



I'm starting to look at the environment as a sacred space. I've started spending so much time appreciating the small things; the leaves, the rocks, the bark, the insects and birds sounds. – Peter D, 65



## Mental health benefits of time in nature

Nature-based recreation has proven to have multiple positive effects on our mental health. Time in nature can result in:

- Increased cognition
- Decrease anxiety
- Decrease depression
- Increase stress recovery
- Overall sense of resilience and wellbeing

Engaging with nature can be different for everyone. We can receive these mental health benefits through:

- Outdoor recreation
- Time in outdoor green-spaces
- Nature expedition programmes
- Forest bathing (the act of sitting or standing in nature for an extended time period)
- Nature visualisation

# Mental health impacts of Climate Change



**Climate forecasts for Macedon Ranges show a likelihood of an increase in severe weather and longer, hotter fire seasons. This increases the community's likelihood of being directly impacted by a local natural disaster.**

**Direct** experience to natural disaster events can result in high levels of mental distress for individuals and communities. Direct mental health challenges after a natural disaster include:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Suicide

Even just the awareness of climate change can impact our mental health:

- **“Ecological grief”** is a term used to describe the grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to small or drastic environmental change.

- **“Solastagia”** is a term that refers to the homesickness you can feel whilst still being at home. This feeling can occur after a natural disaster that results in major changes to the outlook and landscape around a community. It is particularly prominent in indigenous and farming communities.

**Indirect** mental health issues can also arise in a changing climate:

- Increase stress on personal relationships.
- Personal burn-out and disengagement.

Those who contribute least to climate change may be impacted most – including Indigenous peoples, refugees, people living in poverty, the unemployed, the homeless, the alienated, the very young and the very old.

## How does our brain respond to Climate Change?

When the reality of issues are painful, we human beings have some well-practiced ways of coping. The following are some common mental coping mechanisms that avoid the problem, you might spot them in conversations next time you're talking about climate change around the dinner table.

- **Promoting fanciful ideas** “But I recycle, isn't that enough?”
- **If there's a problem then it's not me, it's you** “All activists are just extremists”
- **Going negative** “I haven't noticed a change in climate”
- **‘Knowing and not-knowing’ at the same**



**time** “The climate has changed in the past, it's nothing new and natural”

- **Accepting troubling, political contradictions** “Yes, we're in a climate and ecological crisis, but we need new coal mines for get us out of it”

There is a risk of some people feeling high levels of undue guilt. It's not healthy for people to take undue personal responsibility for everything that is wrong, what is healthy is actively engaging in climate action that works towards the future you'd like to live in.

# Actions to assist with your mental health in a changing climate



## Gratitude

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 our environment, we also recognise our reliance on it and the need to take care of that world.



## Active hope

While passive hope is waiting for others to bring about our desired future, active hope is about becoming an active participant in creating that future. So engage in Active Hope – where activism breeds optimism



## Creativity

Expression through creative means is well known to be therapeutic for the artist, as well as engaging for the viewers. Climate change needs to be explained in many ways to express the reality and emotions it evokes.



## Courage

Finding the courage to speak up about climate change can make a huge difference. Below are a couple steps to help you start:

### 1. Understand your own feelings

Before opening a conversation about climate change reflect on your own fears, values, views and contradictions. This will help you to speak from a place of empathy, not judgement.

### 2. Practice managing your own reactions

Sometimes these conversations become tricky, tense or emotional for you. Try to keep flexible, curious, and openness.

### 3. Take care of yourself

Some people may not be able to engage in this topic 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.



## Collective purpose

Engage with the collective purpose. With others, we’re stronger, louder and more adaptive. By engaging or finding your local community our efforts go beyond the individual. Taking part in local climate action projects is a positive way of diminishing fear, guilt or anxiety and can lead to feelings joy, satisfaction, passion and pride.



## Useful resources

**Lifeline:** [lifeline.org.au/resources/toolkit-downloads](https://lifeline.org.au/resources/toolkit-downloads)

**Climarte:** [climarte.org/about-us](https://climarte.org/about-us)

**Climate for Change:** [climateforchange.org.au](https://climateforchange.org.au)

**Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group:** [mrsg.org.au](https://mrsg.org.au)

**Macedon Ranges Shire Council:**

[mrsc.vic.gov.au/climate-change](https://mrsc.vic.gov.au/climate-change)

[mrsc.vic.gov.au/landcare](https://mrsc.vic.gov.au/landcare)

[mrsc.vic.gov.au/bushland-reserves](https://mrsc.vic.gov.au/bushland-reserves)

# References

1. N. Qwynne Lackey, Deborah A. Tysor, G. David McNay, Leah Joyner, Kensey H. Baker & Camilla Hodge (2019): Mental health benefits of nature-based recreation: a systematic review, Annals of Leisure Research, DOI: 10.1080/11745398.2019.1655459
2. Report-How-Climate-Change-Affects-Mental-Health-in-Australia-v3-1.pdf (dea.org.au)
3. Psychology for a Safe Climate, Let's speak about Climate Change (second edition), Psychology\_Safe\_Climate\_Lets\_Speak\_about\_Climate\_Change\_Second\_Edn\_Final1.pdf (psychologyforasafeclimate.org)



**Bridging  
the Divide**

**Thank you to everyone who participated in the Bridging the Divide workshop.**

**For more information about how you can manage climate change visit:**  
[mrsc.vic.gov.au/Climate-Change](https://mrsc.vic.gov.au/Climate-Change)



**Macedon  
Ranges**  
Shire Council



**CENTRAL VICTORIAN**  
Primary Care Partnership