

Climate Change & Suicidality

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON SUICIDE



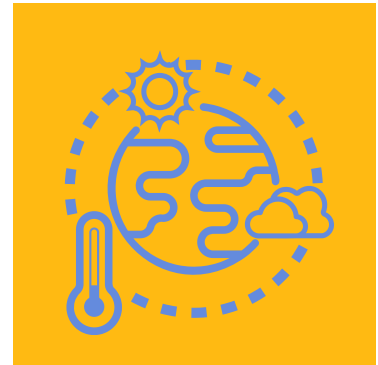
Background

Climate change is reshaping more than our environments. It also defines how many people experience safety, hope, loss, and uncertainty about the future. Conversations about climate-related distress are becoming increasingly common, particularly among young people, Indigenous/First Nations peoples, and communities directly affected by environmental change. Changing the narrative means recognising that emotional responses to climate change are understandable, that support and prevention are possible, and that connection, compassion, and collective action can strengthen hope and resilience.

Research suggests that climate-related stressors (e.g., extreme heat, loss of livelihoods, and climate-related distress) may contribute to factors associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviours in some individuals and communities (Ahmed et al., 2026). At the same time, most people experiencing climate anxiety or distress are not suicidal. Many responses to climate change also include resilience, adaptation, activism, community solidarity, and hope. Understanding the relationship between climate change and suicidality can support more effective, compassionate, and prevention-focused responses. (Kölves et al., 2025)

As climate change intensifies, researchers have also identified a growing range of “eco-emotions” that are emotional responses linked to environmental change and perceived ecological threats. These responses may include anxiety, fear, sadness, grief, guilt, shame, anger, helplessness, as well as positive emotions such as hope, resilience, and empowerment (Pihkala, 2022). As emotional responses to climate change are highly varied and personal, no single framework can fully capture the range of emotions individuals may experience.

Among the most discussed eco-emotions are eco-anxiety, eco-grief, and solastalgia. Eco-anxiety refers to distress or worry associated with climate change and environmental degradation, ranging from mild concern to more severe psychological distress. Eco-grief describes feelings of loss connected to environmental destruction, including the loss of ecosystems, species, landscapes, cultural practices, or anticipated futures. Solastalgia refers specifically to distress caused by negative changes to one’s home environment while remaining in that environment.



Climate Change & Suicidality

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON SUICIDE



These emotions may arise through direct experiences of climate impacts or indirectly through media exposure, scientific information, perceived government inaction, and/or witnessing environmental degradation. Although eco-emotions are increasingly recognised as potential mental health stressors, they are also understood as meaningful and congruent responses to real environmental threats. For some individuals, particularly when combined with existing vulnerabilities or social adversity, severe and persistent climate-related distress may contribute to increased risk of mental health difficulties, including suicidality. (Kölves et al., 2026)

What can potentially help protect mental health and reduce suicide risk?

Connection and community

Strong social support, community cohesion, and culturally meaningful relationships are important protective factors for suicide.

Hope and agency

Opportunities for collective action, advocacy, preparedness, and participation in climate solutions may support meaning, empowerment, and psychological resilience.

Responsible communication

Public communication about climate change should avoid hopelessness and fatalism. Messages that acknowledge challenges while emphasising action, adaptation, and support may reduce feelings of despair and enhance feelings of purpose and empowerment.

Integrated planning

Mental health and suicide prevention should be included within climate adaptation, disaster preparedness, and public health planning.

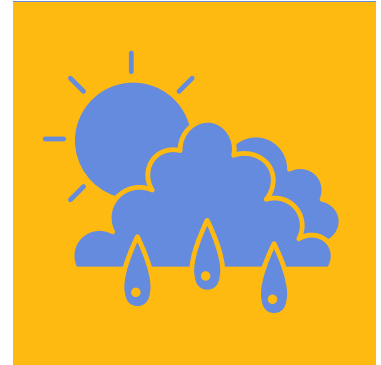
Recommendations

For policymakers

- Integrate mental health and suicide prevention into climate adaptation policies
- Support disaster recovery programs that strengthen social cohesion
- Invest in community resilience and equitable access to care

For health and mental health professionals

- Recognise climate-related distress as a valid emotional response
- Assess suicide risk compassionately and without pathologising concern
- Support coping, connection, and making sense of difficult experiences



Climate Change & Suicidality

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For communities and organisations

- Create safe spaces for discussing climate distress
- Support local initiatives that strengthen belonging and resilience
- Foster inclusion and community support after climate events

For researchers

- Improve evidence from low- and middle-income countries
- Conduct research to better understand eco-emotions and potential relationships with suicidality
- Strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration across climate and mental health research



Resources

- Ahmed, D. R., Kar, S. K., Al Azzawi, M. A. D., & Heun, R. (2026). A systematic review of the association between climate change and suicidality reveals that climate indicators increase suicide rates. *Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health*, 13, e63. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2026.10176>
- Pihkala, P. (2022). Toward a taxonomy of climate emotions. *Frontiers in Climate*, 3, 738154. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2021.738154>
- [The World Health Organization's Mental health and Climate Change: Policy Brief](#)
- [Climate Council Australia: Climate Anxiety Toolkit](#)
- [Cornell Health: Climate Change & Eco-Anxiety](#)
- [Harvard T.H. Chan Centre for Health Communication Creator Resource: The Truth Behind Climate Grief](#)



References

- Pihkala, P. (2022). Toward a taxonomy of climate emotions. *Frontiers in Climate*, 3, 738154. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2021.738154>
- Kølves, K., Shaw-Williams, D., Krishnamoorthy, S., Bayliss, L., Hawgood, J., & Reifels, L. (2025). From rising temperature to eco-emotions: exploring the impact of climate change on suicidality. *The Lancet Regional Health—Western Pacific*, 55, 101491. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2025.101491>
- Kølves, K., Shaw-Williams, D., Krishnamoorthy, S., Bayliss, L., Mathieu, S., Zhong, L. R., Hawgood, J., Donovan, C., Spence, S. H., & Reifels, L. (2026). Eco-emotions and suicidal ideation and behavior. *Crisis*. <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a001065>