

Psychology
for a Safe
Climate

Let's **speak** about **climate change**



SECOND EDITION

OUR VALUES



In writing this booklet *Psychology for a Safe Climate* aims to help people engage and connect with others about climate change.

- We care deeply about the young people in the community, about our children, our grandchildren, and future generations. We believe in their right to live in a safe climate as we have done.
- We value the beautiful and wondrous natural world and acknowledge our dependency on this planet's resources for life.
- We acknowledge human activity is pushing carbon dioxide levels into a dangerous zone and that urgent action is required immediately to put in place massive changes to our current global practices.
- We believe that the cost of doing so is justified, even if it requires sacrifice.
- We believe psychology has an important role in helping us understand and overcome the emotional barriers to this transition.
- We value dialogue that is open, respectful and engaging.
- We acknowledge the complexity of the implications of climate change.
- We hope this booklet will help people urgently engage with thinking, feeling, and understanding of themselves and their responses to this difficult issue.



This booklet has been written by members of *Psychology for a Safe Climate* Writing Group: Libby Skeels, Ben Nisenbaum, Carol Ride, Sue Pratt and Bronwyn Wauchope. (Absent Briony Leo). Photo - Hilary Walker.

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THE GREAT TABOO

How do you respond to the words 'climate change'?

Do you switch off, or feel indignant? Or do you find it ridiculous that everyone's avoiding the subject?

Sadly, climate change is often a taboo topic, and to some degree we can understand why. After all, who wants to be the bearer of 'bad news' to those closest to you?

But even those who know about the climate science often avoid the subject with friends, family or colleagues because it can arouse strong feelings.

Others find it is such a farfetched problem, so removed from everyday life, that it's not worth discussing. While still others find the challenges of climate change so difficult to resolve that talking about it seems pointless.

There are many people, however, who are frustrated and puzzled that as a society, we don't seem to be able to talk about climate change seriously, if at all.

Susan Murphy, author of *Minding the Earth, Mending the World* suggests we are caught in a dilemma which makes it "ridiculous to pretend it is not happening, and almost equally ridiculous to mention it, since no one can personally hope to change its course, and no one much wants even to hear about it." Our position as a species is now so untenable, says Murphy, that "it verges on rudeness to mention it (climate change) in polite company."

This booklet aims to encourage people to consider and to connect with others on the biggest issue of our time.

It is written for all of us who are caught between two states: wanting or daring to understand climate change, and finding it unbearable to acknowledge what a serious problem it really is.

As psychologists, we also want to throw some light on the way human nature contributes to this predicament.

People tend to distance themselves from an issue when it is deeply uncomfortable and challenging. This is especially so if it threatens our sense of who we are and what we stand for.

Please read on. We believe it's important for your own sake, for the sake of your children, and all the generations to come.

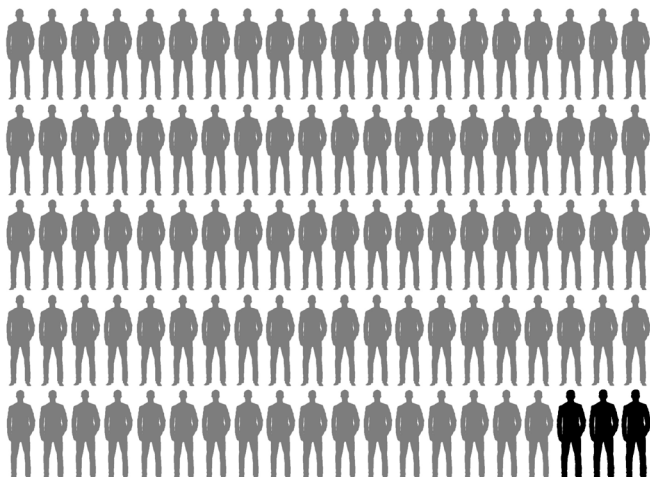


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THE PROBLEM

Ninety-seven per cent of climate scientists around the globe agree that our world is getting hotter because human society is emitting greenhouse gases in ever-larger quantities.

97 out of 100 climate experts agree humans are causing global warming.



www.skepticalscience.com/docs/Debunking_Handbook.pdf

Climate change is happening now. It is a lived reality for many across Australia as they experience extreme weather events such as heatwaves, bushfires, droughts, storms and floods. Temperature records are being broken.

Changes in our climate are happening more rapidly than previously predicted with more severe impacts, and at lower temperatures than predicted.

A warmer climate will have a huge impact on our physical health, as well as our mental health, including premature death, exacerbated illnesses, and trauma, as well as disruption to our social systems on which we rely. Yet climate change is rarely the subject of open and honest discussion between people.

It's not rational to ignore it. And ignoring it really doesn't work, because underneath our busy lives we feel some disquiet that all is not well. We avoid discussing our observations and our disquiet, and live frantically as if there is no tomorrow. But is there some truth in this familiar expression?

Is fear getting in the way of us being rational in confronting these grave concerns?

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After looking at the stories told by Victorians of their bushfire experiences, Black Saturday task force researcher Jim McLennan found that it requires "serious mental effort" to face the unthinkable of risks to our survival. "No alcohol-affected drivers intend to die in a car crash.

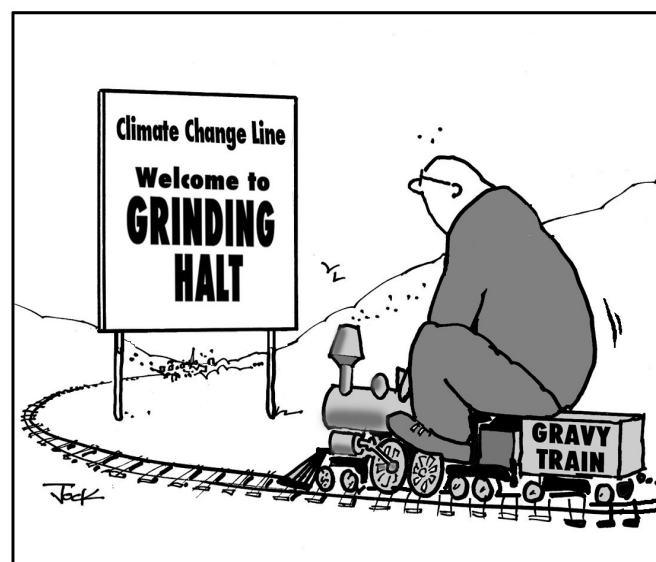
No bushfire residents intend to die in a bushfire. Perhaps for both, their actions (or inactions) result from a deep fundamental human characteristic: our death, or non-being, is mostly unimaginable."

Yes, climate change is a threat to the survival of future generations and is difficult to imagine.

Once we have even an inkling of this scale of threat to our world, to ourselves and to our loved ones, we may well descend into inner conflict, confusion and feelings of despair.

Committed and steady leadership on climate change, free from political point scoring, is missing. This failure can exacerbate our fears.

We have written what follows to help with understanding and with managing these feelings. We hope to help people stay alive to what is stirred up in us, rather than avoid it. Then these emotions can be used constructively to engage in what needs to be considered now and for the future.



BEING IN TWO MINDS

Our conflicted feelings

Climate change stirs up tension or conflict between two quite different and opposite feelings within our selves: between our wish for the way we want life to be, and our recognition of a very sobering reality.

We value and love life and all that it offers, and those who have children and grandchildren express the wish to do anything for them. Yet there is overwhelming evidence that in our production of greenhouse gases in ever-increasing quantities, we are wrecking their future, right now.

Facing our conflicts, such as the one between our deepest wishes and our real limitations can be challenging and at times overwhelming.



As author Susan Murphy writes, “humans seem strangely able to live both as if there is no tomorrow, and as if we have a childish right to demand that tomorrow be guaranteed to arrive.” She says we surely must do whatever we can to disturb this terrifying sleep and wake ourselves up.

“That’s the first move of any kind of response to the emergency. But it has to be a waking up to sobriety and coherence...”

What prevents us waking up? When realities are painful we human beings have some well-practiced ways of coping, such as:

- Promoting fanciful ideas
- If there’s a problem then it’s not me, it’s you
- Going negative
- ‘Knowing and not-knowing’ at the same time
- Accepting troubling contradictions

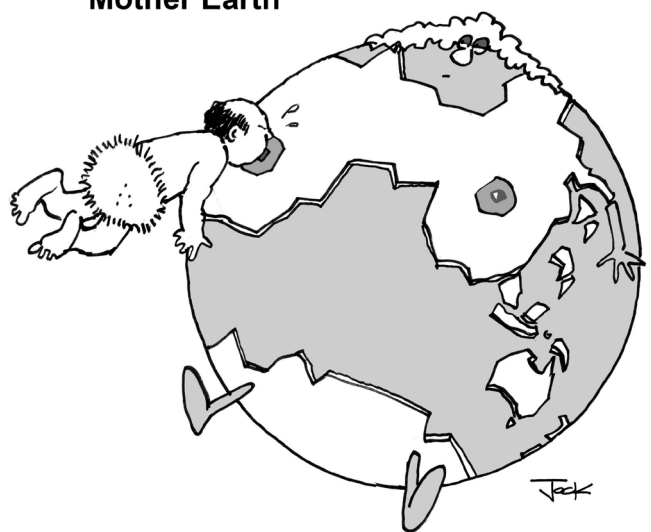
We will look at each of these ways of coping in detail and assess whether they are effective.

Fanciful ideas

What are the signs of using fanciful ideas to deal with feelings we don’t like:

- Always being frantically busy: what Al Gore termed a “culture of distraction”.
- Pretending we are not dependent on nature, so that we can ‘dispense’ with the need to care for our planet and its ecosystems.
- Believing that humans are all powerful, and denying our vulnerability.
- Promoting something which is clearly false, but convenient. For example, economists, politicians and business leaders say that we can endlessly grow the economy. We may wish this to be true so that we have no need to face planetary limits and the painful implications.
- Having over-riding faith that technology will come up with easy solutions, and so protect us from engaging seriously with the need to make very big changes in our lives.
- Believing we can have our cake and eat it too, with ‘greenwashing’. We like to think that with a small tweak we can still have everything we want and not strain the capacity of the planet. In his book *Greenwash*, Guy Pearce describes the green marketing strategy used by many businesses who aim to increase profits rather than to genuinely address the issues of climate change.

Mother Earth



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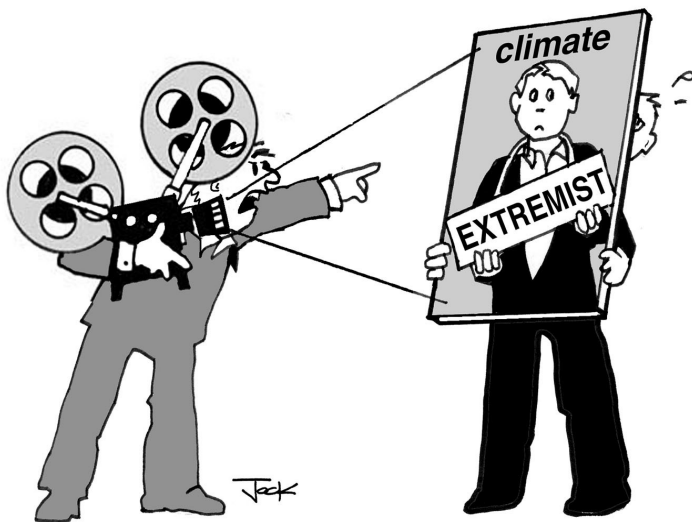
It's not me it's you

Another powerful way we can distance ourselves from uncomfortable feelings is to only see them in other people, while being blind to them in ourselves.

For example we can dismiss or criticise the environmentalists and climate activists urging change. We could label them as 'worriers', 'pessimists' and 'trouble makers'. But what about our own feelings of worry and pessimism? What about our fear of being a trouble maker? If others express our feelings for us we can disown them. This is called 'projection'.

A similar process is occurring when a person who explains the need for a very rapid transformation of our energy supply system is labelled as 'extremist' and 'out of touch with reality'.

The question is: who is out of touch with reality?



Going negative

Despite the weight of scientific evidence, in the media, from the mouths of politicians, and on the street, we still hear statements such as, "there is no link between extreme weather events and climate change", "the scientists have a vested interest", and "we can't see any change in the climate". These utterances simply deny the reality of the unpleasant facts of climate change.

Negation is often a temporary resort when the first shock of a painful reality is too much to bear. "Oh no, that couldn't be true", or "I can't believe that!" we exclaim on hearing bad or shocking news.

For some people, this initial cry that something is not true can be the beginning of a complex process of coming to terms with painful feelings. This includes acknowledging responsibilities and facing sadness and loss. It can result in coming through grief to acceptance with strength, wisdom and purpose.



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“Knowing” and “not knowing”- at the same time

In discussions about climate change both in the public sphere and with friends and family, we very often hear confused and contradictory messages which express simultaneously a ‘knowing’ and a ‘not knowing’.

We hear statements that admit the raw scientific facts of climate change, but deny its seriousness.

This process minimises or rationalises the facts to give them a different meaning. We hear examples in everyday life such as when a known alcoholic claims to be just a ‘social drinker’, or when a speeding driver claims to be driving safely because he is a good driver.

Here are some examples of rationalisations in response to the scientific evidence on climate change.

Fact: While the climate has changed in the past, humans are detrimentally influencing the current climate.

Rationalisation : “Climate change is not new - it’s been happening for eternity - it’s natural.”

Fact: More warmth and less rainfall over southern Australia will be devastating to Australian agriculture and our food production.

Rationalisation: “More warmth in winter will be great for our crops.”

Fact: 97% of climate experts agree humans are causing global warming by producing greenhouse gases from human activity.

Rationalisation: “Climate scientists are not sure yet about the science of global warming, so we can’t do anything yet.”

Fact: Australia’s greenhouse emissions per person are among the highest in the world, together with the USA and some Arab Gulf states. By adding emissions from exported coal to our domestic emissions, Australia’s carbon footprint doubles.

Rationalisation: “Australia’s emissions are negligible.”

Often we minimise the psychological, political or moral implications of climate change. Some common rationalisations and justifications include:

- “It’s got nothing to do with me.”
- “What can an ordinary person do?”
- “Why should I have to lose sleep, or take a risk.”
- “Someone else will deal with it.”
- “I deserve my lifestyle because I work so hard.”

There are also more exaggerated responses, which reflect detachment, unconcern and self-centredness in statements, such as:

- “I don’t care.”
- “So what.”
- “It doesn’t bother me, it won’t affect my life.”
- “Who cares, we’re all going to die anyway?”
- “The planet will be better off without us humans, so who cares what state we leave it in.”



However it is likely these statements disguise anxiety and distress in those who care deeply. “If I don’t care, I won’t feel bad”, is the underlying motivation, suggests Clive Hamilton in *Requiem for a Species*.

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COMING TO TERMS WITH REALITY

Troubling contradictions

There is a contradiction at the heart of current climate policy in Australia. On the one hand it is said that as a nation we need to contribute to global emissions reduction efforts. On the other hand, there is a strong view that we must continue to establish new fossil fuel ventures as hungrily as we have in the past, by developing new coal mines, building new export facilities for coal, and exploring new gas reserves and markets. All of these ventures will make the impacts of climate change more severe.

This moral contradiction is very confusing for us all, but also very familiar in our culture where contradictions are tolerated and not resolved. For example we allocate government money to gambling addiction treatment. We know it is devastating to family life, but at the same time, we continue to expand poker machine permits.

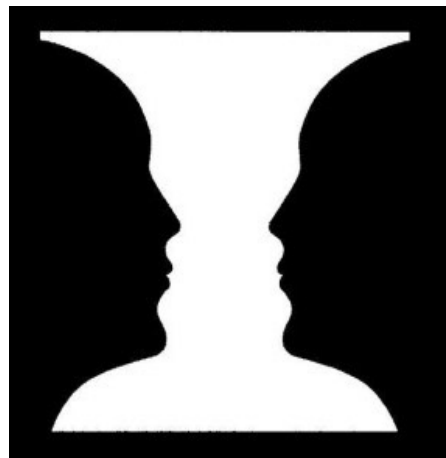
The contradiction between the emission reduction targets and our coal dependency creates confusion. This contradiction feeds a pervasive cynicism about whether real solutions are possible. This can then lead people to cut themselves off emotionally from the issue.

In writing this booklet we are hoping you will not cut off, but find the strength to read on.

New ideas challenge our identity.

In general, all of us want to preserve our self esteem and feel secure about who we are, what roles we take in society and what we value. We all want a sense of belonging to groups with whom we identify.

We like to feel consistent, and so when presented with new information we engage in a process called "biased assimilation". We judge the worth and truth of information according to how it fits with our existing beliefs and culture.

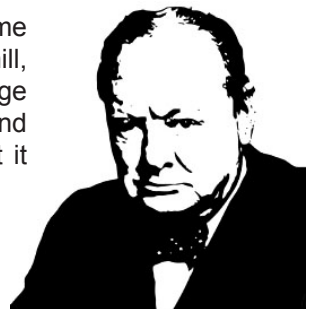


What do you see?

Showing interest or concern about climate change may challenge our identity. This may result in us worrying about our place or status within family, social, workplace or political groups. To remain not fully informed about climate change may well be a more bearable option.

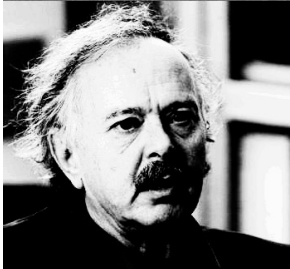
If we are curious, and do become informed, what challenges lie ahead? It takes courage to take a stand in contradiction to our peers.

The British war-time Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, wisely reflected that: "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."



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Breaking rank



Richard Muller, a prominent scientist, had the courage to admit that after careful and objective analysis in the *Berkley Earth Surface Temperature* (BEST) project, he had been wrong about climate change.

In 2012 he said his previous scepticism was incorrect, and had become a 'converted climate sceptic'. Three years previously he had identified problems in climate studies that in his mind threw doubt on the very existence of global warming. Following an intensive research effort involving a dozen scientists, he concluded that global warming was real and that prior estimates of the rate of warming were correct. He went a step further and declared: "Humans are almost entirely the cause."

Climate 'denialism' is an organised process seeking to undermine acceptance of climate science. It is different from not allowing oneself to know about climate change by distancing, minimising and rationalising.

In *Merchants of Doubt*, authors Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway explain organised denialism of climate change and other issues. They examine how a loose-knit group of senior scientists and lobbyists with extensive political connections have, over four decades, run effective campaigns to mislead the public and deny well-established scientific knowledge in various fields, including the dangers of tobacco and climate change.

Their strategy has been to make it seem there is a debate about climate change and that the science is not settled.

The fact is there is a very high level of scientific consensus among climate scientists that climate change is happening and is caused by human activities.

Having created a false debate, they demand equal time in the media for their concocted side of the story, and threaten editors and journalists who do not comply.

In the area of climate change there are very few credible scientists supporting denialism. The 'merchants of doubt' therefore roll out for the media, scientists whose field is not climate change, and those who have no credible publications recorded in the area. Will they ever have to face the charge of crimes against humanity?

For too long the credible climate science community ignored this lobby, much of which was paid for by the fossil fuel industry, because they believed this lobby talked scientific rubbish. But this lack of response was then used by denialists to falsely claim that "climate scientists had something to hide".

This campaign has been very successful in confusing many in the community already dealing with challenging and contradictory emotions about climate change. This has delayed serious global action.



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Our core values

Knowing what we value or stand for helps guide the decisions and actions we take in life. Values are principles, beliefs and ideals that we hold dearly, no matter what we actually do in life. They express our deepest desires about how we want to relate to ourselves, others and the world. The most universally held values are honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness and compassion.

Goals are different from values. They are what we strive to achieve, such as moving out of home, losing weight or getting a better job. When our goals (what we do) are consistent with our values (what we believe), we feel more contented.

When they are inconsistent, we often feel an underlying disquiet and restlessness. For example, a person who values making other people's lives better may find a new job unsatisfying if it doesn't support this value, even though it might support the goal of an increased income.

Hearing the full facts about climate change is very unsettling and forces us to examine our deepest values. It requires us to think about the unthinkable. Unless we can name the extent of the problem, how can we possibly solve it? As a wartime leader, Winston Churchill demanded he be told the brutal truth. "I had no need for cheering dreams" he wrote, "facts are better than dreams."

So how might we respond? Invoking those universal values, we may begin by being honest about the climate science, and show respect to our climate scientists. Then we may be willing to carry our Australian fair share of responsibility, as one of the highest per-capita emitters of carbon dioxide. We may harness compassion for the lives of those most vulnerable to the immediate direct impacts of climate change, as well as for those young people and future generations who will bear the greatest weight.

The vast range of actions required to slow and then stop global warming may challenge the values of many people. These actions may require constraining our economy, affecting what and how much we consume.

This may cause a 'clash of values' when actions are proposed or legislated. The changes may be experienced as reducing the freedom and autonomy of the individual.

But not acting will clash with the wishes of those who care for the wellbeing of future generations, and for the wonder and beauty of the planet on which we depend.

It can be a tremendous personal struggle to work out what matters most.

Author Susan Murphy notes that an addict will sell their own grandmother for supply, yet, "as consumers we are asked effectively to sacrifice our grandchildren in order to maintain our comforts, keep up the supply and maintain the illusion that nothing needs to change."



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But can people change?

How do we bear the different emotions stirred up in facing climate change? Dan Siegel, a renowned specialist in neuroscience and psychology, describes a human window of tolerance for bearing emotional arousal:



“Our mental experience and our neural firing patterns for particular emotions or situations appear to have a span of tolerance in which we can function optimally. Within that span, within the window, we do well; outside the window, we push beyond tolerable levels of arousal and move to either chaos or rigidity and lose our adaptive and harmonious functioning.”

Dan Siegel says our window of tolerance may be wide for feelings such as joy, love, or even sadness, so that we function well when these feelings are aroused. But the window may narrow and be ‘easily ruptured’ for other conditions such as fear, anger and anxiety.

We seem to have a finite ‘worry pool’, but the span of tolerance for fear, grief, or anxiety about climate change varies from person to person. As our concern about climate change escalates, some people will be able to tolerate a wide range of intense emotions, while others will find they are pushed beyond their boundaries into either chaos or rigidity.

Those who are pushed to chaos may find feelings such as fear, grief and anxiety run out of control. They may resort to ‘managing’ such feelings by completely shutting down to the reality of climate change.

Those who respond with rigidity may close down their willingness to consider any change and cling to past beliefs and business-as-usual.

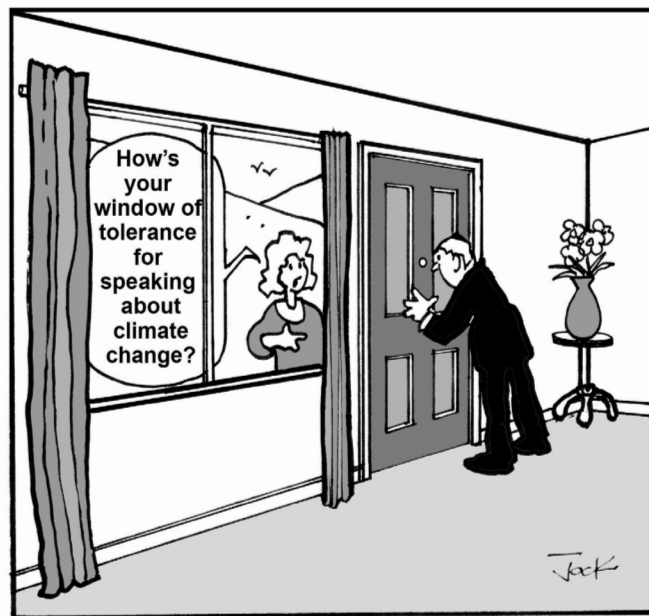
Expanding our window of tolerance

Dan Siegel explains that the window of tolerance can be expanded. If they are actively helped by being provided with security, support and understanding, people can engage with an increased range of emotions. Given support, people can unite thinking and emotion to deal with uncertainty and change.

In psychological counselling such support is offered by a skilled counsellor in a secure environment. In the family, a child can widen their window of tolerance when parents provide understanding and support in a caring, stable and protective environment.

In the community, the support and stability of strong reliable leaders in government, in business and in the local community, offer a similar opportunity for people to engage with what is unfamiliar or challenging.

Open engagement with threats to our survival can shift our value orientation to one that is more mature and protective of the environment, says Clive Hamilton. If people are told the truth, even if it is frightening, research indicates this fosters behaviour that is less materialistic and more focused on the social good, he says.



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FEELING OUR WAY TO REALITY

Coming to terms with what will be lost

The term “solastalgia” was coined by academic Glenn Albrecht to express “the homesickness you have when you are still at home.” He captured the “feeling of chronic distress caused by negatively perceived changes to home and its landscape.” He says we are facing “a pandemic of solastalgia...as a result of the havoc created by unsustainable development and climate change.”

Michael, a young man participating in a *Psychology for a Safe Climate* study, wrote of his feelings on a visit to the remnant forest at Tarra-Bulga National Park in Gippsland, Victoria.

“I stand and wonder how we can accept such degradation. I squeeze my eyes tight and reach into my imagination to see the original forest - the height, the width and magnificence. But this scene is fleeting. I return to what I see...reduced, parched, shrunk, patchy and I feel robbed... Anger stirs in me, frustration and.... then intense sadness. I think about what I know about climate change and ask myself ... what will it take...”

The feeling such change stirs up is grief. It is similar to the grief experienced with the loss of an important relationship, loss of a job through sudden retrenchment, loss through illness or injury.

As we begin to accept the reality of climate change, we will need to face up to deep feelings of grief for what has been lost already, and will be lost in the future. Sadly, we need to accept that even if we act now with urgency, there will be some changes that can't be reversed.

The emotions associated with grief are complex and intense. They include despair, guilt, fear, anger, shame, sadness, and a longing for what is lost. Overall there can be a bewildering state of not quite knowing oneself.

Healthy grief also includes ultimate acceptance. While we may dislike what we are experiencing, ultimately we need to make room for the reality of the loss, to accept it and find ways to find further fulfillment in life.

Acceptance

Accepting climate change requires us to accept the reality of a changed future, with only a short window of time to act to address the issues. We have the wealth to buy anything ...except time. The window of opportunity to stop this disaster is closing fast.



Psychologist and researcher Rosemary Randall says that grief about human-induced climate change is, at first, an intellectual task as we learn about the subject, accept its reality and challenge our prejudices and resistances.

The second task is an emotional one. To realise that we have strong feelings that we may not have recognized, or find difficult to know about. Acceptance is not a shift that occurs like flicking a switch, and may take years.

Psychology for a Safe Climate has undertaken some case studies. In one, “Carla” described how it took years to face the reality of climate change, incrementally. Each step up in awareness was followed by painful feelings of sadness, anger and anguish. Each time she came to a new level of understanding and sad acceptance, Carla said she also recognized that previously she had been in some degree of denial about how serious the problem was, even though she knew she was well-informed factually and felt very deeply about it.

Carla said this helped her to know how hard it is for people to come to understand they are not really facing the full climate reality and the magnitude of the process of acceptance.

As Carla’s case illustrates, gradually facing feelings of grief and coming to acceptance is a slow and difficult process. Having the courage and willingness to allow for this experience to proceed, and for it to take as long as it does, may result in a new view of ourselves, our life and our priorities. New energy may be found for hitherto unexpected directions, learning new skills and making new connections.

What if we sidestep our pain?

In being silent on climate change, perhaps we are trying to sidestep guilt.

For Susan Murphy the silence is understandable “when we remember the shame of knowing we contribute to a slow-motion disaster that is sweeping away our children’s hopes and futures. Much easier to turn away...”

Guilt, and its companion shame, are complex and painful emotions. It is difficult to move on from the thought that “I have wronged”. Fear, anxiety and guilt can be paralysing emotions if they are not expressed.

Sociologist Kari Marie Norgaard found that guilt is one of the key emotions in the lack of public response to climate change in Norway.

As feelings of guilt are denied and suppressed, it takes work to try not to think about climate change. “To ignore is a verb... and it takes work!” she says.

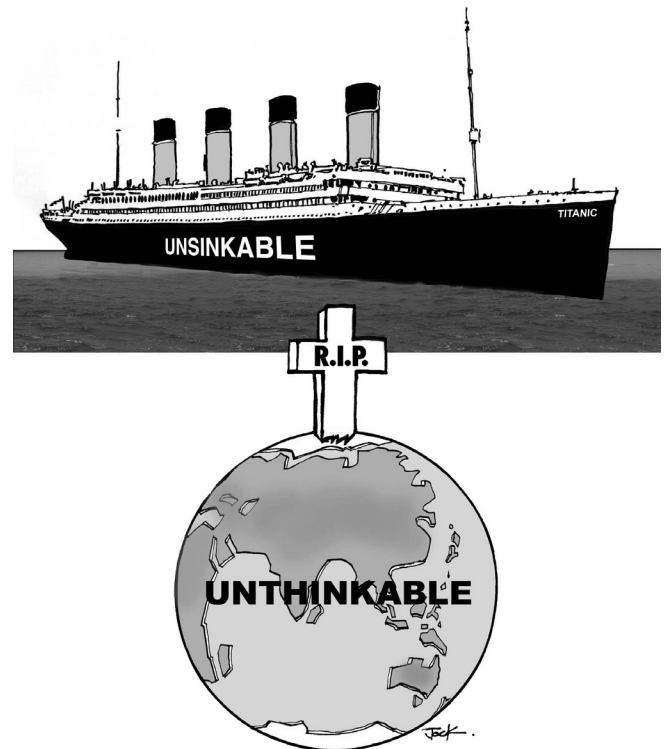


She found that while the people she interviewed admitted to their understanding of climate change, they managed their guilt by minimising its significance and let themselves off the hook by accepting there is nothing they could do.

There is a risk of some people feeling excessive and undue guilt. This plays into the wish to avoid engagement. It’s not healthy for people to become masochistic or to take undue personal responsibility for everything that is wrong. What is healthy is the flourishing of concern, and responsibility that is in proportion to the possible.

If we sidestep our painful feelings of grief because of guilt, the danger is that we will remain in a state of both ‘knowing’ and ‘not-knowing’ about the impact of climate change. This leaves us in denial about the very different world we face.

What if we dare to not sidestep our pain? Clive Hamilton writes that “once we have faced up to the reality of a world under global warming, with all its horrors, we can perhaps begin to make plans and take actions built on the new reality.”



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BUILDING OUR RESILIENCE

Gratitude

We only feel deep sadness about losing what is precious to us when we also deeply love. Recognizing the people we love, the things we love and the gifts in our lives is profoundly strengthening. Such gratitude builds resilience and strength to face difficult personal challenges, such as climate change.

Gratitude is both an appreciation and valuing of what has already happened in our lives, and a process of recognising the people and events that have brought this about.

Gratitude is an antidote to consumerism. With gratitude, we delight and feel satisfied with what we are already experiencing. In contrast, consumerism thrives on promoting the idea that we will only feel satisfied and secure if we have more and more things, and if we don't fall short in the never-ending race to be 'up with the latest'.



Author of *Active Hope* Joanna Macy says that "Gratitude pulls us out of the rat-race. It shifts our focus from what's missing to what's there."

In being grateful for what we have, we also recognize our reliance on other people, our natural world, and the need to take care of that world.

When we forget this, says Macy, "the larger ecology we depend on gets lost from our sight – and the world unravels."

Gratitude increases our capacity to give back.

Gather support for yourself

People who have devoted time and energy to working in the field of climate change, to learning about the issue, or to advocating action, find that it is often a difficult journey, perhaps one too difficult to travel alone.

Over time, sharing experiences and speaking honestly with friends or family can help work through feelings. We can support each other as we face the uncertainty of change and come to terms with the unfamiliar.

This is difficult psychological work. Often we don't know how strongly we feel about something until we find ourselves speaking about it to someone else. It can be amazingly therapeutic to give voice to feelings, rather than leave them swimming around inside our hearts or heads.

Joanna Macy suggests working with another person to complete these open sentences:

"When I think about the condition of our world, I would say things are getting..."

"Some concerns I have include..."

"Some feelings that come up when I think about these are..."

"What I do with these feelings is..."

You can repeat the sentence over and over again, even if you don't think you know what to say, and see what emerges. You may be surprised at what you already know and feel but have not previously given voice to and at the power of this experience when done with others.

WE NEED CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

From a one-to-one discussion, the subject might be opened up to others. A group could be formed to explore and see where it leads. Perhaps a reading group, an art group, or an action group?

Those who are baby-boomers might draw on the 1960s model of the Women's Movement's consciousness raising groups. Those who are younger might want to question the older generation about how this could possibly be useful experience!

Table Talk is one example of group discussion created by *A Grand Stand for the Environment*, a group of grandparents and seniors in Melbourne. Up to ten friends simply gather around a table in a home or café. A facilitator guides a gentle process in which participants have 'a speaking space' to voice their thoughts and feelings about the impact of climate change and its threats to life as we know it. Through guided discussion and simple acts of sharing, participants are empowered and inspired to care for the earth and for future generations.

We need leaders to help us "get real" about climate change, says researcher Susanne Moser.

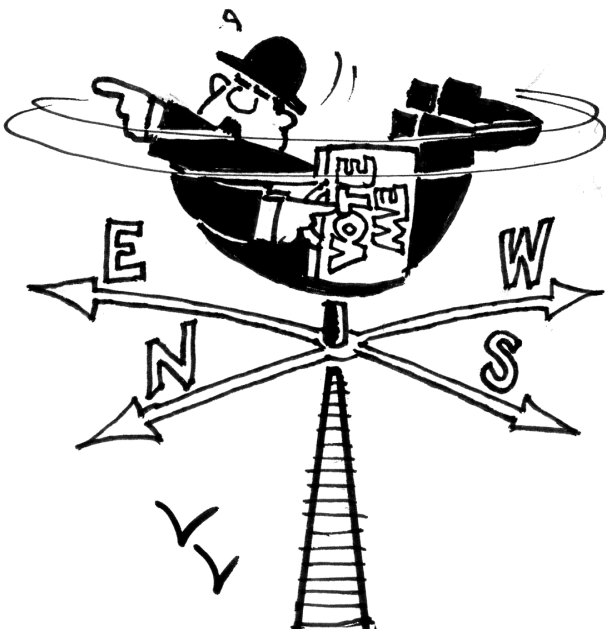


We need leaders and leadership groups with maturity and wisdom, and the courage to face the unthinkable. We desperately hope our leaders will shift from the current short-term political and economic horizons to acting for the longer-term good.

To be leaders they will, of necessity, have addressed their own emotional response to the reality of climate threat, and will have the capacity to integrate this emotional response with rationality. They will need psychological, social and political skills beyond expertise in climate change.

During the great uncertainty ahead, leaders will need to offer a road map as we "let go of the old" even as the new is not yet formed. "They must offer a vision of a desirable outcome, even if it is beyond our own lifetime", Moser says.

Global and national leadership, and leadership in our local communities, are important in widening our window of tolerance for the feelings aroused by climate change, so that we can bear to be real about it. We need leaders to offer vision and truth about the challenge. We need leaders to be open and to invite participation.



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We can all be leaders

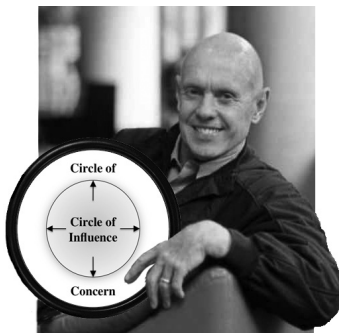
When we need leadership... we look to others. But we are all capable of being leaders within our communities, workplaces and wider networks.

Leadership inspires more leadership. Robert Quinn says "pursuing ever increasing integrity, with courage, is what invites others to do the same."

Leadership on climate change is more than providing modeling by reducing our personal greenhouse gas emissions. It is about working with others, engaging those who are currently not involved and building widespread support for climate action.

Leaders help define a clear purpose in order to achieve a common good. They help groups formulate a common goal. They help unify goals and actions.

Working together often requires compromise, but the challenge is to avoid a compromise that defeats effective action.



Stephen Covey, in his popular book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, identifies the first habit as being proactive. Proactive people don't wait for others to act, but are resourceful and use initiative.

They don't accept that nothing can be done, but instead take up leadership because they recognise that people can always choose how they respond.

Covey distinguishes between our "circle of concern" and "circle of influence". The circle of concern contains all our worries, including things we can do nothing about. The circle of influence contains those things we can do something about.

By focusing our actions on things within our circle of influence, we can bring about change, and at the same time our circle of influence will increase in size.

Many of us underestimate what we can achieve and place some things outside our circle of influence when we actually can have some influence.

Famed civil rights activist Rosa Parks, at the age of 42, refused to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama, USA. This spurred on a citywide boycott and helped launch nationwide efforts to end segregation of public facilities.

"At the time I was arrested, I had no idea it would turn into this. It was just a day like any other day. The only thing that made it significant was that the masses of the people joined in", she said.



Anthropologist Margaret Mead says **"Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."**

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Stepping up : A personal story

“Deep down I knew there was a problem, because I bought two books about climate change but they remained unopened on the bedside table.

This changed when a friend insisted I read Tim Flannery's *The Weathermakers*. It was a wake up call and set me on a see-saw emotional journey as I lurched from concern, to anxiety, to guilt, to alarm.

I sought out learned people for reassurance that all was well; only to find that those offering such reassurance were just wishful thinkers! I came to understand that my baby boomer generation has lived in the most stable times since the 1939-1945 war, yet has silently poisoned the future for our children and grandchildren.

I could no longer sit by and not act. I naively thought people only needed to ‘know the facts’ about the climate change danger for them to feel as I did, and then our political leaders would respond because of community concern. All we had to do was let them know.

I sought interest from friends and neighbours to set up a forum during the 2007 federal elections to hear candidates’ views on climate change. From an initial Sunday afternoon chat around the kitchen table, we established a local community climate action group which has been active ever since.

The experience of taking up a leadership position has at times taken me out of my comfort zone. I had never before met an MP in their office, contacted journalists from local papers, nor stood up in public meetings to ask a question, let alone chair a public meeting.

I am amazed at what can be learned when the stakes are high. Over this time I have experienced the joy of the birth of two grandchildren and have had to deal with very bleak feelings and fears about their future. What more does one need for motivation?

As well as learning new skills and tapping in to existing ones, I have gratefully extended my friendship group and met people whose paths I would not otherwise have crossed. Being active in climate change activities has helped me focus on constructive projects, rather being absorbed in my fears and concerns.”

Great transformations

Throughout history, great transformations have occurred when enough people acknowledge the truth, and join together to create mass social movements. Change has happened that could not be imagined at the beginning.

Nations have moved from dictatorship to democracy (in eastern Europe, for example) and from being racially dominated to more tolerant (such as South Africa) within relatively short periods. When enough people united and worked for change, the Civil Rights Movement in America succeeded and the Berlin Wall fell. Women have the vote almost universally, and America has elected a black President. Change is possible.



One person may feel insignificant, but when the truth is understood, huge transformations can occur. “Truth has its own integrity, reality and power”, says Al Gore. “When people shed illusions and look unblinkingly at what the truth of our situation really is, and see the choices between right and wrong, that has a force that can break down walls of resistance, no matter how high and how strong.”

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HOPE, CREATIVITY AND COURAGE

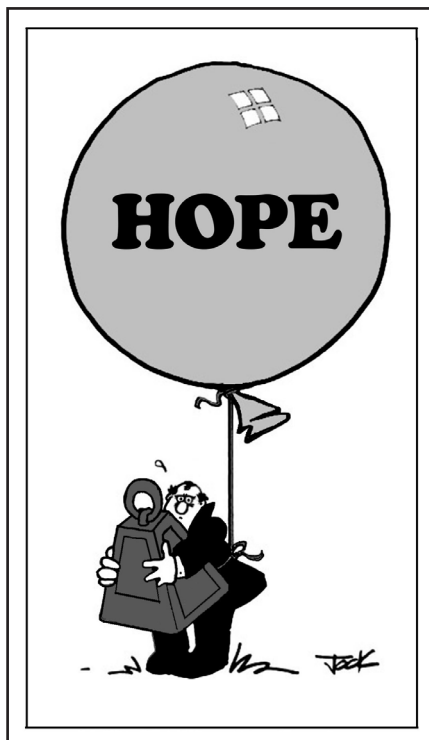
Active hope

Hope, says author Joanna Macy, has two meanings. The first is hopefulness, when we believe our preferred outcome is reasonably likely to happen. If we require this kind of hope before we commit ourselves to an action, our response gets blocked when we don't rate our chances highly.

The second meaning is about desire: knowing what we hope for and what we'd like or love to take place. What we do about it makes the difference. Passive hope is waiting for external agencies to bring about our desire; active hope is becoming an active participant in realising our desire.

The guiding impetus is intention; we choose our goal and focus our intention as our guide, rather than weighing chances and proceeding only when we feel hopeful.

Joanna Macy's book and associated online courses on active hope are sub-titled "How to face the mess we are in without going crazy." We certainly need that.



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Creativity

Expression through creative means is well known to be therapeutic for the artist, as well as engaging for the viewers. We need a multiplicity of ways to express the reality and emotions evoked by climate change. They inspire us.

The group *A Grand Stand for the Environment* wrote and produced an allegorical radio-play on reluctance to accept climate change. *Turning the Titanic* has been performed to appreciative audiences. Inspired by the great tragedy 100 years ago, the play expresses the profound parallels between the sinking of the Titanic and the trajectory of climate change and its impact on the natural world and human life on earth.

Climarte.org formed in Melbourne to harness the creative power of the Arts to inform, engage and inspire action on climate change.

ClimActs is an Australian theatre troupe using striking visual spectacle as well as satire to communicate the urgent need for the world to respond to climate change. See more of their activities as the *Climate Guardians* (below), the *Frackers Guild*, and the *Flat Earth Institute* at www.ClimActs.org.au



Songwriting is also powerful. These are the words from singer and songwriter Emma Tonkin.

Deep down we know
The waiting storm
We are beginning to fray
The silence is gone
Deep down we know

Collective Purpose

Climate change is our collective problem and it needs a collective response. We need to turn our 'consumer muscles' into 'citizen muscles' says Annie Leonard, author of the YouTube film *The Story of Change*.



One of the great starting points for building sustained collective action, political power and social movements is moral outrage. How often have we felt or said, "I am outraged about..." one injustice or another.

Many people live in vulnerable circumstances and have little capacity to adapt to climate change impacts. It is an injustice to future generations, to the natural world, and our own future livelihoods. It is already an injustice suffered by many people impacted by bushfires, storms and drought in Australia and felt even more deeply in poor countries with less resources.

Perhaps our moral outrage does not have one clear target, but too many. Do we blame ourselves, our over-consumption and our lifestyles? Or the coal and gas and oil corporations and the big airlines?

Or is the primary fault our politicians or sections of the media? Or the failure of international diplomacy to agree on global action?

Yes, it is clear that beyond making our lifestyles much more environmentally sustainable, we must engage collectively with others in our community to build understanding, that the lack of effective action on climate change is a matter of morality.

Finding the courage to speak up

There is a famous psychology experiment in which people are exposed to smoke increasingly filling a room, and their response is observed. Those who were alone in the room reported the smoke almost immediately, while those in the room with others remained passive despite the increasing discomfort. From this experiment, and others, we learn that people look to others for a cue as to the urgency of the situation.

Most people would find this story matches their experience. We have an urgent climate crisis, but if we look around, there is insufficient response to activate others.

This is the experience reported by Anna in a case study by *Psychology for a Safe Climate*, as she alerted colleagues to the 'smoke'.

"When I raised the subject of climate change with my colleagues I saw a veil drop between them and me, and an eerie silence descended into the room. I wished I had never spoken, and felt really foolish. At the same time I wished I had been able to take the subject further, but was aware that if I did so I would be a party-pooper. After all it was a celebratory dinner."

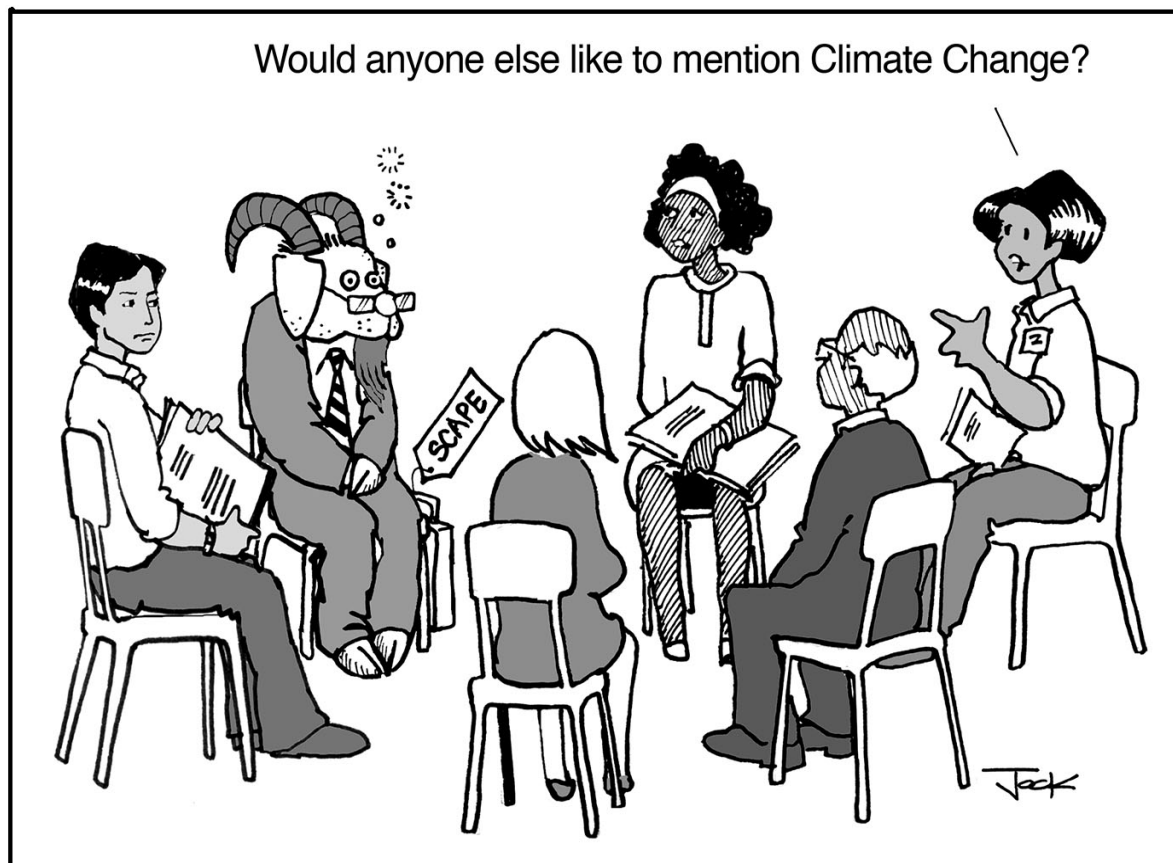
It takes tremendous courage to persist at this point. It's valuable to remember that the silence that descended for Anna could well reflect her colleagues' lack of confidence or fear about the subject, rather than their rejecting or silencing her. How to keep going?



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Nelson Mandela described courage as not the absence of fear, but the ability to inspire people to move beyond fear. Courage is a key in creating a culture that can honestly face the reality of climate change, right now.

Part of courage is the strength to learn for ourselves the real climate change state of affairs, to risk speaking out, to risk being scapegoated and to risk talking about the scale of change and the time frame needed to face the realities of global warming. So let's begin the conversation.



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Preparing to speak up

1. Peer influence

Using opportunities to talk with others is a wonderful time to influence their views. We don't form our views from data, but from social interaction with peers in a steady process of negotiation over time.

2. Be a model

It's not just what we say, but how we say it and what we do that influences people. People will not accept the reality of the problem unless they see others who are engaging in activities that reflect its seriousness.

3. Understand your own feelings

Reflect on your own fears, value conflicts and contradictions. Be aware of your own confusion and discomfort and whether you felt alone in your understanding of the reality of climate change. Reflect on the pressures you experienced in being confronted by this reality. This will assist you in understanding how others may be grappling with this reality. It will also help you when you need to hold your views in a conversation.

4. Practice managing your own reactions

Be ready for conversations that could become tricky, tense or emotional for you. If this does happen, take a breath and reflect that the most important thing you can do is to keep the conversation going. To regain your flexibility, focus on empathy, curiosity, and openness towards the person you are speaking with.

5. Caution!

Some people may not be able to engage in this emotional work because it is too disturbing, worrying or unsettling. So we need to be sensitive to their need for us to back off and let them be.



Blanket Statement...

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Keeping the conversation alive



These tips are useful in any conversation on climate change, but particularly with someone who doesn't accept the climate science. They are based on the work of George Marshall of talkingclimate.org where you will find a video of him discussing these tips.

1. Listen, listen, and understand the other person.

Establish common ground (such as interests, passion, politics or faith). Don't go into the conversation with the idea that it's an argument to either win or lose. Find commonalities to avoid triggering people's defences.

As you begin to engage people in discussion, be careful not to inadvertently induce guilt in others by creating an 'us and them' atmosphere. Instead it is important to acknowledge that we are all in this together and most of us have been beneficiaries of this materialistic society. We need to foster common identity to foster collective engagement.

2. Treat people with the respect you like to receive.

Be patient. Your conversations may not at first pin down the problem or get to the bottom of it. The aim is to be able to sustain the conversation, no matter what the circumstances. Over time those with whom you talk about climate change will come to understand your knowledge of the issue and what you are doing about it. You are planting a seed.

If the person does not accept climate change, don't label them a 'denier' or 'sceptic'. Rather think of the person as dissenting or not agreeing with the accepted science.

3. Own and hold your own views. Keep away from arguing about data. Focus on what you think and why you think it. Don't seek to undermine the sources of people's information.

Be mindful that we tend to look for views that fit with our existing worldviews which are formed through life experiences. The language of climate change is often perceived as about having less or sacrificing material goods, which can threaten people's worldviews.

4. Notice what is happening between you.

Be prepared to invite the person or people you are speaking with to consider what is happening between the two of you and to reflect together on what is causing the discomfort.

5. Describe your personal journey. Start by talking about a time when you may not have cared about energy conservation or were unsure of climate change. Explain how you came to hold your views. For example was it someone you met or the changes you saw in the weather? Show that views can change over time.

6. Offer rewards. Relate to people's concerns and values (with community and family, compassion, honesty and fairness) and describe how changing their views on climate will have benefit. Describe the benefits of energy efficiency or consuming differently, and separate this from climate change.

Conversations about climate myths.

If you are invited or do want to have a discussion about climate science, and need to deal with misinformation, there are some key tips to help the process provided in the *Debunking Handbook*, published by SkepticalScience.org.



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Where to from here?

We hope this booklet helps you to reflect on climate change, and to consider how you and those around you are dealing with it. We hope we have helped you feel more able to engage with the issue over time. Some people may wish to initiate a first conversation on climate change so that it is no longer a socially taboo subject. This might in turn help grow the network of climate concerned citizens.

Others may choose to become more active. Taking part in a problem solving activity related to the climate crisis is a positive way of diminishing fear, guilt or anxiety, by being engaged in finding solutions. Leading or contributing to an engaging project can offer rewards of pleasure, satisfaction, passion and pride.

Most people are cautious about how much they want to give, and are frightened of losing control of their time. So be mindful of how much you want to do, how much you want to give, and what sort of activity suits your skills and personality. For example, is a focus on positive solutions such as renewable energy more rewarding for you, or would you prefer a negative problem focus such as opposing fossil fuels?

Engaging with the reality of the climate challenge will no doubt impact on your individual life journey, on your quality of life, and the mark you leave on others and the world. Those who are parents and grandparents have a particular challenge: of not shifting the responsibility to those least responsible for it, while also helping the young know how much climate change matters to them and to you!

Research by Hugh Mackay for his book *The Good Life* shows that as a moral guide in life, people still value most highly the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Al Gore reminds us the day will come when the next generation will look back on our time and, if we fail to act in time, ask us "What were you thinking? Why didn't you join the dots? Did you think all the climate scientists in the world were wrong? Why did you let the fossil fuel interests have the power to wreck our future?"

We have a choice... now. With warm hearts and cool minds, let's begin to act. Let's speak about climate change!

Is now a good time
to speak about
climate change?



*It's 3:23 in the morning, and I'm awake
because my great, great, grandchildren
won't-let-me -sleep.*

*My great, great, grandchildren ask me
in dreams*

*what did you do, while the planet was
plundered?*

*what did you do, when the earth was
unravelling?*

*surely you did something when the
seasons started failing*

*as the mammals, reptiles, and birds
were all dying?*

*did you fill the streets with protest when
democracy was stolen?*

what did you do

once

you

knew

Drew Dellinger

**We recognize that climate change can be
challenging emotionally. If you find you need help,
please contact your psychologist of choice, or
seek a referral from your GP.**

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Climate Campaign groups

A Grandstand for the Environment grew out of deep concerns (by initially grandparents and seniors) about the deep ecological crisis and its impact upon the earth community and especially upon future generations.
agrandstandfortheenvironment.org

Australian Youth Climate Coalition – AYCC

AYCC believe that the only way to solve the climate crisis is through a social movement and believe that the best way to build this movement is to give young people the tools to make it happen. It's our future at stake, and it's our creativity and vision that will inspire those around us to act.
youthclimatecoalition.org

Beyond Zero Emissions: BZE is a not-for-profit research and education organisation known for its work designing and implementing a zero emissions economy for Australia. Their reports include:

Zero Carbon Australia Stationary Energy Plan demonstrating that 100% renewable energy is achievable and affordable: Repowering Port Augusta, Zero Carbon Australia High Speed Rail, Zero Carbon Australia Land Use Plan and Zero Carbon Australia Buildings.

BeyondZeroEmissions.org.au

Climate & Health Alliance raises awareness of the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions.

CAHA.org.au

Climate for Change uses the party plan model made famous by Tupperware and transforms it to reach people not yet engaged with climate change through their friends who are.

climateforchange.org.au

Vote Climate advocates climate action as a central issue in elections.

voteclimate.net.au

Lock the Gate Alliance is a national grassroots organisation made up of over 40,000 supporters and more than 250 local groups who are concerned about unsafe coal and gas mining.

These groups are located in all parts of Australia and include farmers, traditional custodians, conservationists and urban residents.

lockthegate.org.au

Market Forces believes that the banks, superannuation funds and governments that have custody of our money should use it to protect – not damage – our environment. They work to expose the institutions that are financing environmentally destructive projects and help Australians hold these institutions accountable.

marketforces.org.au

Quit Coal is a Melbourne-based collective, which campaigns against the expansion of the coal and unconventional gas industries in Victoria.

Quitcoal.org.au

Solar Citizens is a community project bringing together existing and future solar owners to ensure the rights of solar owners are protected, and to help see Australia put a panel on every rooftop.

The project is non-partisan and independent of any political organisation or party.

solarcitizens.org.au

350 Australia is one part of a global movement taking action to halt the climate crisis. They work with a network of campaigners and local groups across the country to help co-ordinate online campaigns, grassroots organizing and mass public actions.

The number 350 means climate safety: to preserve a livable planet, scientists tell us we must reduce the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere from its current level beyond 400 parts per million to below 350 ppm.

350.org.au

Community Climate Action Groups

There are many groups in local communities campaigning on climate change.

Search your local community directories for a group near you. **Or start one!**

Victorian groups can be found at Victorian Climate Action Network: vcan.org.au

Climate scientists have feelings too.

Some climate scientists have recorded their feelings about climate change on the website isthishowyoufeel.org. As the website says, we are fortunate to have people who have dedicated their lives to the science of climate. They write complex research papers, and unpack every aspect of climate change, analyzing it thoroughly and clinically. They know what is causing it, what the impacts will be and how we can minimize these impacts. "But they are not robots. These scientists are mothers, fathers, daughters, and grandparents. They are real people. And they're concerned." Here are the feelings of just two.



"Sometimes I have this dream.

I'm going for a hike and discover a remote farm house on fire.

Children are calling for help from the upper windows. So I call the fire brigade. But they don't come, because some mad person keeps telling them that it is a false alarm.

The situation is getting more and more desperate, but I can't convince the firemen to get going.

I cannot wake up from this nightmare."

Professor Stefan Rahmstorf
Head of Earth System Analysis
Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research

Photo credit: Phil Coates.



"On a recent visit to Arnhem Land, I was struck by the beauty of the landscapes and seascapes, the rich variety of species, and the staggering amount of art, going back 60,000 years, that permeate the landscape. The first Australians clearly learned how to live in tune with the land, understanding and respecting the great cycles of planet Earth that provide the goods and services that support human life.

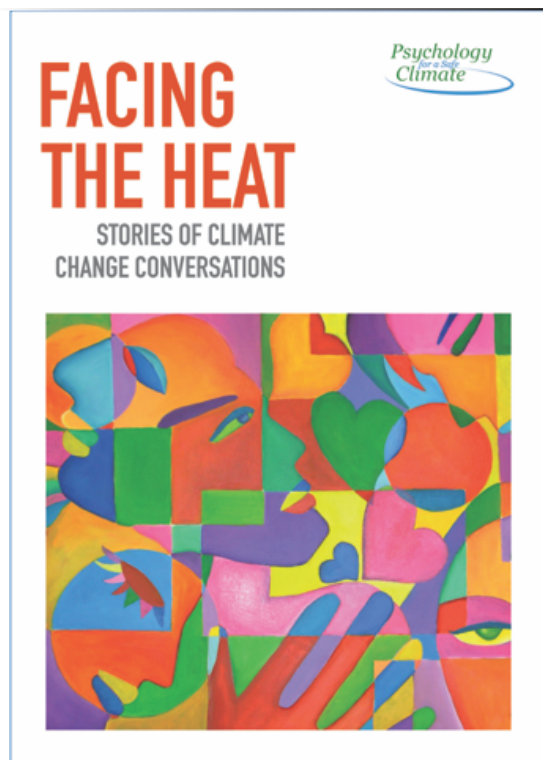
We think we have come a long way from they but – in one very important respect – we have regressed significantly. The first Australians were intimately connected with the biosphere around them, and made sure that future generations had the same, stable life support system they had. Present day Australians, however, have increasingly cut themselves off from the biosphere, ignorant of its functioning and importance, and rapidly eroding it's integrity.

Climate change is one of many global changes that are destabilising our planetary life support system. It is ultimately a question of core values. Can we change our core values rapidly enough – and decisively enough – to halt our slide towards collapse? That is humanity's most important question in the 21st century!"

Adjunct Professor Will Steffen
Fenner School of Environment and Society
Australian National University

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Further resources from Psychology for a Safe Climate

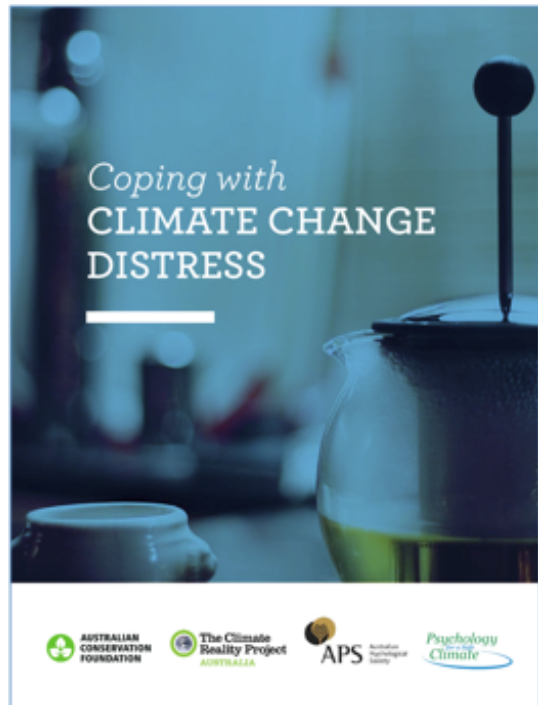


Our companion publication, ***Facing the Heat: Stories of Climate Change Conversations*** takes the audience on a journey as we share some of our stories and learnings from climate change conversations. Read it as you imagine how you would respond if it were you in each of the stories.

"The most powerful climate change communication comes in the form of personal stories that express commitment and conviction. For people who refuse to accept the underlying science this may be the only way to reach and persuade them. Psychology for a Safe Climate's new booklet is built of such stories, reminding us that conversations and negotiations between friends and workmates may be as important for social change as the fattest scientific report." George Marshall, author of *Don't Even Think About It: How our brains are wired to ignore climate change*.

Facing the Heat can be downloaded as a pdf at PsychologyforaSafeClimate.org

Hard copies can be ordered for \$3 plus postage at PsychologySafeClimate@gmail.com



Psychology for a Safe Climate together with the Australian Psychological Society, The Climate Reality Project and the Australian Conservation Foundation have written a guide to help people in ***Coping with Climate Change Distress***.

The booklet begins by acknowledging that knowing about climate change is not enough for most people to take action. *Feeling* it as a threat is important, and having ways of coping with these feelings is vital so that people don't become overwhelmed, or avoid the feelings, or burn out. The booklet provides helpful tips to keep our lives functioning well while staying engaged with climate change.

Coping with Climate Change Distress can be downloaded from our website PsychologyforaSafeClimate.org

Workshops to support, nourish and foster reflection

We offer a variety of workshops for people concerned about climate change. These workshops foster self awareness, self care and develop communication skills. They are tailored to the context and needs of the participants. Contact us for more information: PsychologySafeClimate@gmail.com

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Dr Susie Burke Senior Psychologist, Public interest, environment and disaster response, Australian Psychological Society.

"Climate change poses such a tremendous threat to our very way of life that it can be very difficult to look at. It can be tempting to ignore or minimise the problems, or let ourselves be distracted by other parts of life. In this booklet, psychologists help us to understand why we feel, think and behave the way we do about climate change, and invite us to face the feelings, and most importantly, then step up to action. This is very valuable leadership."

Professor Tim Flannery Chief Councillor of the Climate Council, Author of *The Weather Makers*.

"It's critical that we keep talking about climate change - but many of us don't want to discuss it. This publication helps to understand some of the reasons why this topic is so difficult for some and why it's never been more critical to keep the conversation going."

Professor Clive Hamilton Professor of Public Ethics at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University. Author of *Requiem for a species: Why we resist the truth about climate change*.

"Our future is under severe threat, yet most are too afraid to talk about it. And those with the angriest voices insist that everything is fine. This simple yet profound booklet explains what is going on and provides a guide to how we can find our way out of the peril."

Carolyn Ingvarson Convenor of Lighter Footprints and Boroondara Citizen of the Year 2016.

"Facing the complex feelings that understanding climate change brings is an ongoing challenge. I found this booklet very helpful not only in addressing these feelings, but in staying clear and focused when trying to spread that base of understanding within our community. The booklet has been regularly revisited as new circumstances arise, and it always offers something worth remembering; a necessary companion for those of us working for climate change action."

Dr Susan Murphy Zen practitioner and author of *Minding the earth, mending the world: the offer we can no longer refuse*.

"This timely booklet encourages us to understand the terror and shame that can leave us so psychologically mute and paralysed, and to begin to directly face the grave reality of the crisis of climate change we are living through, before it steals a livable future from our children and grandchildren."

Dr Graeme Pearman Former head of the CSIRO Division of Atmospheric Research, Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, Monash University

"To date climate change has largely been a physical science topic. Yet it is about us. Why do we need the energy that leads to many of the greenhouse gas emissions? Why do we source and use energy in the way that we do? And why, when confronted with the risk that dangerous climate change may occur, we find it so hard to respond? This document exposes some of the real issues; the human dimensions of climate change."



