



Mental Health and Climate Change



Terms to know:

Eco-fear: overwhelming fear or stress in reaction to the changing environment and climate.

Climate trauma: distress, fear, and other emotional upheaval following a climate-related event, such as an extreme storm or a flood.

Solastalgia: distress and sadness from watching the environment change in a negative way.

Mental Health in Extreme Weather Situations

- Disruptive weather events cause stress and can lead to more severe mental health disorders, like PTSD or depression.
- Extreme weather events lead to isolation, economic loss, disruptions to work, and homeowner worries.
- Extreme heat is dangerous to people's mental health and can cause increased use of alcohol, higher admissions to hospitals, and overall more aggressive behaviors.
- Groups that are more vulnerable to weather-related disasters will often see harsher impacts on their mental health.

Mental Health and Climate Change

- Climate change causes stress about present and future losses of space, culture, and earth.
- As extreme weather events happen more frequently due to climate change, the stress on daily routines will become more severe.
- Exposure to pollutants and poor air quality is also linked to negative health impacts.
- Climate change can feel like an overwhelming, unsolvable problem. People sometimes cope with denial or pessimism.

Climate Events Affect People with Pre-existing Mental Health Conditions in Specific Ways

- Psychiatric medication can make it more difficult for someone's body to regulate temperature, causing unsafe fluctuations in temperature.
- People with mental health disorders are more likely to depend on services, medication supplies, and infrastructure, which can all be disrupted by extreme weather events.
- Disruptions in daily routine can also take a toll, especially for younger kids.

What To Do and How To Help

- Know the warning signs of mental and emotional distress: overwhelming sadness, changes in appetite/activity, difficulty concentrating or sleeping, increased use of drugs/alcohol, and physical ailments like headaches.
- Check in with those who may be isolated during an extreme weather event.
- Advocate and take action. Find a local environmental justice organization and take part. Ask a friend to join you!
- Take care of your body: stay hydrated and try to exercise. Reconnecting with nature through hikes, walks, and runs can help your mental health.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. Climate stress is legitimate.
- During a disaster, prioritize your mental health treatment if possible.
- Take a step away from constant news and updates. While staying up-to-date is good, there's no need to bombard yourself with depressing information.

For Mental Health Resources

- SAMHSA helpline at 1-800-985-5990.
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Talk to someone you trust: pastor, parent, teacher, friend, etc...
- <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/mental-health-resources/>

For More Information

- <https://www.goodgriefnetwork.org>
- <https://workthatreconnects.org>
- <https://livingresilience.net>
- www.climatecrew.org