

Sometimes the climate change news is grim. The US election is a setback, global negotiations are stalled, pledges to decarbonize are running up against cost and inertia, and global warming is disrupting and destroying homes, food and water systems, and lives. It is depressing.

Are we screwed and is there hope? Those who work in the climate change sphere get asked this a lot. Their answers have a common theme, whatever terms they use. Some refer to two kinds of optimism or two kinds of hope; others make a distinction between optimism and hope. They say there is no place for blind optimism that complacently assumes all will be well. Instead, what's needed is a kind of optimism that is linked with action, a conditional optimism, or effective optimism, or pragmatic, realistic, urgent, impatient optimism. Similarly, they reject false, passive hope and turn rather to active or constructive hope, which involves a desire for something and taking steps toward it. When that desire is grounded in what we believe is right and needed, hope and action are not dependent on the outcome.^[1] No one knows what will happen next, and in that uncertainty there is possibility.

“Hope is not optimism. Optimism assumes the best, and assumes its inevitability, which leads to passivity, as do the pessimism and cynicism that assume the worst. Hope... means recognizing the uncertainty of the future and making a commitment to try to participate in shaping it. It means facing difficulties and accepting uncertainty. To hope is to recognize that you can protect some of what you love even while grieving what you cannot - and to know that we must act without knowing the outcome of those actions.” Rebecca Solnit ^[2]

“Set aside your resignation and nihilism. There is a wide range of possible futures. Peril and possibility coexist.” Ayana Elizabeth Johnson ^[3]

People are feeling anxious, powerless, afraid, sad, and angry, especially young persons,^[4] and may also experience terror, panic, guilt, grief, rage, frustration, bewilderment, helplessness, or despair. Here are suggestions I found for how to cope, with more resources in the footnotes.^[5] *Acknowledge* your emotions, positive and negative. It's okay to despair on occasion, but don't get stuck there; seek help if needed. *Appreciate* the blessings around you – other people, other life, the Earth. Walk among trees, admire clouds, talk to a friend, share a hug.

“Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the Earth gives me daily and I must return the gift.” Robin Kimmerer ^[6]

Do something. Taking action gives you more control and is empowering, especially collective action with others. As Greta Thunberg says, “Hope is something you have to earn, to create.”^[7]

“It doesn't matter if you're optimistic or pessimistic. There's just a necessary set of things we have to do to dodge a mass extinction event and keep civilization running and then, good things will happen and bad things will happen.... Let's just pitch in. Put your shoulder to the wheel.” Kim Stanley Robinson ^[8]

“There's not a point where everything is lost.... We can always prevent things from getting worse. It's never too late to do as much as we can.” Greta Thunberg ^[9]

Stay informed, but monitor your news consumption, both time and content. One way I deal with scary subjects is to try to learn more. Writing helps me think; having readers helps me write. Thank you for accompanying me on my climate change explorations. Shirley, cloudyclimate.org

FOOTNOTES AND RESOURCES

[1] Is it wrong to be hopeful about climate change? Diego Arguedas Ortiz, Jan 2020, BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200109-is-it-wrong-to-be-hopeful-about-climate-change>)

[2] *Not Too Late: Changing the climate story from despair to possibility*, Rebecca Solnit & Thelma Young Lutunatabua, eds (2023). Stories of grief and hope, from youth-led Pacific Climate Warriors declaring, “We’re not drowning. We’re fighting” to elder activist Bill McKibben, who “has long said, when people ask him what’s the most significant thing you can do for the climate, ‘Stop being an individual; join something.’”

[3] *What if We Get It Right? Visions of climate futures*, Ayana Elizabeth Johnson (2024). Solutions in interview style; also, how the marine biologist author got involved in policy and The Blue New Deal.

[4] Feeling anxious, powerless, afraid, sad, and angry were the most frequently reported emotions in two surveys of young people: Climate emotions, thoughts, and plans among US adolescents and young adults. RE Lewandowski et al, Nov 2024, Lancet ([https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(24\)00229-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(24)00229-8/fulltext)); and Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey. C Hickman et al, Dec 2021, Lancet ([https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanplh/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00278-3.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanplh/PIIS2542-5196(21)00278-3.pdf))

[5] Resources for climate anxiety (also called eco-anxiety)

>> Ten ways to confront the climate crisis without losing hope. Rebecca Solnit, Nov 2021, The Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/18/ten-ways-confront-climate-crisis-without-losing-hope-rebecca-solnit-reconstruction-after-covid>)

>> Active Hope, as discussed in this Zen Studies podcast (<https://zenstudiespodcast.com/response-to-the-worlds-suffering/>) involves gratitude, honoring our emotions, and being open to new ways, which can help with finding our part to play. The book is: Active Hope by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (2012); there’s a free online Active Hope training course (<https://activehope.training>)

>> The Climate Mental Health Network - resources and a Climate Emotions Wheel (<https://www.climatementalhealth.net/resources>)

>> Unthinkable Earth (<https://www.unthinkable.earth/resources/>). Support for climate distress; founded by Britt Wray, author of *Generation Dread: Finding purpose in an age of climate anxiety* (2023)

[6] *Braiding Sweetgrass. Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants*, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013). Our relationship with the world, “intertwining of science, spirit, and story.”

[7] *The Climate Book*, Greta Thunberg (2022)

[8] Can science fiction help us fight climate change? with Kim Stanley Robinson, Jul 2024, The Climate Question podcast (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct5wry>) - no transcript

[9] It’s never too late to do as much as we can, Greta Thunberg, BBC interview ahead of COP26, Oct 2021 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/science-environment-59110260>)

Bonus: a fun video to watch:

One behavioral scientist’s way to bring joy to climate action, Jiaying Zha, TED Radio Hour, Dec 2024. How to feel good while making greener decisions (Thank you DL for the link!) (<https://www.npr.org/2024/12/06/g-s1-36991/one-behavioral-scientists-way-to-bring-joy-to-climate-action>)