Climate change affects our mental health. Human activity—especially the continued burning of fossil fuels—is causing the Earth to warm and increasing the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events. More people than ever are reporting feeling worried about climate change.

A recent report found that seven in ten Americans are at least somewhat worried about climate change, with one in three reporting significant concern.¹

How climate change can affect our mental health

Climate change can impact mental health in many ways.

People who experience extreme weather events, like hurricanes or wildfires, may experience direct trauma from injuries, being forced to leave their homes, or witnessing frightening events in their communities. Heat waves have been associated with increased anxiety, depression, and suicide rates, as well as increased rates of aggression and interpersonal violence. Some medications used to treat mental illness can make people more vulnerable to the health effects of temperature extremes.² Air pollution has been linked to increased anxiety, depression, and use of mental health services.³

Living with the ongoing threat of climate change can also cause feelings of distress. Anxiety (sometimes called “eco-anxiety”), grief, depression, anger, fear, and guilt are all common, normal responses to climate change.

Climate change may be especially scary for those of us with children, and many parents are worried about the ways climate change may affect our children's futures.

Temperature extremes and air pollution can also contribute to adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes, such as higher miscarriage rates, which threaten expectant parents’ mental health.⁴,⁵

Climate change, mental health, and injustice

Climate change’s effects on mental health aren’t distributed evenly.⁶,⁷ Many communities are already more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to systemic oppression and reduced access to resources, such as communities of color, Indigenous people, children, older adults, disabled individuals, and the LGBTQIA+ population. These individuals may also be more likely to experience adverse mental health effects from climate change.

The mission of Moms Clean Air Force is to protect children from air pollution and climate change. We envision a safe, stable, and equitable future where all children breathe clean air. We fight for Justice in Every Breath, recognizing the importance of equitable solutions in addressing air pollution and climate change. www.momscleanairforce.org
Climate change and our children’s mental health

Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable to the impact of climate change on mental health.

A 2021 survey of young people around the world found that eight in ten youth aged 16-25 feel that people have failed to care for the planet, and three-quarters reported feeling afraid for the future. A majority of youth in the survey reported feeling betrayed by government inaction on climate change.8

80% of youth age 16-25 feel that people have failed to take care of the planet, and 75% feel afraid for the future.

Coping with climate distress as a parent

An important first step can be to normalize and validate feelings of climate distress. These feelings are a sign that we care about our children and our communities. Other strategies for coping with climate concern and supporting our well-being include:

- **Find a supportive community.**
  Talking with a few close friends or a circle of climate-concerned parents can help ease feelings of isolation. Joining a climate action group, like Moms Clean Air Force, can be a way of channeling feelings of distress into purposeful action. Faith communities are increasingly engaging with climate issues and may provide emotional and spiritual support for people of faith. You can find faith communities working on climate through Interfaith Power and Light: www.interfaithpowerandlight.org

- **Prioritize your mental and physical health.**
  Staying physically active, connecting with loved ones, getting outdoors when possible, taking breaks from the news, and learning techniques to calm your nervous system can support overall well-being and resilience.

- **Take time to learn about climate solutions.**
  Learning about ways to address climate change and exploring how you can contribute can help you feel more empowered. Engaging in climate solutions as a family can be empowering for both parents and children.

- **Create a family emergency plan.**
  Considering how to prepare for extreme weather that may affect your community—such as wildfires, heat waves, or strong storms—may help you feel more prepared. Ready.gov offers emergency planning guidance for individuals and communities: www.ready.gov/plan

- **Look for a climate-aware therapist.**
  If your feelings of distress are too intense to process with loved ones, you may wish to reach out to a climate-aware therapist. The Climate Psychology Alliance and Climate Psychiatry Alliance have a growing directory of climate-aware therapists around the US: www.climatepsychology.us/climate-therapists

Remember

Feelings of climate distress are a sign that we care, not a sign that something is wrong with us. For parents, finding the support we deserve can help us channel climate distress into meaningful action to help protect our children and the planet.

Important Resource

If you or someone you love is having thoughts of self-harm, please call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255.

For sources, please visit: www.momscleanairforce.org/sources-mental-health

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