ACE
Addressing
Climate
Emotions

an initiative of Halcyon Experience LLP

A Handbook on the

Climate Emotion Wheel

Halcyon Experience LLP
www.ace-the.com
www.thehe.in

CC BY NC SA

Climate Emotion Wheel v1.0
© 2025 by Halcyon Experience LLP

ACE
Addressing
Climate
Emotions

Halcyon Experience LLP

The Climate Emotion Wheel and the Handbook are original works published by Halcyon Experience LLP in 2025.

www.ace-the.com
www.thehe.in
Contact us at **thehalcyonexperience@gmail.com**

This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

You're welcome to use and share our content for free, as long as you:
– Credit us
– Don't use it to make money
– Share any changes you make in the same spirit (free and with credit)
To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

For commercial inquiries, please contact us at **thehalcyonexperience@gmail.com**

Acknowledgements

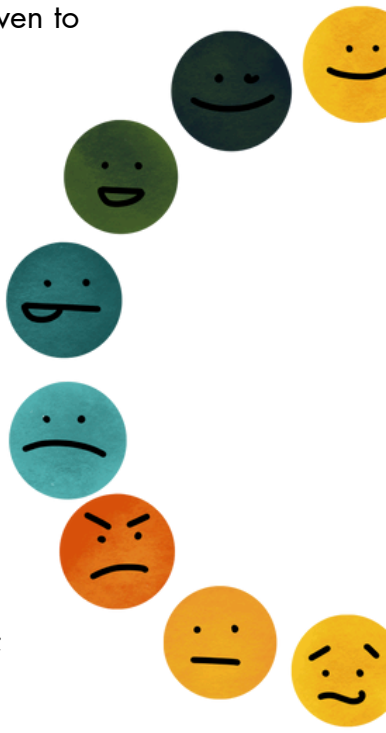
The developement of this wheel drew conceptual inspiration from existing frameworks such as Robert Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions and Gloria Willcox's Feelings Wheel.
We also acknowledge the earlier contribution by the Climate Mental Health Network (2022), whose wheel introduced a foundational visual framework for climate emotions.

ACE
Addressing
Climate
Emotions

Halcyon Experience LLP

About ACE

ACE (Addressing Climate Emotions) is a project of Halcyon Experience LLP, a mental health initiative based in Bangalore, India. ACE is a supportive structure that facilitates the exploration of emotional responses to the climate crisis, giving deeper insights into climate psychology while encouraging collaboration across fields to help, share and create communities driven to take effective action.



About the Team

Priya Vijay - Author; co-founder of *Halcyon Experience LLP* and *ACE*; dance/movement therapy practitioner

Bhavna Vijay - Contributor; co-founder of *Halcyon Experience LLP* and *ACE*; clinical psychologist

Neha Suresh - Illustrator & Designer

A key focus of their work is in climate psychology, where they explore ways to highlight the interconnectedness of personal, collective, and ecological well-being. They also design and implement arts-based programmes to support communities engaging with ecological distress, helping sustain creative and resilient responses to the climate crisis.

Table of Contents

Climate Emotion Wheel 1

Introduction 2

Why We Need this Wheel 4

Development of the Wheel 6

Components of the Wheel 9

1. Core Emotions (Innermost Circle) 10

2. Emotional States (Second Circle) 11

2.1 Radical Hope 11

2.2 Eco-Anxiety 13

2.3 Eco-Grief 15

2.4 Anger 16

2.5 Detachment 17

2.6 Guilt 18

3. Somatic Experiences (Third Circle) 19

4. Action/Response Pathways (Outermost Circle) 21

Shared Emotions Across Core Emotions 22

How the Wheel is Being/Can Be Used 25

Challenges and Considerations 26

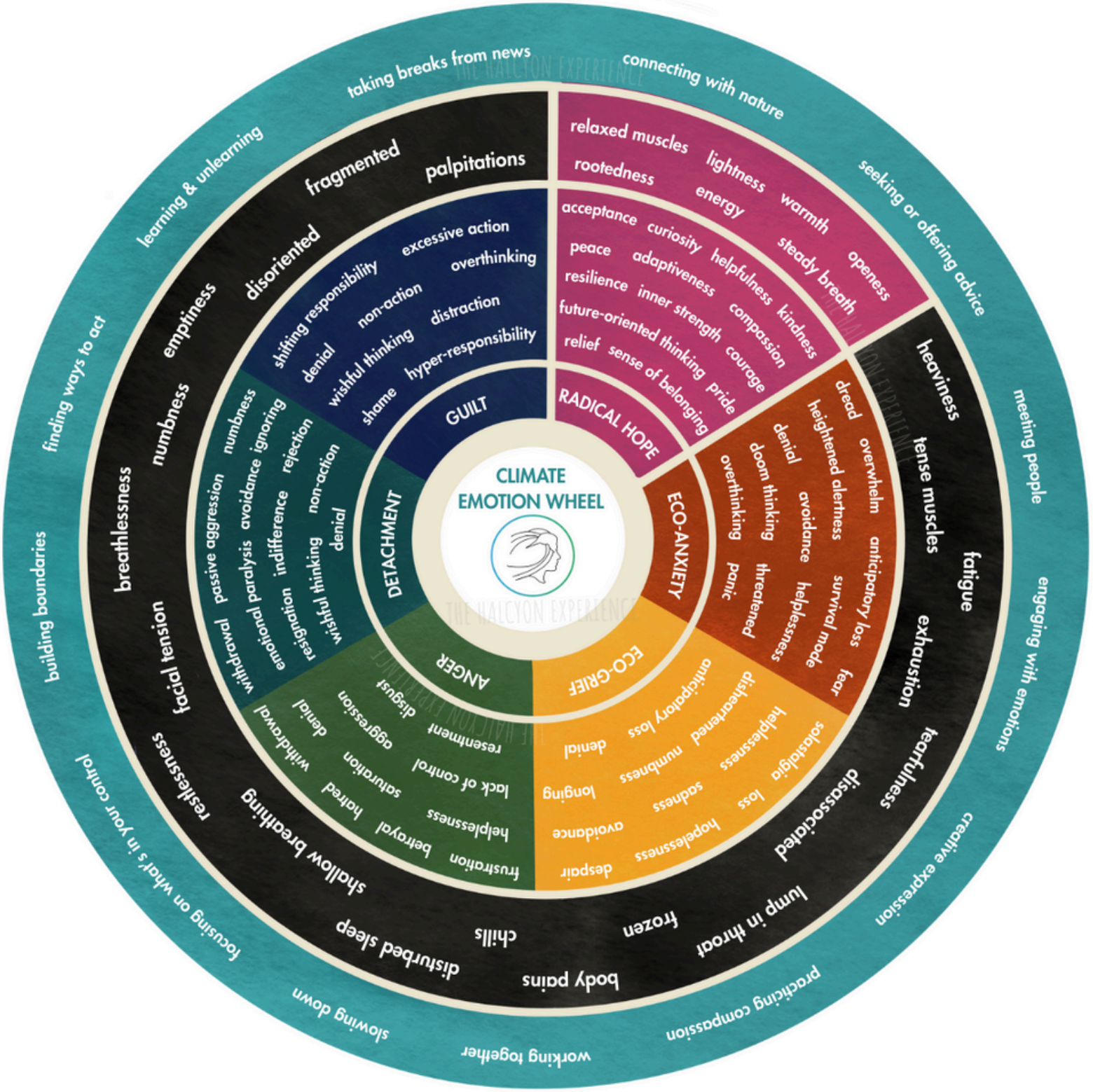
Conclusion 27

Suggested Reading and References 28

ACE
Addressing
Climate
Emotions

an initiative of Halcyon Experience LLP

CLIMATE EMOTION WHEEL



Halcyon Experience LLP
www.ace-the.com
www.thehe.in

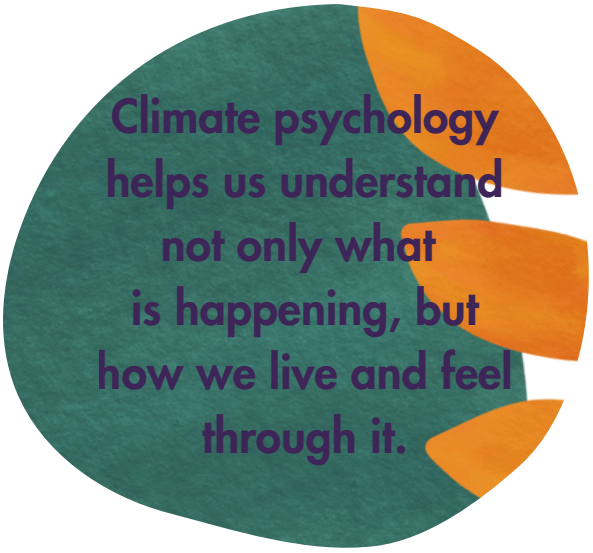
Climate Emotion Wheel v1.0
© 2025 by Halcyon Experience LLP is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Introduction

We are living through a time of overlapping and interconnected crises, or what many people may refer to as the polycrisis. This was coined by a French philosopher, Edgar Morin, when he explained how challenges of the modern world - political, socio-cultural, ecological and economic all have a cascading effect on each other and cannot be looked at in isolation. The polycrisis refers to the overlapping effects of systems such as climate change, wars, inflation, resource depletion and AI.

As we witness the climate crisis unfolding, we may think of it as only an environmental or political challenge. But the very roots of the crisis, as well as how it's playing out in our everyday lives, has emotional and psychological depth.

In spaces around us, whether it's in conversations with other people, or in interacting with students and young adults, or in community spaces, alive with resilience and determination, or in news stories that fill our feeds with reports of climate disasters across the world, people are grappling with feelings that are big, complex and probably exhausting.



We created this handbook as a tool to explore those feelings. This can be used by individuals grappling with their own responses, students, practitioners in climate psychology and mental health, educators, activists and community organisers looking for tools to build on emotional literacy and resilience.

Climate psychology is the study of human emotions and responses towards the climate crisis. This includes the systems, histories and contexts that have and continue to shape our behaviours towards this crisis.
The work of Caroline Hickman[1] and many others have contributed to how we are exploring *eco-anxiety,* a complex and adaptive emotional response to the climate crisis. Glenn Albrecht's[2] concept of S*olastalgia* has given language to the distress of losing a familiar home environment, while the Climate Psychology Alliance[3] has developed a broad vocabulary for climate-related emotional states that help increase understanding of this lived experience. Approaches like Joanna Macy's *Active Hope*[4] have shown how difficult emotions can be transformed into resilience, courage and meaningful engagement.

The Climate Emotion Wheel builds on this body of work, mapping four interconnected layers:

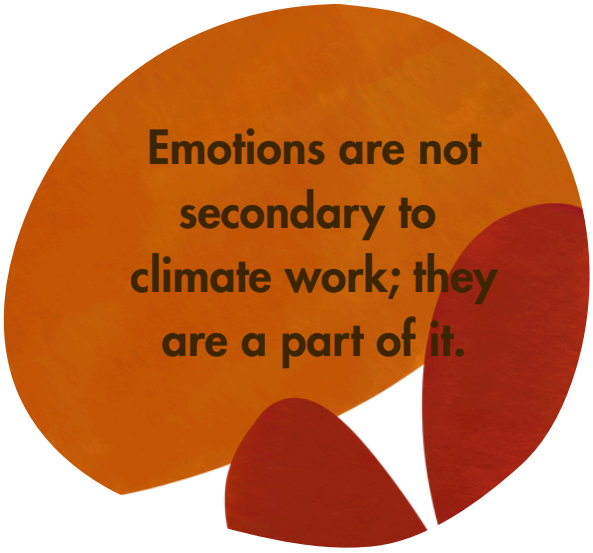
- **Core emotional states** — the larger emotions most commonly linked to the climate crisis.
- **Related emotional states** — specific feelings that emerge within those broader states. These can also be alternative ways of expressing the core emotion.
- **Somatic experiences** — how these emotions may be felt physically in the body.
- **Action/Responses** — ways to engage with and channel these emotions toward sustainable well-being and action.

The wheel is a work in progress and a tool intended to be used for self-awareness as well as in community dialogue, education and climate work. It will evolve as we learn from the ways people use it, helping us contribute to the emerging field of climate psychology research.

[1]Caroline Hickman (2024) – Article on eco-anxiety in children and young people, and how trust, agency, and hope are central to their experiences. Read here
[2]Glenn Albrecht (2007) – On Solastalgia, the emotional distress of losing familiar environments to climate change. Read here
[3]Climate Psychology Alliance – Climate Psychology Handbook (2022). A resource for understanding how psychology helps us make sense of the climate crisis. Read here
[4]Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone (2012) – Active Hope. A guide for finding meaning and resilience in the face of ecological crises.

Why We Need This Wheel

The responses to the climate crisis are as complex and varied as the crisis itself. Feelings of grief, fear, frustration and hope often rise alongside a deep sense of urgency, yet these emotions are frequently suppressed, misunderstood or dismissed as a distraction from "real/actual" work.
The Climate Emotion Wheel was developed to identify and name these experiences, to recognise them as valid and natural responses towards a changing planet and what that means for our futures.



Emotions are natural, valid and collective

Climate emotions are not signs of overreaction - they are proof that we feel connected to the world around us. Whether shared across a community experiencing a flood, or quietly felt by an individual reading climate news, these emotions are a part of a larger, collective reality.

A need to bridge gaps in emotional language

Within many existing frameworks of education, policy making or community work, strategies and outcomes are often prioritised over the emotional understanding that may also guide the work. Emotional work is often seen as an informal or a secondary process. The wheel addresses this gap by offering a shared vocabulary for recognition and response so actions can be taken with an emotionally informed perspective.

The wheel can be a supportive structure

During instances of sudden disasters, since immediate survival and action is often the priority, it is naturally difficult to reflect on emotional needs during such times. The wheel is not meant to replace urgent responses, but to be a tool for before and after - building emotional literacy ahead of time and processing experiences afterwards to sustain resilience.

Socio-cultural dimension of language and understanding

Climate emotions are expressed in different ways across communities and generations. While this version of the wheel is in English, it could be adapted and translated into regional languages, especially in the South Asian and other non-English speaking contexts. This would reflect the emotional vocabularies that already exist, making it more rooted and accessible.

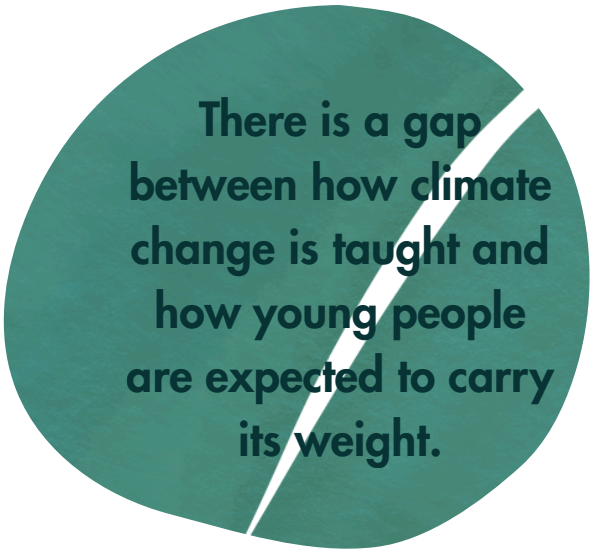
As research in climate psychology expands and as more people share their lived experiences, it is important that the wheel can adapt, so it stays responsive to the shifting realities of the crisis.

Development of the Wheel

The idea for this wheel came from our own personal limitations in understanding and communicating our feelings about the crisis. As practitioners attempting to build supportive structures that hold multiple realities of the climate crisis, we saw the need for a tool that could help put words to our felt and lived experiences.

When we began engaging with children, we found a huge gap between how climate change is framed in education and how children are expected to carry such big feelings. For example, in a chapter about the environment in the 2025 middle school textbooks from the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)[5], the highlight is on the governments' efforts in promoting sustainable practices, mitigating climate risks and encouraging simple practices of individual lifestyle changes. While it is important for the language of communication to be within the comprehensive capacity of an adolescent, it is also necessary to educate children of the larger, systemic roots of the problem. Children have a right to know about the damage that has already been done to the world that they will have to live in.
Coupled with the lack of mainstream discourses with children about their own futures, we have seen many young people feel overwhelmed and powerless because of a distorted sense of personal responsibility.

Some emotions, like Solastalgia, cannot be contained within an individual's inner world alone. They are shaped by histories and shared memories. It is not possible to shrink them into individualised "eco-friendly" actions. So we created a tool that could support this complex reality without over-simplifying it.



[5]NCERT (2025) – Our Environment (Class 7 textbook). An example of how climate change is introduced in Indian schools. Read here

Influences and Foundations

The Climate Emotion Wheel builds on previous emotion wheels that were developed to map and categorise human feelings. We looked at established models such as Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions[6] and Wilcox's Feelings Wheel[7], which organize emotions in a radial format to show how they are related. We also drew inspiration from Lindsay Braman's illustrated Emotion Sensation Feeling Wheel[8], which links emotional states to their physical sensations.

Our adaptation integrates a somatic layer and an action-oriented outer ring to encourage moving from awareness to response.

Choosing and Defining the Core Emotions

Rather than relying on "primary" emotions like fear, joy, anger and sadness (common in standard emotion wheels), we named six base emotions that arise specifically in the context of the climate crisis: Radical Hope, Eco-Anxiety, Eco-Grief, Anger, Detachment and Guilt. These are further broken down into smaller, more clearer emotional states. Because lived experience does not always fit into neat categories, some emotional states such as denial, helplessness or wishful thinking, appear in more than one core emotion.

Why Concentric Circles

The wheel is designed in four concentric layers:

1. Core emotions at the centre.
2. Related emotional states in the second ring.
3. Somatic experiences - the physical ways emotions show up in the body, in the third ring. For five of the core emotions, this is a shared set, Radical Hope has its own somatic profile.
4. Action-oriented responses in the outer ring, to help move from recognition to response.

This layered design reflects systems thinking: emotions, bodies and actions are interconnected. You can start at any point in the wheel and move inwards or outwards.

[6]Robert Plutchik – Wheel of Emotions. A foundational model of how core emotions expand into more complex feelings. Read here

[7]Gloria Wilcox – The Feelings Wheel. A practical tool to expand emotional vocabulary. Explore here

[8]Lindsay Braman - Emotion Sensation Feeling Wheel. An illustrated tool that connects emotions to physical sensations and feelings, offering a creative and accessible way to build emotional literacy. Explore here

Iterative Process

The wheel went through several drafts and will continue to, in response to climate psychology research, lived experience and feedback from the communities we work with. The repetition of overlapping emotions was kept intentionally, to reflect how complex and interconnected climate emotions are.

The Action/Response Circle

One of our key additions to existing emotion wheel models was the Action/Response Circle - a reminder that engaging with emotions and carrying out small actions is itself a form of response. The wheel mirrors emotional reality and helps navigate towards possible movement.

A Work in Progress

The Climate Emotion Wheel will evolve as our understanding of climate emotions deepens and as more voices contribute to it. Future versions may adapt it for different languages, cultural contexts and community needs.

The wheel is designed to reflect interconnectedness of emotions, bodies and actions.

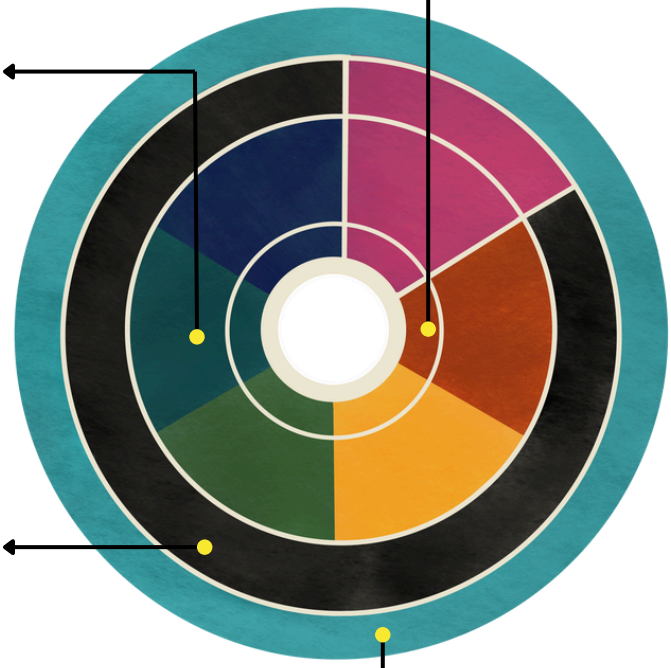
Components of the Wheel

Understanding the Climate Emotion Wheel: Four Concentric Circles

The wheel is made up of four concentric circles that help identify, name and respond to our feelings, highlighting how our experiences are interconnected.
This section introduces each layer:

1. Core Emotions (Innermost Circle)

These are six foundational climate emotions:
Radical Hope, Eco-Anxiety, Eco-Grief, Anger, Detachment and **Guilt.**
Each reflects a distinct way the climate crisis is emotionally experienced.



2. Emotional States (Second Circle)

Around each core emotion is a cluster of related emotional expressions, such as dread, overwhelm, helplessness, denial or courage. These help name the specific feelings that might arise within each emotional landscape. These can also be alternative words that help describe the emotion.

3. Somatic Experiences (Third Circle)

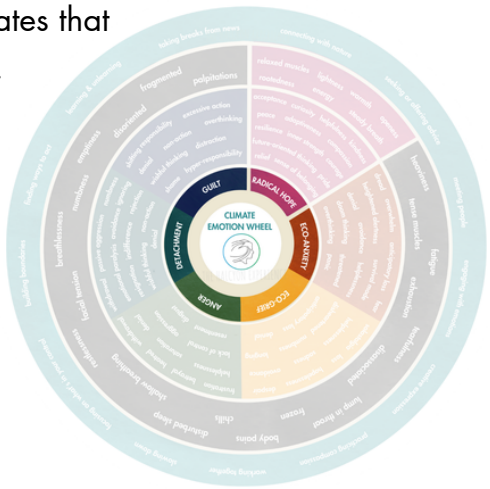
This circle captures the physical sensations that often accompany climate emotions, such as fatigue, tense muscles, numbness or heaviness. These are ways the body holds and communicates what may not yet be fully understood cognitively.

4. Action/Response Pathways (Outermost Circle)

The final layer offers supportive and grounded responses, such as connecting with nature, working together, engaging with emotions or practicing compassion.
These are not solutions, but ways to support regulation, connection and sustainable engagement.

1. Core Emotions (Innermost Circle)

This innermost circle names six foundational emotional states that many people experience in response to ecological crises. These are not rigid categories, but act as starting points.

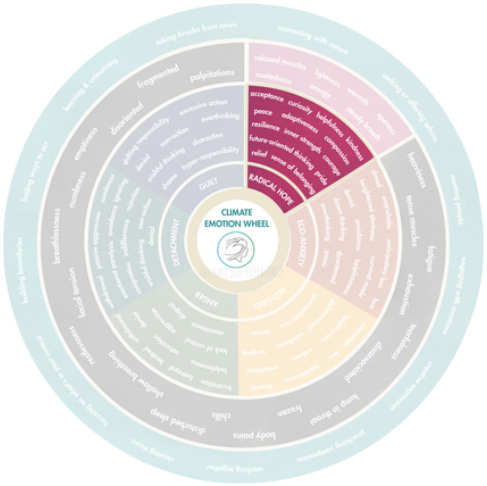


Overview of the Core Emotions

Core Emotion	Brief Description
Radical Hope	The capacity to imagine futures beyond collapse, grounded in values, resilience and care.
Eco-Anxiety	A state of fear, dread or overwhelm in response to ecological crisis and uncertainty.
Eco-Grief	Mourning for ecological loss - both what is gone and what may be lost.
Anger	A reaction to injustice, betrayal or harm in the face of the crisis.
Detachment	Emotional withdrawal or disconnection, often protective, sometimes habitual.
Guilt	A feeling of having caused harm, not done enough or benefited while others or the planet are harmed.

2. Emotional States (Second Circle)

This section describes in detail the emotional states that could be associated with a core emotion.



2.1 Radical Hope

The courage to stay present with difficult realities of discomfort, loss or uncertainty, while still imagining new ways of being. Different from hope, radical hope is not naïve optimism. It is the deep emotional capacity to act, feel and care in the face of disruption/destruction

Below are the emotional qualities and ways in which Radical Hope can be experienced -

- **Acceptance** – accepting realities and still having the capacity and inclination to reimagine actions and a future.
- **Curiosity** - an inclination to learn, question and discover what may yet be possible.
- **Helpfulness** – an impulse to contribute meaningfully in small and big ways to affirm that we are not entirely powerless. It is also a feeling of not being alone and asking for/taking help.
- **Kindness** - a deliberate choice to meet self and others with gentleness and care.
- **Peace** - a sense of calmness, even in uncertainty, that allows space for rest and trust.
- **Adaptiveness** – willingness to adjust expectations and behaviours as times change by letting go of old systems and learning to live differently and creatively.
- **Compassion** – a deep sense of care for the suffering of others, including the rest of the natural world. It moves us to act and protect, even when it's hard.
- **Resilience** – capacity to absorb disturbance and yet find ways to continue by recovering, integrating and/or changing.
- **Inner Strength** – an embodied sense of endurance and rootedness to hold grief, fear, joy and purpose without becoming overwhelmed.
- **Courage** – capacity/willingness to face painful and frightening truths and to act in uncertainty even when the outcome isn't guaranteed.
- **Future-oriented thinking** – ability to (re)imagine and emotionally invest in a possibility of a world beyond crises. Envisioning and planning alternative futures even if we may not live to see them.

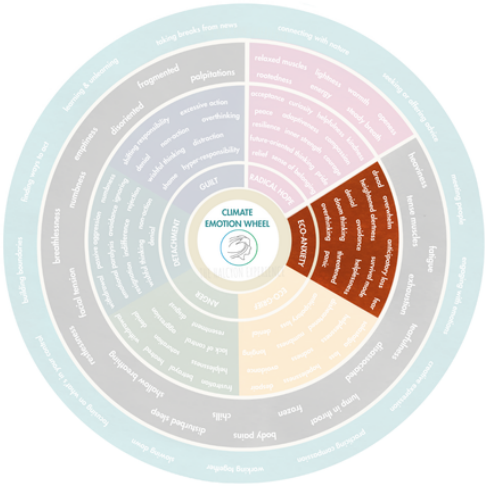
- **Pride** - a quiet strength that comes from recognising effort, resilience or shared achievement.
- **Relief** - the easing of tension when something feared does not come to pass, or when safety and possibility briefly return. It can feel like being able to breathe easier.
- **Sense of belonging** - the feeling of being a part of something larger, grounded in connection with people, hopes and places.

2.2 Eco-Anxiety

A term that describes heightened psychological and emotional distress in response to the scale of environmental change. The American Psychological Association, in 2017, explained eco-anxiety as a "chronic state of environmental doom".

The APA further asserts that this isn't a clinical diagnosis but a valid and increasingly common psychological response to the ecological crisis.

Experiencing eco-anxiety can be a sign of attunement to reality but if unaddressed, it can lead to burnout, denial or shut down.



The experience of Eco-Anxiety ranges from quiet unease to full-body distress, often combining overwhelm, existential fear and a disrupted sense of future.

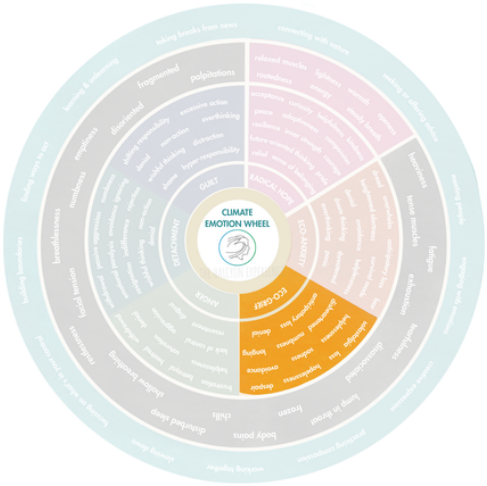
Below are some of the experiences of Eco-Anxiety -

- **Dread** – a persistent feeling that something terrible is coming, even when it can't be named. It can make the near future/future seem like an ominous fog.
- **Overwhelm** – a feeling of being emotionally and cognitively flooded and not having the capacity to process incoming information or stimuli. A feeling that everything is "*too much*".
- **Anticipatory loss** – anticipating possibility of more loss of species, habitats, ecosystems, places and futures.
- **Fear** – an acute sense and response to danger or vulnerability.
- **Heightened alertness** – a persistent readiness to detect risk or disruption often characterised by difficulty in resting or relaxing. It can feel like having narrowed, tunnel vision or being very vigilant.
- **Survival mode** – Getting by, by doing the bare minimum just to survive, not experiencing the qualities of being alive.
- **Denial** – most often a protective mechanism, this helps avoid overwhelm or collapse by blocking out, minimising or numbing climate-related information or emotions.
- **Avoidance** – a conscious or unconscious redirection away from distressing realities. It can mean not doing something because it brings in some sense of anxiety.
- **Helplessness** – a felt absence of personal and collective power to influence change - like nothing one does makes any difference or like one is incapable of improving the situation.

- **Doom thinking** – a sense of impending catastrophe or worst-case scenarios in response to the catastrophic nature of the crisis. It can seem like "*everything is going to end.*"
- **Threatened** – a sense of existential risk that can be personal, collective or planetary making it feel vulnerable and unsafe.
- **Overthinking** – a repetitive, sometimes uncontrollable mental loop in the face of uncertainty. It can also feel like a thinking overdrive.
- **Panic** – a sudden surge of intense fear that is often accompanied with a loss of grounding or orientation.

2.3 Eco-Grief

This is the emotional response to actual or anticipated ecological loss. It arises from the breakdown of our known worlds – species, ecosystems, places, identities, cultures and ways of living. It carries a deep sense of mourning, longing and love.

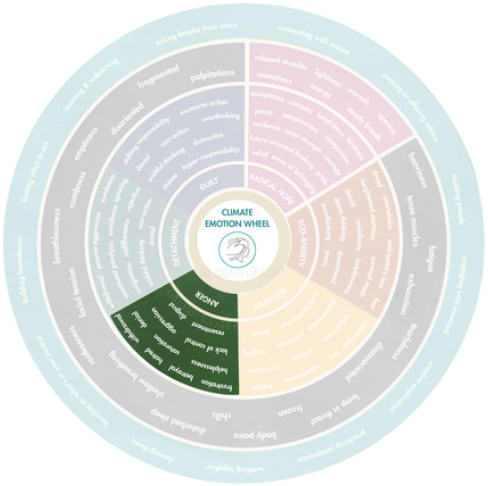


Below are the experiences of Eco-Grief –

- **Solastalgia** – Coined by Glenn Albrecht (2007), this describes the distress or pain that is caused by the loss of a familiar and comforting place because of invasive changes.
- **Loss** – a felt recognition that something once known, loved or relied upon is now gone. It can be physical, cultural, relational or symbolic.
- **Hopelessness** – a sense of despair that arises when meaningful futures feel out of reach or entirely absent. Often linked to irreversible loss or stagnation, it reflects a deep difficulty in imagining change or possibility in the present.
- **Despair** – a deep collapse into emotional pain characterised by a feeling that no comfort can be found.
- **Helplessness** – a sense of inability to protect or preserve what matters that can arise while bearing witness to destruction while feeling unable to stop it. It can also be difficult to ask for help.
- **Sadness** – a response to something cherished that has been changed, lost or harmed. It can carry disappointment, longing or grief and often holds within it layers of despair, helplessness or hopelessness.
- **Avoidance** - a turning away from pain too great to feel all at once.
- **Disheartened** - a sinking feeling or heaviness felt when hope fades and energy to keep going feels lost. This can make it hard to imagine possibility and sustain action.
- **Numbness** - an emotional or physical disconnection, often arising as a protective response to overwhelming intensity. It can feel like an absence of feeling when in fact it may signal the system being overloaded or shut down.
- **Longing** - a yearning for what is lost or endangered. A desire that comes from this yearning, to reconnect with people, places and identities.
- **Anticipatory loss** - anticipating possibility of more loss of species, habitats, ecosystems, places and futures.
- **Denial** - a protective refusal to fully acknowledge the depth or permanence of what has been lost, seeming like a numb disconnection from emotional reality.

2.4 Anger

In the climate context, anger can arise when harm, injustice or betrayal threatens people, ecosystems, communities or futures. Anger can mobilize action, protect the vulnerable or even conceal underlying grief, fear or powerlessness.

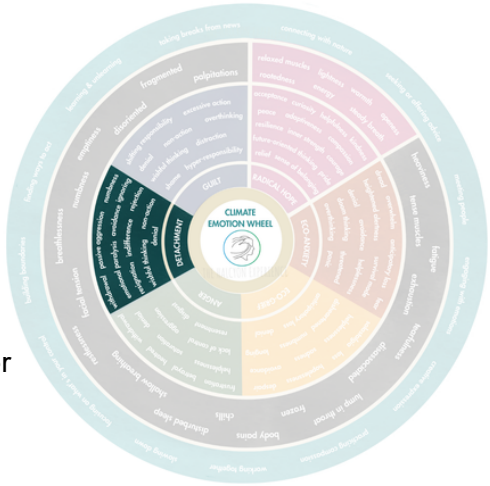


Below are some experiences of Anger -

- **Frustration** - a feeling that arises when meaningful change is obstructed, resulting in feeling blocked or unresolved.
- **Betrayal** - a response to broken trust particularly to those in power that may result in a loss of faith in collective structures.
- **Hatred** - an intense form of anger that can feel overwhelming, especially towards those seen as causing harm or injustice.
- **Withdrawal** - a retreat from engagement or connection as a result of repeated disappointments or injustice.
- **Helplessness** - feeling unable to influence outcomes despite urgency or clarity. When it's underlying anger, this may also feel like emotional volatility or collapse.
- **Saturation** - an emotional or informational overload leading to irritability or burnout. Often rooted in frustration from repeated setbacks or feeling unheard, it may surface as a mental or emotional "*I'm done.*"
- **Denial** - a redirection of felt anger - inward or displaced.
- **Lack of control** - an awareness of powerlessness towards larger, systemic forces.
- **Aggression** - an outward directed, intense response towards harm. It can be protective but can also isolate, escalate conflict or become misdirected.
- **Resentment** - a slowly growing dissatisfaction towards systems and injustice that can accumulate when anger goes unexpressed over time.
- **Disgust** - a distancing or revulsion in response to harmful behavior such as corruption, greenwashing or systemic failure.

2.5 Detachment

A psychological and emotional disconnection that arises in response to overwhelming, seemingly unresolvable or socially discouraged feelings. It can be protective, unconscious or even strategic. In the climate context, detachment can mask grief, fear or despair while reinforcing emotional distance and inaction.

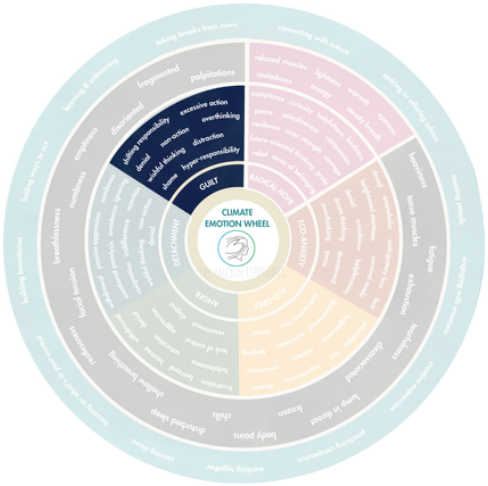


Below are some experiences of Detachment -

- **Withdrawal** - a pulling away from people, routines or information usually as a way of coping with helplessness.
- **Passive aggression** - indirect expressions of resentment or resistance, often through withdrawal or obstruction that may arise when direct emotional expression is unsafe or socially discouraged.
  This can sound like, *"Oh great you finally decided to care."* or *"Let's pretend recycling will save the planet."*
- **Numbness** - a lack of emotional sensation or response when distress exceeds internal capacity.
- **Emotional paralysis** - a state in which emotional responses become inaccessible or frozen often accompanied by indecision or inability to take meaningful action.
- **Avoidance** - a pattern of redirecting away from emotionally uncomfortable truths.
- **Ignoring** - a conscious choice to disengage from certain information or actions, usually to avoid confronting uncomfortable truths.
- **Resignation** - a retreat into inaction, marked by perceived futility or exhaustion.
- **Indifference** - a flat or neutral response to matters that may typically evoke concern.
- **Rejection** - a psychological dismissal of climate related concerns or emotions, acting as a defence against vulnerability or accountability.
- **Wishful thinking** - a reliance on imagined positive outcomes without grounded action or acknowledgement of reality, acting as an illusion that delays emotional responsibility.
- **Non-Action** - a pattern of emotional or behavioural inactivity despite awareness of crisis that may result from apathy or overwhelm.
- **Denial** - a conscious or unconscious refusal to acknowledge distressing realities, protecting against overwhelm by narrowing perception or minimising threat.

2.6 Guilt

In the climate context, guilt arises from a perceived or internalised sense of responsibility for harm caused, complicity or inaction. It could stem from personal behaviours, generational practices or the tension between values and choices. Guilt can motivate repair but it can also lead to shame or distorted action.



Below are some experiences of Guilt -

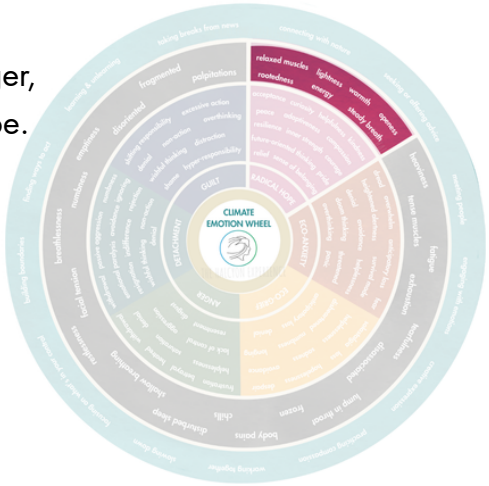
- **Shifting responsibility** - a tendency to deflect blame or accountability onto others or external systems, usually arising as a defence against the discomfort of personal complicity.
  It can sound like, *"This isn't my job"* or *"They started it, let them fix it."*
- **Excessive action** - a pattern of over-performing or over-correcting as a way to compensate for guilt. This can seem like, *"If I don't do everything, I'm not doing enough and nothing will change."*
- **Denial** - a refusal to acknowledge the depth or consequences of one's role or impact, to avoid confronting internal discomfort.
- **Non-Action** - a state of emotional or behavioural paralysis despite awareness or concern.
- **Overthinking** - a thought spiral focused on moral judgement, decision-making or self-scrutiny that may arise when guilt becomes internalised.
- **Wishful thinking** - an idealized belief that things will resolve without difficult action or accountability, reflecting an attempt to bypass guilt. This can be like, *"Someone will figure this out eventually, we just have to wait."*
- **Distraction** - a turning away from difficult feelings through entertainment, over-engaging with tasks or keeping busy. It may feel relieving in the moment but prevents deeper processing of the guilt underneath.
- **Shame** - a painful self-consciousness rooted in the belief of being fundamentally flawed or bad, focusing on identity and leading to withdrawal or hiding.
- **Hyper-responsibility** - an inflated sense of personal obligation to fix or solve systemic problems that could stem from internalised guilt. This can lead to or come from a belief that responsibility rests solely on one's shoulder, rather than being shared collectively.

3. Somatic Experiences (Third Circle)

This circle captures the physical and bodily sensations that often accompany emotional responses. They can serve as early signals of emotional states that may not yet be consciously acknowledged.

Five of the six core emotions - Eco-Anxiety, Eco-Grief, Anger, Detachment and Guilt, share a common somatic landscape. This reflects the ways distress can settle into the body.

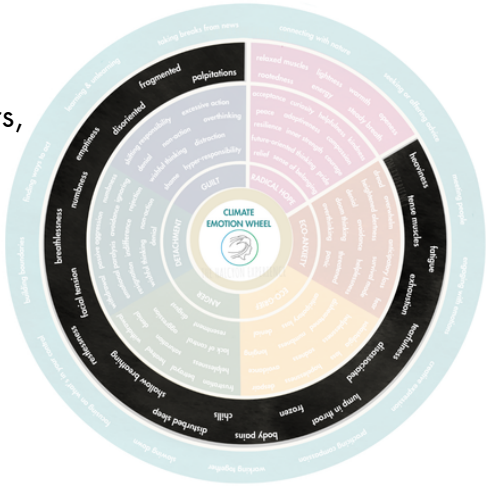
In contrast, Radical Hope carries a distinct somatic experience, often associated with openness, lightness and energy. Together, these bodily cues help ground awareness in physical experience, offering pathways to regulation, reflection and presence.



Below are the physical sensations that often accompany emotional states like **Radical Hope** that help us feel the possibility of hope, even when the mind struggles to find it.

- **Relaxed muscles** – a softening of sometimes chronic tension, most often felt in the jaw, neck, shoulders, back or chest.
- **Lightness** – a sense of ease, felt in the breath, back, shoulders or face that comes from sharing the load, not carrying it alone. This can also feel like breathing easier without feeling constrained.
- **Warmth** – a sense of heat or glow often felt in the chest, belly or hands that signals connection and capacity to care.
- **Openness** – a felt sense of space in the body, sometimes felt in the chest and breath, able to feel and be receptive without shutting down. It can also be a sense of accepting what's happening, internally and externally.
- **Rootedness** – a grounded sensation in the feet, legs or anywhere in the body as a sense of being held, or feeling anchored.
- **Energy** – a subtle yet vibrant sense of aliveness in the body, like a readiness to respond.
- **Steady breath** – slow, rhythmic breathing that helps feel and sustain.

These following shared sensations reflect the physical experience of **Eco-Anxiety, Eco-Grief, Anger, Detachment** and **Guilt**.



- **Heaviness** - a weighted sensation, often felt in the chest, head, limbs or the body as a whole. "*My chest feels tight*" can seem like a common experience.
- **Tense muscles** – involuntary tightening in the shoulders, neck, face, back or limbs.
- **Fatigue** – a persistent sense of tiredness not always relieved by rest, which can be felt bone-deep. Characterized by extreme tiredness, difficulty in going about daily activities, lack of energy and motivation.
- **Exhaustion** – a deep feeling of depletion of mental, emotional, social and physical energy.
- **Tearfulness** - a readiness to cry, with or without clear cause.
- **Disassociated** - a sensation of not being fully present in one's body or surroundings.
- **Lump in throat** – a tight, blocked sensation that often accompanies unexpressed grief or sadness.
- **Frozen** – a state of immobility or emotional stillness.
- **Body pains** – generalized or localized aches, often with no clear physical cause.
- **Chills** – sudden waves of cold or shivering.
- **Disturbed sleep** – difficulty falling or staying asleep, having vivid and distressing dreams, waking up earlier than usual.
- **Shallow breathing** – rapid, light breathing from the chest rather than the diaphragm.
- **Restlessness** – an inability to settle physically or mentally along with a constant need to do something/keep doing something.
- **Facial tension** – clenched jaw, furrowed brow, tightness around eyes or mouth.
- **Breathlessness** – a sense of restricted air flow, difficulty in breathing.
- **Numbness** – the absence of sensation or feeling, emotionally or physically.
- **Emptiness** – a hollow or vacant sensation that reflects a sense of something missing.
- **Disoriented** - a loss of grounding or sense of direction, internally and externally.
- **Fragmented** – a sense of being emotionally and physically scattered or disconnected.
- **Palpitations** - a sensation of fluttering, uneven, pounding or rapid heartbeats.

4. Action/Response Pathways (Outermost Circle)

The outermost layer of the Climate Emotion Wheel contains practices, responses and actions that support emotional processing, resilience and re-engagement. These are not solutions to emotions but ways of staying present and connected, without denying or bypassing what is being felt.

- **Connecting with nature** - spending time with the living world, with attention and care to restore a sense of grounding, belonging, awe and inspiration.
- **Seeking or offering advice** - sharing knowledge or tools across communities or disciplines.
- **Meeting people** - spending time in relationships - listening, laughing, grieving or creating - to strengthen social resilience.
- **Engaging with emotions** - allowing space to feel, name and express emotions without judgement. This can help prevent suppression or burnout.
- **Creative expression** - channeling emotional energy into art, writing, movement or performance, which can help integrate and communicate what is hard to say.
- **Practicing compassion** - extending understanding and kindness to self and others, including the rest of the natural world.
- **Working together** - collaborating with others to share effort, vision and care in an effort to build belonging and reduce isolation.
- **Slowing down** - choosing to pause, rest or act steadily in a culture of urgency.
- **Focusing on what's in control** - redirecting energy towards actions, decisions and relationships that are personally manageable. It can reduce overwhelm and build stability. Small intentional choices can create a sense of control within larger, uncontrollable situations.
- **Building boundaries** - creating protective space around energy, time or emotional labour.
- **Finding ways to act** - taking tangible steps, no matter how small, to align values with behaviour. This can help counter helplessness through meaningful engagement.
- **Learning & unlearning** - Making space to take in new understanding while letting go of beliefs, habits or assumptions that no longer serve. This includes recognizing histories, systems or biases that shape personal and collective responses.
- **Taking breaks from news** - creating intentional boundaries around climate-related media or doomscrolling.

Shared Emotional States Across Core Emotions

Some emotional states appear in more than one core category because their meaning, intensity and impact shift depending on the emotional landscape they emerge from. Below are context-specific examples of each.

Denial Across the Emotional Landscape

Core Emotion	**Denial - Example Phrase**
Eco-Anxiety	*"It's probably not as bad as they say."*
Eco-Grief	*"Things will go back to normal soon."*
Anger	*"There's no point feeling anything about this - nothing's actually happening."*
Detachment	*"I just don't think about it anymore."*
Guilt	*"I haven't really contributed to the problem, so I don't need to worry about it."*

Helplessness Across the Emotional Landscape

Core Emotion	Helplessness - Example Phrase
Eco-Anxiety	*"No matter what is done, it won't make a difference."*
Eco-Grief	*"The loss has already happened. Nothing can change it."*
Anger	*"People in power won't listen, so what's the point?"*

Anticipatory Loss Across the Emotional Landscape

Core Emotion	Anticipatory Loss - Example Phrase
Eco-Anxiety	*"This place will also be gone in a few years."*
Eco-Grief	*"I'm already mourning something that hasn't happened yet."*

Overthinking Across the Emotional Landscape

Core Emotion	Overthinking - Example Phrase
Eco-Anxiety	*"If I think through all scenarios, I can stop the worst from happening."*
Eco-Grief	*"Maybe if I'd done something earlier, this wouldn't have happened."*

Numbness Across the Emotional Landscape

Core Emotion	Numbness - Example Phrase
Eco-Grief	*"It's too much to take in, so I've stopped feeling anything."*
Detachment	*"I just go about my day like it's not happening."*

Wishful Thinking Across the Emotional Landscape

Core Emotion	Wishful Thinking - Example Phrase
Eco-Grief	*"It'll all go back to the way it was."*
Detachment	*"Technology will fix this before it's too late."*

Non-Action Across the Emotional Landscape

Core Emotion	Non-Action - Example Phrase
Detachment	*"It's not my job to fix this."*
Guilt	*"I feel so bad about it that I can't bring myself to do anything about it."*

How the Wheel is Being / Can Be Used

The Climate Emotion Wheel can be used in personal, collective and professional settings:

- **Personal reflection and emotional literacy** - individuals can use the wheel to identify their emotions, notice changes and patterns in how climate-related feelings show up.
- **Community engagement or sharing circles** - in group settings, the wheel can guide explorations that help people witness each other's emotions without judgement.
- **Education spaces** - teachers, facilitators and students can bring the wheel into classrooms or study groups as a visual aid for exploring climate emotions.
- **Burnout prevention in climate activism** - by naming and working through difficult emotions, activists can recognise early signs of burnout and help reorient themselves.
- **Therapy** - mental health therapists can draw on the wheel as a reflective resource to support clients navigating climate emotions.
- **Workshops** - the wheel can be used to spark dialogue and support mutual understanding and help participants explore both challenges and possibilities.

The wheel is meant to be shared, adapted and brought into conversations. We only ask that you credit its source, keep it non-commercial and pass it on with the same openness in which it was created.

Challenge and Considerations

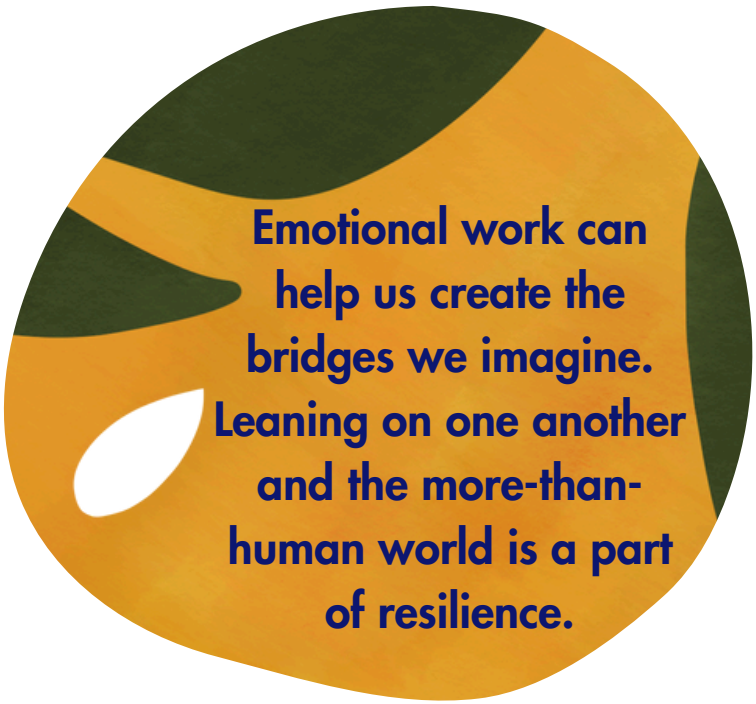
While the Climate Emotion Wheel may help address complexity, it may not fully hold everybody's experiences.

- **Emotional overwhelm or resistance** - for some, seeing their feelings named can be a relief; for others, it can bring up more than they are ready to face. Without space for grounding, the wheel may feel too intense.
- **Cultural relevance and translation** - while the emotions here are described in English, this is not the only or most resonant way to name them. In Indian and other South Asian languages, there may be no direct equivalents to some terms, as some emotions may have richer local expressions. This raises the possibility that in some contexts, the "wheel" might need to take on an entirely different form.
- **Accessibility and inclusion** - both visually and linguistically, the wheel could be made more accessible. For example, through multilingual versions, or by adapting it for low-vision readers.
- **Risk of oversimplification** - complex experiences can never fully be captured in a single diagram. The wheel is not meant to pathologize or "box" people in, but the risk exists if it's used without context.
- **Limits of origin** - most of the referenced research and emotional vocabulary come from Western climate psychology. The language to express South Asian climate emotions - rooted in lived realities, histories and local knowledge is still emerging. We acknowledge our own gaps in awareness and welcome contributions that can make this tool more rooted in the region.
- **Facilitation matters** - in group settings, having a skilled facilitator can help create deeper connections and protect people from unintended harm.
- **As a tool, not a solution** - the wheel is not a solution to the deeper roots of the crisis, it can only help people identify and respond to emotions to support them in the work they do.

Conclusion

Engaging with our emotions around the climate crisis can be a starting point for many to cross the bridge that separates our current world from the world that we are imagining. The wheel simply tries to support that. None of what we are going through is meant to be dealt with alone. As humans, social or solitary, we need to lean on each other, including the more-than human world, with respect, empathy and patience for any change to be meaningful.

This wheel is one tool among many, and it will keep evolving as our collective understanding grows. We hope this sparks more conversation and movement, reminding us that we truly are not alone.



Suggested Reading & References

- **Climate Psychology Alliance** – *Climate Psychology Handbook (2022).* A resource for understanding how psychology helps us make sense of the climate crisis. Read here
- **Caroline Hickman (2024)** – Article on *eco-anxiety* in children and young people, and how trust, agency, and hope are central to their experiences. Read here
- **Glenn Albrecht (2007)** – On *Solastalgia*, the emotional distress of losing familiar environments to climate change. Read here
- **Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone (2012)** – *Active Hope*. A guide for finding meaning and resilience in the face of ecological crises.
- **Amitav Ghosh (2016)** – *The Great Derangement.* A cultural and literary perspective on why climate change has been ignored in politics and storytelling.
- **NCERT (2025)** – Our Environment (Class 7 textbook). An example of how climate change is introduced in Indian schools. Read here
- **Robert Plutchik** – *Wheel of Emotions*. A foundational model of how core emotions expand into more complex feelings. Read here
- **Gloria Wilcox** – The Feelings Wheel. A practical tool to expand emotional vocabulary. Explore here
- **Lindsay Braman** - *Emotion Sensation Feeling Wheel.* An illustrated tool that connects emotions to physical sensations and feelings, offering a creative and accessible way to build emotional literacy. Explore here