever to face humanity and it will take all of us to be part of the solution.

When people have their agency and choice honored in the collaborative process of working toward solutions, they are empowered.

Climate empowerment is strengthened the more people can meaningfully participate in ways available to them.

? When and where have I felt empowered in climate action and how can I recapture that feeling?

Inspiration

I am inspired by her everyday climate activism.

There are so many different ways in which climate work can be done. No one person holds the only solution. When we see someone else living out their ideals, we can choose to be inspired and recommitted toward our own work. We can also feel inspiration from the power, mystery and beauty of nature.

If we are lucky, our own efforts can inspire others as well.

? What kind of things inspire you in relation to making the world better?

Empathy

I really feel compassion for those who suffer from climate damage.

Empathy is a key resource. However, it is not expected that we feel a constant amount of empathy all the time in the midst of long emergencies. Compassion fatigue is real and it doesn't mean you are a less caring person. Eco-empathy is foundational to eco-anxiety: we hurt because we care.

? How do we maintain and renew our capacity to care?

Gratitude

I feel grateful for Earth and everyone who has made an effort to protect it.

Gratitude is a living thing's essential orientation toward the many pleasures of being alive. We can also cultivate gratitude for our awareness of the truth, and even for climate pain, which reminds us of our connection to all of existence.

Daily practice of gratitude can give strength even in dire circumstances. It coexists with, and informs, other climate emotions such as moral outrage.

? What can you be grateful for right now, in this moment?

Hope

I desire a future!

Hope is a big word. It can mean different things for different people: hope need not be wishful thinking. Fundamentally, hope is connected with meaning. Hope is manifested in agency, energy, and efforts to make things better, and this gives meaning.

? How can we keep meaning and hope alive in difficult times?

Reflection

Research shows that the ability to name emotions helps people to engage with them more constructively. Various languages have slightly different vocabularies for emotions, and it is important to keep an open mind for different kinds of shades of emotions.

It is not possible for any study to name every potential emotion you might feel in relationship to the climate crisis. Take a moment now to fill out your own climate emotions wheel. You might include some emotions that are found on the wheel, and others of your own. Here are some additional possibilities for climate-related emotions and mental states that some people have reported.

Some additional climate emotions



Apathy/numbness

I just don't feel anything in relation to the climate crisis.

People may feel numb because they are overwhelmed and burnt out by bad climate news, or because of feeling a lack of efficacy to do anything about it.



Confusion

These debates about climate politics make me feel so confused.

Confusion is a common climate emotion, especially at first. Misinformation about climate change has often made confusion worse.



Distress

I just feel so stressed and burdened by the climate crisis.

A prevailing mood about climate change may be a general feeling of distress, which may hide many kinds of emotions underneath it.



Hopelessness

I just don't see any way out of this.

Feeling meaninglessness amidst the climate crisis. Note: all absence of optimism is not hopelessness; some people practice active pessimism and do climate work.



Horror or dread

All this just feels totally horrible.

In addition to fear, climate threats can evoke strong feelings of horror and dread.



Inadequacy

I just feel unable to do all the things I would want or need to do!

A very common climate emotion, because the crisis is so wide-ranging.



Melancholia

Everything feels gray and the world is burning.

An emotional state where people feel they can't make an impact and feelings of sadness are stuck in our body-minds.



Pride

I feel proud about my community, the way it has prepared for climate impacts.

When possible, it is important to be able to feel healthy pride for doing good. Moreover, anticipated pride can be a motivation to start action.



Relief

The decision was made to cut the emissions! I feel so relieved.

As we're emotionally invested in the outcome of various climate-related decisions, we can feel relief when we get a win. Some people also feel relief from breaking a silence and talking about the climate crisis with others.



Solastalgia

I feel sadness and longing because my home environment has changed so much.

Solastalgia is Glenn Albrecht's neologism for a kind of homesickness while still living at home, referring to a combination of eco-emotions including sadness, nostalgia, longing, and feeling desolation. Climate change is causing or impacting solastalgia in numerous ways.



Vengefulness

I feel like wanting to punish those who have harmed us by their climate emissions.

It is natural to sometimes feel vengeful, but we must critically evaluate the actions that we take.



Dynamics of Climate Emotions

Like all our emotions, climate emotions evolve and interact with each other. We rarely feel only one pure hue or shade at a time.

Here are some of the ways this can look.

Various temporalities

Emotional phenomena can have many durations and intensities, and the relationship between various phenomena can be complex. For example, one may have a generally sad mood about climate change but still be able to feel occasional empowerment (and vice versa). Many different terms are used of emotional phenomena, such as feeling, mood, affect, and emotion.

?

What temporalities of climate emotions have you observed? Are some climate emotions for you especially fleeting? Are some especially long-lived?

Interlaced emotions

Emotions can be closely interconnected with other emotions, and there can be typical sequences of emotions. For example, many contemporary people feel combinations of climate guilt and grief, or combinations of outrage and powerlessness.

?

Take a look at the Climate Emotion Wheel.

Do you recognize combinations of climate emotions that you sometimes feel?

Do you recognize typical sequences between your climate emotions? For example, does feeling depressed about a piece of climate news lead to a search for someone to blame, which leads to anger? Or does a feeling of climate anxiety turn into worry and

then hopelessness, once the energy of repetitive thoughts is exhausted?

If those sequences leave you to a place where you wouldn't want to be, how could you move towards a more constructive sequence?

For example, outrage could be channeled into taking action, which could yield to empowerment.

Or a feeling of grief could be shared with another person who feels the same way, which could result in empathy.

Primary and secondary emotions

It can happen that a situation first evokes a (primary) emotion, but the person quickly moves on to feeling another (secondary) emotion. People may feel that the secondary emotion is more appropriate or socially allowed. Furthermore, people may also have emotions about emotions. For example, a person may first feel climate guilt, but this becomes replaced by anger. Or a person may feel climate grief but then they start to feel shame because they believe that to be a sign of weakness.



Have you noticed dynamics of primary and secondary emotions in relation to climate emotions?

Conscious / unconscious emotions

People are not always conscious of emotions that they feel. For example, many people are not aware of how much climate guilt and climate grief they bear. People may also intentionally try to suppress emotions.

?

Take a look at the Wheel and think about the emotions in relation to consciousness / unconsciousness of feeling them. Have you experiences of realizing that you feel an emotion which you didn't notice before? What kind of bodily signs can testify of suppressedemotions?

Objects

Climate emotions may be about climate change in general or about a specific aspect of it. For example, many positive emotions are evoked by climate action.

?

Take a look at the Climate Emotion Wheel and mark emotions that you feel.

What are the specific objects of those emotions?

”Positive” and ”negative”

The words ”positive” and ”negative” should be used with caution in relation to climate emotions. An emotion may feel bad but still be a necessary response to an event. It is important to remember that people suffering from multiple injustices may experience a very different set of climate emotions.

?

What do you think about the common distinction between positive and negative emotions?

In what ways can an emotion be “positive” or “negative” in a certain context?

Which climate emotions feel good when you experience them? Are there possible strengths in climate emotions which feel bad? (cf. medicine which tastes bad but is necessary)

Emotion regulation

There are various ways in which people can try to shape their emotions. Emotion regulation is a research area which names many of these ways, such as situation selection, situation modification, cognitive change (reframing), distraction, or modifying one’s emotional expression.

Coping

Coping refers to ways of trying to react to a difficult situation. Emotions affect coping, and some methods of coping are directed towards emotions. Emotion-focused coping is not only about decreasing negative emotion, but more widely about engaging with emotions. Sometimes people need to increase the intensity of climate emotions for practical or ethical reasons (e.g. cultivating climate anger).

?

What kind of methods of emotion regulation and coping have you been using in relation to climate emotions?

What other methods could be useful for you?

Individual and collective

A climate emotion can be felt both by an individual and a group. Emotions spread in groups via emotional contagion. For example, feelings of empowerment and moral outrage are often contagious in climate demonstrations.

?

Are there climate emotions that people near you also feel? What emotions do you see people expressing in gatherings? On social media? In individual conversations?

Have you experienced emotional contagion in relation to climate emotions? If so, how has that felt? Do you have experiences of positive and/or negative impacts of emotional contagion?

Are there some climate emotions that you feel which you suspect are not felt by others close to you? Are you sure? How could you find peer support if you feel lonely with your climate emotions?

Emotions on behalf of others

People can feel climate emotions because they are touched by the situations of others. For example, one can feel climate empathy, sadness and/or guilt because of the suffering of other people and creatures.



What climate emotions do you feel in relation to situations of other people and/or other creatures?

Emotion norms

People are influenced in their emotional expression by the norms in their social groups. These emotional social norms may be gendered. For example, a common emotion norm in industrialized societies has been that men should not cry in public, and this affects the expression of climate grief. Similarly, racialized minorities in the United States face stereotypes around expressing anger, and so do women.

?

What emotions do I feel comfortable or uncomfortable expressing? How have these been shaped by social norms?

What are the impacts of all this on my climate emotions?

What kind of norms about climate emotions do your social groups manifest? In what ways do you want to follow these norms and are there ways in which you want to differ from them? (e.g. wanting to feel more concern, outrage or guilt than others)

Normativity (ethics)

People can have different views about which climate emotions are better than others. There can be different criteria for this: for example, the impact of the emotion on behavior, or on well-being. Climate emotions are usually complex in this regard and can have, depending on the context and the person, different outcomes.

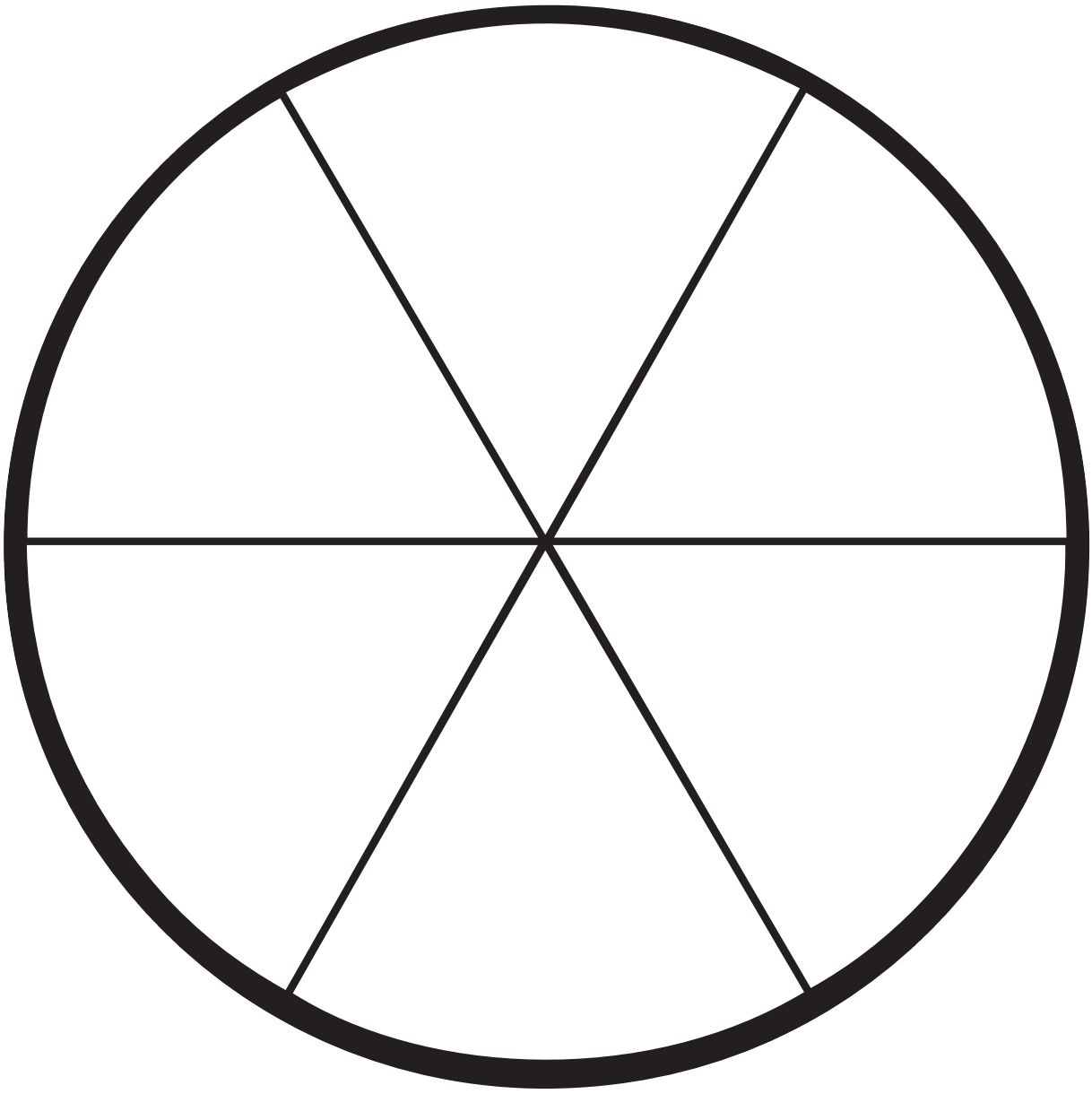
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Which climate emotions do you think are most suitable for the situation in which you live? Why?

Have you encountered conflicting views about normativity of climate emotions? What kind of factors can shape people's views?



Climate Emotions Wheel Activity Sheet



Climate Emotions Wheel Activity

Any emotions that you feel about the climate crisis are normal and valid. Explore and connect with these emotions using the Climate Emotions Wheel Activity. This activity is for people of all ages and can be done with family members, in a classroom, with friends, work colleagues, etc. Print out the blank Climate Emotions Wheel andwrite and draw whatever representation of the climate emotions you most often feel in each segment. Please refer to the complete Climate Emotions Wheel for possible emotions to include. When you're done, share with someone about what you created, why, and discuss ways to address your emotions & practice self care. To learn more check out our **Self Care & Taking Action Worksheets**, **Creative Arts Therapy Guide**, **Tips**, and **Parents Guides**, at **ClimateMentalHealth.net**.