



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.
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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