

Eco-anxiety aware classrooms

Resources for teachers
supporting climate-related
emotions in the classroom

OUR WONDROUS PLANET





Museums Victoria acknowledges the
Wurundjeri- Woi wurrung and Boon Wurrung
peoples of Kulin Nation, the Traditional Owners of
the land on which Melbourne Museum stands.

We pay our respect to Elders past and present, and
to all Aboriginal peoples of Australia here today.
We acknowledge their continued and unceded
connection to Country and culture.



Using this resource

The resources within this guide support students and teachers experiencing a range of natural and valid responses to climate and environmental change. Anxiety, fear, sadness and anger, along with positive emotions such as empathy and hope, are reasonable reactions when confronted with curriculum content on human environmental impacts.

This guide is by no means exhaustive. It contains evidence-based information and resources that have informed the approach of Our Wondrous Planet education programming.

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Introduction

Background:

Climate change distress is real, escalating and driving mental ill-health in young people. [Research](#) conducted by Orygen Institute found that three in four young people are concerned about climate change, and two in three report it is negatively impacting youth mental health (7).

In the face of this data, it is understandable that some teachers report avoiding the topic in an effort to shield students from distress. However, this can be viewed as a double disservice: firstly, it denies students access to accurate information leaving them vulnerable to misinformation. Withholding this knowledge prevents them from developing the understanding and skills they need to critically evaluate sources, make informed decisions, and engage with solutions. Secondly, many students are aware of the climate crisis and may already experience climate-related distress. Discussing climate change openly—while normalising and validating the emotional responses it evokes—actually helps students process their feelings and build coping strategies (6).

Talking openly and honestly about issues like climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation is essential for preparing students for the future and supporting their mental-health.

Take care of yourself:

As they say in travel, fit your own mask before helping others! Diving deep into these topics can take its toll on the mental health of educators. The ideas, tips and resources referenced within this guide are valuable to apply to improving your own mental health and that of your teaching colleagues.

Our Wondrous Planet

Discover a world 4 billion years in the making. In Melbourne Museum's Our Wondrous Planet exhibition, students will come face to face with animals from around the world. Step into their vibrant ecosystems and experience the incredible connections that unite all life on Earth. Play your part in helping to shape a thriving future for our planet.

Our Wondrous Planet education offer includes:

- [Facilitated programs](#) for years 3 to 10 onsite at Melbourne Museum
- Teacher guides (PDF) associated with each program
- Social story to support neurodiverse visits
- [Climate Commons](#) events co-designed with high school students to support students mental and social health while providing inspiring science stories and information.

Name it to tame it

Young Australians have identified that having their concerns about climate change acknowledged is the most valuable response when seeking help (7). Providing supporting language to label emotions, both positive and negative, can often be the first step in recognising, discussing and coping with them effectively. In fact, brain imaging has shown that simply labelling negative emotions can reduce activity in parts of the brain associated with emotions such as distress. (4)

Try providing a copy for students to reference. Tuning into their emotional states before and after confronting lessons can help them identify, call out and process their emotions.

This resource is available as a PDF in [multiple languages](#), and is reproduced here courtesy of the Climate Mental Health Network.

Climate Emotions Wheel



Climate Emotions Wheel © 2024



Climate
Mental Health
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Take a break

Engaging in stress and anxiety-reducing activities is an effective strategy for coping with climate distress.

Not only do activities such as exercise, mindfulness and creative expression assist in regulating negative emotional states, they can also improve focus and attention, making them a valuable addition to classroom practice.

The power of green

Spending time in green spaces such as parks, gardens and even school grounds, can reduce the feelings of anxiety, as well as providing valuable environmental services (1).

ACTIVITY: Biodiversity hunt. If you have access to a green (or blue) space near your school, use a [“What can I find...”](#) list for a nature treasure hunt. Even short bursts of time in green spaces has benefits.

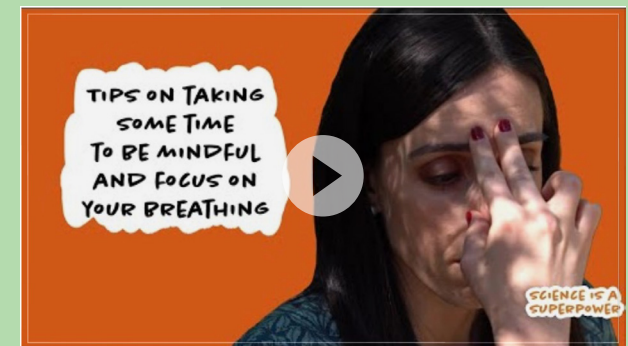
If you and your students don't have easy access to green spaces, meditation with nature sounds has been found to have similar positive benefits (3). Try [this mindfulness video](#) as a starting point. (8:29)



A moment to breathe

As little as five minutes of deep, slow breathing can significantly reduce feelings of anxiety. Breathing exercises stimulate the vagus nerve which runs from the brainstem, past the lungs and into the abdomen, and is directly responsible for communicating 'gut-feelings', including the nausea and 'butterflies' sensation associated with anxiety. (5)

There are many different deep breathing techniques, but you may like to try [this yogic method](#) as demonstrated by Museums Victoria's Dr Nurin Veis (1:52), or view the longer [‘Science is a Superpower’](#) episode in the importance of calmness (6:35).



Making meaning

Citizen Science

Connecting to and collaborating with others on meaningful projects action can help students find hope and purpose, reducing the sense of isolation that can sometimes come with climate emotions.

Citizen-science projects provide the opportunity to work together, as well as encouraging your students to celebrate positive progress and climate initiatives. Communicating your contributions can spread awareness and inspire others, creating a ripple effect of benefits.

For more projects and programs like those highlighted on this page, visit [Become a citizen scientist](#).

Count bugs for science

Citizen science platforms like iNaturalist allow your sightings to help researchers make better decisions for nature, and for all of us. Find out how to record sightings of bugs (or other animals) [here](#).

ACTIVITY: The Australian Pollinator Count. If you can schedule time during Australian Pollinator week, you can [record your observations](#) of flowers to help scientists better understand the plight of Australia's insect pollinators.



Frog ID

If you can hear frogs, you can ID them! Complete with [extensive classroom resources](#), this nation-wide citizen science project is managed by the Australian Museum.

With the goal of establishing current habitat ranges, the data collected is an invaluable resource for frog conservation researchers, particularly in the face of threats like climate change and cane toad spread.



Taking action

Whether writing a letter to leaders, starting a school sustainability project or hosting a community clean-up, taking concrete steps to address issues provides a positive focus for climate emotions.

Advocate for change

Taking collective action creates social connection and supports students to develop strong communication skills. More ideas can be found at [Advocate for change](#).

Everyday greener living

Taking action publicly may not suit all students. But the benefits of positive action can be experienced through many small choices that collectively have a big impact! Grow veggies, plant wildflowers or go meat free for three – more at [Everyday greener living](#).

Join a change-making network

[Earthwatch Australia](#) offers teachers programs to grow their knowledge, build strong networks, and take action on the environmental issues local to their communities.

Programs like [ResourceSmart Schools](#) can help your school embed sustainability across your campus, curriculum and community, and connect to other schools doing the same.



Go for an “Emu Walk”

Going for a walk to pick up rubbish can actually be one of the most beautiful and rewarding rituals at our disposal!

Taking time to care for the green spaces in your immediate surroundings can provide a way to connect to nature, and feel ownership and belonging in communal spaces.



Climate Superpowers

Created with and for young people and the University of Melbourne, [Climate Superpowers](#) recognises that everyone has different strengths and assets to draw upon in navigating the climate crisis.

It is hard to take positive action when you are feeling down. The strength of the Climate Superpowers is to instil that there are many ways to respond to the climate crisis, not the least of which is taking care of yourself first.

Free lesson materials are available to support your use of the Superpowers in your classroom.



For students

Seven Climate Superpowers have been identified through this project - what is yours?

Through a quiz, students can identify their own strengths, and find tips and rich resources in how to use their unique superpowers to:

- Learn about climate change
- Practice self-care
- Take action

Identifying these strengths and owning them can open up channels for communication and support among students.

For teachers

Teaching is a superpower! Climate Superpowers provides support in identifying your own strengths in engaging with climate change, and how to effectively harness them.

The [Teacher Climate Superpowers](#) professional development resource is designed to support teacher and student wellbeing in the face of climate change.

Sign up to learn your own superpowers, access self-paced learning modules and more.

Climate emotions in the classroom

[This guide](#) explores the emotional impacts of climate change on young people and how educators can support students experiencing climate-related distress. Just as with other complex challenges that affect student wellbeing, a collaborative, strengths-based approach is essential when supporting young people navigating eco-anxiety and related emotions.

This resource focuses on building the capacity of educators to recognise, understand, and respond to difficult climate emotions in constructive, empowering ways.

It offers a summary of practical strategies for use in the classroom, grounded in an approach that supports wellbeing, fosters resilience, and strengthens agency. It is designed to complement the [Stay Tuned to Our Planet](#) program, but can also be used independently as part of a whole-of-school approach to climate wellbeing.



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CLIMATE EMOTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR TEACHERS

SUMMARY

Feelings of anxiety, fear, and sadness about climate change are normal and valid, especially among young people who face an uncertain future but often lack a voice in decision-making. This three-page summary guide, followed by detailed guidance on pages 4–11, is intended to help teachers support students dealing with difficult climate-related emotions and distress. It also serves as a companion guide to the *Stay Tuned to Our Planet* program. The full resource can be accessed [here](#).

HOW CLIMATE EMOTIONS SHOW UP IN THE CLASSROOM

There are a wide range of **climate emotions**, both pleasant and unpleasant, and all of them have a role to play. However, while some worry or sadness can be constructive and even motivating, persistent distress—such as climate anxiety/distress—can affect students' concentration, mood, sleep, and social engagement.

In the classroom, it is important to support students in expressing and responding to their climate emotions. **Recognising** them is the first step in offering meaningful support and helping students process difficult feelings in healthy, empowering ways.



Further Resources

STTOP

STAY TUNED TO OUR PLANET is a 28 episode fast paced YouTube series and FREE education program that delivers simple, everyday actions to inspire young people to become advocates for a more sustainable future.

[Teaching resources](#) are available for Years 5-9.



Sustainability Victoria

The award winning [ResourceSmart Schools](#) has supported thousands of schools to make sustainable actions to save the planet and save money.

[Climate Change Forums](#) put students in charge, empowering them to design the future.



headspace

headspace supports young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.

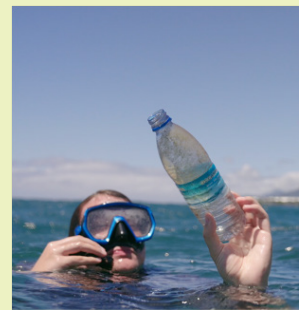
Their free online or in person [Mental Health Education Program](#) is interactive, strength-based and evidence informed.



Blueminds – Rising Up documentary

The compelling and inspirational story of 23 year old Kal Glanznig's global journey to uncover stories of hope and solutions to the climate and ocean plastic crisis.

Schools can watch [Rising Up](#) for free, or host a community screening.



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