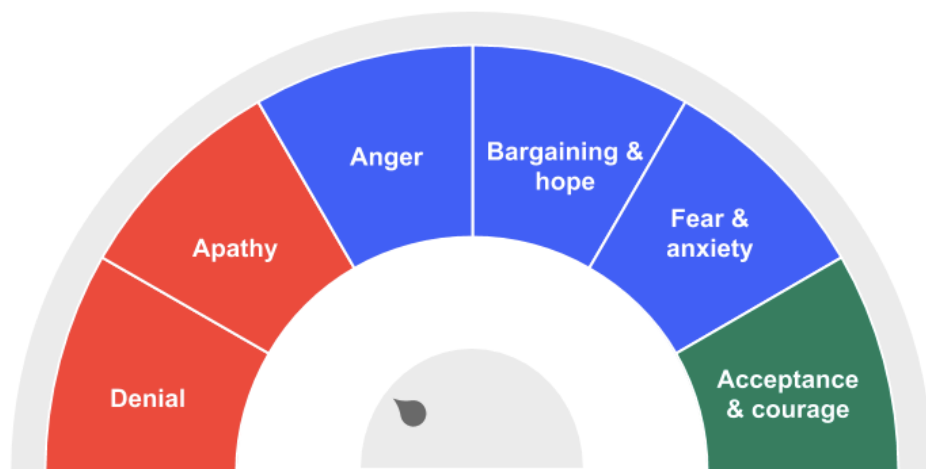


Shifting emotions tool

Audience understanding and engagement tool





Why do we need a tool for working with emotions?

When developing audience-centric campaigns, we have developed ways of studying attitudes, [values](#) and behaviors, which are all important aspects to consider in campaigns aiming to shift mindsets. **But how do we engage with audiences whose worldviews and behaviors are mainly driven by emotions, such as fear, anger or guilt?** Such feelings are often so unbearable that they lead to subconscious defence mechanisms like denial or apathy and thus disengagement with the topics that we campaign on.

Climate change is the best example of an issue that evokes difficult feelings and defence mechanisms (for more on this, read [Inconvenient Mind Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)). But how do we understand which emotions our audiences hold when even their own brains are hiding them? And how can we create campaigns so as to help them face and work through these unpleasant feelings, which often are the core barriers to change? This tool aims to give answers to these questions and assist in the design process of climate crisis campaigns.

How to use this tool?

Below, you can find two tables; the first table presenting the most common emotions people have as reactions to the climate crisis. In a campaign, our objective would be to move our audiences from red emotional defences like apathy and denial to green emotions of courage and acceptance. This sometimes requires moving them through other emotional stages (blue). People who are already in a blue emotional state should also be moved to green. The first table helps you to identify these emotions in your audiences.

It is important to note that we do not consider this as an audience segmentation tool. This is because, compared to attitudes or values, emotions are relatively unstable; they can shift quite quickly. What's more, people can hold multiple feelings at the same time. For example, they can feel fear about the consequences of climate change at the same time as expressing denial about their role in causing it. Or they can be just as afraid of climate impacts, as they are scared of their loss of convenience and thus express bargaining. Lastly - in contrast to the way we design strategies based on classic audience segmentation - an important part of emotional campaigning is to make our audiences self aware of their emotions so they can face and change them. Which is why the tool should also be used to develop strategies that help your audiences to understand their own feelings.

The second table provides information on what you need to consider when developing an engagement strategy for your audience. This is relatively simple if you are dealing with a person or a group of persons that hold one dominant emotion. But what do you do if the individual or group holds more than one emotion? We advise to engage first with at the red end of the spectrum - denial/apathy as engaging with fear or anger might raise defences of denial or apathy if still present.



Prevalent emotional reactions	How to identify the emotion in audiences?	What are their needs and tasks for moving on?
Denial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Offering counter- arguments to reality >Downplaying the general or personal impacts >Denying one's responsibility and agency >Denial can be partial so they might see the crisis but not their role in it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >To accept the reality as it is happening, and to link it to personal life. Even if this means accepting one's fear too.
Apathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Had cared about the issue in the past but can not hold the emotional tension. >Expresses resignation and absence of agency >Can show hedonistic attitude ('it is to late anyway so let's enjoy the time we have left') 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >To re-engage with the topic and feel resilient and empowered enough to face one's feelings.
Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Blaming (corporations, governments, parents, society). >Often see themselves as the lesser villain. >Often feel disempowered >Can be fired up and energetic or burned out >Tries to preserve the past and potentially resistant to change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Develop the ability to hold anger and compassion at the same time. >Develop ability to accept loss
Bargaining & hope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Has hope or believes in any kind of solution that promises to maintain convenience. >Happy to delegate agency and responsibility >Relieves guilt by doing some small things, like uses less plastic or does more recycling >Creates himself 'acceptable versions of the apocalypse' that he can handle. >Creates reasons to justify his personal lack of change and engagement. >Creates justifications for personal exceptions for not acting responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Accept the gravity of the situation and the need and possibility of radical change. >Move from passive hope¹ to courage. >Ability to live with uncertainty.
Fear & Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Prolonged state of fear or pain, not being able to deal with the uncertainty. >Potential tendency of climate masochism or sardism² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Building resilience, to cope with despair and other difficult emotions >To find new meanings, new identities, and purposes.
Acceptance & courage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Inspired, ready to "start a new chapter", to contribute in a meaningful way. >Is doing actions, despite being unsure if action will be successful in avoiding a climate crisis. >Might not be stable in this stage but fall back into emotional stages of blue (sometimes red) >Considers adaptation as much as mitigation and feels agency in both 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Expand psychological and social agency >Provide meaning by offering them the chance to help others to reach the "green" stage. >Make them aware that it is normal that they fall back into previous emotional stages and give them confidence that they can return here.

Table 1: Part one of the Emotions Tool³. Identifying prevalent emotions and defining change-objective. The objective of the emotions tool is to assist audience journeys from red or blue emotions to green (acceptance and courage for action), and to stabilize them in green. When moving people from red to green it might be necessary to transition them through blue. Red are emotional defences, blue feelings that act as drivers and green is the stage of acceptance and agency.

¹ Passive hope is that all will go well, because it always did or because god looks after us, or because technology will fix it.

² Climate masochism is the tendency to obsessively assess information of how bad the climate crisis is to trigger moods of depression and anxiety. Climate Sardism is the tendency to then spread this news with the intention to make people feel as bad as oneself.

³ This tool is still in development. If you are testing it, please add your name [here](#) so we can ask about your experiences. You can also send all immediate feedback to mindworks-group@greenpeace.org

Prevalent emotional reactions	How to engage with this group?	Possible tactics
Denial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Non-judgemental, patient listening > Create safe spaces to allow people to drop emotional defences and explore reality (including their authentic feelings) through asking questions and creating experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > On- and offline experiences allowing people to connect to their real feelings and offer support to face them. > Create 'aha' moments to help less defended people trip over the truth. > Use unlikely allies, messengers that are trusted, peers that are comfortable to talk about their feelings, in a context and with topics that are familiar to your audience.
Apathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Empathy and non-judgemental activation. > Reducing helplessness, while creating a feeling of community. > We're "all in this together" approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Create safe spaces to enable them to face and endure difficult emotions realities (i.e., create resilience). > Defining moments of connection. > Create support networks. > Create meeting spaces that feel safe to allow feelings to surface. > Use peers that have been here in this emotion, and have moved on. > Provide training to handle feelings of guilt and fear
Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Create outlets for anger without spurring rage or hate. > Create experiences to engage without judgement. > Create empathy for the challenges our mind and social context provides. > Create a forward looking perspective including adaptation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Engage into action. > Create conversations between opposing factions of society > Adaptation workshops > Collective mitigation work
Bargaining & hope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Build on first steps, enlarge the feeling of agency and responsibility without judgement. > Build pride and satisfaction in engagement journeys that encourage to leave the comfort zone > Provide satisfying substitution for lifestyle changes, not just preach relinquishment > Imagine treating an addict (of convenience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Socratic conversations, assess where people are and nudge them for more. > Create social norms that expand the notion of responsibility and the comfort zone. > Create peer networks > Create pride and community, and praise for leaving the comfort zone.
Fear & Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Communities of support and safe spaces. > Conversations, deep listening, and coaching. > Actionable adaptation and mitigation support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Conversations and workshops around tangible adaptation and mitigation strategies (creating agency). See street classrooms. > Create defining moments that create social connection and agency (engage them in civil disobedience)⁴.
Acceptance & courage for action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Using as the best examples, community leaders, exposing to other audiences for inspiration. > Provide tools to recover from falling back into blue or red emotions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Providing guidance for meaningful change. > Provide networks and tools that enable them > Provide safe space to assist recovery from emotional rollbacks.

Table 2: Part two of the Emotions Tool - developing engagement strategies and tactics. The aim is to develop audiences that can hold authentic emotions, to motivate them to act and build courage, and to teach them to hold fear and hope at the same time.

⁴ "I've always loved Gramsci's "optimism of the action is better than the pessimism of the thought." Action is a means of stoking the fires of hope, especially in a space where others are acting with me, where I see a cheeky chance we can win, and where our action is reinforcing deep sustaining values. Cynicism is the real enemy, action keeps it at bay." (A quote from Brian Fitzgerald).

Interactions with our audiences can be very diverse but if we want to resolve emotions we strongly recommend a format that prioritises listening, rather than broadcasting. Ideas how to design a conversation can be found in the conversation design tool.⁵

If you are looking for a set of questions that you could use to research your audience or that you can use in a conversation you can use these [example questions](#). At the end of this document you will also find [a list of answers to some of the most common questions](#) that we have noticed popping up during workshops and discussions when applying the tool in practice. This tool is based on two popular models that explain how to deal with feelings associated with loss and grief.⁶ The chapter following the questions explains [why these particular emotions are addressed and what loss and grief have to do with climate](#). If you feel like you need a longer introduction then this is a good read before you start.

Frequently Asked Questions

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> Why do we need to care about emotions? Won't people just act automatically when they understand the graveness of the problem?

Awareness and acknowledgement that climate change is man-made and a grave problem have substantially increased in the past decades among both the general public and decision-makers. But the necessary lifestyle and policy changes fall far short of this trend. We are tempted to perceive this just as a time lag. However imagine the discrepancy between our knowledge of a healthy lifestyle and our behavior. Knowledge is not enough to drive change.

> Shouldn't we just instill fear, guilt, and anger, and then use the feelings to drive people into action?

These emotions can be very strong motivators. But fear and guilt are emotions we humans do not want to experience for too long. So they are not sustainable drivers as our minds will search for ways to avoid these feelings. Especially, if solving the crisis takes a long time; our minds will create strategies to overcome these feelings without actually solving the problem. These are either placebo actions (I reduced my plastic use and decided to not fly into vacation this year), or we become attracted to arguments about why it is not so bad (denial) or why we should just give up (apathy). Anger can be maintained longer but this also leads to burnout over time. Fear, guilt and anger are also tricky feelings to instill in societies as they can easily be used to pitch people against each other and polarise societies, fostering inequality and social instabilities.

> Is the emotions tool only for engagement strategies, or can it also be used to inform advocacy work?

You can use the emotions tool to both engage with the general public, and to help build an emotional foundation when talking to politicians and corporate management. Knowing the emotions of our political or corporate counterparts, and moving their emotional drivers can be a very powerful way to create more systemic changes in their leadership.

> Are the emotions of our audiences as distinct as outlined in the table? And are they stable?

Even for a single individual it is not to be expected that they inhabit only one of the emotions. And the dominant emotion can change over time, as we have more hopeful or gloomy days. Emotions are strongly

⁵ The design guide is still under construction but will be released soon.

⁶ <https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/handbook/321-grief>

influenced by our hormones, and our worldviews are complex, which can trigger conflicting emotions at a time. Therefore this tool is not meant to label audiences or segment them into categories as we do it in value based segmentation. The tool is rather meant to acknowledge emotional stages and facets of a person to allow us to better engage with them.

> We are activists not psychologists, therefore shouldn't we leave dealing with emotions to the professionals?

It is great to see that professionals like the Climate Psychology Alliance or Psychologists for Future are supporting the transition but the societal transition will not happen because of the engagement of a few doctors. We need billions of acts of courage and that includes that we leave our comfort zone and start engaging with the emotions of our audiences. And we can learn a lot from each other when doing so, so if you have the chance to find a psychologist to support your work then do so, especially if we (Mindworks) are not there to help.

> Is this a linear process? Do people have to go through all different emotional stages?

No. Not all people go through all stages, and not all emotions are difficult in the same way for all audiences (thus they don't have to be processed in the same ways). People can change these stages based on the external incentives and impetus they receive (e.g. a new event, a new piece of information) and/or skip some of the emotions if they are easy for them to deal with. They might go back and forth between some stages, or fall back to an emotion they have already processed. For example, it is common for activists to go back and forth between acceptance and anxiety.

> Are there any other feelings our audiences might experience?

Yes. We have covered here the most common emotional reactions they might have. However, you can also use the template as a tool for addressing other emotions and defence mechanisms, if they have surfaced during the audience research of your campaign project.

The feeling of loss in the times of climate crisis

One of the main emotions that the rapidly worsening climate crisis triggers is that of loss. This manifests in two ways. The first is the loss of things we love due to the changing weather. For instance, landscapes, species, habits and lifestyles that are not anymore possible because of the changing weather. Sometimes these losses can be acute which can create traumas in people. For example, when losing one's house in a wildfire, a loved one in a typhoon, or a livelihood in a drought. Even for those not immediately and directly impacted, people who empathise with those that are affected, can equally develop a vicarious trauma⁷. Large proportions of people exposed to climate disasters suffer from mental disorders like PTSD or depression long after the event.⁸ But even if people have not yet experienced loss, they can develop anxieties, about fearing losses that could occur in the future.

The other type of anxiety can be based on anticipating future changes due to changes in the economy or the political framework. People fear as much economic instability, degrading convenience, degrading social security, loss of job or discontinuation of certain lifestyles. It is in our nature as humans that letting go of things we love is a difficult process that is often associated with painful feelings. For a lot of people

⁷ Byrne, M. et al. (2006). Predicting vicarious traumatization in those indirectly exposed to bushfires.

⁸ Berry, H. L., Bowen, K., & Kjellstrom, T. (2010). Climate change and mental health: a causal pathways framework. *International journal of public health*, 55(2), 123-132.



climate change appears as a loss, or at least as a tough choice, and this can trigger feelings of grief which is also a difficult feeling for people to handle.⁹

The stages of grief, change and the climate

When it comes to dealing with loss, letting go and grief, a useful model that helps to identify the emotions and the needs of the specific person/audience for moving towards action is the Kübler-Ross model¹⁰. It explains the stages of “grief” we go through when confronted with the prospect of a loss, such as being diagnosed with a terminal illness or passing away of a loved one. We use this model as the basis of the table.¹¹

This model has also been successfully used in change management¹² when people in organizations have to undergo significant change, for example restructuring, firing or change in management. It is therefore unsurprising that the model also helps to understand the emotional reactions to the climate crisis when it is seen as a change process.¹³ Many of us working on climate change know that much of our messaging suggests that life has to fundamentally change; we ask people to give up certain lifestyles, aspirations, habits that form a substantial part of our identities and lives. Therefore the prospect of change and uncertainty about the future in the context of climate crises, can trigger similar emotions as in the process of grieving.

Further reading

- > In [this Appendix](#), we explain **the emotions presented** in the table above, slightly more in-depth.
- > To read more on **ecological grief**, as well as the two models we used in this tool, we highly [suggest this blog article](#).
- > We have also created [a one-page A3 PDF version](#) of the tables.
- > A podcast on the [“sixth stage of grief” - finding meaning](#) with Brene Brown and David Kessler.

⁹ Most cultures have developed grief rituals to assist people through traumatic loss like the death of a loved one.

¹⁰ Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth, and David Kessler. (2005). On grief and grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss.

¹¹ We have expanded the original model to add some emotions that are prevalent reactions to the climate crisis, but are not discussed in the original model – apathy and courage. We have also combined it with the theory of grief, which discusses the different tasks that each person has to achieve in order to come to terms with the objective reality, so they can then act. We have used insights from psychology to translate the ways to deal with each emotion to create suggestions about engagement strategies and tactics.

¹² Friedrich, E., & Wüstenhagen, R. (2017). Leading organizations through the stages of grief: The development of negative emotions over environmental change. *Business & Society*, 56(2), 186-213.

¹³ Randall, R. (2009). Loss and climate change: the cost of parallel narratives. *Ecopsychology*, 1(3): 118-129.

