

YOUTH, EMOTIONS, AND THE PLANET

A handbook on personal and
environmental well-being



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GLOSSARY

CLIMATE CHANGE

Long-term changes in the Earth's temperature and weather patterns, mostly caused by human activities like burning fossil fuels.

TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS

The three big environmental challenges we face—climate change, pollution, and loss of nature and biodiversity.

ECOLOGICAL-EMOTIONS OR ECO-EMOTIONS

A range of feelings people experience in response to environmental issues, like sadness, anger, or hope.

ECO-ANXIETY

Feelings of worry or fear about environmental problems and the future of the planet.

CLIMATE-ANXIETY

A specific type of eco-anxiety, where the anxiety is linked to climate change and its impact on the world.

ECO-GRIEF

Deep sadness or mourning because of the destruction of nature or loss of species and ecosystems.

SOLASTALGIA

The distress or sadness people feel when their home environment is changing or being damaged, like from climate change or pollution.

MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLD

A term that acknowledges the interconnectedness of humans with the entire ecosystem, emphasising the significance of non-human beings (animals, plants, etc.) in shaping our shared environment.

①

HELLO AND INTRODUCTION



We want to welcome you to this handbook on navigating eco-anxiety and eco-emotions! This handbook is for young people who care deeply about the planet and feel the weight of the global environmental crisis. It will hopefully help you understand, navigate and cope with your emotions related to our changing planet. However, it is also for not-so-young people, professionals and others who are curious to hear a youth perspective on the difficulties of living through the triple planetary crisis! Either way, eco-anxiety is a natural response to the reality we're facing, and it's important to understand that you're not alone.

THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU EXPLORE YOUR EMOTIONS, BUILD RESILIENCE, AND FIND WAYS TO CHANNEL THAT ANXIETY INTO MEANINGFUL ACTION.

Whether you're feeling scared, frustrated, or powerless, there are ways to cope and thrive in the face of these challenges.

Throughout this handbook, you'll find advice on how to take care of your mental health, seek support from others, and even turn your anxiety into advocacy. The handbook is created by the YEE team, our project psychologist, and trainers of an in-person workshop that was held. It is based on the input of participants of our workshops, providing us with invaluable insights to exactly what a handbook like this for young people should contain. You can also look forward to tailor-made content created by our participants, which is scattered throughout the handbook!

Together, we can create strong communities that empower each other to face the environmental crisis with strength, hope, and purpose. Let's start this journey together!

YEE team
Hanna Jumi Masha
Andra Alexandra Alex

②

UNDERSTANDING ECO EMOTIONS



As we go through life, we experience a wide range of emotions—some fleeting and intense, others lingering for days. Emotions are more intense and last shorter periods of time than moods, which are milder and can last from hours to days.

Emotions are part of our biological makeup; they're connected to our basic needs and ultimately help us to adapt and balance our system. No emotion is “bad” or “good” on its own. Each one, from joy to sadness, plays an important role in helping us navigate the world. But, while all emotions are natural, the ways we handle them can either help us or create more challenges.

You'll find more about coping with emotions in the upcoming chapters.

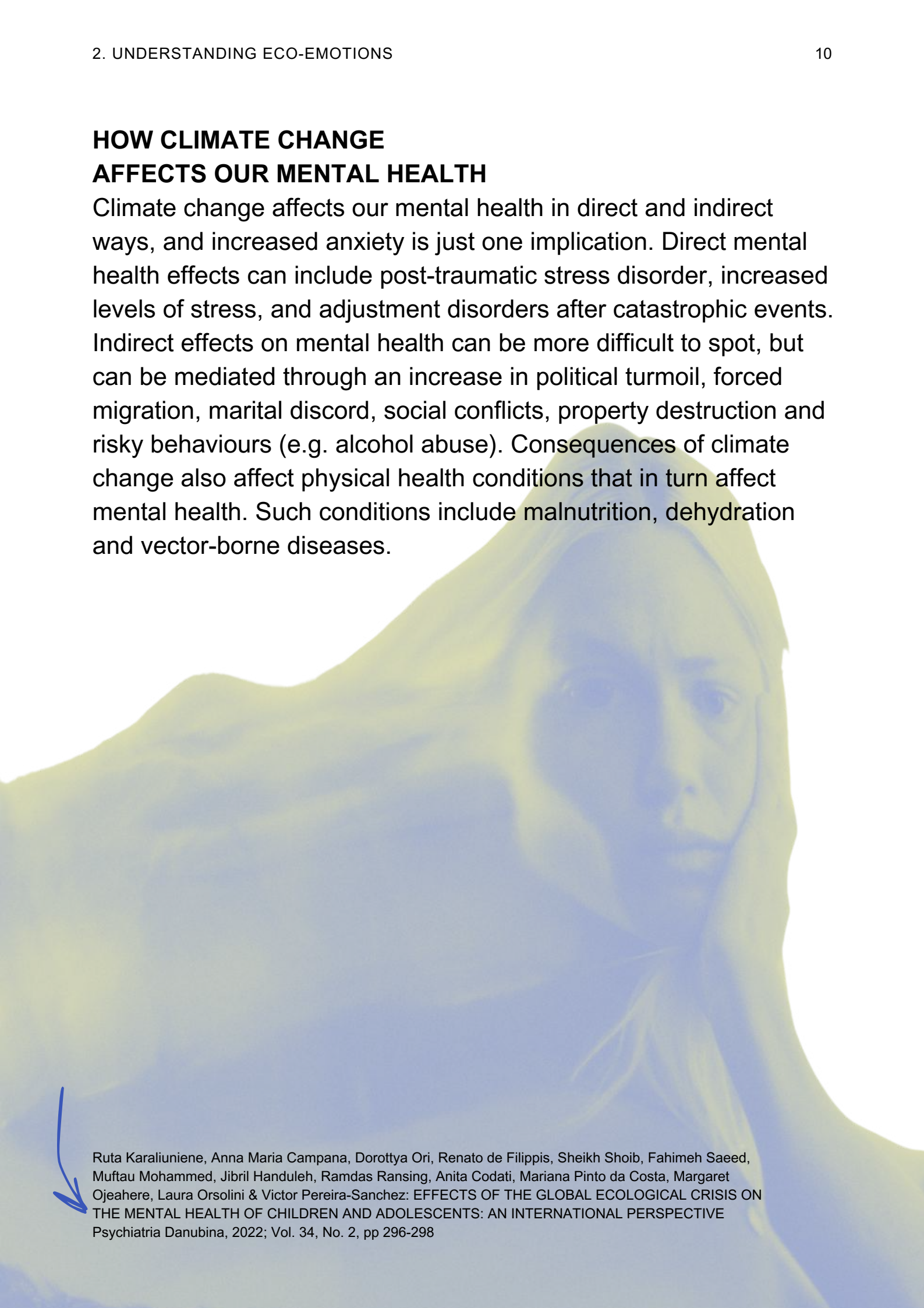
WHAT ARE ECO-EMOTIONS?

Eco-emotions is an umbrella concept for a wide array of emotions linked to environment, climate and nature. These emotions, such as climate anxiety, are not a disease or a diagnosis. Rather, they inform us that we are aware of what's happening in our world and that we care about it. Experiencing emotions such as worry, anxiety and sadness is an understandable and healthy response to everything that's happening in the world. There are also uplifting eco-emotions, such as awe over beautiful landscapes and pride over climate action.

**ULTIMATELY, ECO-EMOTIONS
ARE A MANIFESTATION OF OUR
CONNECTEDNESS TO OUR
HOME, PLANET EARTH AND ITS
OTHER INHABITANTS.**

HOW CLIMATE CHANGE AFFECTS OUR MENTAL HEALTH

Climate change affects our mental health in direct and indirect ways, and increased anxiety is just one implication. Direct mental health effects can include post-traumatic stress disorder, increased levels of stress, and adjustment disorders after catastrophic events. Indirect effects on mental health can be more difficult to spot, but can be mediated through an increase in political turmoil, forced migration, marital discord, social conflicts, property destruction and risky behaviours (e.g. alcohol abuse). Consequences of climate change also affect physical health conditions that in turn affect mental health. Such conditions include malnutrition, dehydration and vector-borne diseases.



Ruta Karaliuniene, Anna Maria Campana, Dorotyya Ori, Renato de Filippis, Sheikh Shoib, Fahimeh Saeed, Muftau Mohammed, Jibril Handuleh, Ramdas Ransing, Anita Codati, Mariana Pinto da Costa, Margaret Ojeahere, Laura Orsolini & Victor Pereira-Sanchez: EFFECTS OF THE GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL CRISIS ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE
Psychiatria Danubina, 2022; Vol. 34, No. 2, pp 296-298

Young people are disproportionately affected by eco-distress. Results from a global study conducted in 2021 and covered 10 000 16–25-year-old respondents from 10 countries suggest that:

59%

VERY OR EXTREMELY WORRIED ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

84%

AT LEAST MODERATELY WORRIED ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

75%

FEEL THAT THE FUTURE IS FRIGHTENING

45%

REPORT NEGATIVE IMPACT ON DAILY FUNCTIONING

Hickman, C., Marks, E., Pihkala, P., Clayton, S., Lewandowski, R. E., Mayall, E. E., Wray, B., Mellor, C., & van Susteren, L. (2021). Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey. *The Lancet. Planetary Health*, 5(12), e863–e873.

ECO-EMOTIONS AS A SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

Emotions are also a social phenomenon. They are connected to our thinking, moral assessment and behaviour. Human groups have emotional norms which affect the emotional expression of individual members. Sometimes eco-emotions, such as grief over clear-cut forests, become disenfranchised emotions. This means that the emotion is not recognised, validated or valued by the rest of the community. As a result it might leave the individual experiencing eco-emotions feeling alone and isolated.

As a species we have not evolved to survive nor thrive in a vacuum. Rather, our lives and wellbeing are interconnected not only with that of other humans, but also with other life on Earth. It is essential for us to connect and receive support from others, but also to place our emotions within a greater ecological context. This is very true also with experiencing difficult eco-emotions. Read more about cultivating collective wellbeing and creating community in Chapter 3, under [“How to Seek Support and Build Strong Communities”](#).

HOW EMOTIONS SHOW UP IN OUR BODIES

Emotions, although felt mentally, also manifest physically in our bodies. Learning how different emotions exist and flow in our nervous system, recognising patterns as well as naming emotions, can help us to self-regulate, cope and connect with others in a more mindful way.

[EXERCISE: EMOTIONAL MAP OF THE BODY]

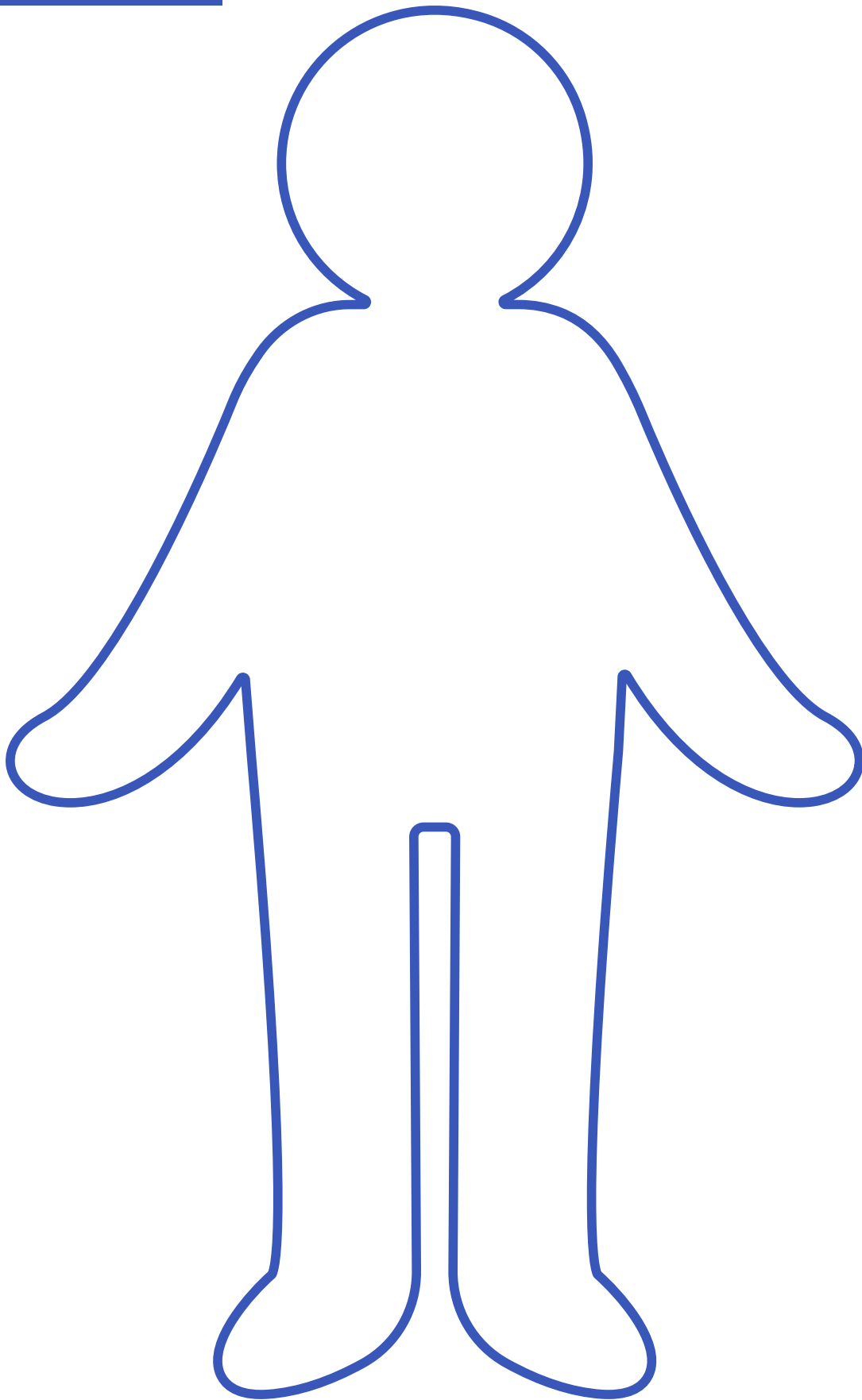
Use the picture below as a guide, or create your own body outline. On the outline, draw, colour, or write where you physically feel the effects of climate change, natural hazards, or other environmental threats. If the sensations move from one area to another, indicate that as well.

Are there sensations in your body that are hard to define as feelings? Try to describe those too.

Next, create a second drawing that reflects the feelings you experience when thinking about something close, dear, or important to you, such as a loved one, pet, or a special place.

After both drawings, reflect on the emotions and sensations you discovered in your body. Did you notice a difference between how your body reacts to feelings of threat versus feelings of safety? How did it feel to draw and colour? Was the process easy or difficult? What new insights did you gain about yourself?

[EXERCISE: EMOTIONAL MAP
OF THE BODY]



③

DEALING WITH ECO-EMOTIONS



Recognising and naming your emotions is one important step in promoting your psychological well-being. There are tools to help you in this process, such as emotion wheels or maps. There are also tools to help you cope with your emotions and build mental resilience, which you will also learn about in this chapter. One of the most powerful tools of them all is perhaps seeking support in your communities—whether from your closest friends or community at large. We hope to also give you inspiration to connect with these communities and build collective resilience—read on to find out how!

THE CLIMATE EMOTIONS WHEEL

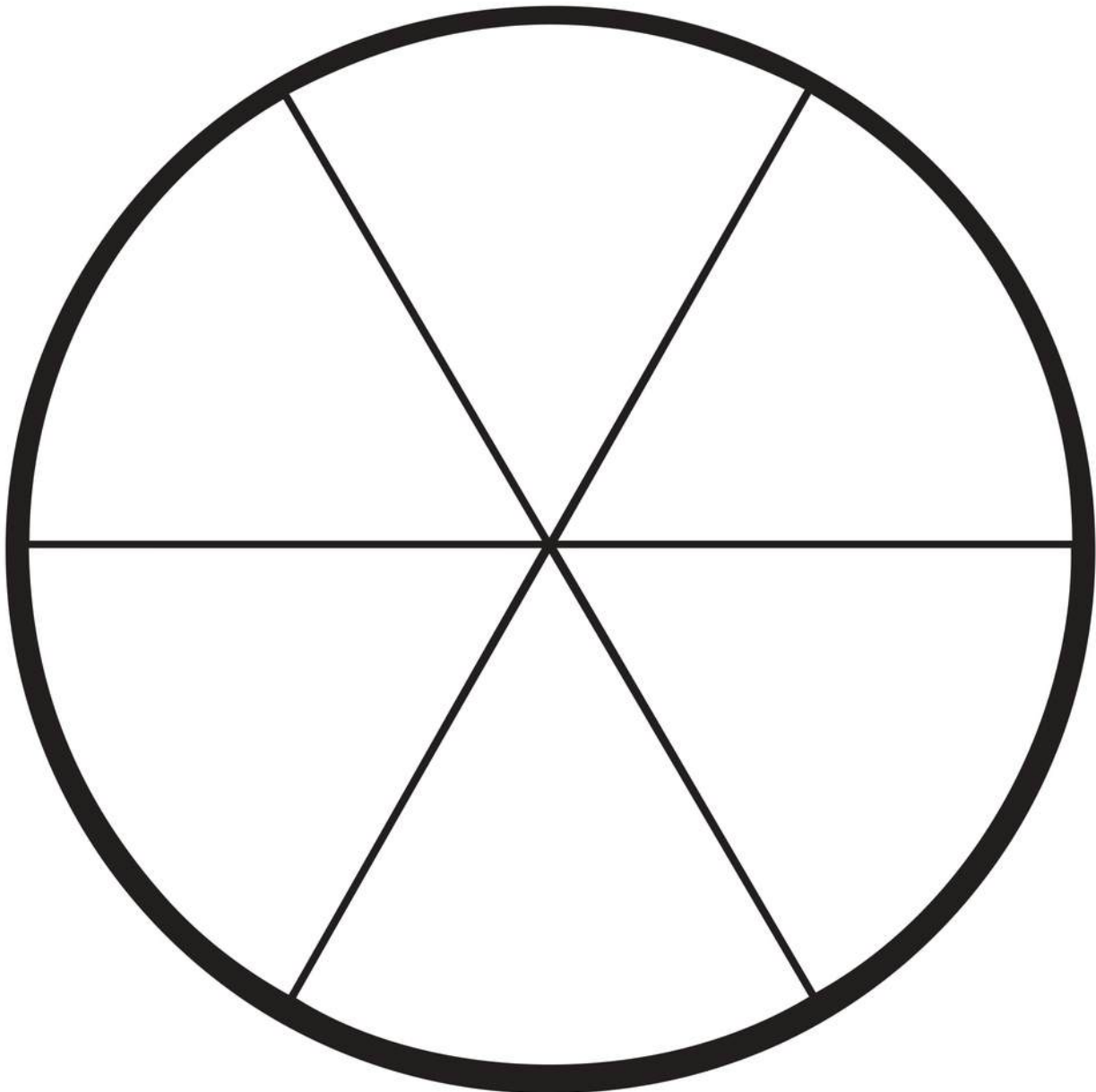
This visual tool known as the *Climate Emotions Wheel* is based on the research of Panu Pihkala, and is now commonly used to navigate eco-emotions. If you struggle understanding how exactly you feel, looking at this wheel can help you better identify your emotions and work with them.



Climate
Mental Health
Network

[EXERCISE: THE CLIMATE EMOTIONS WHEEL ACTIVITY SHEET]

Take a closer look at the wheel above – which of these emotions have you experienced? Now, print or draw the empty *Climate Emotions Wheel* below and fill in your climate emotions in each segment. You can write or draw your emotions. When finished, share your wheel and emotions with someone. Reflect on your wheel by asking yourself what kind of contexts or situations you have experienced these emotions? Which emotions are the most difficult for you, and why?



BUILDING EMOTIONAL AGILITY – THE LOVE MODEL

Emotional agility means having flexibility when navigating our thoughts and feelings, meeting them with an open mind and using them constructively – including the more difficult ones.

Emotionally agile people can approach difficult emotions with curiosity, compassion and acceptance rather than with avoidance or neglect. In this way, emotions can help aligning our actions with our values, and help us to pursue our goals rather than acting as a hindrance.

All of us have the ability to strengthen our emotional agility. A tool that can help us achieve this is the so-called “LOVE model”.

LOVE stands for Listen. Observe. Validate. Express.



**LOVE STANDS FOR
LISTEN. OBSERVE.
VALIDATE. EXPRESS.**

The first step is **LISTEN**. Pay attention to what surfaces as you observe your emotions. This could involve noticing physical cues in your body, like your heart rate, body temperature, or areas of tension. It might also involve being aware of the thoughts passing through your mind. Whether there's a lot happening inside or very little, the goal is not to change or stop these thoughts and sensations—just listen to them and acknowledge their presence.

Then comes **OBSERVE**. This involves spending a moment with your emotions, even if it's just for a few seconds. By observing what's happening inside yourself, you create space between yourself and the emotion. The goal isn't to eliminate the feeling, but to recognise that there are two parts to the experience: 1) the emotion itself, which is generating the experience, and 2) the "me," the person who is observing and being with those emotions.

The next step is **VALIDATE**. Remind yourself that whatever you're feeling is completely valid, no matter how it manifests. In the context of the climate crisis, your emotions are understandable and proportional to the challenges we're facing. Validating your emotions means telling yourself, "It's okay. It makes sense that you're thinking and feeling this way right now. This emotion has a place." This brings us to the final step which is...

EXPRESS. At this point, you have the opportunity to decide how you'd like to respond to the emotion you're experiencing. It can be helpful to ask yourself: "What's most important to me right now? What is this emotion trying to tell me? How is it asking me to respond?" Your responses will vary depending on the emotion and situation—sometimes just acknowledging the feeling is enough. Other times, you may feel called to take action on climate change, or perhaps, in this moment, what you need most is time to pause, regroup, and restore balance.

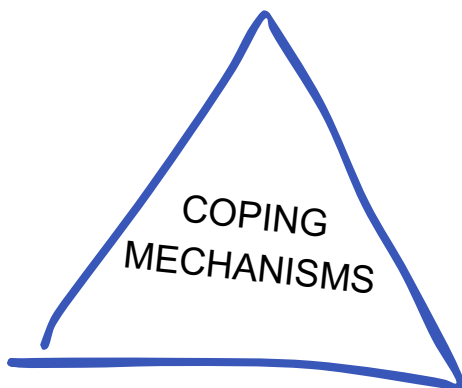
There will be plenty of examples for how to express your emotions throughout the rest of this handbook – whether it is reflecting independently, discussing with friends and family, or taking action! No method is right or wrong, but you might find some of them useful to help express your own emotions.

KEY CONCEPTS FOR NAVIGATING EMOTIONS

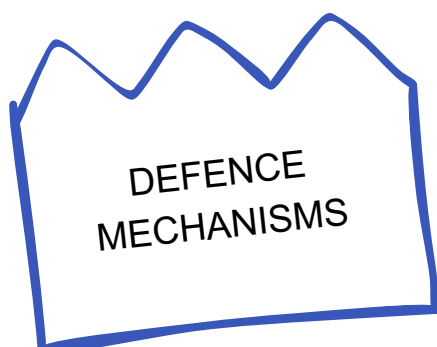
Identifying our emotions is a crucial first step—but how do we navigate them? Our psychological well-being consists of multiple components and processes. Some key concepts are emotion regulation, coping mechanisms, and defence mechanisms, which are all ways to respond to emotions.



Trying to shape one's emotions (e.g. distraction, situation modification)



Usually conscious and purposeful ways of trying to manage in a challenging external or internal situation. Coping strategies can be adaptive (sustaining wellbeing on the long-run and resulting in desired outcomes, e.g. active planning, seeking for social support) or maladaptive (not promoting wellbeing nor promoting desirable outcomes if used frequently, e.g. emotion numbing, procrastination).



Unconscious ways of trying to survive in a situation of adversity by reducing the difficult emotions.

DIFFERENT WAYS TO COPE

MEANING-FOCUSED COPING

Mental reframing that we do in order to live with situations that can't be resolved quickly or completely, or by ourselves alone.

PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING

Concentrating on ways to solve the problem, such as searching for information about what one can do.

EMOTION-FOCUSED COPING

Eliminating difficult emotions through avoidance, distancing, and denial but also leaning into and experiencing the emotions themselves, without trying to change them and make them go away.

A PROCESS FOR ECO-ANXIETY AND ECO-GRIEF

Panu Pihkala, the researcher behind the *Climate Emotions Wheel*, has also created a process model in order to more comprehensively distinguish between different phases of experiencing emotions and coping with them.

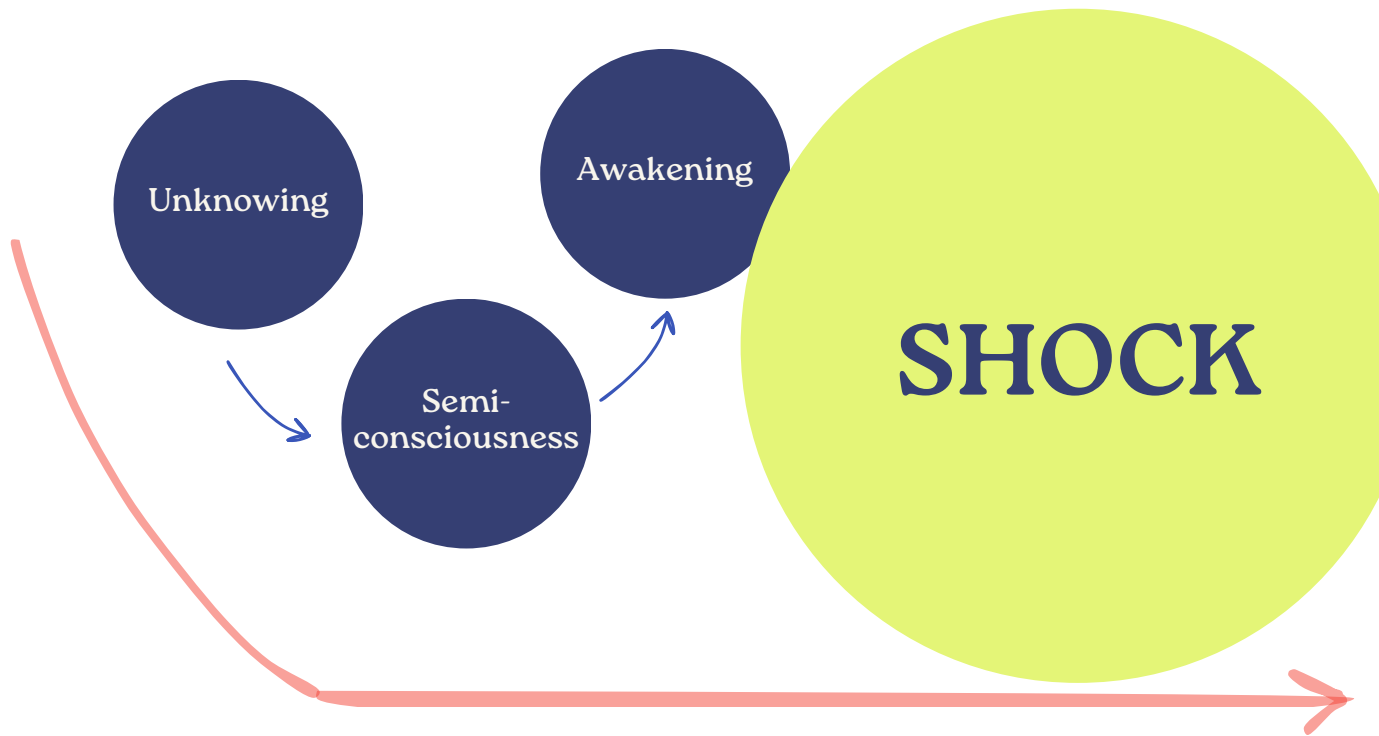
In the *Process Model*, the initial phases of acknowledging the ecological crisis and possible responses are described, such as “awakening” to the severity of the crisis and “shock” resulting from this awakening. This leads to trying to cope with these feelings, which can be done in many unconstructive ways, leading to feelings of strong anxiety. To live sustainably, we need to strike the right balance between emotional engagement, action and self care.

As Pihkala writes, everyone should have “(a) at least some engagement with the emotions of grief related to the state of the world, and many other emotions are intertwined, such as anger, disappointment and guilt; (b) to practice at least some kind of action in the means possible for them; and (c) to take at least some respite from this emotional engagement and action, so that they will continue to have energy for them.”

Thus, all three of these components are needed to cope in a constructive way to the climate crisis and the emotions arising from it. However, an exaggerated focus on any one of them can lead to problems. It is therefore necessary to strike the right balance between them to remain healthy in the midst of the crisis!

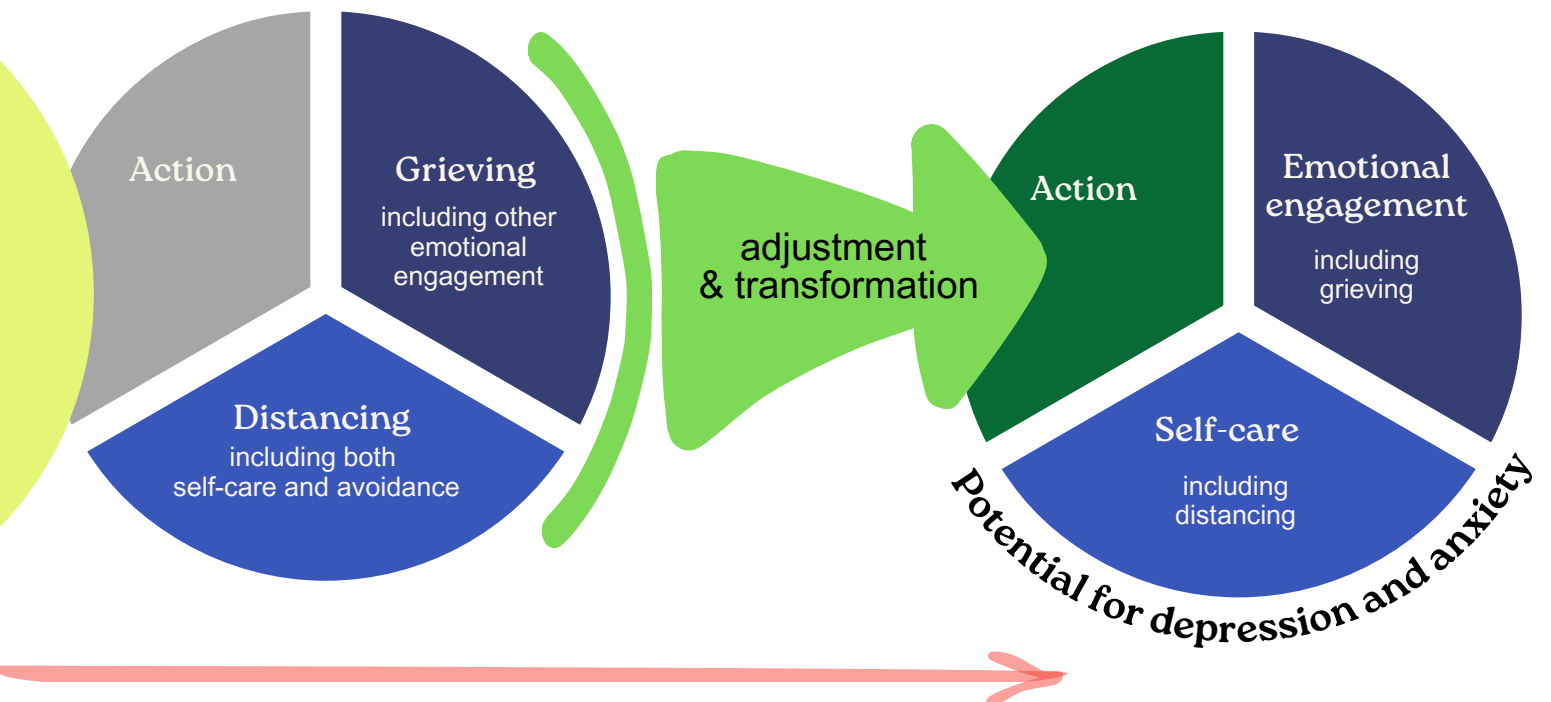
A PROCESS MODEL FOR ECO-ANXIETY AND ECO-GRIEF

The process goes chronologically from left to right.



COPING AND CHANGING

LIVING WITH THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS



3.1 TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF – BUILDING MENTAL RESILIENCE

Emotional regulation and coping mechanisms are fundamental to dealing with eco-emotions. However, there are other ways in which we can more efficiently understand and deal with our emotions, the rest of this chapter is dedicated to doing this at different levels—first we begin with the innermost level—yourself!

**MENTAL RESILIENCE IS THE
ABILITY TO ADAPT TO STRESS,
ADVERSITY, OR CHALLENGES AND
BOUNCE BACK FROM DIFFICULT
EXPERIENCES WITH STRENGTH
AND CONFIDENCE.**

It enables you to navigate life's ups and downs without becoming overwhelmed, fostering emotional flexibility and self-efficacy. Like any skill, it requires consistent effort and reflection, but over time, these practices help you better cope with challenges, remain calm under pressure, and emerge from adversity even stronger.

Tools that can help to build mental resilience include mindfulness exercises, stress-management techniques, and practices to help you regulate your emotions. Exactly what tools work depends on the individual- so we encourage you to try different techniques to find what works better for you!

PERSONAL STORY: ALEKSANDRA

I first experienced eco-anxiety when I did my international training for a volunteer project in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The aim of this project was to educate kids in NGO schools in Rio about sustainable development goals. During our practical experience we were acknowledged that parts of Amazon forest have been set on fire for cattle ranching, agriculture, logging, or illegal mining. For my level of awareness this realisation was disturbing. Actually my overwhelming feelings arrived when the project ended and when I returned to Belgrade, Serbia.

Similar decisions were made in my country, forests have been cut down for urban development and profit, which led to an increase of temperature and air pollution in our hometown.

Lots of irrational decisions were made by decision makers without taking nature conservation into consideration, which was distressing for me. My knowledge and awareness didn't give me peace so I directed all those emotions in constructive action, which led me to self-development.

I believe that eco-emotions are healthy messengers, they direct us and challenge us towards personal growth and improvement of our behaviour towards nature and ourselves.

Aleksandra's personal story clearly shows us that eco-emotions, though difficult, can serve as an effective motivation for positive action and self-growth. These emotions can be directed toward constructive efforts, leading to personal development and a healthier relationship with both nature and oneself. Challenging emotions offer the chance to practise habits that build resilience. Get inspired to try out Aleksandra's resilience promoting habits from her "mental resilience toolkit" below!

ALEKSANDRA'S MENTAL RESILIENCE TOOLKIT

1. **Mindful Breathing:** Take breaks to breathe deeply, observe your body, and return to the present moment.
2. **Self-Awareness & Positive Self-Talk:** Treat yourself as you would a friend. Use encouraging phrases like "I can handle this" to reframe negative thoughts.
3. **Gratitude Practice:** Daily list three things you're grateful for to focus on the positives in your life.
4. **Set Boundaries & Take Breaks:** Recognise your limits, communicate them, and schedule regular breaks. Learn to say no when needed.
5. **Continuous Learning:** Explore new activities or revisit past interests. This can boost your confidence and sense of achievement.
6. **Helping Others:** Volunteer or assist neighbours to foster a sense of purpose and community connection.
7. **Digital Detox:** Regularly unplug from screens and social media to enhance mental clarity and reduce stress.
8. **Sleep & Nutrition:** Prioritise restful sleep and balanced meals, as physical health supports mental resilience.
9. **Movement:** Incorporate regular physical activity, like walking or dancing, to refresh your mind and boost your mood.
10. **Adaptability:** Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth rather than setbacks.

You can be inspired by Aleksandra's tips and make your own resilience toolkit, or you can connect with friends, family or colleagues to inspire each other!

[GROUP EXERCISE: MAKE A COLLECTIVE MENTAL RESILIENCE TOOLKIT!]

Throw a ball among participants, the person who catches the ball should say what is their way of building mental resilience through good habits they practise regularly. Collect all the inputs and decide on which good habits you want to add to your collective mental resilience toolkit.

You can also be inspired by the participants of [YEE's training](#), who shared their best ways of coping with eco-emotions that become overwhelming!

I usually talk with the loved ones who share my values.

I use that negative emotions as an internal force for action. I do some community work. I brainstorm with my friends about possible solutions.

I try to be close to a natural habitat, watching wild animals and hearing birdsongs.

I focus on what motivated me to engage with the field of environmental ethics: a sense of purpose around a desire to contribute to the climate crisis mitigation efforts

I am trying to remember what sustainable practices I am already doing





3.2 HOW TO SEEK SUPPORT AND BUILD STRONG COMMUNITIES

Even though building your own mental resilience is beneficial when dealing with eco-anxiety and other eco-emotions, remember that you're not alone! Sharing your experiences with others and finding support in a group can significantly improve your well-being. Strong communities provide a sense of belonging, purpose, and collective strength, which are crucial for navigating complex emotions like fear, grief, or frustration about environmental issues. So let's move beyond our innermost circle and explore how our communities can play a role in dealing with eco-emotions!

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

Eco-anxiety can often feel isolating, but connecting with others who share your concerns can create a sense of solidarity and hope. Communities not only offer emotional support but also inspire collective action, which can help turn eco-anxiety into a force for positive change.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE: TALKING ABOUT ECO-EMOTIONS WITH YOUR CLOSEST CIRCLE

Starting conversations about eco-emotions with friends and family can be a powerful way to release inner tension and create mutual understanding. By doing this you are not only contributing to breaking the stigma around eco-emotions, you can both alleviate your negative emotions and strengthen your relationships!

By openly addressing your feelings, you can find support in unexpected places and inspire those around you to reflect on their own relationship with nature. However, you might be wondering how to start a conversation like this? We have collected some practical advice below — to help you get the conversation flowing!



GENERAL ADVICE FOR A GOOD CONVERSATION

HONESTY

Share honestly how climate change and environmental degradation make you feel—whether it's anxiety, sadness, frustration, or hope for change. Being open creates space for deeper connection.

TIMING

Find a moment when you and the other person are relaxed and open to conversation. This helps ensure that the discussion is thoughtful and not rushed.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Encourage dialogue by asking questions that invite reflection and sharing, rather than yes/no responses.

EMPATHY

Acknowledge that everyone's experience of eco-emotions is different. Some people may not yet have processed their feelings about environmental issues, and that's okay.

COMMON VALUES

Highlight how your concerns for the environment are rooted in shared values, such as caring for future generations, preserving natural beauty, or protecting health and well-being.



DISCUSSION PROMPTS FOR TALKING ABOUT ECO-EMOTIONS

Sometimes starting the conversation can be the most difficult part. Be inspired by the starting questions you can find below, or phrase your own question to start talking about eco-emotions!

“I’ve been feeling anxious about what’s happening to the environment lately. How do you feel about it?”

“Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by climate change. Do you ever feel the same way?”

“It helps me to talk about what we can do, even in small ways. What do you think we could do together to help the environment?”

“I’ve been thinking a lot about how our actions impact the planet. What do you think are some ways we could be more mindful about that?”

“I’m trying to stay hopeful despite the news on climate change. What gives you hope when you think about the future of the environment?”





WIDENING THE CIRCLE: HOW TO TALK ABOUT ECO-EMOTIONS IN OUR COMMUNITIES?

Different groups can play a vital role in supporting us as we navigate challenging emotions related to climate change. Peers from organisations, activist groups, workplaces, and other community structures can serve as essential sources of support by providing a sense of belonging and understanding during difficult times.

How can we start creating a space for sharing eco-emotions in these kinds of groups? By discussing them, and by sharing our experiences, and carefully listening to the ones of others too. This process can help us to deal with our own emotions. Moreover, having meaningful and vulnerable discussions with our colleagues can bring us closer together. In this way, the community can become a source of social support—an essential resource to keep us going in a world that sometimes can feel difficult to navigate.

We prepared a step-by step plan about how to facilitate such a discussion, to better and more deeply understand each other. The session is based on so-called “non-formal education” methods, which you can read more about later in Chapter 4, under [“Taking action by educating your communities”](#).

[EXERCISE: FACILITATING A DISCUSSION SESSION]



50 MIN

THE SESSION OVERVIEW:

1. Introduction, agenda and setting a conversational space (2 min)
2. What do we know about eco-emotions? Presentation and open discussion (13 min)
3. *Climate Emotions Wheel* Activity (20 min)
4. Share in plenary and debrief (15 min)

MATERIALS CHECKLIST:

- Pens and coloured pencils and markers (or any colourful writing instruments available)
- Paper or the climate emotions wheel template print-out – one paper for each participant
- Projector (If you use a presentation)

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE SESSION

Step 1. The context of your group

Reflect upon these questions and answer them, in relation to your group:

- How do you, (if ever), talk in your group about the eco-emotions that you experience? Which emotions? Why?
- How could this discussion benefit your group?
- What would you want to achieve with this discussion (purpose)?
- When would be the right time to organise this?

Then, talk to some peers (and to the coordinators or the organisation/ group) about the idea of the discussion and reflect together on the same questions. Find together the best moment to have this discussion. Set a date and time.

Step 2. Create a short presentation about eco-emotions

Using [Chapter 2](#) and [Chapter 3](#) of this handbook (or any other fact-checked information available online), prepare a short presentation, using your own words, about what are eco-emotions. Include information that is relevant for the context of your group (remember the questions you answered in step 1). It can be just a verbal speech, or you can use some slides as a visual support. Rehearse it until you feel confident talking about the topics. If it helps you, you can ask a colleague to do it together.

Step 3. Set up the space

How you arrange the space where the session takes place is important, because it can encourage more or less communication among the participants. We suggest you arrange the chairs in a circle or semicircle shape, so everyone can see each other when speaking. Prepare the materials from the checklist.

HOW TO FACILITATE THE SESSION

Part 1. Introduction, agenda and setting a conversational space

At the start of the session, present the agenda of the session and the duration, as well as the purpose of the discussion. This way the participants will know what to expect from the session.

To create a space where they feel safe to share their experiences, invite them to participate fully and with no judgement. You can say phrases like: Come into this space with an open mind and heart. Listen actively to all of our experiences, with no judgement.

Part 2. What do we know about eco-emotions? Presentation and open discussion

Ask open questions to the group:

- What do you think eco-emotions mean? What are they?
- Can you think of some examples?

These questions help you to assess what is already known, and then in your presentation you can build on the ideas that they shared. Then continue with the presentation you prepared. Make sure to ask if they have any questions as you present.

HOW TO FACILITATE THE SESSION

Part 3. *Climate Emotions Wheel* activity

Present the *Climate Emotions Wheel*. Invite participants to read it and identify which emotions they have felt so far, and which emotions they felt most frequently and most intensely. Furthermore, ask to think: How does our work in our organisation influence these emotions? Are there eco-emotions generated by our work? Which ones? How?

Distribute pens, coloured pencils and markers, papers or the *Climate Emotions Wheel* template print-out, and invite them to create their own wheel, reflecting on their experience. When they finish, invite them to present and explain it in pairs, to one of their colleagues.

Part 4. Share in plenary and debrief

Invite the participants to share in plenary (if they want) their climate wheel and what it means to them.

Ask these debrief questions:

- How did this exercise make you feel?
- What are the key learning points you take with you after this exercise?

AFTER THE SESSION

Feedback

After you finish the session you can ask for feedback from the participants. You can create an anonymous feedback form online or ask them to write their impressions on a paper and collect them at the end.

We would love to hear your experience facilitating this session: send us an e-mail at yee@yeenet.eu

MORE TIPS FOR INTEGRATING SUPPORT ON ECO-EMOTIONS IN YOUR GROUP:

- Set a designated time to discuss emotions: for example, a monthly meeting to ventilate and discuss your concerns and how you feel
- Implement check-ins: at the start of every meeting or activity together, do a short one-word check-in.

Examples of check-in questions:

- How do you feel right now?
- What animal/plant/colour/season do you feel like today/now and why?

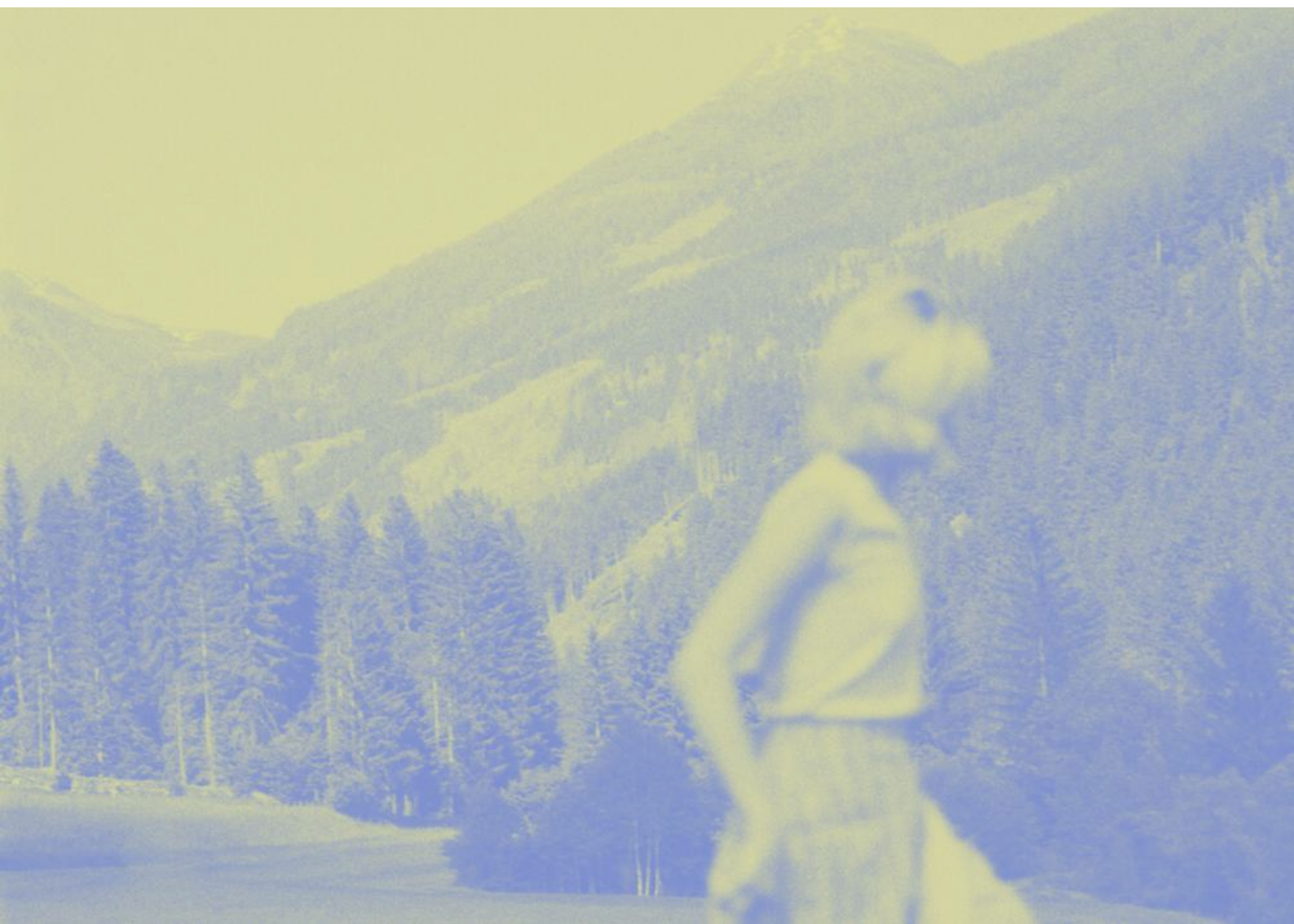
Similarly, you can implement check-outs, which are the same as check-ins but done at the end of meetings or activities together.



CONNECTING WITH MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLD

In this chapter, we started to look at how to cope with emotions and build resilience within ourselves, before widening our coping mechanisms to include friends and family, then our larger community groups and structures. Let's finish off this chapter on how to deal with our eco-emotions with an exercise that allows us to further connect to not only our surrounding human-community, but the more-than-human world and nature at large!

Art can be an incredibly effective way of both expressing your emotions and connecting with your community. Eco-poetry invites you to explore your connection to nature, your community, and the many emotions surrounding our environment. This exercise encourages you to reflect on your experiences, sharing them within your community through poetic expression.



[EXERCISE: ECO-POETRY]**INSTRUCTIONS**

Split participants into groups of 4-5.

Task: Write 3 lines of a poem, starting from the chosen theme. Write the first things that come to your mind, don't think too much.

Let the participants start, and inform them that further instructions will be given along the way. After the participants write three lines, ask them to fold the paper in front to cover the first two lines and leave the last one visible.

The exercise then proceeds by the participants giving their papers to the person to their right, so that the next person can only see the last line written. The participants should now continue adding three lines to the poem they received.

But here's the twist - when the participants adds the next three lines, they should include one word from the sentence of the previous person, into their new lines. It can be any word from the visible line. The paper should then be folded again and passed to the next person on their right side, and the process repeated.

Each round has 5 minutes. The facilitator can include as many rounds as the time allows.

Debriefing

- Encourage participants to read their poems.
- How did the process feel for them?

Embodiment of others' pride

Find.

Eco poems

BY THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE
TRAINING OF TRAINERS

Just like a tiny seed, waiting in the ground
To spread my roots, to see the light
Patiently I seek my people to find

Connected with others
who share your concerns
People's solidarity can change the world
For the better

But the world doesn't begin and doesn't end
And time is fast and cold and harsh
And we are brief and mortal
And we are faith and strength
We still have hope
Turn grief into victory

Patiently I seek,
My people to
Find



Eco poems

BY THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE
TRAINING OF TRAINERS

Is there anything which u would like to share with the others?
Maybe we should embrace together and finding ourselves,
In order to capture the sunset and
Also being able to share our idea, creation

Is this about mental well-being, as we suppose?

Or about wellbeing of all
When everyone is safe and sound
And shares the compassion for the rest

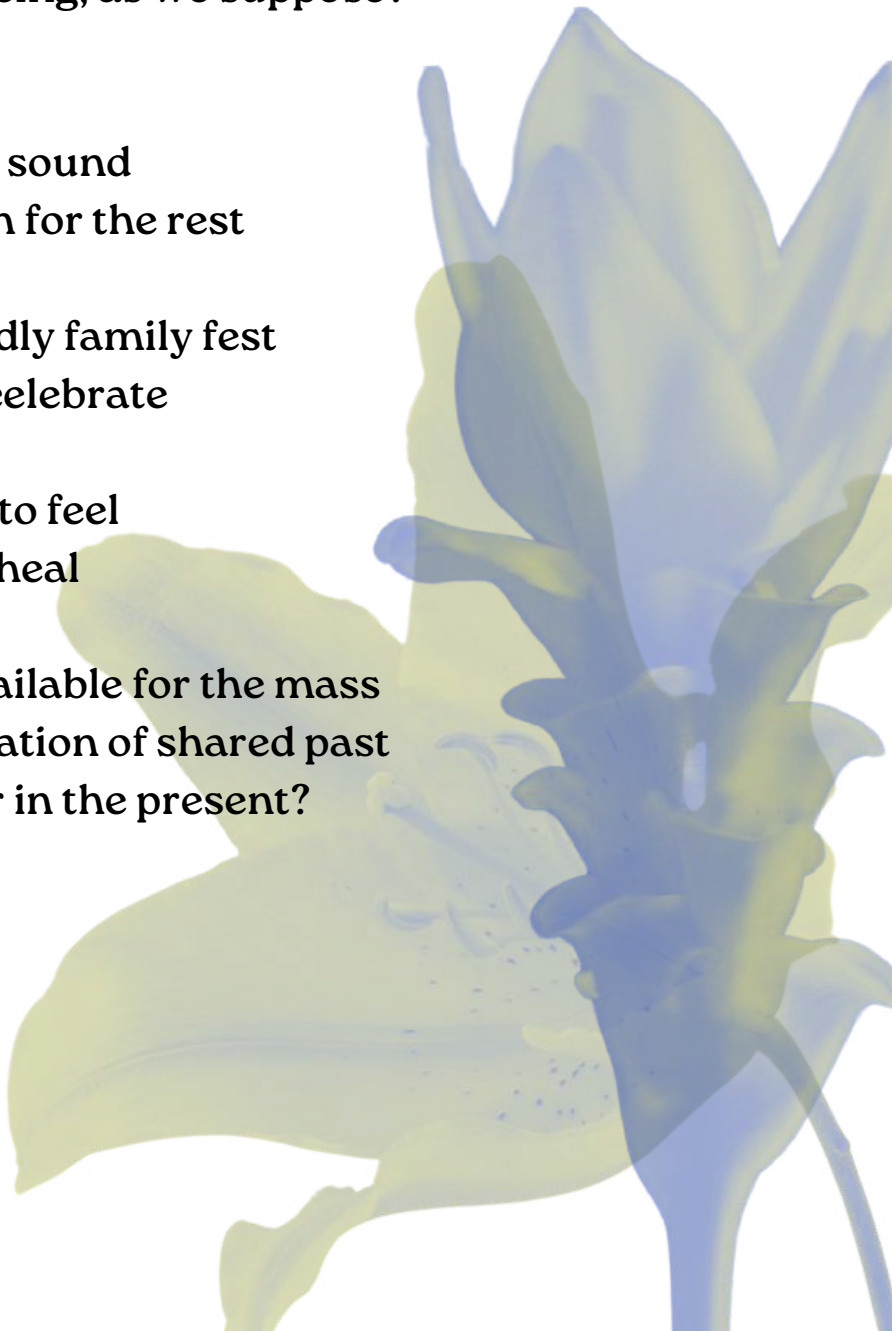
We gonna have a eco-friendly family fest
Where we talk, share and celebrate

That everyone has a space to feel
Space to chill and space to heal

Can we make this place available for the mass
Can all of us come to realisation of shared past
And building what is better in the present?

This is how we get in there
This way to
The amazing times

Sharing...



3.3 WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP?

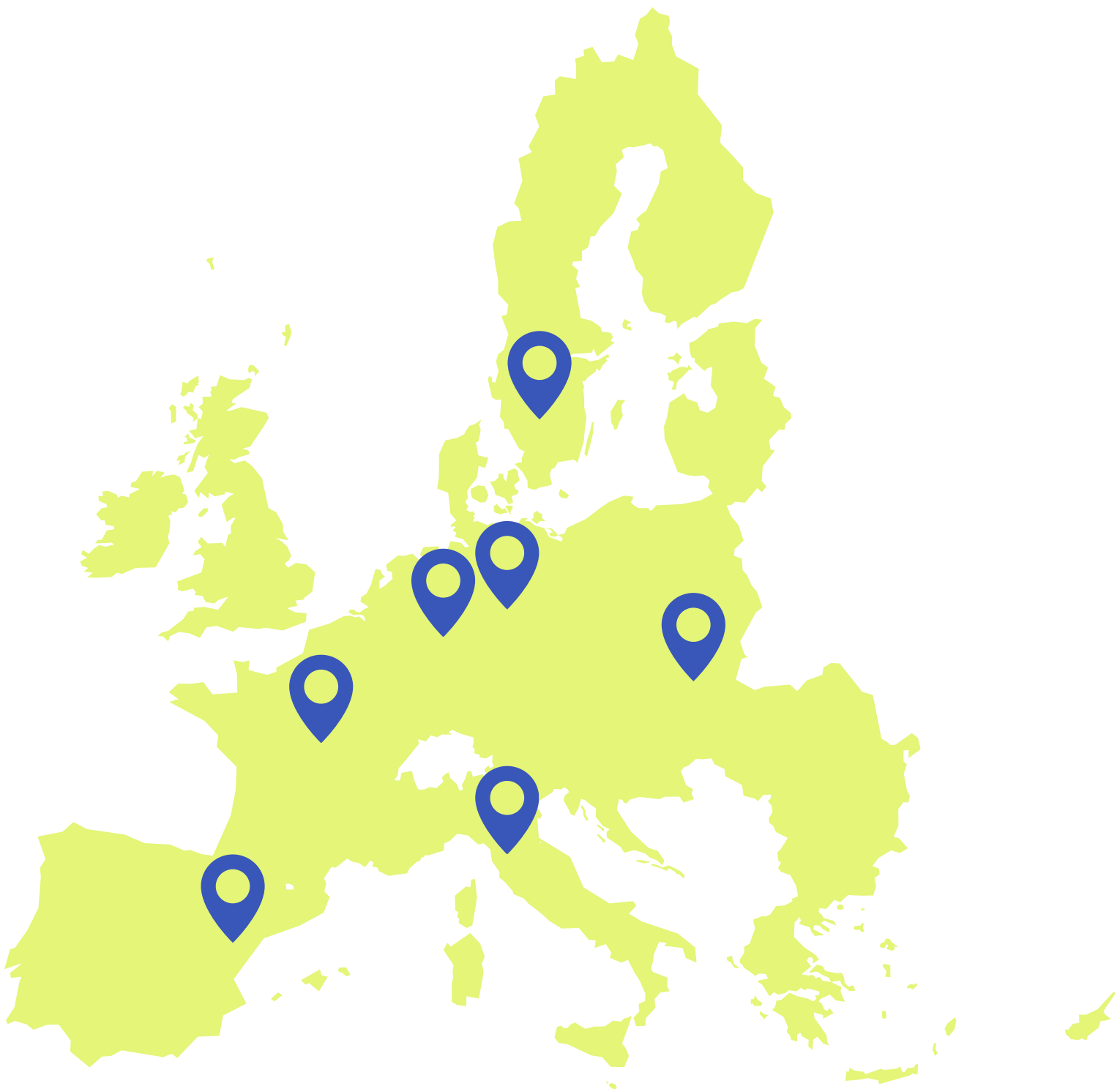
To understand our emotional experience better, we can every now and then try to notice and name different emotions we're experiencing.

Where do we feel the emotion in our body? How can it be described? One way to recognise if the difficult emotions you experience are climate-related is to start to notice what triggers them. In what kind of situations do you feel anxious, worried, distressed, sad or overwhelmed? What kind of thoughts are linked to these emotions? There are also different kinds of physical symptoms that can be part of climate anxiety, such as muscle tension and loss of sleep. If you get anxiety e.g. because you realise that the autumn is abnormally warm or when reading the news about the impacts of climate change, you might indeed be experiencing eco-anxiety.

As mentioned before, eco-anxiety is not by itself a mental disorder, but rather a healthy response to the crisis we are in. However, if the distress over climate and environment starts to severely affect your daily functioning, you should seek professional support to help you deal with your emotions. Intense eco-anxiety can cause physical stress symptoms, such as sleep problems, panic attacks and compulsive behaviour. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms – it might be time to seek out professional help.

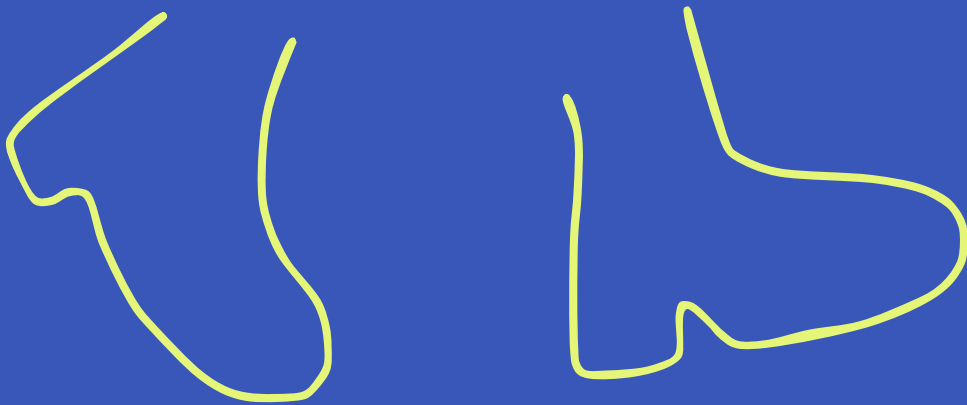
Mental Health Europe has created a map which gathers helplines or support organisations for young people in all European countries! You can check it out [here](#), and find the support you need in your own country.

Click on the map to learn more!



④


TOWARDS A RESILIENT FUTURE



The triple planetary crisis is a complex, long-term challenge rather than a problem with a clear, finite solution.

To address it, individuals, communities, and societies need to adapt and work together. It's important to understand that humanity isn't purely the villain or the hero. While the wealthiest and most privileged in the Global North have contributed significantly to the crisis, it doesn't mean all humans necessarily are harmful to the planet. Many indigenous communities, for example, demonstrate how humans can live in harmony with nature.

We also can't solve the crisis alone. Nature is always with us, and our survival depends on working together with the broader, more-than-human world.




THROUGH "SYMPOIESIS"— COLLABORATING CREATIVELY WITH OUR MULTISPECIES COMMUNITY—WE CAN FIND WAYS TO NAVIGATE AND SURVIVE THE CHALLENGES WE FACE.

While eco-emotions can be overwhelming, one of the most powerful ways to combat them is through action. Taking steps to address environmental issues not only helps protect the planet but also empowers individuals and communities, offering a sense of purpose and agency. In this section, we will explore how meaningful action, grounded in collaboration with nature and our communities, can be a vital tool for both environmental and emotional well-being.

So taking action is not only crucial, it can also help coping with eco-emotions, and alleviate feelings of hopelessness and despair. However, how can we take action that benefits not only our planet, but also preserves our mental health?

4.1 BURNOUT AND SUSTAINABLE ACTION

WHAT IS BURNOUT?



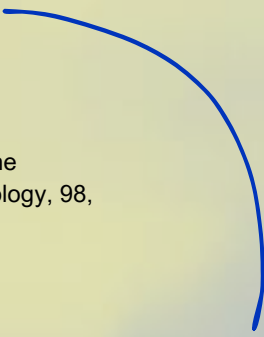
Burnout in the context of climate activism means feeling “emotionally worn out due to the immense challenges posed by climate change (exhaustion); and have a desire to withdraw from the movement due to the overwhelming challenges the movement faces (disengagement).”

Bird et al. (2024), who defined the terms above, also showed that experiencing despair about climate change increases exhaustion. On the other hand, addressing the practical side of climate action, such as thinking about the next steps to achieve, reduced disengagement. Thus, promoting hope and setting clear practical plans can help with buffering burnout.

In addition, the coping strategies and mental resilience tools presented earlier in the handbook help to avoid burnout. Panu Pihkala’s [Process Model](#) presented in Chapter 3 also offers a comprehensive suggestion on how to avoid severe anxiety, depression and burnout.

HOW TO AVOID BURNOUT?

Burnout is a significant challenge for activists, particularly in the face of the overwhelming and ongoing nature of the planetary crisis. Regenerative action offers a solution by encouraging us to organise and act in ways that are sustainable not only for the planet, but also for activists and their surrounding communities.



REGENERATIVE ACTION MEANS ORGANISING IN WAYS THAT RENEW, REVITALISE AND SUSTAIN OUR RESOURCES AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS COMMUNITIES.

In order to achieve impact on a longer run, we must create a sustainable action culture, which entails doing activism in ways that don't cause burnout in the first place.

Key elements of this regenerative approach include:

Building resilience

Cultivating healthier social and psychological conditions that enable groups to sustain their efforts over the long term.

Effectiveness

Striking a balance between action and reflection to maintain impact.

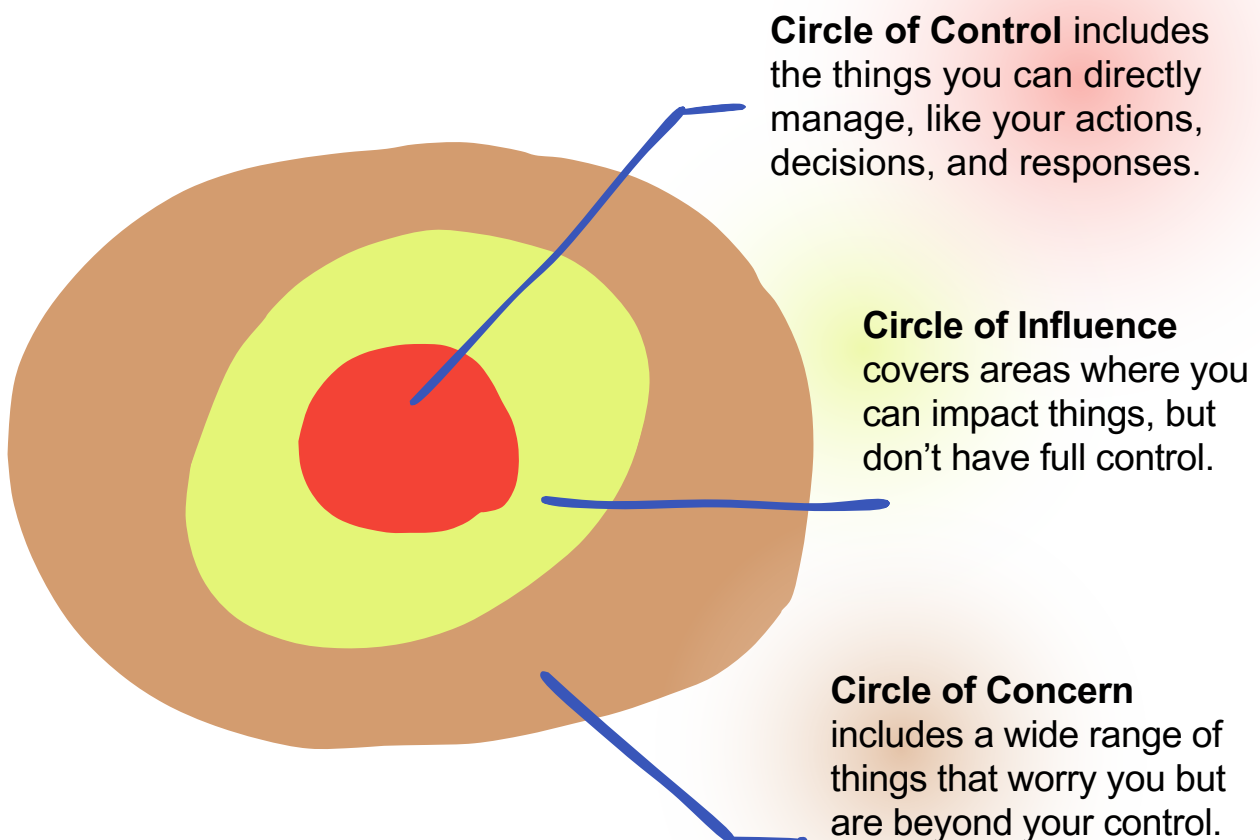
Systems thinking

Recognising and addressing the broader factors that influence both action and change.

There are multiple ways to work with each of these points above, to make action more regenerative.

[EXERCISE: CIRCLES OF CONTROL, INFLUENCE, AND CONCERN]

An example of this is the [concept of circles of concern, influence, and control](#). This tool helps us understand where we direct our energy and attention. It helps us focus on what we can truly impact, rather than getting overwhelmed by everything that concerns us but may be beyond our control. By concentrating on what we can directly influence, we can limit overthinking and inaction, which in turn improves effectiveness. This approach also helps us recognise our achievements and connections more clearly, reinforcing a sense of purpose. What is in your control and influence circles?



Remember that resilience means the ability to bounce back after a crisis and recover after difficulties. In Chapter 3 under [“Taking care of yourself – Building mental resilience”](#) we already discussed some methods that can help you build your emotional and psychological resilience, which is crucial when navigating difficult situations. Alongside this type of resilience, there are several other elements that contribute to a holistic form of resilience that can strengthen both individuals and communities.

These elements include social support, which is the social network providing care and encouragement to the individual. Organisational resilience, which includes effective conflict resolution, helps groups navigate challenges collectively. Adaptability and flexibility enable us to adjust to changing circumstances, while fostering connection and diversity ensures that we draw from a wide range of perspectives and strengths. Together, these components form the foundation of a more resilient approach to both personal and collective action.

Key elements in a resilience are:

- Psychological and emotional resilience
- Social support
- Organisational resilience, e.g. conflict resolution
- Adaptability, flexibility
- Connection and diversity

[EXERCISE: VENN DIAGRAM]

Take a look at this diagram and answer the question in each circle to determine your climate action. These additional questions may help:

What inspires you in climate movement?

What climate issues do you believe are important to address?

What resources and skills do you have? If you don't have certain skills or resources, who can you connect and work with?



4.2 TAKING ACTION BY EDUCATING YOUR COMMUNITIES

One of the most impactful ways to contribute to positive change is by sharing your knowledge and inspiring others to take action. Educating your community about climate change and mental health and the tools for resilience you've learned in this handbook is a powerful way to expand the movement towards sustainable, life-positive action.

EDUCATING YOUR COMMUNITY IS A POWERFUL WAY TO EXPAND THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE, LIFE-POSITIVE ACTION.

Education doesn't have to be formal or large-scale to make a difference. Whether through conversations with friends, organising local workshops, or simply sharing resources, every effort helps build a more informed and engaged community.

The exercises and strategies covered in this handbook, from discussion prompts to meditations, are valuable tools that can help others not only understand the challenges we face but also navigate them with hope and resilience.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION?

Non-formal education (NFE) may take different shapes and forms, and can sometimes be hard to pin-point. However, there are some common features that can be highlighted — **NFE is...**

- a structured learning process with specific educational objectives;
- designed around learners' needs and encourage input from participants, connecting the learning process to real-life experiences;
- voluntary, meaning it is not a compulsory activity.
- inclusive and accessible, ensuring all young people can participate, and actively seeks to involve those who may face exclusion or marginalisation;
- diverse, participatory, and learner-centred, blending individual and group learning while encouraging peer learning;
- focused on developing life skills and preparing learners for active citizenship;
- holistic, engaging learners emotionally, mentally, and physically;
- facilitated by both professional educators/trainers and volunteers;
- based on active participation, where learning happens through doing and experiencing.



Non-formal education (NFE) emphasises active participation through hands-on learning and direct experiences. A key component of the learning process is self-reflection. NFE activities are experiential, such as simulations and role-plays, and the input is always interactive, shaped collaboratively by both facilitators and participants, who contribute their knowledge and experiences.

At [YEE's Training of Trainers](#) held in May 2024 with the support of the European Youth Foundation, the participants were trained in the principles of non-formal education and on the topic of eco-emotions. During the week of training, they also designed training sessions specifically on the topic. You can find one of them below, and be inspired to implement it yourself in your own community!

[TRAINING SESSION: DEALING WITH ECO-ANXIETY IN YOUTH WORK]

Overview

This training plan is designed to help youth workers address eco-anxiety by facilitating a deeper connection with their bodies, nature, and emotions through a series of structured exercises. The plan consists of four different parts, classified as “sessions”. The final output will be an art exhibition showcasing the participants' reflections on their experiences.

SESSION 1. CONNECTING WITH THE BODY THROUGH INTUITIVE DANCING

Purpose: To help participants become present and attuned to their bodies.

Setup: Create a comfortable, open space for movement. Prepare a playlist with various genres of music.

Instructions: Ask participants to close their eyes. Play the first genre of music and instruct participants to move intuitively to the rhythm. Change the music genre every few minutes to encourage diverse movements. Remind participants to focus on how their bodies feel and move with the music.

Reflection: After the exercise, gather participants in a circle. Facilitate a short discussion on how they felt during the exercise and any insights they gained about their bodies.

[TRAINING SESSION: DEALING WITH ECO-ANXIETY IN YOUTH WORK]

SESSION 2.

CONNECTING THE BODY TO NATURE WITH TAI CHI

Purpose: To promote relaxation and a sense of connection to nature through guided Tai Chi movements.

Setup: Find a quiet, open space, preferably outdoors. Prepare a speaker for calm, instrumental background music (optional).

Instructions: Invite participants to relax their bodies. Guide them through deep breathing exercises: breathe in, breathe out. Lead participants through Tai Chi movements with imaginative instructions:

- Hug a Tree: Breathe in while spreading arms as if embracing a tree, breathe out while lowering arms.
- Rotate the Moon: Breathe in while lifting arms in a circular motion, breathe out while lowering them.

Refer to a Tai Chi [instructional video](#) for additional movements and techniques

Reflection: Discuss how the movements felt and how imagining interactions with nature influenced their experience.

[TRAINING SESSION: DEALING WITH ECO-ANXIETY IN YOUTH WORK]

SESSION 3. REFLECTING ON NATURE THROUGH ART

Purpose: To enable participants to express their connection to nature and eco-anxiety through creative drawing.

Setup: Provide drawing materials: paper, pencils, markers, etc. Create a quiet and comfortable space for drawing.

Instructions: Ask participants to choose a natural being (e.g., a tree, ocean, animal) and imagine themselves as that being. Encourage them to think about how this being interacts with the world and its environment. Have participants draw the world from the perspective of their chosen natural being.

Reflection: Allow participants to share their drawings and the stories behind them. Discuss the emotions and thoughts that emerged during the exercise.

[TRAINING SESSION: DEALING WITH ECO-ANXIETY IN YOUTH WORK]

FINAL SESSION **ART EXHIBITION PREPARATION**

Purpose: To showcase the participants' artistic reflections and foster a sense of accomplishment and community.

Setup: Select a venue for the exhibition (classroom, community centre, outdoor space). Prepare exhibition materials: frames, display boards, labels, etc.

Instructions: Work with participants to arrange their artworks and decide on the presentation format.

Encourage participants to write brief descriptions of their drawings and the natural beings they represented. Organize an opening event where participants can community members.

Reflection: Conduct a final group discussion on the entire training experience and the impact it had on their eco-anxiety and connection to nature.

CONCLUSION

By the end of this training, participants should have a deeper understanding of how to manage eco-anxiety through physical, imaginative, and artistic activities. The culminating art exhibition will serve as a testament to their journey and the diverse ways they connected with nature and their emotions.

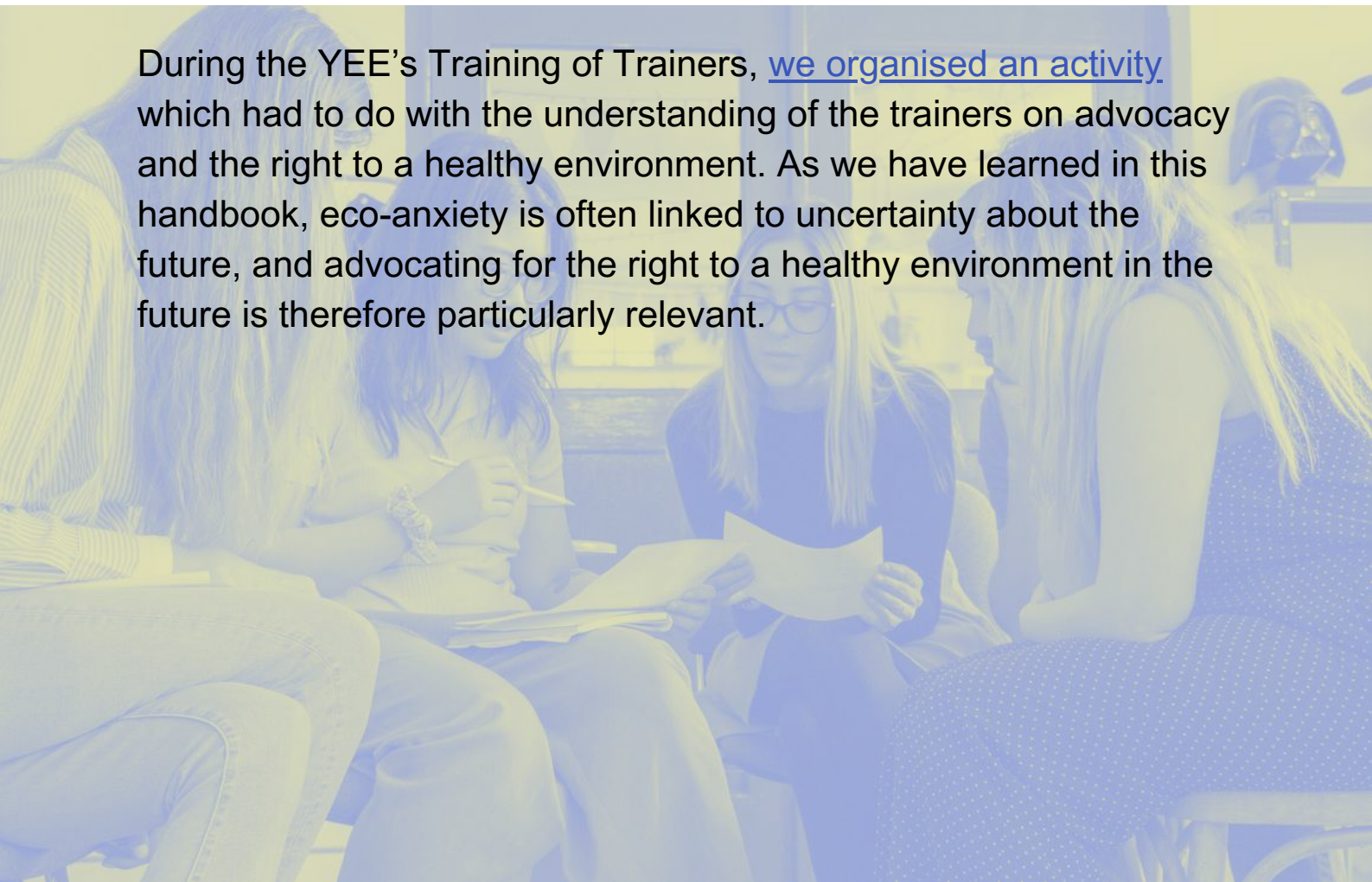
4.3 TAKING ACTION THROUGH ADVOCACY

Another impactful way to drive positive change is by advocating for the issues that matter. By raising your voice and engaging in advocacy for climate action and mental health, you can help push for policies and initiatives that promote resilience and sustainability.

Advocacy can take many forms, from local grassroots efforts to influence community decisions, to international campaigns that aim to shape global policies. It might involve meeting with local officials, organising petitions, or engaging in global climate forums. Regardless of the scale, every advocacy effort contributes to raising awareness, influencing decision-makers, and driving meaningful change.

In other words, advocacy is a complex concept. Let's therefore delve into an example activity to understand better!

During the YEE's Training of Trainers, [we organised an activity](#) which had to do with the understanding of the trainers on advocacy and the right to a healthy environment. As we have learned in this handbook, eco-anxiety is often linked to uncertainty about the future, and advocating for the right to a healthy environment in the future is therefore particularly relevant.



[ABOUT THE ACTIVITY]

The activity involved the participants forming groups of 4-5 people and brainstorming on questions such as “What is advocacy?”, “What are advocacy tools?”, “What do you perceive as the right to a healthy environment?”, “Why is it important for youth?”, “How would you advocate for the adoption of the right to a healthy environment?”.

The answers provided form the bulk of the information below, complemented by content from training materials used in the Council of Europe North-South Center's Rule of Law Youth Network training which took place in June 2024 in Cidade Velha.

Advocacy is recognised as a process of supporting, promoting or defending a cause, policy or idea to bring about positive change.

Advocacy involves efforts to influence one or more of the following:

Public policy, Laws,
Societal attitudes

It can be undertaken by:

Individuals, Groups,
Organisations

It can take multiple forms, such as:

Lobbying, Public campaigns,
Research, Education,
Coalition-building, Protests,
Artistic expression

Key components of advocacy include a clear direction, strong communication, targeted influence and impactful collaboration.

When it comes to the right of a healthy environment, participants identified the words



FURTHER EXAMPLES OF ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

In our activity, the participants identified many relevant forms of advocacy, and important elements related to the right to a healthy environment. There are further advocacy methods that can complement the advocacy activities already mentioned. Check them out to get more inspiration!

Capacity Building

- Training: Train young people to acquire the skills necessary to be able to discuss eco-anxiety in their communities.
- Institutional straightening: Support institutions such as but not limited to schools and universities in enhancing their capabilities to address eco-anxiety.

Dialogue

- Facilitating Dialogue: Use media platforms to facilitate respectful and constructive dialogue between stakeholders.
- Conflict resolution stories: Publish success stories in the media about resolving conflicts through dialogue

Campaigning

- Coalition building: Partner up with relevant individuals, groups and organisations to increase your outreach
- Petitioning: Launch a petition which is to be published by social media presence and organisation of on-site events and artforms
- Emailing politicians: Email political representatives and explain to them what you want to achieve

**AND REMEMBER... ACTIONS SPEAK
LOUDER THAN WORDS!**



⑤

CLOSING COMMENTS AND GOOD-BYE FOR NOW!

We are now at the end of this handbook, and we want to take a moment to thank you for joining us on this journey through eco-emotions, mental resilience, and climate action! It is not easy to navigate the complicated emotions linked to our environment, but understanding and acknowledging them is a significant first step towards building inner strength and finding your way forward.

Remember, eco-anxiety is a valid response to the challenges we face, and you are not alone. This handbook has offered you tools, strategies, and reflections to help you cope, and it's important to keep them in your mental resilience toolkit as you continue to face the uncertainties of the future. Whether through mindful practices, connecting with your community, or transforming your emotions into meaningful action, you have the power to make a difference—for yourself and for the planet.

As you move forward, we encourage you to take things one step at a time. There will be days when emotions feel overwhelming, and that's okay. Take time for yourself, seek support when needed, and remind yourself of the importance of self-care and community. In moments of doubt or fear, return to the practices you've explored here and connect with your communities for strength.

This is not a final goodbye – the work to protect the planet and care for our emotional well-being continues, and we are all part of this collective journey. Take time for yourself, seek support when needed, and remind yourself of the importance of self-care and community. In moments of doubt or fear, return to the practices you've explored here and connect with your communities for strength.

If this handbook has piqued your interest and you are keen to learn more about eco-emotions and the intersection between mental health and climate change, YEE also provides an [online resource pack](#), where you can find more resources such as articles, webinars and more tools. We urge you to check it out and to share these resources with your communities to spread the word!

Thank you for being part of this community, and for staying with us until the end of this handbook. So we will say good-bye for now, and we hope you will revisit us for more inspiration in the future!

With hope and solidarity,
The YEE Team