

It's Getting Hot in Here!

Keeping sane in the age of eco-grief, eco-anxiety and climate depression.

[Force of Nature](#) founder Clover Hogan recalls the moment she fell apart. Sitting on a train, she came across a series of images of the destroyed Amazon. That low point led to an emotional breakthrough: 'after having that moment, I felt liberated.'

Many of us will recognize that despair when the iron cage of eco-anxiety closes around us. Bombarded with news of the climate breakdown, we veer from fury to overwhelm, from apathy to fear - enough to make us want to burrow in our comforters and tell the world to come back later.

Some of us are already facing the reality of fires, floods, heatwaves, crop failures and desertification. As well as physical loss, these horrors cause emotional trauma. Even those of us who have been spared so far can feel hopeless. Psychotherapist Joanna Townsend reports seeing clients with eco-anxiety or eco-grief daily. 'These feelings make sense,' she says. But how do we manage them? How do we engage with life during a time of ecological emergency?

Organizer and writer Daniel Sherrer, author of *Warmth, Coming of Age at the End of Our World*, has grappled with these feelings since college. 'Taking part in the global climate movement has helped me see the path to a just and sustainable future and move from depressed resignation to clear-eyed, furious, almost spiritual resolve.'

In other words, we let grief and anxiety transform into action in ways that make sense to us. Do we love fashion and beauty? Or tech and gaming? We can move towards eco-fashion, upcycling and ethical products. Depending on our talents, we organize, manage data, help victims, support at-risk animals, speak out, reach out to those still locked in the old paradigm. And we vote.

Taking action isn't easy. Despair can paralyse, make us apathetic or urge us toward distraction. But through all those emotions runs a vein of anger, and anger is adaptive: a fuel for action, not destruction. 'We can act when we're coming from a place of compassion for ourselves and others,' explains Joanna Townsend.

Daniel Sherrell continues: 'Equally important, it's placed me in a community where I don't have to carry the weight by myself, where I can hold it in solidarity with the people I love.' Participating in environmental action gives us a community that sustains us.

As well as community action, we can seek therapy in one of the groups that have appeared online and offline. In the US, [Good Grief Network](#) has a 10-step eco-grief program. The [Climate Psychology Alliance](#) has pioneered Climate Cafés in many cities and curates a list of therapists specialized in eco-depression and anxiety.

Finally, Daniel Sherrell says: 'I'm adamant about reserving time away from my phone and my inbox to nurture my relationship to the physical world.' Joanna Townsend agrees this is vital: we need to practise self-care, take time out, have fun. We need to eat well, sleep enough and cultivate our relationships, including with the earth. As Native American botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer wrote in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 'We have to put our hands in the earth to make ourselves whole again.' Nurturing a rose is nurturing ourselves.

A few strategies to explore:

- Accept our feelings about the environmental emergency without shame. They are valid and justified. That also means protecting ourselves from gaslighting.
- Seek support in individual or group therapy and a support network.
- Action is golden, especially collective action, which doubles up as a means of community sustenance.
- Take time out! It helps our personal sustainability.
- Accept our limits: we are not to blame if a campaign doesn't achieve all we want. We'll be all the stronger next time.

- Cultivate our relationship to the earth through gardening, walking in nature or hiking. A stroll among trees is beautiful therapy.
- Develop a spiritual practice that validates our feelings and commitments to a clean, liveable planet.
- Learn from those who've been here before. We can all benefit from the collective wisdom of communities that have developed resilience over decades, sometimes centuries.

Books we love:

Warmth, Coming of Age at the End of Our World, Daniel Sherrell.

The Field Guide to Climate Anxiety, Sarah Jaquette Ray

Braiding Sweetgrass, Robin Wall Kimmerer

Our favorite quotes:

"Hope doesn't produce action; action produces hope." Greta Thunberg.

"Instead of asking "What can I do to stop feeling so anxious?", "What can I do to save the planet?" and "What hope is there?", people with privilege can be asking, "Who am I? How am I connected to all this?" The answers reveal that we are deeply interconnected with the well-being of others on this planet and that there are traditions of environmental stewardship that can be guides for where we need to go from here." Dr Sarah Jaquette Ray.

"Each one of us is responsible for all of us", Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

"Whatever you think you can do or believe you can do, begin it. Action has magic, grace and power in it." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

"Letting it get to you. You know what that's called? Being alive. Best thing there is. Being alive right now is all that counts." Dr Who, 11th Doctor.