

# Youth Mental Health in the Climate Crisis

## Strategies and Tools for Supporting Child

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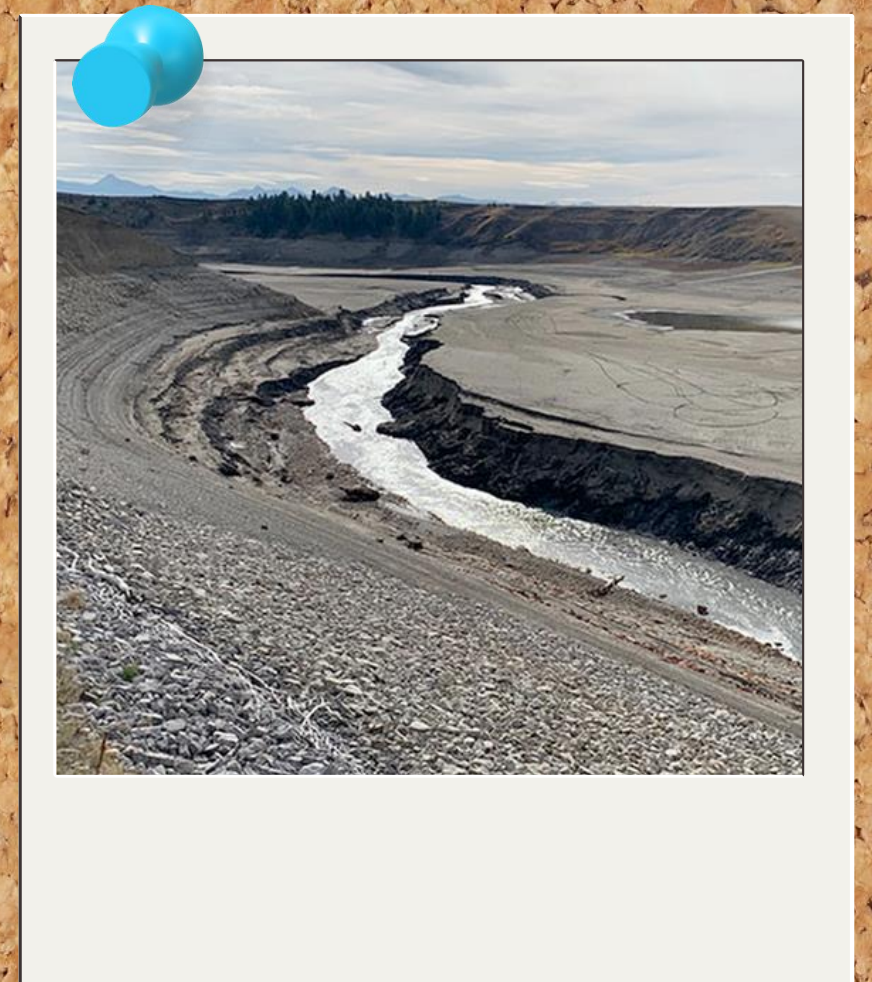
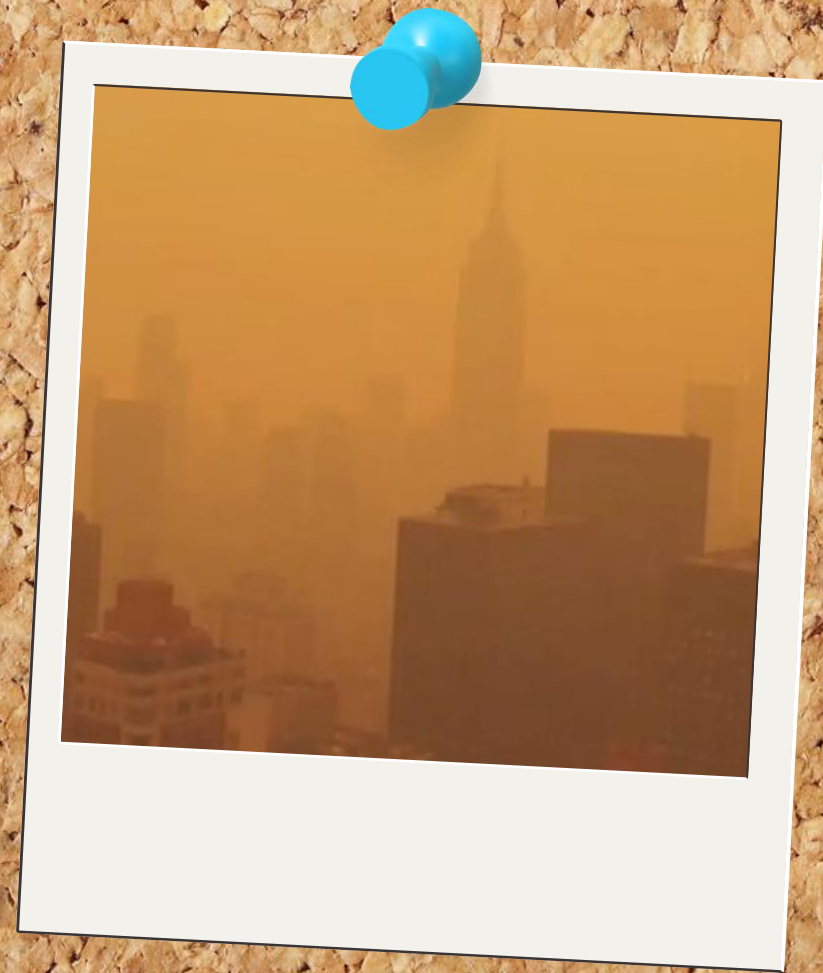
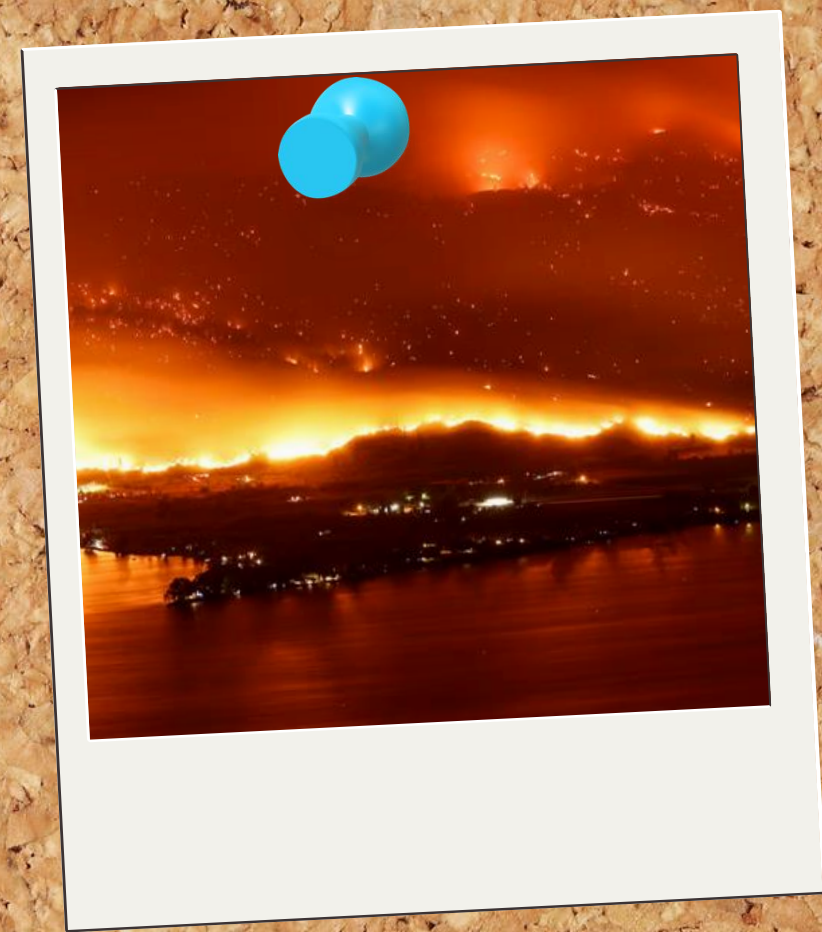
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**Children and youth are  
embedded in their environment**



# Today's Talk

1. Climate change
2. Eco-anxiety and eco-emotions
3. Helping youth



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# What is Climate Change?

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Long-term changes in  
temperature and weather  
patterns

## Consequences on the environment

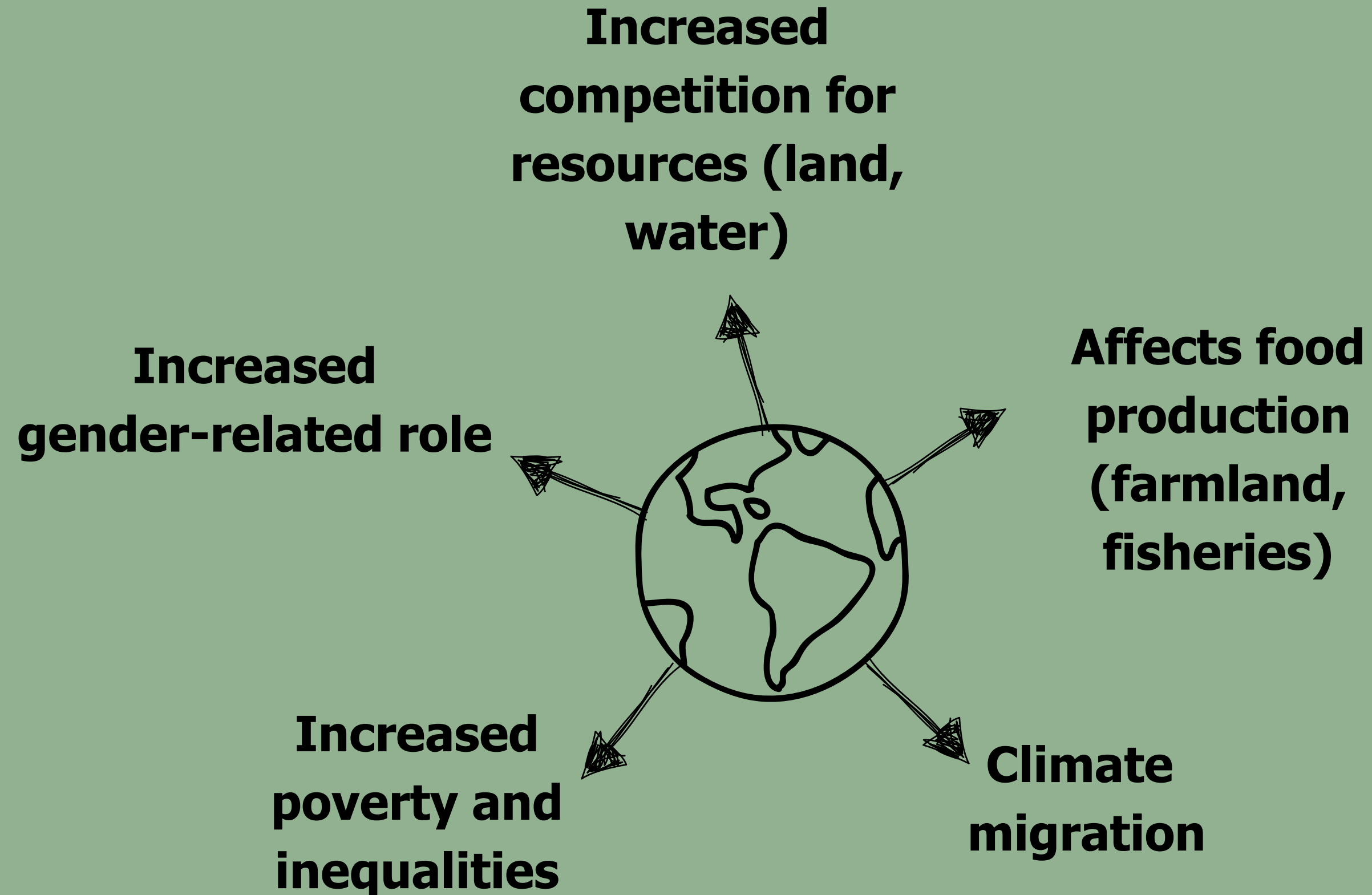
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- Intense droughts;
- Forest fires;
- Rising sea level,
- Severe storms;
- Flooding;
- Declining biodiversity;
- Heat waves.

These natural disasters will occur more frequently and with greater intensity.

# Social Impacts

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How do you feel when  
talking about climate  
change and its impacts?



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# Eco-Anxiety

- Psychological and/or physical state of discomfort that varies in intensity
- Sense of apprehension about a threat in the future
- Anxiety tied to our collective inaction



# Eco-emotions

Other emotions can also be tied to the climate crisis, and may be as relevant for child and youth mental health.

Here are examples of these emotions, which can be experienced both positively and negatively:

- Sadness
- Worry
- Guilt
- Anger
- Hope
- Inspiration
- Resilience
- Joy

Positive emotions are often associated with collective action.



# Prevalence of Eco-Emotions in Youth

**73%**

say thinking about the future is frightening

**39%**

hesitate having children due to climate change

**48%**

are very worried or extremely worried about climate change

# Prevalence of Eco-Emotions in Youth



66% report  
fear



63% report  
anxiety



65% report  
sadness



58% report  
helplessness

# Are Eco-Emotions a Problem?

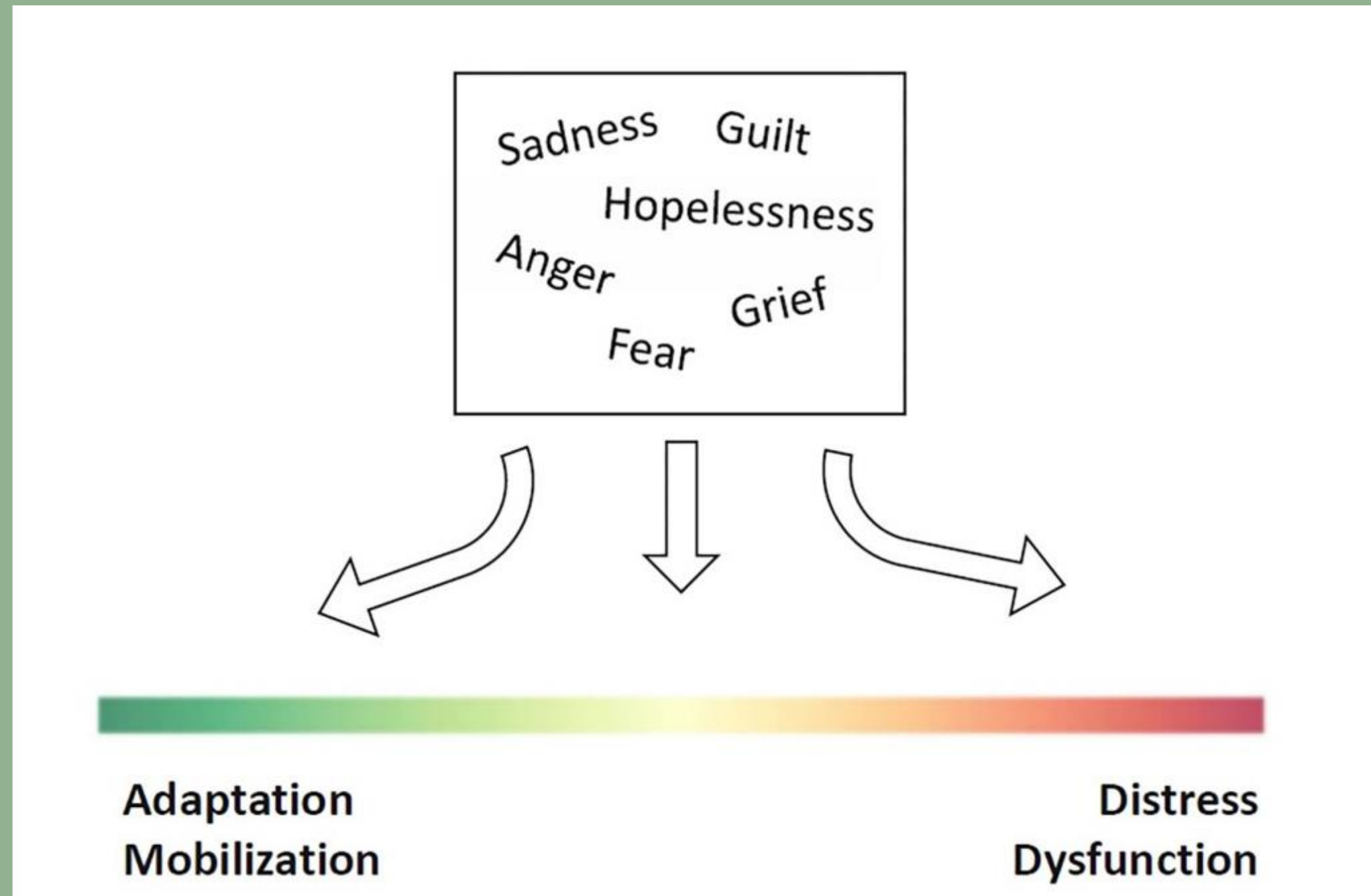
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Normal reaction to a significant threat

But high distress is not normal, nor adaptive

Emotions as adaptive and guiding our actions

# Eco-Emotions as a Spectrum



# Manifestation of Eco-Emotions

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Affective	Cognitive	Interpersonal	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sadness</li><li>• Fear</li><li>• Anger</li><li>• Distress</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rumination</li><li>• Intrusive thoughts</li><li>• Difficulty of concentration</li><li>• Altered thinking</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conflict with those who do not share our beliefs</li><li>• Isolation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sleep disturbances</li><li>• Exhaustion</li><li>• Knot in the stomach</li></ul>



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# Photovoice Study

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25 Canadian youth

Aged between 12-25 years old

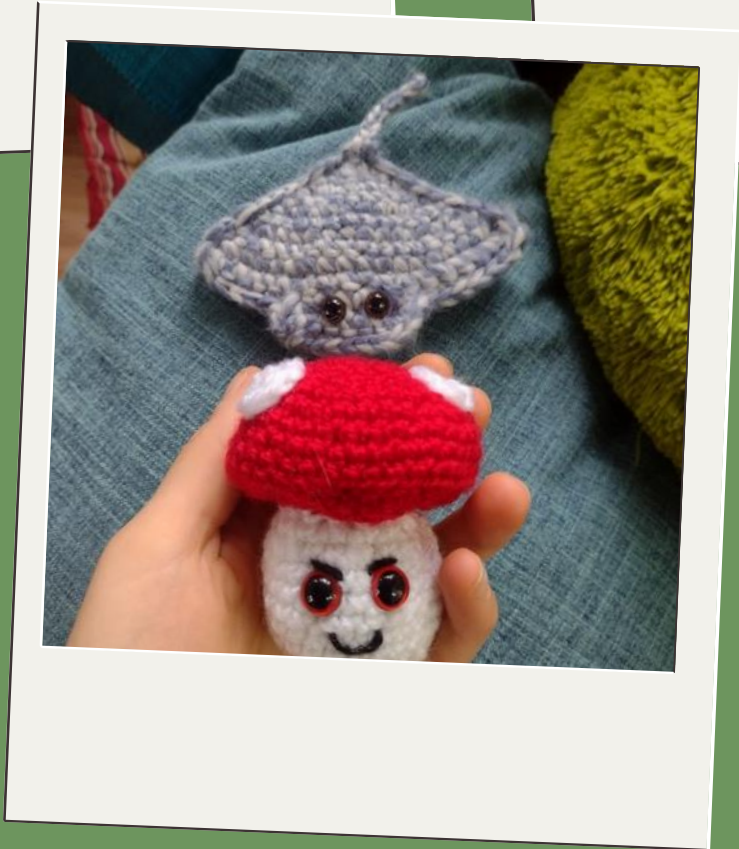
Rural and urban areas

- Participants have taken pictures of:
- What causes eco-emotions
  - What are their coping strategies

Some participants are currently in the photo-taking period.



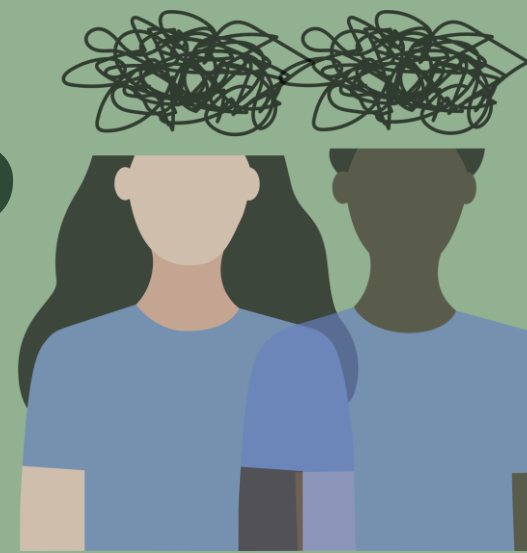
# Photovoice Study



# Experiencing Eco-Emotions

Affective	Cognitive	Interpersonal	Physical
<p>“That brings me, like yes, anxiety, there's also a lot of anger. And you know, a lot of sadness even, I would say, a bit of despair, um, it's quite heavy.”</p>	<p>“It just makes me think of an apocalyptic world that might happen, where there are no more trees.”</p>	<p>“ I was at my friend’s house” (...) “I was a little annoyed and a bit angry at her too. Because, well, I think I'm more conscious of these things.”</p>	<p>“I feel the emotion as a knot in my stomach, it's like I freeze when I see that.”</p>

# What Amplifies Eco-Anxiety?



## Powerlessness

“Well, I felt pretty helpless because I could see everything happening in front of me, but really, there was nothing I could do about it. Like, yes, I could take photos and talk about it afterwards, but in the moment, I couldn't do anything, and it's not me who decides.”

## Small actions not taken

“There's a lot of trash everywhere, and I find that really frustrating because, to me, it's pretty easy to just contain the trash and make sure it goes into a bin.”

## Part of the daily life

“I'd say it definitely brings up more negative emotions, especially since it's something I see every day on my way to school. (...) It's kind of depressing to wake up in the morning, go to school, and that's the first thing you see when you step outside.”

## Not taken seriously

“Yeah, I feel like it's just the people in power don't care. They have their priorities all wrong, and we can't really do much about it. That's how it is.”

## News

“Maybe I was focusing too much on the news, but I feel like in the media, we see a lot of things that remind us how bad things are, how the environment is suffering, with so many things happening in the world—natural disasters that are really scary.”

## Inconsistency with values

“It's what brings me most of my eco-emotions, difficult to handle, negative, when I am faced with choices I make that are not in alignment with my values.”



# How Youth Cope



\_\_\_\_\_ Focusing on the present moment

\_\_\_\_\_ Being in nature

\_\_\_\_\_ Having someone to talk to, who knows how to listen



\_\_\_\_\_ Engaging in activities that help clear the mind

\_\_\_\_\_ Getting involved, taking action

\_\_\_\_\_ Becoming aware of eco-friendly actions around us

\_\_\_\_\_ Cultivate hope

# Quotes

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“But it makes me feel calm, you know? I can go there, it’s peaceful, there’s no noise, maybe I can hear the birds, and at the same time, I feel kind of connected to nature, because you’re really out in nature.”



“Sometimes having conversations with people from your generation, it’s like... we’re all in the same boat. So I don’t know, it kind of depends on the conversation, but sometimes it’s reassuring.”

“It was really interesting, and it also made me question myself, like I feel like I learned things about myself while doing the exercise. (...) Yeah, it's like I had never really sat down and asked myself what triggers these emotions on a daily basis.”

“It would be about doing something we truly enjoy, something that brings us happiness, (...) like meditation.”

“And those were the remains of the infrastructures that were there before, and I thought it was great because nature had really taken over. Now, you don't really see much left of the factory, it's more nature that dominates the environment. So I found that beautiful, and I thought it was interesting—it gave me hope.”

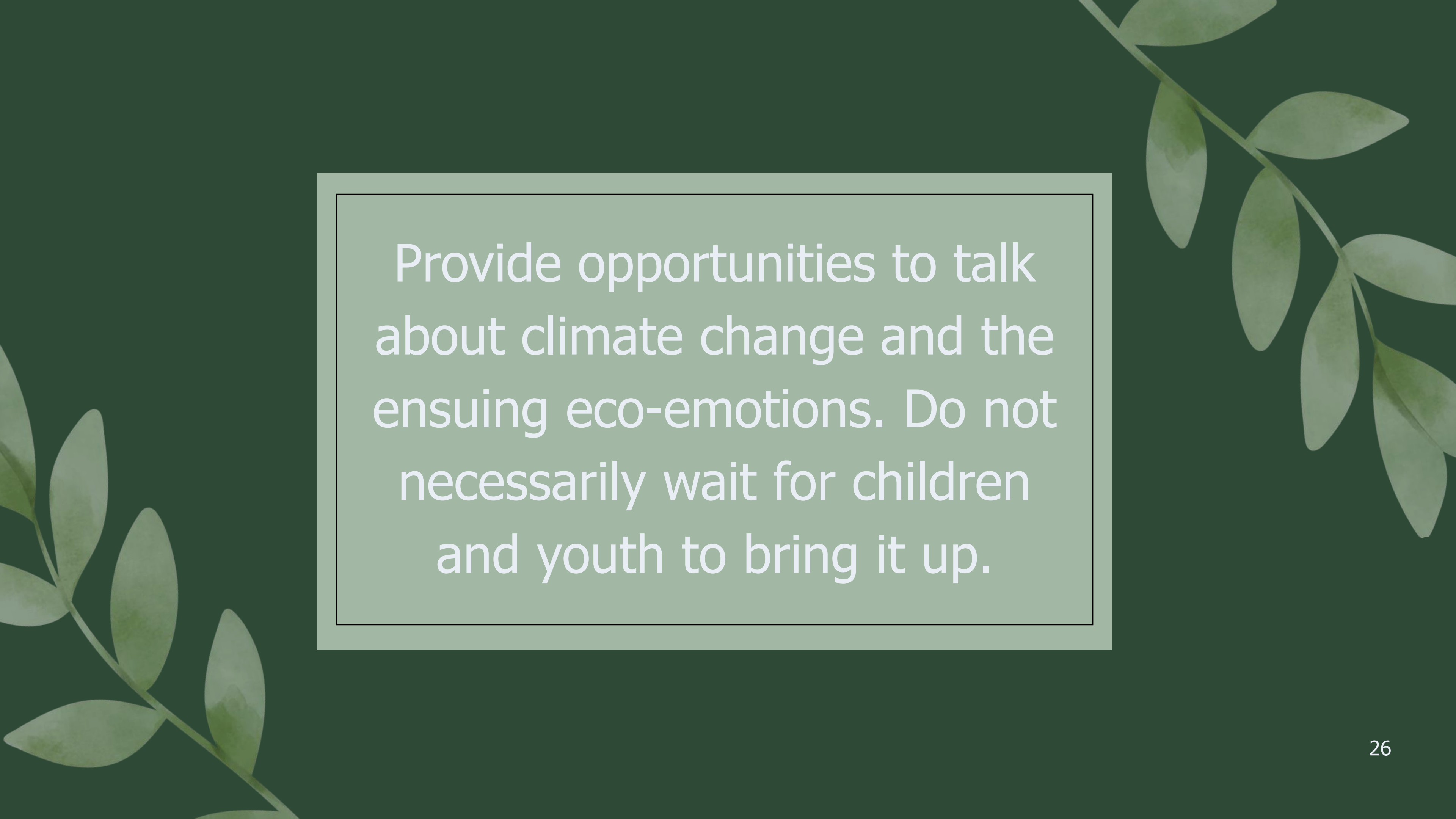


# How to Support Children and Youth

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- 1) Support and validate emotions, instead of dismissing them
- 2) Educate yourself and others
- 3) Avoid overly optimistic discourses
- 4) Foster reflection and self-awareness





Provide opportunities to talk about climate change and the ensuing eco-emotions. Do not necessarily wait for children and youth to bring it up.



Guide for parents developed  
by the Australian Psychological Society

## Recommendations



Try to understand children's perspectives

Cultivate critical hope

Support children's positive adaptation  
skills

# In a Clinical Setting

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- Building inner resilience in children and youth

- Supporting children and youth in finding social connections and emotional support through group participation

- Encouraging children and youth to take action

- Encouraging children and youth to connect to nature

# Toolkit

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**Photo-  
voice**

**Systematic  
Reviews**

**Parent-  
Child  
Study**

**Toolkit to support children  
and youth**

# Acknowledgments

## Members of the RISE Lab



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