

# Exploring Climate Change and Mental Health



An Educational Toolkit  
by Natania Abebe



# CLIMATE CHANGE AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Anthropocene is “an unofficial unit of geologic time, used to describe the most recent period in Earth’s history when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet’s climate and ecosystems” (National Geographic, n.d). Unfortunately, human dominance over Earth's biophysical processes has evoked negative emotional responses due to the scale of environmental change (Albrecht, 2019; 2020).

In today's world, many individuals suffer from feelings of being emotionally lost and trapped within social and political systems that hurt our environment (Albrecht, 2019). Consequently, despite many people in the Global North living lives of material affluence, many do so at the expense of their emotional and mental wellbeing.





Though the research literature on climate change and mental health is nascent, evidence suggests that there will be an increase in the prevalence and incidence of psychiatric disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, psychotic disorders, and suicide (Cianconi, Betrò & Janiri, 2020; Clayton et. al, 2017). Other major epidemiological trends include “higher rates of aggression and violence, more mental health emergencies, an increased sense of helplessness, hopelessness, or fatalism, and intense feelings of loss” (Clayton et. al, 2017, p. 4). These feelings of loss, helplessness and hopelessness are related to a phenomenon known as psychoterratic syndromes. “Psychoterratic syndromes” is an umbrella term that includes a number of mental states that can be conceptualized as “Earth emotions” (Albrecht, 2019). Such conditions refer to the relationship between our minds and our planet and includes phenomena such as: eco-anxiety, eco-paralysis and ecological grief.



# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit features a film that discusses the topic of mental health and climate change. The film highlights the voices of students and climate change experts who have previously taken or were guest lecturers in the NURS290: Health Impacts of Climate Change course in at the University of British Columbia.

The toolkit is meant to empower students to think critically about the structural inequities that affect them and challenge the assumption that they do not have the capacity to critique as well as overcome the sociopolitical issues that affect them. Questions that explore eco-anxiety, ecological paralysis and ecological grief are included in this toolkit. Students are encouraged to answer questions according to the emotions that they resonate most with and want to explore further. Additionally, students are encouraged to examine the relationship between anthropogenic activity, mental health and their values, emotions and behaviours.



# BIOGRAPHIES

## CLIMATE CHANGE EXPERTS

### Dr. Courtney Howard



Dr Courtney Howard is an Emergency Physician in Yellowknives Dene Territory, a Clinical Associate Professor in the Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, a Community Research Fellow in Planetary Health at the Dahdaleh Institute for Global Health Research, and Past-President of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE). Dr Howard worked in Djibouti for six months on a pediatric malnutrition project with Médecins Sans Frontières, and that experience drives much of her work on climate-related mitigation and adaptation. She has researched menstrual cups and wildfires, and led policy work and advocacy regarding ecoanxiety, vaccine equity, movement-building, active transport, plant-rich diets, fossil fuel divestment, carbon pricing, coal phase-out, hydraulic fracturing and with regards to Canada's Oil Sands. She led the 2017-2019 Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change Briefings for Canadian Policymakers and was the 2018 International Policy Director for the Lancet Countdown. Dr Howard sits on the boards of the Canadian Medical Association and the Global Climate and Health Alliance, is the co-chair for advocacy for the WHO-Civil Society Working Group on Climate Change and Health, as well as being on the Steering Committee of the Planetary Health Alliance, and the Editorial Advisory Boards of the Lancet Planetary Health and the Journal of Climate Change and Health. When not in the ER or deep in a literature review she can be found dancing with her two young daughters on the shores of Back Bay in Canada's subarctic.

### Dr. Melissa Lem



Dr. Melissa Lem is a Vancouver family physician who also works in rural and northern communities within Canada. President-elect of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and Founder and Director of PaRx/Park Prescriptions for the BC Parks Foundation, she is a long-time advocate for the health benefits of time spent in nature and ecosystem conservation. A widely published writer, she was the resident medical expert on CBC TV's hit lifestyle show Steven and Chris for four seasons and continues to appear on air as a regular contributor to CBC Radio and CTV News. Dr. Lem was the inaugural winner of University College's Young Alumni of Influence Award at the University of Toronto, a 2020 Joule Innovation grant recipient from the Canadian Medical Association, a 2021 World Parks Week Ambassador, and is a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia. She also enjoys collaborating with global colleagues on the Advisory Committee of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Health and Well-being Specialist Group.



# BIOGRAPHIES

## CLIMATE CHANGE EXPERTS

### Raluca Radu, RN, MSN



Ms. Raluca Radu is a dedicated nursing professional with a deep passion for promoting planetary health and advancing knowledge in this realm. She has worked in both the public and private sectors as a clinical resource surgical nurse as well as in occupational health and safety locally and for a short duration in Northern British Columbia. In addition, she has been very fond of working in various educator roles, especially that of a Lecturer in the School of Nursing at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, where she thoroughly enjoys being the lead for the Health Impacts of Climate Change course (Nursing 290). Ms. Radu values a learning environment conducive of positive behaviours as one that is inviting, safe to participate in, and a key determinant of success in education. Overtime, Ms. Radu has increased her understanding of the critical role served by health professionals to integrate the social determinants of health and apply an equity lens at each level of decision-making, in order to ensure all voices and stories of individuals who experience marginalization are lifted and included. This is even more critical as we face the largest crisis of the 21st century, climate change, which will only further exacerbate inequities. Ms. Radu is hopeful that through her roles as an emerging planetary health expert sitting on countless provincial and national committees, mentor, and educator she will inspire others to integrate sustainable principles into their practices and daily lives, such that we can ensure a Planet where biodiversity is protected and where future generations can thrive.

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Be sure to follow Ms. Radu on Twitter @\_Raluca\_R

# UBC STUDENTS



Dylan



Emilie



Lauren



Magalee



Yunuhen



Zahra

# The Film



Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmA07vdOb2M>



# ECO-ANXIETY



# ECO-ANXIETY

## Definition

Eco-anxiety is defined as "a chronic fear of environmental doom" (Clayton et. al, 2017, p. 68).

An example of eco-anxiety is when one feels anxious about the likelihood of severe weather events due to 24/7 news coverage that is available from one's cellphone (Albercht, 2019).

## Reflective Questions

1. How does eco-anxiety manifest in your life?
2. On a scale from 1-10 (1 = least important and 10 = most important), how important is it for you to address your eco-anxiety? What made you choose this number?
3. In the context of working through emotions related to climate change, many people feel tension between individual versus collective pain and responsibility. How do you think this relates to eco-anxiety?
4. Complete the advantages vs disadvantages tool on page 15. What did you learn from this exercise?
5. What are your beliefs about the responsibility of youth regarding climate change?
6. On the scale of 1 to 10 (1 = least important and 10 = most important), how confident are you that you can address your eco-anxiety and why?
7. This is a two part question: a) What personal or collective beliefs have contributed to your eco-anxiety? b) Name 3 personal values that are important to you - please note examples of values are provided on page 16 of this toolkit. Consider how you can be empowered to use your personal values to address your eco-anxiety and climate change.

## More Clips

Watch the following clips and answer the following questions



<https://youtu.be/pkAsCvGdW2A>



<https://youtu.be/FjQMpBZNZ50>



<https://youtu.be/LFdFVKOpIHY>



A woman with dark, curly hair is shown in profile, looking out over a city. She is wearing a white, quilted jacket. The background is a blurred cityscape. The text "ECO-PARALYSIS" is overlaid in white, sans-serif capital letters. A vertical bar with a yellow top and dark blue bottom is on the right side of the image.

# ECO-PARALYSIS



# ECO-PARALYSIS

## Definition

Eco-paralysis is conceptualized as the response people give when faced by the feeling that one cannot do anything meaningful to positively affect climate change. Eco-paralysis is commonly linked to feelings of powerlessness, which can look like apathy, complacency or disengagement (Albercht, 2019).

## More Clips

Watch the following clips and answer the following questions



<https://youtu.be/jeKj4P1LLM>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YK-iX3IQ-U>



<https://youtu.be/iZYoRR783uQ>



<https://youtu.be/Yhi0PJQP89c>

## Reflective Questions

1. How does eco-paralysis manifest in your life?
2. On a scale from 1-10 (1 = least important and 10 = most important), how important is it for you to address your eco-paralysis? What made you choose this number?
3. In the context of working through emotions related to climate change, many people feel tension between individual versus collective pain and responsibility. How do you think this relates to eco-paralysis?
4. Complete the advantages vs disadvantages tool on page 15. What did you learn from this exercise?
5. What are your beliefs about the responsibility of youth regarding climate change?
6. On the scale of 1 to 10 (1 = least important and 10 = most important), how confident are you that you can address your eco-paralysis and why?
7. This is a two part question: a) What personal or collective beliefs have contributed to your eco-paralysis? b) Name 3 personal values that are important to you - please note examples of values are provided on page 16 of this toolkit. Consider how you can be empowered to use your personal values to address your eco-paralysis and climate change.

# ECOLOGICAL GRIEF



# ECOLOGICAL GRIEF

## Definition

Ecological grief is defined as "the grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change" (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018, p. 275).

## Reflective Questions

1. How does ecological grief manifest in your life?
2. On a scale from 1-10 (1 = least important and 10 = most important), how important is it for you to address your ecological grief? What made you choose this number?
3. In the context of working through emotions related to climate change, many people feel tension between individual versus collective pain and responsibility. How do you think this relates to ecological grief?
4. Complete the advantages vs disadvantages tool on page 15. What did you learn from this exercise?
6. What are your beliefs about the responsibility of youth regarding climate change?
7. On the scale of 1 to 10 (1 = least important and 10 = most important), how confident are you that you can address your ecological grief and why?
8. This is a two part question: a) What personal or collective beliefs have contributed to your ecological grief? b) Name 3 personal values that are important to you - please note examples of values are provided on page 16 of this toolkit. Consider how you can be empowered to use your personal values to address your ecological grief and climate change.

## More Clips

Watch the following clips and answer the following questions



<https://youtu.be/BVimAmhvh8I>



<https://youtu.be/QErBNxIVkLU>



# PROS VS. CONS OF ECO-ANXIETY, ECOLOGICAL PARALYSIS AND ECOLOGICAL GRIEF

**1. What are the advantages of  
eco-anxiety, ecological  
paralysis and ecological grief?**

**2. What are the disadvantages  
of eco-anxiety, ecological  
paralysis and ecological grief?**

**3. What are the advantages of  
addressing eco-anxiety,  
ecological paralysis and  
ecological grief?**

**4. What are the disadvantages  
of not addressing eco-anxiety,  
ecological paralysis and  
ecological grief?**

Evaluate the pros and cons of one of the following: ecological anxiety, ecological paralysis or ecological grief.

# WHAT VALUES\* MOVE YOU?

ACCEPTANCE	FAME	OPENNESS
ACCURACY	FAMILY	ORDER
ACHIEVEMENT	FITNESS	PASSION
ADVENTURE	FLEXIBILITY	PLEASURE
AUTHORITY	FORGIVENESS	POPULARITY
AUTONOMY	FRIENDSHIP	POWER
BALANCE	FUN	PURPOSE
BEAUTY	GENEROSITY	RATIONALITY
BRAVERY	GENUINENESS	REALISM
CARING	GROWTH	RESPONSIBILITY
CHALLENGE	HEALTH	SAFETY
CHANGE	HELPFULNESS	SELF-ACCEPTANCE
COMFORT	HONESTY	SELF-CONTROL
COMMITMENT	HOPE	SELF-ESTEEM
COMPASSION	HUMILITY	SELF-KNOWLEDGE
COMMUNITY	HUMOR	SERVICE
CONTRIBUTION	INDEPENDENCE	SIMPLICITY
COOPERATION	INNER PEACE	SOLITUDE
COURTESY	JUSTICE	SPIRITUALITY
CREATIVITY	KNOWLEDGE	STABILITY
DEPENDABILITY	LEISURE	TOLERANCE
DUTY	LOVE	TRADITION
ECOLOGY	MASTERY	VIRTUE
EQUITY	MINDFULNESS	WEALTH
EQUANIMITY	MODERATION	WORLD PEACE
EXCITEMENT	NON-CONFORMITY	OTHER
FAITHFULNESS	NURTURANCE	

\*This values list is an adaptation from the 3rd edition of *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change* by William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick (2012).

# RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

## Things to Read:

- **Books:**
  - (2019) Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World by Glenn Albrecht
- **Journal Articles:**
  - (2020) Ecological Grief and Anxiety: The Start of a Healthy Response to Climate Change? by Cunsolo, A., Harper, S.L., Minor, K., Hayes, K., Williams, K. G., & Howard, C.:  
[https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanplh/PIIS2542-5196\(20\)30144-3.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanplh/PIIS2542-5196(20)30144-3.pdf)
  - (2019). The Health Effects of Climate Change: Know the risks and become part of the solutions by Howard, C., & Huston, P.: <https://doi.org/10.14745/ccdr.v45i05a01>
- **Websites:**
  - Climate and Mind: <https://www.climateandmind.org/>
  - The Climate Optimist: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/climateoptimist/>
  - The Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance: <https://mhcca.ca/>
  - The Planetary Health Alliance: <https://planetaryhealthalliance.org/bibliography?group=MENTAL%20HEALTH>

## Media to Watch:

- **Podcasts:**
  - Climate Change and Happiness Podcast: <https://climatechangeandhappiness.com/>
  - Facing it Podcast: <https://www.drjenniferatkinson.com/facing-it>
- **TedX Talks:**
  - Healthy Planet, Healthy People, by Dr. Courtney Howard: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgIYakIWOK4>
- **Meditations:**
  - 1 minute meditation by HeadSpace: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1Ndym-lsQg&t=6s>
  - 5 minute meditation by Eco-Anxious Stories: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5\\_DxBPJcYc4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_DxBPJcYc4)
  - Body Scan Meditation by Yale School of Medicine: <https://medicine.yale.edu/media-player/body-scan-meditation/>

## Ways to Get Involved:

- AMS Sustainability at UBC: <https://www.ams.ubc.ca/how-we-run/sustainability/>
- Colour the Trails: <https://colourthetrails.com/>
- Eco-anxious Stories: <https://www.ecoanxious.ca/>
- PaRx: <https://www.parkprescriptions.ca/>
- UBC Climate Hub: <https://ubcclimathub.ca/projects/>
- UBC Farm Volunteer Program: <https://ubcfarm.ubc.ca/volunteer-program/>
- Work that Reconnects: <https://workthatreconnects.org/>



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# BIOGRAPHIES

## FILM TEAM

### Natania Abebe, RN, MSN/MPH (c) - Director, Producer, Editor



Natania is an experienced registered nurse whose clinical expertise is in mental health and public health. She is currently completing a double master's degree in nursing and public health at the University of British Columbia. Having worked in both Ontario and British Columbia, her interests include health promotion, knowledge translation, gender equality, anti-racist health care approaches and media and health. Some of the projects Natania is involved with includes her work as the co-founder of Stars in a Jar and the Coalition of African, Caribbean and Black Nurses in British Columbia. Additionally, Natania is a film maker. For example, her film, Just a Nurse won an international film campaign and was subsequently screened at LucasFilm Studios and translated into Spanish by the General Council of Spain.

### Adrian Harewood - Narrator



Adrian is the host of CBC News Ottawa at 6. Harewood attended elementary and high school at Ashbury College, and was involved in community radio at CKCU (Carleton University) and CHUO (University of Ottawa). He has been a guest host on national CBC programs such as *It Happens*, *Sounds Like Canada* and *The Current*. Before coming to television, Harewood was the host of *All In A Day* on CBC Radio One in Ottawa. In addition to his work at the CBC, Adrian is an associate professor at the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University.

### Navjit Gill - Director of Photography



Navjit Gill is an award-winning digital artist. Navjit helped create blockbuster animated movies like *SpiderMan Into The Spiderverse*, *How To Train Your Dragon* movies and many more. His focus has been color and lighting in animated films, which has expanded as a hobby into videography. Born in Nigeria to Indian parents, at first he intended to be an engineer and then stumbled in the world of computer graphics. Making his way to Hollywood and growing as an artist. He now lives and works in Vancouver, pursuing creative ideas and enjoying the beautiful nature of BC.

# BIOGRAPHIES

## FILM TEAM

### Natalia Gubareva - Camera Operator



As a little child, Natalia dreamed of traveling the world. However, being from a place known locally as the 'dead end' where the train arrives and always turns back, her ability to break away and accomplish her childhood dreams was difficult even to imagine. Natalia started exploring the world while undertaking a bachelor of digital media at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW, Australia. Since then Natalia has been working as both a cinematographer, colourist and a digital artist. Her work as a cinematographer is composed of various documentaries, the most recent of which was "To the Edge with Ray Zahab: Gobi Desert". Her work as a digital artist includes movies such as "The Angry Birds Movie", "The Lego Movie", "Walking with Dinosaurs", "Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol", "Prometheus", "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows: Part 2" and many others. Visit her website for more information: <https://www.nataliagubareva.com/>

### Johann McBee, MTA - Composer (Mini Clips)



Johann graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Music Therapy in 2018, and maintains the accreditations as a music therapist in both Canada and the United States. In 2013 he discovered the handpan, a beautiful and unique melodic percussion instrument invented in 2001, making it one of the newest acoustic instruments made. The handpan is the focus of his performing work in recent years, from busking in Vancouver to playing gigs including wedding and corporate events, recording an album and numerous videos, and more recently, teaching music lessons to handpan players. Visit his website for more information: <https://www.johannmcbee.com/>



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**ams**  
**SUSTAINABILITY**