



CREATIVE LIFE MAPPING

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Self-Care for Climate Activists and Storytellers

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Your work to address climate change is essential and we urge you to be part of this storytelling community we are creating. Here are some resources to help you stay strong and resilient in the midst of the climate crisis and the many societal challenges we face.

First and foremost, in support of your mental health, we do not recommend denying your feelings. Many people are experiencing grief associated with losses and changes that have come with climate change. There are moments when we need to take time to pause and recognize these feelings. At the same time, we need work-life balance and opportunities to generate positive feelings and well-being, individually and as a community.

In the book [A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety](#), Sarah Jaquette Ray talks about the mental health challenges of climate and social justice work and advocates for a daily practice of self-care as a way to avoid burnout. Here I highlight and expand on some of these practices.

1. **Practice mindfulness and gratitude.** A daily practice of mindfulness and acknowledging gratitude helps us to stay centered and directs our attention to the good things we have in life. There are many free resources that are available to support these practices. One that I recommend is the [Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA](#) which provides [free guided mindful meditations](#) in multiple languages. The Greater Good Science Center provides instructions for creating a [gratitude journal](#).
2. **Avoiding self-sabotaging habits.** In the field of mental health, we advocate for healthy coping skills as opposed to unhealthy habits. Examples of healthy coping include acknowledging our difficult feelings, taking breaks, exercising, finding time for play, and focusing on self-care. Unhealthy coping strategies are things like suppressing our emotions, focusing too much on negative news, or doing things that hurt our body in excess. The [Greater Good Science Center](#) has many free resources on healthy habits, including a “happiness calendar”.
3. **Limiting use of social media.** Although social media has much potential to support positive storytelling around the climate crisis and create the tipping point for the change we need, it can also consume our time and take us away from our priorities. [Common Sense Media](#) provides tips for parents, educators and advocates on the use of social media for youth. Most of the literature on mental health and social media recommends a healthy balance between use of social media use and spending time on other activities.
4. **Getting enough sleep.** Sleep is fundamental to mental health. In studies of sleep health, it is recommended to establish a regular routine with the same wake up time each day. Other strategies include having a wind-down routine at the end of the day to focus on relaxation and get away from worries before going to bed.
5. **Focusing on the tasks you find fulfilling and in line with your priorities.** Each of us have particular motivations and passions that bring us to work on the climate crisis. There are so many areas that need attention! For example, if you have a passion for animals, you can focus on supporting natural ecosystems such as oceans and forests. If you care particularly about supporting children, you can help educate the next generation with climate solutions.
6. **Saying no to requests that are not aligned with your priorities.** We all have limited time. This becomes even more apparent to us as we get older. With the climate crisis, it is good to stay focused on climate solutions that have the greatest impact for achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions, as well as priorities that are based on our own expertise. Project Drawdown [lists the most impactful solutions for mitigating climate change](#).
7. **Fostering a support network.** As human beings, we are wired to connect with others for support and safety. On the flip side, as we have seen with COVID, loneliness can be traumatizing. The climate crisis creates an opportunity for us



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to develop a support network with others who are doing similar work. By working on common goals, we not only create a movement to address the climate crisis but also support each other at the same time.

8. **Cultivating compassion.** When we realize that we are not alone in our feelings and that others struggle with similar emotional distress, we can help to relieve suffering by listening, validating feelings and expressing compassion. Scientists have found that when we express compassion, our heart rate slows down and we secrete oxytocin – our feel-good, bonding hormone.
9. **Caring for others.** By getting involved in the climate activist community, we have a wonderful opportunity to care for not only ourselves, but also fellow activists. Personally, I have found climate activists to be some of the finest people I have ever met and spending time with them motivates me and gives me energy to do this important work. We can all take time to express appreciation and acknowledge each other's work.
10. **Visualizing good outcomes.** In the book [The Future We Choose](#) by Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac, they recommend facing our grief while holding a vision for our future. I was recently inspired by a video called [Imagine the Future](#) created by Climate activist Xiye Bastida.
11. **Creating better stories.** This is the goal of our storytelling work. We are focusing on how we can communicate effectively with others to motivate change and action. We plan to continue sharing stories to create a tipping point of change in our newly created storytelling community! We realize that messages need to be repeated, shared and effective to reach people. Please join us on [Slack](#) to share storytelling experiences!
12. **Celebrating successes.** As people, we tend to have a negativity bias where we focus our attention on potential threats. We are hypervigilant to danger. Although the news media has a role in highlighting the climate crisis, it is not focusing as much on the progress we are making and solutions. I love the work of [Project Drawdown](#), a non-profit organization that has identified over 80 climate solutions to reach our climate goals. [Regeneration](#) also focuses on solutions and provides a framework for taking action on a variety of climate concerns. [The Waggle](#) is a publication of Regeneration which shares inspiring stories by people around the world and initiatives to address climate change.
13. **Seeking beauty and pleasure.** There is much about the world we can appreciate even with the climate crisis. Identifying everyday pleasures and “bringing in the good” are ways of supporting joy in our lives. Going out and enjoying nature and sharing our experiences fosters continued support for preserving our natural spaces.
14. **Cultivating the relaxation response.** Our body and mind are inseparable. When we are in a constant state of stress, our body secretes stress hormones such as cortisol that, over time, have a negative impact on our health. [Relaxation](#) is the antidote. It can take many forms, such as taking time to breathe deeply, focusing on the present moment, connecting with our body, taking a walk, spending time with family or friends, or playing a game.
15. **Cultivating our creativity.** This brings purpose and adds vibrancy to our lives. Activities such as writing, reading, painting, cooking, making or playing music, and making things are examples. We can even apply our creativity to the climate crisis by coming up with our own ideas and solutions.
16. **Taking action and advocating to address climate change.** Some literature on climate and mental health notes that the overwhelming nature of the climate crisis can lead to inaction and despair. By finding and participating in advocacy and action, it builds our sense of self-efficacy, confidence and accomplishment. As we participate in advocacy with others, it builds our sense of community and shared purpose. [The Sierra Club](#) and the [Climate Reality Project](#) offer a variety of ways to become involved. There are many organizations doing great work.
17. **Engaging in conversations.** By bravely engaging in conversations with others about the climate crisis, we learn different perspectives and also can gain a sense of connection, and realize that we are not alone in our work.



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18. **Being in it for the long term.** Several years ago, I attended a workshop called Falling Awake with David Ellis. He recommended that we think beyond the time of our own lives. This long term thinking applies well in the climate crisis. We need to plan not only for ourselves, but also for future generations.
19. **Getting help when you need it.** One positive thing to come out of the Covid-19 pandemic was helping us realize that we all need help with our mental health at times. Seeking support by meeting individually or in groups can help us with our individual problems and environmental challenges. By calling your health insurance company or your local department of mental health, you can request mental health services. [The Climate Mental Health Network](#) offers a variety of tips to cope with the climate crisis.
20. **Continue learning.** I have found the climate crisis to offer many opportunities to learn, find solutions and avenues for advocacy. There are many ways you can learn. For example, the [Sierra Club](#) offers workshops, campaigns and publications. The [Climate Reality Project](#) offers leadership training. [Drawdown](#) has a variety of videos.

In the book and website Regeneration, Paul Hawken notes that a commonly asked question about the climate crisis is what to do?, where to start? and how to make a difference? We believe that there are many ways to take action. It is our hope that you will pick out a few actions you can take to support your well-being, while at the same time, joining us as we work together to address one of the biggest challenges facing humanity.

Resources that Focus on Self-Care and Hope in the climate crisis.

- **A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety, How to Keep Your Cool on a Warming Planet** by Sarah Jaquette Ray
- **Active Hope, How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy** by Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone
- **All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis.** Edited by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson & Katharine K. Wilkinson.
- **Drawdown, The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming** Edited by Paul Hawken
- **Falling Awake, Creating the Life of Your Dreams** by Dave Ellis
- **Go Gently, Actionable Steps to Nurture Yourself and the Planet** by Bonnie Wright
- **Regeneration, Ending the Climate Crisis in One Generation** by Paul Hawken
- **The Future We Choose, Surviving the Climate Crisis** by Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac
- **Under the Sky We Make, How to Be Human in a Warming World** by Kimberly Nicholas