



Tool 1.2. Offering climate emotions checks

CLARITY Competence Area: Taking care of climate emotions and trauma

GreenComp Competence Area: Acting for sustainability

Why use this tool?

This tool enables each learner to start growing their emotional literacy as well as emotional regulation skills, so as to limit and better cope with climate emotions, including climate anxiety. It is critical for learners and educators to check the level of anxiety, stress and overwhelm in the group, while providing simple practices to address some of the anxiety, stress and overwhelm on the spot. It helps express emotions so as to release the tension surrounding them.



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Activity 1.2.3. Climate emotions symbols

Overview

This artistic practice helps explore climate emotions by drawing symbols of our emotions related to climate change on a piece of paper or on the back of a fellow learner, and then discussing them with the group.

Curriculum linkage

Any discipline or class during which climate change is discussed.

Competences built

Emotional literacy emotional regulation, empathy, compassion, self-compassion

Basic info

- **Age range:** 7+
- **Duration:** 20-30 minutes
- **Group size:** Open
- **Level of difficulty:** Intermediate
- **Materials/space required:** A5 or A6 paper for each learner, felt pens, pencils or markers. Does not require a specific space.
- **Location:** Indoors
- **Engagement of external stakeholders:** No

Prep Work

Practice guiding breathing and grounding exercises.

Have information ready for learners who are particularly distressed and/or request additional support.

Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

1.1 'Fostering a trauma-informed learning environment'.

Activities from competence areas **1.2** that help you regulate your emotions and feel prepared to welcome the emotions of a large group.

Also **3.3.2**, Deep listening to others.

Steps in the activity

1. Introduction and breathing exercise



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2. Drawing of symbols
 3. Open-sharing
 4. Reflections and integration
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Step 1 - Introduction and breathing exercise

1. Inform learners that this activity is an invitation to express their emotions in a group and that they can choose to opt out. For adaptations for those who choose to opt out, please see below.
2. Make sure each learner has a piece of A5 or A6 paper and a felt pen or a marker, and explain to them that they will be drawing symbols.
3. Explain to the learners that they will have to draw symbols after the guided breathing exercise. Symbols are stylized representations of concepts, objects or relationships. No particular drawing skill is required to draw a symbol. You can show the group images of different symbols in general or in different cultures, and introduce their meanings, as this can help with inspiration.
4. Invite learners to take part in a breathing exercise to encourage them to connect to their body. You can invite them to close their eyes to do the breathing exercise. If you or some learners do not feel that closing their eyes and doing the breathing exercise will be helpful, there is an alternative: invite learners to keep their eyes open, lean back against their chair, feel their feet firmly supported by the ground, and just observe their breathing. If you or your learners are new to breathwork, or unsure, you may want to do this exercise with open eyes and feet on the ground, as deep breathing can amplify emotions while closing the eyes can feel like a disconnection and be potentially re-traumatizing for some learners.



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5. You can accompany the breathing or grounding exercise by encouraging learners to rub their hands together during the entire duration of the exercise, if they wish to.
6. While learners are breathing and rubbing their hands together, invite them to focus on the part of their body where they are feeling the strongest emotion(s) associated with climate change.
7. Invite learners to continue breathing deeply or grounding as they experience the emotions in different parts of their bodies

Step 2 - Drawing of symbols

After 3-5 minutes of guidance, invite learners to open their eyes, if they are closed, and start drawing a symbol representing their emotions immediately and spontaneously.

Step 3 - Open-sharing

1. Create subgroups of 3-5 people, depending on the time you have available (count 3-5 minutes per person).
2. For 18+ learners:
 - a. Ask learners to show their symbols to other members of the groups. For each symbol, the members of the group who did not draw the symbol are invited to comment on the symbol, by sharing how it makes them feel and what they interpret the represented emotions to be.
 - b. After all members of the group have shared their interpretations on the symbols drawn by other members of the group, each member of the group is invited to share what their symbols meant for them.



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- c. Remind learners that the purpose of the exercise was not to get the interpretation of each other's symbols right, but to explore the variety of climate emotions that can be felt, sometimes simultaneously.
3. For learners below 18:
 - a. Invite them to share what their own symbol means to them with the group.
 - b. Invite learners to reflect on the similarity or variety of climate emotions that may have come up.

Step 4 - Reflections and integration

- Provide learners with an opportunity to discuss the impact of the experience on them, and their relationship to their own climate emotions and to the climate emotions of others. This can be done openly in the classroom or through journaling exercises.
- Provide learners the opportunity to go outside, so that they can move, breathe, and integrate what they have felt and learnt before going back to the next class or assignment.
- If going outside is not possible, you can play some music and invite learners to move, get a drink of water, chat with their friends informally, before moving on to the next activity of your day.

Dos and Don'ts

Do



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- Acknowledge and accommodate the possible discomfort of learners when practicing breathing exercises.
- When offering the alternative of keeping the eyes open and feet on the ground, introduce it by saying 'If it helps you to close your eyes then do that, if not then keep them open, whatever you are most comfortable with'. It is important not to stigmatize the learners who choose that option.
- Offer learners the opportunity not to disclose the meaning of their own symbols to the other learners.
- Listen to learners who feel overwhelmed by the exercise, and/or express the need for additional support, and provide them with the information they need to access this support (check [1.1.1, Creating a culture of safety and care](#), for more details).

Don't

- Don't assess or judge the aesthetic quality of the symbols drawn.
- Don't foster a dialogue between learners around the emotions expressed, especially if this dialogue could lead to hierarchies between emotions or to questioning the validity of some emotions. The exchange space is about open sharing and deep listening (check the Listening tool 3.3).

Adaptations

If your learners do not want to take part in the exercise, encourage them to journal to just journal about the emotions they feel or do not feel in relation to climate change, or to listen to the guidance and both draw a symbol and journal, without any need to share with the group. For tips about journaling, check activity [2.1.1](#)



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We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how *you* want to be treated, but how *they* want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

References

This activity stems from a collaboration between One Resilient Earth and theater and visual artist Alois Reinhardt. It was improved thanks to guidance from Jo McAndrews, of the Climate Psychology Alliance.

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Grose, A. (2020). *A Guide to Eco-Anxiety: How to Protect the Planet and Your Mental Health*. Watkins. <https://www.anouchkagrose.com/books/a-guide-to-eco-anxiety>



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