

GRADES 6 - 12 | SEL + ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Eco-Anxiety & Climate Emotions

Classroom Resource Pack

Psychoeducation on Climate Emotions | Hope-Based Action Activities
Regulation Strategies | Community Connection Projects

8 Lesson Plans	Eco-Emotion Vocabulary Cards	Climate Hope Journal (Student)
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"Validating feelings. Building resilience. Inspiring hopeful action."

UM Printables

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Teacher Facilitation Notes

Thank you for choosing to address eco-anxiety and climate emotions in your classroom. This resource pack is designed to help educators create a safe, supportive space where students can explore their feelings about environmental change while building resilience and agency. Below you will find essential guidance for facilitating these sensitive conversations with care and confidence.

Why This Resource Matters

Research shows that a growing number of young people experience significant distress about climate change. A 2021 global survey published in *The Lancet Planetary Health* found that 59% of youth respondents were very or extremely worried about climate change, and 45% reported that climate-related feelings negatively affected their daily functioning. Students are arriving in our classrooms carrying these emotions — often without the vocabulary or support to process them. This resource bridges Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Environmental Education to address this critical gap.

Key Facilitation Principles

- **Validate Before Educate:** Always acknowledge students' feelings before moving to solutions. Dismissing or minimizing emotions — even with good intentions — can deepen distress.
- **Choose Hope Over Optimism:** Hope is not the same as optimism. Optimism says "everything will be fine." Hope says "even though things are hard, our actions matter, and we are not alone."
- **Never Teach Alone:** Before facilitating these lessons, ensure your school counselor or mental health professional is aware of the unit. Have a referral pathway ready.
- **Agency Is the Antidote:** Research consistently shows that the most effective buffer against eco-anxiety is a sense of agency — the belief that one can take meaningful action.
- **Respect Diverse Perspectives:** Students come from different backgrounds, cultural contexts, and political environments. Create space for all voices while maintaining a science-based, compassion-centered framework.
- **Monitor Your Own Emotions:** Teachers experience eco-anxiety too. Practice the regulation strategies yourself before teaching them. Model emotional honesty and healthy coping in front of your students.

Content Sensitivity Note: Some students may have experienced direct climate impacts (wildfires, floods, displacement). Be prepared for strong emotional responses. Always provide opt-out options and check in privately with students who seem distressed. Have school counselor contact information readily available.

Establishing Classroom Safety Agreements

Before beginning Lesson 1, co-create safety agreements with your students. These should be displayed throughout the unit. Suggested agreements include:

- We listen with respect and without judgment.
- We use "I" statements when sharing feelings (e.g., "I feel worried when...").
- What is shared here stays here; what we learn here leaves here. (Confidentiality with safety limits: if someone is at risk of harm, a trusted adult must be informed.)
- Anyone can pass at any time — participation is always by choice.
- We seek to understand, not to convince.
- Feelings are facts — all emotions are welcome in this space.
- We focus on what we *can* do, not only on what we cannot.
- If something feels too much, we tell a trusted adult.

SEL Framework Alignment

This resource aligns with the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) framework across all five competencies:

SEL Competency	Application in This Resource
Self-Awareness	Identifying and naming climate emotions; recognizing personal stress responses
Self-Management	Practicing regulation strategies; managing eco-anxiety through constructive action
Social Awareness	Understanding diverse emotional responses to climate change; empathy for affected communities
Relationship Skills	Communicating about difficult emotions; collaborating on community action projects
Responsible Decision-Making	Evaluating action options; making informed choices about climate engagement

Differentiation & Grade Band Guidance

- **Grades 6–8:** Focus heavily on emotion identification and expression. Use more visual and hands-on activities. Keep discussions concrete and grounded in students' lived experiences.
- **Grades 9–10:** Introduce more complex psychoeducation concepts. Encourage deeper analysis of media messaging about climate. Students can engage with more nuanced discussions about systemic vs. individual action.
- **Grades 11–12:** Allow for philosophical and ethical exploration. Students can research climate psychology independently. Facilitate discussions about eco-anxiety in the context of identity, future planning, and civic engagement.

How to Use This Pack

- The **8 lesson plans** are sequential and build on each other. Teach them in order for best results. Each lesson is designed for 45–60 minutes.
- The **Eco-Emotion Vocabulary Cards** should be introduced in Lesson 3 and displayed throughout the unit. Students can refer to them during journaling and discussions.
- The **Climate Hope Journal** is a personal student workbook. Print one copy per student. Journaling is a core practice — allow 5–10 minutes per session.
- The **Coping Strategy Poster Set** (5 posters) should be displayed in the classroom as visual anchors. Introduce them in Lesson 4 and reference them throughout.
- The **Community Action Project Guide** supports Lessons 7–8 and any extended project work. It provides scaffolding for student-led action.
- The **Parent Resource Letter** should be sent home before the unit begins. It informs families about the topic and provides home support strategies.

General Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers for collaborative activities
- Printed Climate Hope Journal pages (one set per student)
- Printed Eco-Emotion Vocabulary Cards (classroom display set + optional student sets)
- Printed and laminated Coping Strategy Posters for classroom display
- Quiet background music option for regulation activities
- Access to outdoor space (for select activities in Lessons 4 and 7)
- Colored pencils, markers, or crayons for creative expression activities
- Sticky notes (for gallery walks and anonymous sharing)

Remember: The goal of this resource is not to eliminate eco-anxiety — it is to help students understand, express, and channel their emotions into hopeful, connected action. Eco-anxiety is a rational response to real threats. Our role is to hold space for the feeling while illuminating a path forward.

Recommended Reading for Teachers

- *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Crisis* by Britt Wray
- *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety: How to Keep Your Cool on a Warming Planet* by Sarah Jaquette Ray
- *Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think Is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis* by Elin Kelsey
- *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy* by Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone
- The Climate Psychology Alliance (climatepsychologyalliance.org) — free resources
- CASEL Framework (casel.org) — SEL competency guidance

Lesson Plans

The following eight lesson plans are designed to be taught sequentially. Each lesson builds upon the previous one, guiding students from understanding their climate emotions toward taking hopeful, community-connected action. Adjust pacing and depth based on your students' grade level and emotional readiness.

LESSON 1: Understanding Eco-Anxiety & Climate Emotions

Duration	45–60 minutes
Grade Band	6–12 (Differentiation noted within)
SEL Competency	Self-Awareness
Materials	Chart paper, markers, sticky notes, student journals (or printed Climate Hope Journal pages)

Learning Objectives

- Define eco-anxiety and recognize it as a normal, rational response to climate change.
- Identify personal feelings related to environmental issues.
- Distinguish between productive and overwhelming eco-anxiety.

Key Vocabulary

- **Eco-Anxiety:** Chronic fear of environmental doom; worry about the future of the planet.
- **Climate Emotions:** The range of feelings (grief, anger, hope, guilt) triggered by awareness of climate change.
- **Productive Anxiety:** A level of concern that motivates constructive action rather than paralysis.

Content Sensitivity Note: Some students may be experiencing high levels of distress. Emphasize that this is a safe space. Remind students of the classroom safety agreements established in the Teacher Facilitation Notes. Allow students to pass during sharing circles.

Activity Breakdown

1. Opening Circle: Feelings Check-In (5 min)

Invite students to sit in a circle (or reflect at their desks). Ask: *"When you think about the environment or climate change, what is one word that describes how you feel?"* Students can share aloud, write on a sticky note for a feelings wall, or pass. Validate every response without judgment.

Journal 3: Naming My Emotion

Using the Eco-Emotion Vocabulary Cards, choose two words that best describe how you are feeling right now. Write the words below and explain why they fit. Remember, having the right words for our feelings gives us power over them.

Journal 4: My Coping Plan

We all have a "Window of Tolerance." When eco-anxiety pushes us outside our window, we need strategies to return. Which of the coping strategies we learned (Grounding, Box Breathing, Self-Compassion, Nature Connection, Action Anchoring) works best for you? Write a commitment to use it when you feel overwhelmed.

BOX BREATHING

Use this strategy when your heart is racing, you feel panicked, or your mind is spiraling.

Step 1: INHALE slowly through your nose for a count of 4. Fill your lungs completely.

Step 2: HOLD your breath for a count of 4. Let your body be still.

Step 3: EXHALE slowly through your mouth for a count of 4. Release all the air.

Step 4: HOLD your empty lungs for a count of 4. Rest before the next breath.

Step 5: REPEAT this cycle 3 to 5 times. Return to normal breathing when you feel calm.

Remember: Box breathing tells your nervous system that you are safe. It physically slows your heart rate and lowers stress hormones.

SELF-COMPASSION PAUSE

Use this strategy when you feel guilty, inadequate, or are being too hard on yourself.

Step 1: ACKNOWLEDGE your feeling without judgment: "This is a moment of stress. This is hard."

Step 2: REMEMBER you are not alone: "Other people feel this way too. I am part of a shared human experience."

Step 3: OFFER yourself kindness. Place a hand on your heart and say: "May I be kind to myself. May I give myself the compassion I need."

Remember: You do not have to be perfect to be a good climate advocate. Beating yourself up drains your energy; self-compassion refuels it.

Parent Resource Letter

Print and send this letter home to families before beginning the unit. It informs them about the sensitive nature of the topic and provides strategies for supporting students at home. Fill in the bracketed information before printing.

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Dear Families,

As part of our commitment to supporting the whole child, our class will be engaging in a special unit titled **Eco-Anxiety & Climate Emotions Classroom Resource Pack**. This unit bridges Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Environmental Education to address a growing need among young people today: how to process the complex emotions that arise from learning about climate change.

Research shows that a significant number of young people experience *eco-anxiety*—chronic worry about the future of the planet. While awareness of environmental issues is crucial, it can also bring up feelings of grief, anger, guilt, and helplessness. This unit is designed to help students name and validate these feelings, rather than suppress them, and to channel them into hopeful, community-connected action.

What We Will Cover:

- Understanding and naming climate emotions (eco-anxiety, eco-grief, solastalgia)
- Learning self-regulation strategies (grounding, breathing, self-compassion)
- Exploring stories of climate resilience and hope
- Designing a Community Action Project to build collective efficacy

How You Can Support at Home:

- **Listen and Validate:** If your child shares climate concerns, resist the urge to minimize or fix. Simply saying, "That makes sense, a lot of people feel that way," is powerful.
- **Focus on Agency:** Help your child identify small, manageable actions they can take. Feeling helpless fuels anxiety; feeling capable builds resilience.
- **Limit Doomscrolling:** Encourage breaks from distressing news. Balance awareness with solution-focused stories.
- **Connect with Nature:** Spend time outdoors. A personal connection to nature is one of the strongest buffers against eco-anxiety.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if your child is experiencing significant distress that requires additional support, please do not hesitate to reach out. We are partners in supporting your child's well-being.

Sincerely,

[Teacher Name]

[School Name]

[Contact Information]

Thank You for Choosing UM Printables!



Your support means the world to us. If you found this resource helpful in addressing your students' eco-anxiety and building climate resilience, please consider leaving a review on Teachers Pay Teachers.

Your feedback not only helps us improve but also helps other educators find resources that prioritize student well-being and SEL integration.

How to Leave a Review:

1. Go to your "My Purchases" page on TPT.
2. Find this resource and click "Leave a Review".
3. Share how you used it in your classroom—your story matters!

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Premium Classroom Resources