

Confronting our Climate Grief in the time of COVID-19

Carol Hollenshead Inspire Award for Excellence in Promoting Equity & Social Change
Award Winner Virtual Presentation



Potential made possible.

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ABOUT CEW+

CEW+ empowers women and underserved individuals in the University of Michigan and surrounding communities by serving as an advocate and providing resources to help them reach their academic, financial, and professional potential.



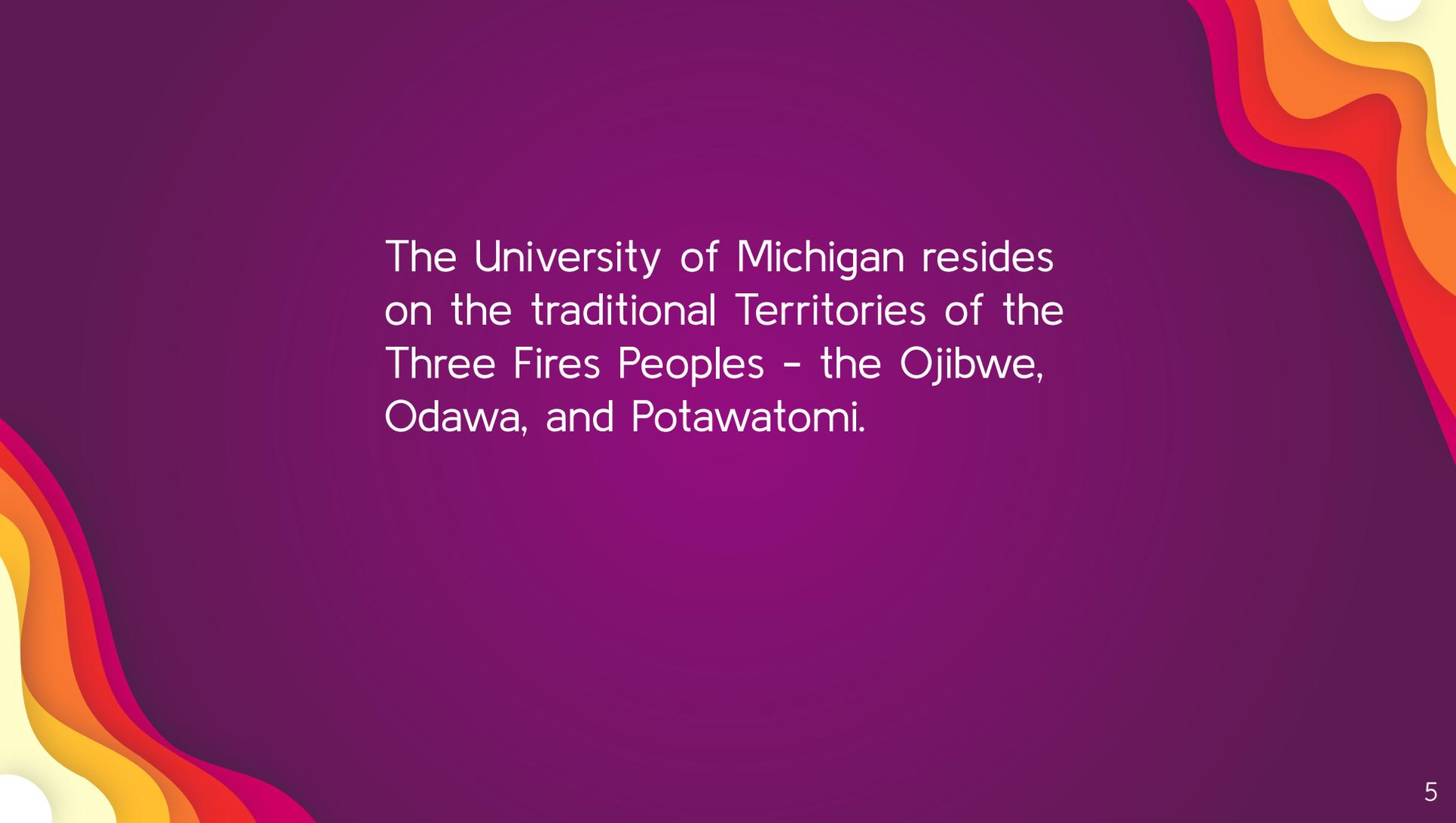
Mindfulness



Confronting Our Climate Grief

Natalie Sampson
May 7, 2020





The University of Michigan resides
on the traditional Territories of the
Three Fires Peoples - the Ojibwe,
Odawa, and Potawatomi.

Hello!

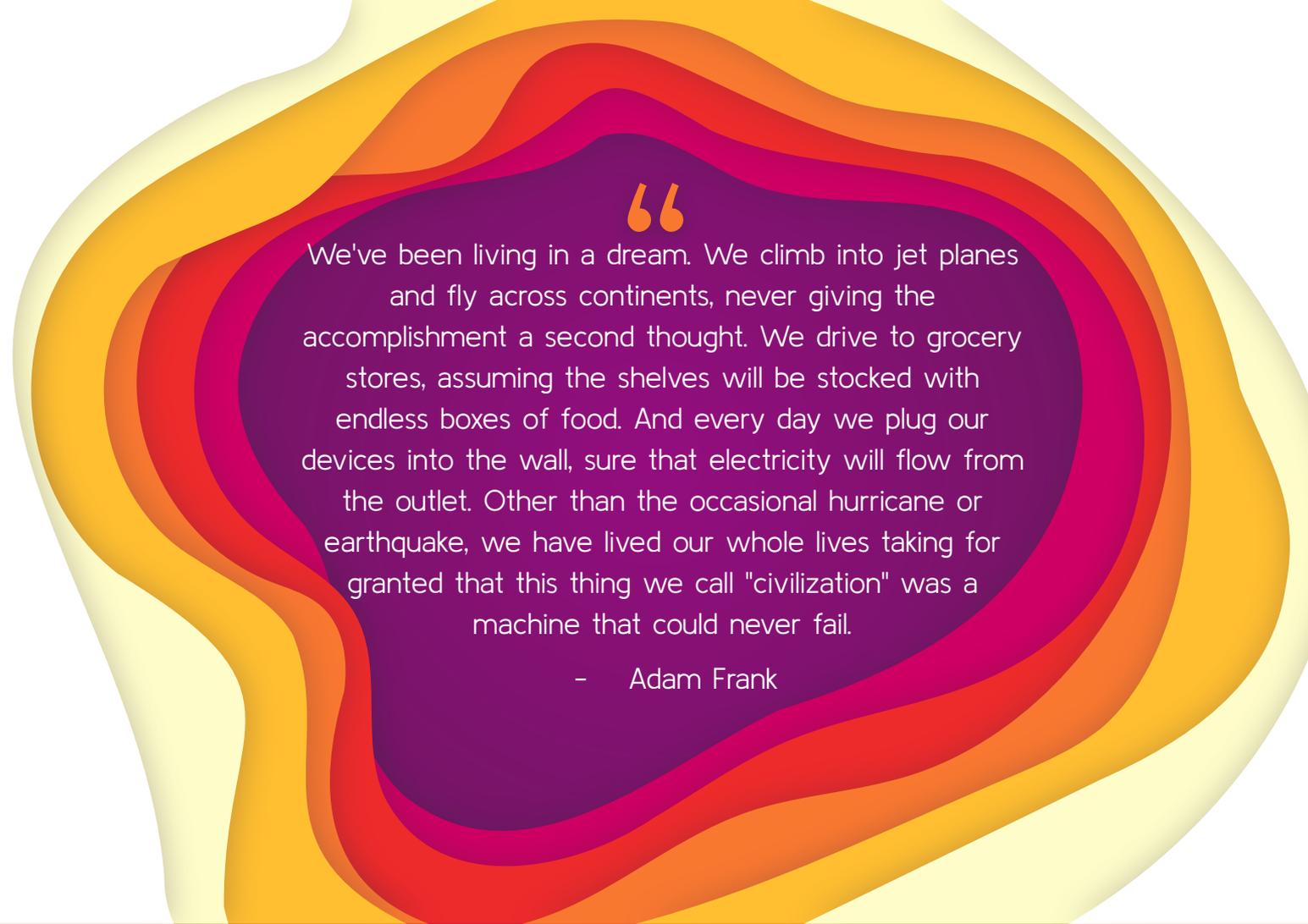


I am not:

- Mental health professional
- Climatologist

I am:

- Public scholar focused on environmental health inequities
- Michigander, mom, sister, daughter, teacher, activist...



“

We've been living in a dream. We climb into jet planes and fly across continents, never giving the accomplishment a second thought. We drive to grocery stores, assuming the shelves will be stocked with endless boxes of food. And every day we plug our devices into the wall, sure that electricity will flow from the outlet. Other than the occasional hurricane or earthquake, we have lived our whole lives taking for granted that this thing we call "civilization" was a machine that could never fail.

- Adam Frank

Tell me the bad news first

Is it normal to feel this way?

Confronting climate grief

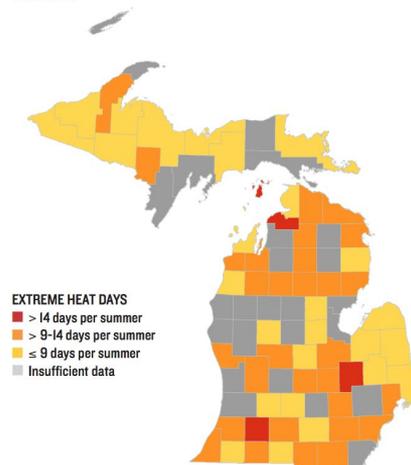
More resources



Tell me the bad news first

FIGURE 1. AVERAGE NUMBER OF EXTREME HEAT DAYS EACH YEAR IN MICHIGAN COUNTIES, 2007–2016

"Extreme heat days" are defined as June, July, and August days from 2007 to 2016 on which the maximum temperature at a given weather station fell within the top 10 percent of readings at that station. We used the June, July, and August days from 1961 to 1990 to calculate the top 10 percent of temperature readings. Nine extreme heat days per summer, on average, would be expected if temperatures were stable.³⁶



In Michigan:

- Hotter, wetter in extremes
- Threatened water quality
- Temp has increased 2° F since 1895
- Warmer temps → worse air quality → climate change

FIGURE 2. COUNTIES IN MICHIGAN WHERE BLACKLEGGED TICKS WERE REPORTED (FEWER THAN SIX TICKS OF A SINGLE LIFE STAGE) OR ESTABLISHED (SIX OR MORE TICKS OR TWO LIFE STAGES) IN 1996 AND 2015.

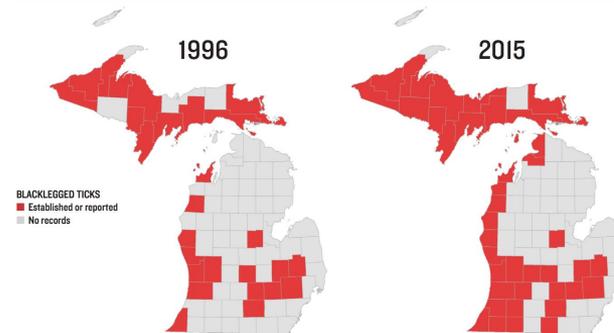
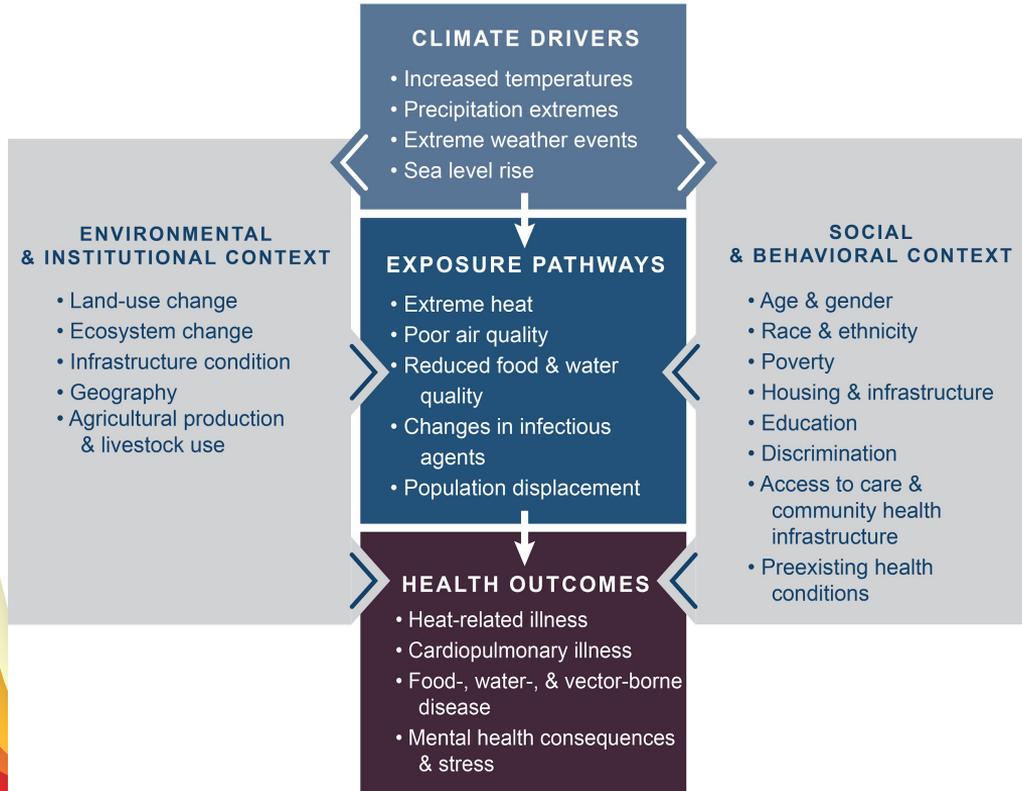


Figure adapted from Eisen et al., *Journal of Medical Entomology* 53 (2016).

Learn more here: <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/climate-change-health-impacts-michigan-ib.pdf>
<http://glisa.umich.edu/resources/great-lakes-regional-climate-change-maps>

Tell me the bad news first

Climate Change and Health



Balbus, J. A. et al., (2016) Ch. 1: Introduction: Climate change and human health. *The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment*, U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, 25–42. doi:10.7930/JOVXODFW.

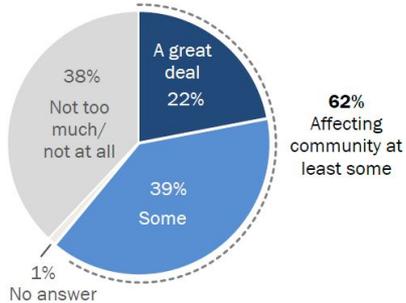
Learn more here:

https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71548_54783_54784_55975---,00.html

Tell me the bad news first

A majority of U.S. adults say climate change is affecting their local community at least some

% of U.S. adults who say global climate change is affecting their local community ...

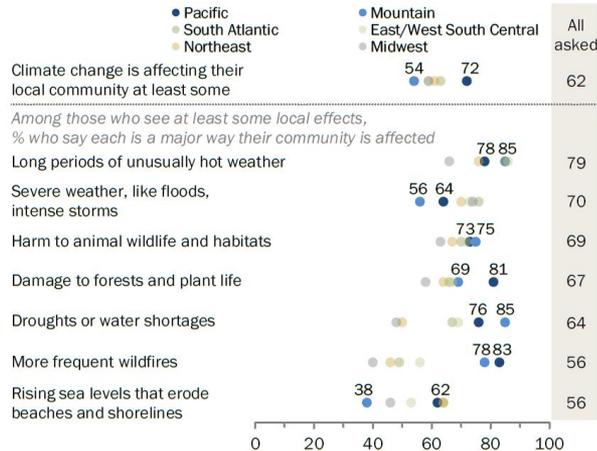


Source: Survey conducted Oct. 1-13, 2019.
"U.S. Public Views on Climate and Energy"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Majorities in Western states report experiencing more frequent wildfires, droughts locally due to climate change

% of U.S. adults living in each region who say the following



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Oct. 1-13, 2019.
"U.S. Public Views on Climate and Energy"

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Your community & work are likely already affected.

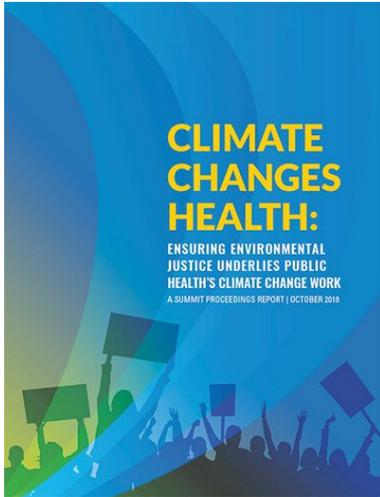
Tell me the bad news first

Table 2 Health issues in small communities potentially impacted by managed retreat. Adapted in part from McMichael et al. 2010 and Edwards 2013

Health impact	Issues affecting health	Examples
Mental health, including well-being, anxiety, depression, suicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in exposure to flooding and extreme weather events • Change in quality of physical living environment • Loss of traditional livelihood • Disruption of place attachment • Reduced relevance of traditional knowledge • Change in land security/land ownership • Disruption of daily activities focused on beach and water access • Adequacy of new location for population growth • Conflicts with new neighbors 	<p>Cartaret Islands: subsistence farmers unfamiliar with cultivating cash crops; Taholah: new community being designed with community input to have improved physical environment</p>
Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption of clanship with strong social ties • Potential for improved community collaboration during relocation 	<p>Isle de Jean Charles and Gardi Sugdub Island: some community members moved elsewhere prior to relocation</p>
Food security and nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host in new location may not welcome those relocating • Potential loss of traditional subsistence food sources, especially fishing sites and agricultural land • Potential undernutrition, malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies 	<p>Cartaret Islands: disputes over fishing access at new site; access to some unfamiliar foods; Vunidogoloa: residents received assistance in adjusting fishing and agriculture livelihoods</p>
Water security and sanitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diarrheal disease risk associated with water quality • Hygiene and dehydration associated with adequacy of freshwater quantity 	<p>Tegua Island: new rainwater harvest tanks built to provide freshwater because of saltwater intrusion into groundwater supply; Kivalina: community developed a biochar reactor to improve sanitation</p>
Infectious disease risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disease exposures may vary in new location • Potential new exposure from contact with new neighbors 	<p>Gardi Sugdub Island: malaria risk may be higher in new mainland site than on island</p>
Injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma before, during, or after relocation • Potential disputes with new neighbors 	<p>Taro Island: new location has lower tsunami risk</p>
Access to health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to health care before, during, and after relocation due to community remoteness 	<p>Gardi Sugdub Island: new health center partially built</p>

ation in small

Tell me the bad news first



“While there may be some people who want to debate whether or not climate change and global warming are real, there are other people whose lives have been completely destroyed by the impact of our changing climate. We have to recognize that the government is not coming to help you...The cavalry may not be coming, but help is on the way.”

~ Vernice Miller-Travis, summit facilitator

Sampson, N. Hollis, A., Thomas, J., Shattuck, S., Latshaw, M., Harris, G., Price, C., Shafiei, F., Varga, M., Miller-Travis, V. & Lee, C. (2018). Climate Changes Health: Ensuring Environmental Justice Underlies Public Health's Climate Change Work. Washington D.C.: American Public Health Association - Environmental Justice Subcommittee.

For powerful perspectives, check out Mary Annaisé Heglar: <https://medium.com/@maryheglar>.

Is it normal to feel this way?

“Climate Change has always Existed for Me”

- SAYAAMELI HAJEBI

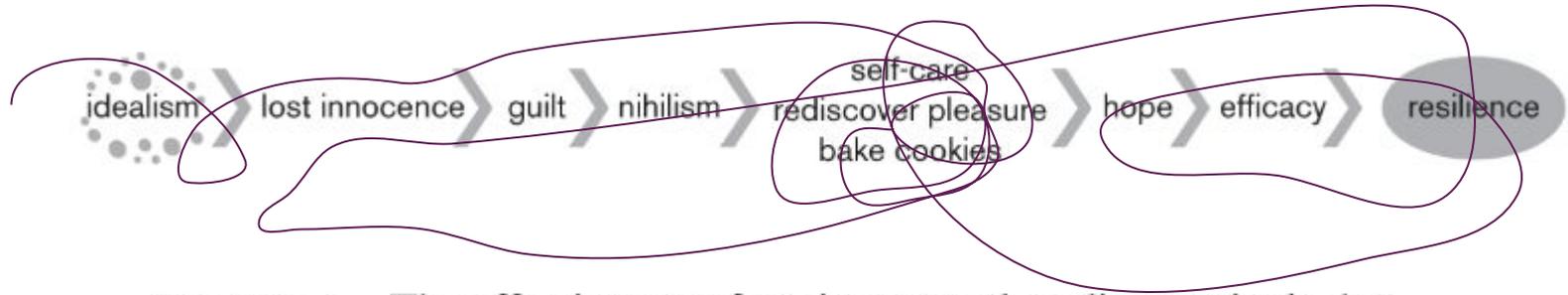
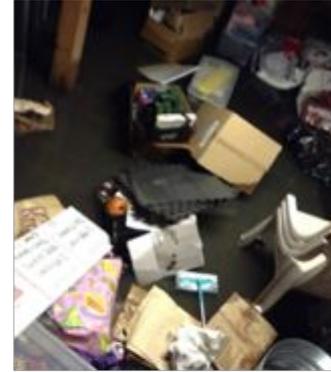
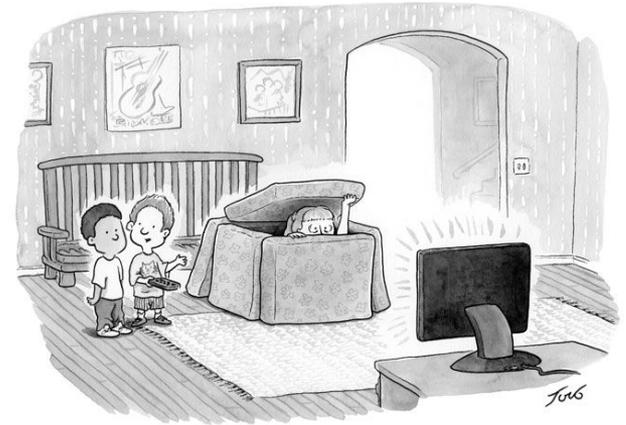


FIGURE 2. The affective arc of environmental studies curricula, by Sarah Jaquette Ray.

Is it normal to feel this way?



Is it normal to feel this way?



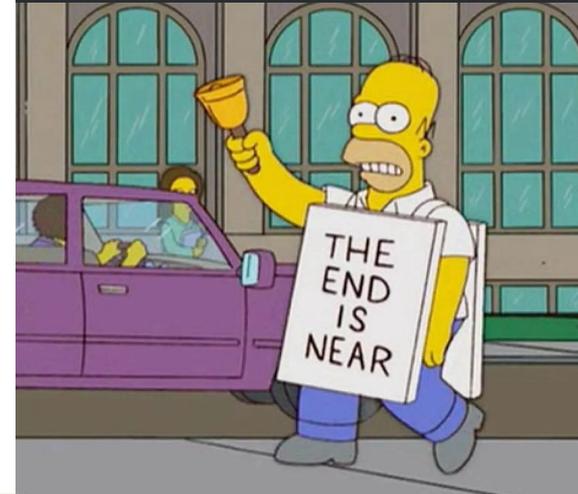
"Whenever I want my mom to play fort, I just turn on news about climate change."

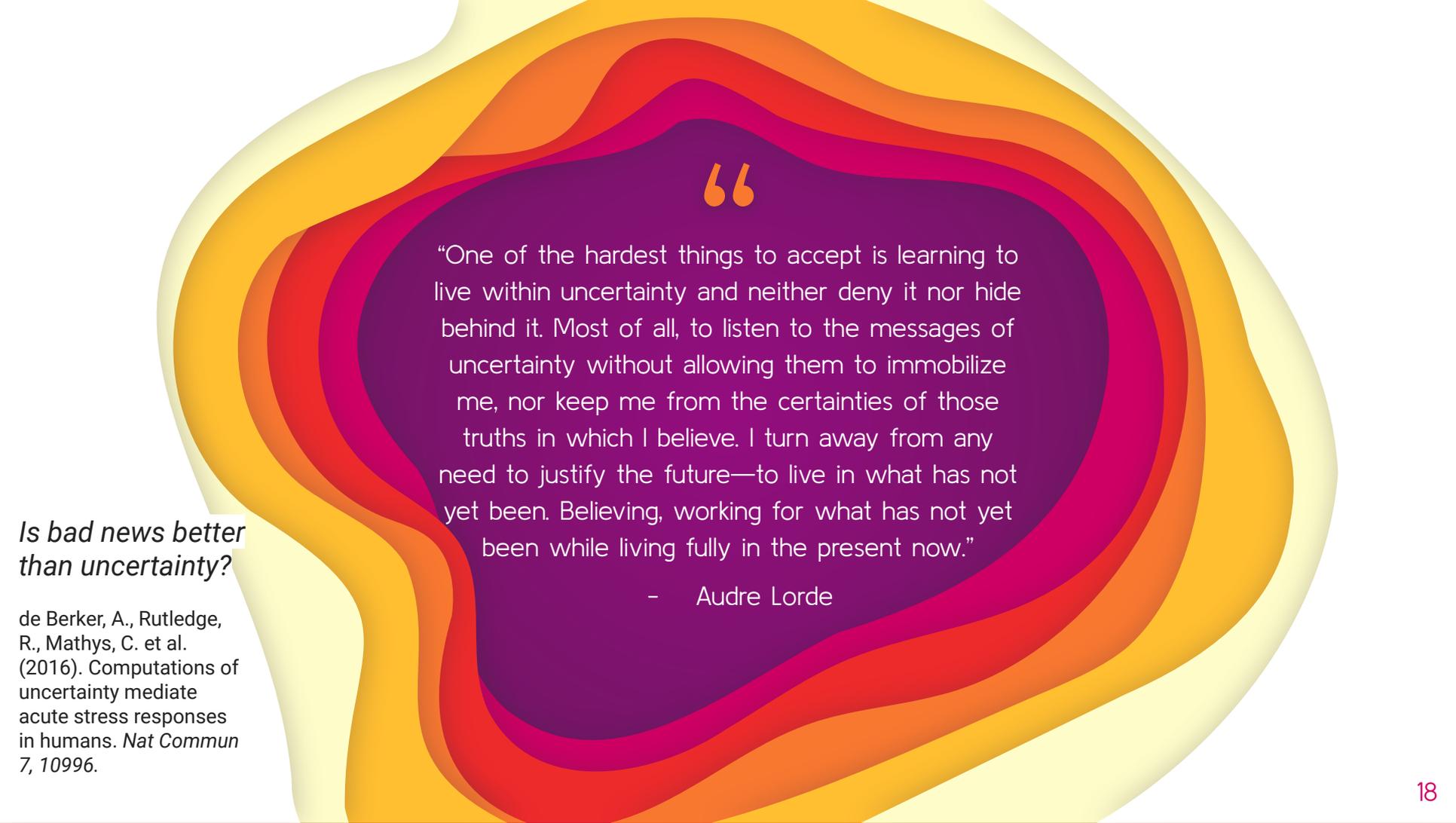
Is it normal to feel this way?

- Acute mental impacts
- Denial, demotivation, apathy (not a long-term option)
- Guilt
- Ecological grief, eco-anxiety, solastalgia (Glenn Albrecht -1984), anticipatory grief

The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not 'get over' the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same nor would you want to.

~Elisabeth Kubler-Ross





“

“One of the hardest things to accept is learning to live within uncertainty and neither deny it nor hide behind it. Most of all, to listen to the messages of uncertainty without allowing them to immobilize me, nor keep me from the certainties of those truths in which I believe. I turn away from any need to justify the future—to live in what has not yet been. Believing, working for what has not yet been while living fully in the present now.”

- Audre Lorde

Is bad news better than uncertainty?

de Berker, A., Rutledge, R., Mathys, C. et al. (2016). Computations of uncertainty mediate acute stress responses in humans. *Nat Commun* 7, 10996.

Confronting climate grief

1. Name your feelings & uncertainties.
2. Know your tolerance & coping strategies.
3. Connect w/nature or humans.
4. Find meaning through action towards resilience.



Confronting climate grief

1. Name your feelings & uncertainties.

In the Chat Box:

In 5 words or less: What concerns you most about climate change?

Confronting climate grief

2. Know your tolerance & coping strategies.

Poll: How often do you think about climate change?

1 is 'not at all'

5 is 'I focus on it all day, every day'

Confronting climate grief

2. Know your tolerance & coping strategies.

1. Tolerance: What are strategies you use to 'turn off' the scary or anxiety-provoking narratives? How might you manage your 'information diet' about climate change?
2. Coping: Describe 3 favorite activities that bring you joy. How often have you done them in the last week, month, or year?



Confronting climate grief

3. Connect with each other & nature.

Related to climate change:

- Good Grief Network
- Climate Psychology Alliance
- Climate Psychiatry Alliance

Related to movement building:

- Irresistible Care Circles:
<https://irresistible.org/circle>

Irresistible Care Circle



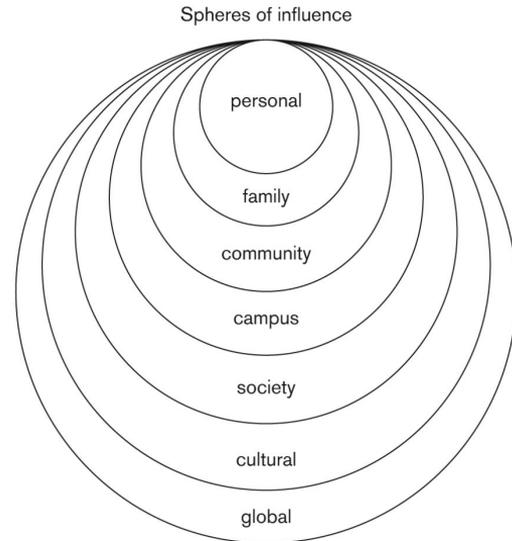
Confronting climate grief

4. Find meaning - Act towards “transformational resilience.”

- Resiliency implies we can bounce back
- Need for mental health response systems to address coming challenges
 - How do we think/act while in emerging crises? Can adversity transform us (i.e. PTG)?

Doppelt B, (2016). *Transformational Resilience: How Building Human Resilience to Climate Disruption Can Safeguard Society and Increase Wellbeing*. Greenleaf Publishing.

“Claim your calling & scale your action”
- Sarah Jaquette Ray



Confronting climate grief

4. Find meaning – Act towards “transformational resilience.”

Urge your members of Congress to cosponsor the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act

Climate change threatens human health today in many ways, including from extreme heat and other weather-related illness and injury; increased spread of vector-borne infectious diseases; increases in respiratory illnesses associated with increased pollution, wildfires and allergens in the air; and drinking water contamination.

Tell your members of Congress to cosponsor the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act to better equip the medical and public health communities to adapt to and protect the public from the health impacts of climate change.

Enter your zip code and click "Check Zip Code" to continue

CHECK ZIP CODE

<https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/advocacy-for-public-health/action-alerts/cchppa>



Urge Congress to support agriculture's role as a climate solution.

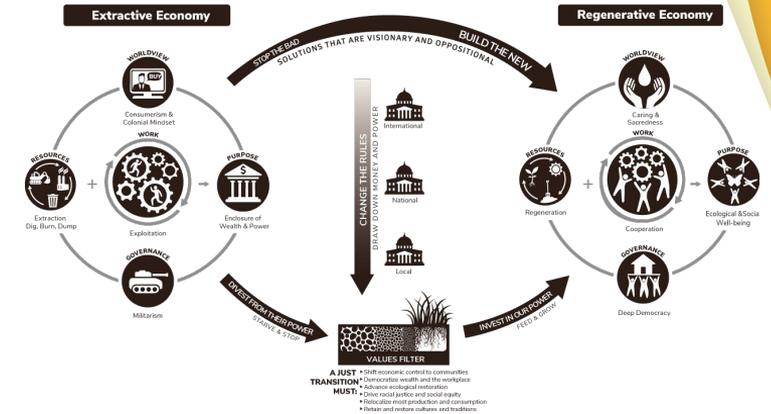
SEND LETTER

<https://www.ucsusa.org/take-action>

Confronting climate grief

4. Find meaning – Act towards “transformational resilience.”

- Climate Mobilization
- Climate Reality Project
- Michigan Climate Action Network
- 350.org
- American Society of Adaptation Professionals
- Sunrise Movement
- Citizens Climate Lobby



Think critically & support just transition:
<https://climatejusticealliance.org/just-transition/>

Add other groups in the chat box!

Confronting climate grief

4. Find meaning – Act towards “transformational resilience.”

- Sunrise Movement
- Youth Climate Leaders
- Zero Hour

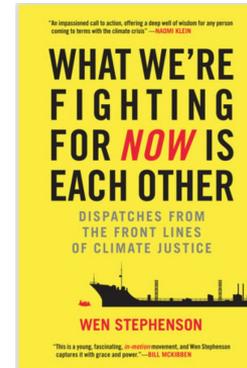
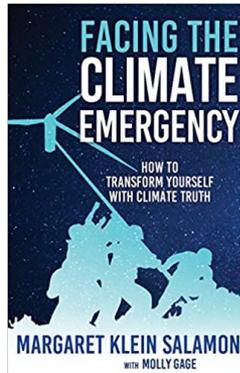
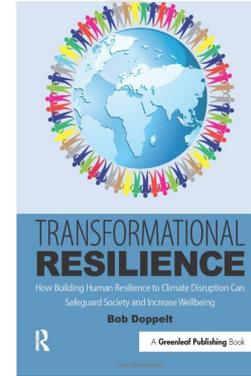
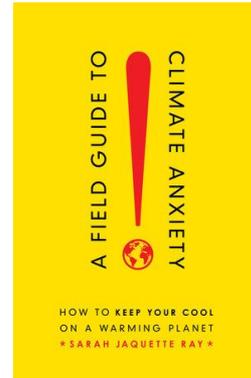
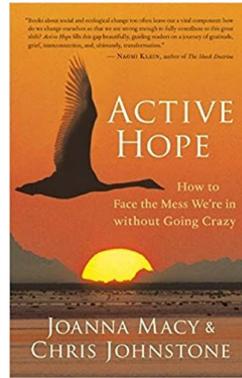
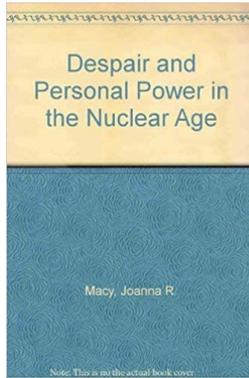
Environmental Health Research-to-Action



I know my kids are going to do stuff I couldn't do, heal stuff I couldn't heal. It's clear that the healing you're doing is healing your family, parents, ancestors.

—Taj James

More resources: <https://bit.ly/cewclimategrief>



Confronting climate grief

1. Name your feelings & uncertainties.
2. Know your tolerance & coping strategies.
3. Connect.
4. Find meaning through action towards resilience.
5. Begin again & re-engage.

And, never hesitate to seek professional help if the grief is too big!



**GRIEF
&
JOY
can
coexist!**



Thanks!

Any questions?

You can find me at:



@nrsampson

nsampson@umich.edu



Thank you for attending today!

The University of Michigan resides on the traditional Territories of the Three Fires Peoples - the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi.



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