



Society Promoting Environmental Conservation
Practical Solutions for Sustainable Cities

From Climate Distress to Climate Action: A Guide for Turning Anxiety Into Meaningful Change

Feeling overwhelmed by climate change? You're not alone. This guide will explore ways to move from distress to action in a way that empowers you, connects you to others, and fosters hope.

Thoughtfully created with wisdom from SPEC Elders.

1. What is Climate Distress and Why Does it Feel So Heavy?

Climate distress is that tightness in your chest when you read about wildfires in your home province. It's the sinking feeling when you notice fewer bees or trees. It's the grief that rises when you think about the future your children or grandchildren will face.

It's normal to feel this way. Climate distress is real, and it's being felt across the globe as we watch ecosystems change, species disappear, and weather patterns intensify.

- **Why it's hard:** As humans, we are wired to care for our environment. Watching it deteriorate, sometimes helplessly, can cause deep emotional responses.
- **What helps:** Acknowledging these emotions and understanding that distress can be a signal of your deep connection to the world around you.

Quote for Reflection:

"It is understandable to feel despair, fear, or sadness in the face of environmental destruction. But these feelings are the beginning, not the end, of our journey." – Mary DeMocker

Concepts to Consider:

Climate Grief: Feelings of loss and mourning for ecological changes, often anticipated or witnessed.

Moral Injury: The emotional turmoil caused by witnessing or contributing to actions that conflict with personal values, especially regarding environmental destruction.

Solastalgia: A term coined by Glenn Albrecht, describing the emotional pain and distress caused by environmental damage in one's home environment.

Journaling Prompts:

1. What does “home” mean to me, and how has climate change affected the way I think about home?
2. When I feel climate distress, where do I feel it in my body? How do I typically respond?

Resources for Reflection:

- Feeling like climate change is making home unrecognizable? There's a word for that ([CBC](#))
 - Environment Change, Distress & Human Emotion Solastalgia ([Youtube](#))
 - Contemplative nature engagement practices to support individuals and communities facing ecological distress ([University of Melbourne](#))
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2. Moving Beyond Anxiety: From Fear to Hope

If you've found yourself doom-scrolling or lying awake at night worrying about the state of the planet, you're experiencing climate anxiety. You're not alone: nearly 70-80% of Canadians express concern about climate change¹.

But here's the thing: anxiety can also be a motivator for change. **Hope Matters**, a book by Elin Kelsey², argues that hope is actually more powerful than fear in driving action. When we feel like things can change, we are more likely to take steps to make them better.

- **Why it's hard:** Climate anxiety is fueled by constant bad news, and it can make us feel like our small actions don't matter. But they do. Studies show that collective, small actions add up in powerful ways.
- **What helps:** Reframing your perspective. Yes, the world is facing big problems, but focusing on solutions instead of the enormity of the crisis can shift your energy.

Quote for Reflection:

"You do not have to be hopeful to act, but you do have to act to be hopeful." —Barbara Kingsolver

Journaling Prompts:

1. What stories of hope or positive change have I come across recently? How did they make me feel?
2. How can I contribute to a positive environmental change, even on a small scale? What action could I take this week?

¹ 7 in 10 Canadians worried about climate change, poll suggests ([CBC News](#))

² Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think Is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis ([Greystone Books](#))

Resources for Reflection:

- Hope Matters - Elin Kelsey ([Hope Strategy Podcast](#))
 - Hope Matters book review - Elin Kelsey ([Cohort 21](#))
 - Seven Ways to Feel Hopeful About Climate Change ([Greater Good Magazine](#))
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3. Taking Action: Turning Your Feelings into Power

When you're feeling helpless, it's easy to think "I can't make a difference." But that's not true. Studies show that taking action—no matter how small—helps to combat climate distress³. It shifts the narrative from helplessness to empowerment. And that empowerment builds momentum.

Start where you are: maybe you can reduce your personal waste, join a local community garden, or advocate for greener policies in your workplace. These actions not only make a tangible difference but also remind you that you have agency.

- **Why it's hard:** Feeling like you're just one person against an enormous problem can feel defeating. But you're not alone—millions of people worldwide are taking action, and when you add up all those small acts, they lead to real change.
- **What helps:** Connecting with others who share your vision for a better future can build resilience and fuel your actions. Start small, and celebrate each step.

Quote for Reflection:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." —Margaret Mead

Journaling Prompts:

1. What are things I am already doing, big or small, that help the environment? How can I keep the momentum going?
2. Who in my life can I talk to about my feelings and ideas for taking action? How can I involve them in my efforts?

Resources for Reflection:

- 8 Dynamics of Climate Engagement ([All We Can Save](#))
- Neighbours United Toolkit — A guide on how to connect with others and share stories that inspire collective climate action. ([Neighbours United](#))
- Nexus: The Nexus is an expansive collection of solutions and challenges that tackle various aspects of climate change. It offers actionable guidance tailored for individuals,

³ Barnett, Jon & Jarillo, Sergio & Greenaway, Katharine & Mortreux, Colette. (2023). [Reducing personal anxiety is key to adaptation](#). Nature Climate Change.

communities, and organizations, while also providing in-depth reading resources for each topic. Start by exploring the topics that resonate most with you to discover how you can contribute to meaningful change. ([Regeneration](#))

4. Engaging in Conversations: Turning Polarization into Connection

Climate change can be a divisive topic, but it doesn't have to be. Amanda Ripley's book *High Conflict*⁴ looks at how we can have productive conversations about polarizing issues. One key? Start by focusing on shared values rather than differences.

When we talk about climate change in ways that connect to people's everyday lives (lowering energy bills, having cleaner air, etc.), we can find common ground even with those who may not share our exact views.

- **Why it's hard:** It can feel intimidating to start a conversation about climate change, especially with those who might disagree. But focusing on shared values makes these conversations easier and more impactful.
- **What helps:** Use questions to guide the conversation: "What about your life would improve if we stabilize our climate?" This allows people to see the benefits personally and opens up a constructive dialogue.

Quote for Reflection:

"When we listen and share stories, we can connect on shared values and overcome what divides us." —Neighbours United Toolkit

Resource: Complicating the Narratives - What if journalists covered controversial issues differently — based on how humans actually behave when they are polarized and suspicious? - Amanda Ripley ([Medium](#))

Journaling Prompts:

1. How have my past conversations about climate change gone? What would I do differently to connect more meaningfully?
2. Who is someone I can have a climate conversation with? What shared values can I focus on to make the conversation productive and positive?

⁴ *High Conflict* by Amanda Ripley — A guide on how to turn divisive topics into constructive conversations that build bridges, not walls. ([Amanda Ripley](#))

Resources for Reflection and Action:

- *High Conflict* by Amanda Ripley — A guide on how to turn divisive topics into constructive conversations that build bridges, not walls. ([Amanda Ripley](#))
- How to Talk About Climate Change - Dr.Katharine Hayhoe ([TedTalk](#))
- Can love be more effective than science in communicating the urgency of climate change? - Alice Klein ([Greenhouse](#))
- The Climate Conversation Card Deck - A resource that aims to connect people through conversation in which they work through their own relationship with climate change to envision a climate resilient future. It offers some potential language for better communicating across differences. ([SPEC](#))