

Eco-Anxiety and how the younger generation is carrying the world on their shoulders

Young people are feeling increasingly anxious about climate change and the effects a dying planet could have on their futures. Many feel helpless and feel there is nothing they can do to incite change that will make a global impact.

Temps de lecture : minute

5 November 2021

According to the BBC, nearly 60% of young people feel worried or extremely worried about climate change, with over 56% feeling that humanity is doomed. Many young people report feelings of betrayal by their governments, politicians, and adults. Failure to act by authorities is causing our planet to wear out and many young people carry the weight of this anxiety because their futures are the ones at stake.

What is Eco-anxiety?

In recent years, researchers have coined the term 'eco-anxiety' to describe the overwhelming and chronic struggles of many young people relating to climate change and its effects on the planet.

One survey found that 77% of young people in the UK get anxious when thinking or talking about climate change. 4 out of 10 young people are hesitant to have children because they fear what the future holds for them. Eco-anxiety is something that is being taken very seriously by health professionals due to the significant impact it is having on young people.

Who is most vulnerable to eco-anxiety?

It is perhaps unsurprising that the young people most susceptible to eco-anxiety are those environmental changes are affecting the most.

Individuals directly suffering from climate change and environmental changes such as wildfires, superstorms, and flash floods (to name a few) are certainly the most vulnerable.

Scientists have studied the links between natural disasters and mental health and there are some disturbing statistics to back up the above claim. For example, after Hurricane Katrina *claimed 1,800 lives*, 1 in 6 survivors were reported to show post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide rates more than doubled.

Furthermore, after Australia's Black Saturday bushfires, *15.6% of the affected community* were left with post traumatic stress symptoms years after the event had occurred. Eco-anxiety is a very real struggle for hundreds and thousands of people around the world and it must be addressed by governments and *world leaders as a driver for change*.

If climate change and the many issues surrounding this topic make you feel stressed, anxious, or depressed, you are not alone. Below we have listed just some of the ways you can take action to manage your eco-anxiety and start feeling hopeful again.

Steps you can take to help

Climate change is a very real threat and the anxiety surrounding this topic is completely understandable. In fact, *Susan Clayton*, co-author of the APA's eco-anxiety report assures us that, "anxiety is our signaling mechanism saying, "Hey, you need to pay attention to this issue 'cause it's threatening." It's what we do with these feelings of anxiety that matters.

As with all mental health struggles, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. For some young people, carrying out research and gathering as much information as possible is what helps them. While for others, turning off the news and disconnecting from social media helps them the most.

Below are some of the steps you can take to help manage your eco-anxiety.

Stay true to your values

More often than not, we can't change the actions of those around us but we can change our own. Sure, saying 'no' to dairy products and switching from a predominantly meat-based diet to a predominantly vegetable based diet may not change the world, but it will make a difference to you. What's more, by staying true to your values you will have a far more significant impact on those around you. After all, actions always speak louder than words.

Connect with like-minded people

How do you think Greta Thunberg first started her campaigns to end climate change? She led the way for others to follow and soon enough she was able to connect with like-minded people.

Connecting with people that share your values is a great way to manage your eco-anxiety and ignite hope for world change. Connections reduce isolation and help us feel less alone. If you struggle with eco-anxiety, we urge you to get connected with like-minded people and find a community you can be part of.

Spend time in nature

Finding green spaces and spending time in nature is extremely beneficial

for mental health. It promotes relaxation, helps reduce stress, boosts your mood, and lowers your risk of depression (to name just a few).

Finding green spaces to spend time in could include anything from your garden to forests, farmland, or parks. It will help you stay connected with the natural environment, stay inspired and motivated to drive positive change in your community, and it will help you stay grounded in your values.

Talk to others

Eco-anxiety, just like other mental health struggles, is an isolating thing. It often makes sufferers feel alone and helpless like nobody else even cares or understands.

This is why it is so important to talk to other people. This could be your friends or family, a therapist or a work colleague. But talking to other people about your eco-anxiety and your concerns about our changing climate is a great way to share your burden with others while also raising awareness of the issue.

Sometimes, people don't realise just *how bad climate change* is until someone they know talks about it. Sure, we've all seen the news and read the articles but often it isn't until a topic directly affects us that we can connect with it and make a real change. Talking to others about climate change is a great way to inspire action.

Final words

If you struggle with eco-anxiety, it's important to know that you are not alone. Eco-anxiety affects almost all of us to some degree. While you may feel helpless, alone, or let down by others, we hope you feel encouraged that change is possible.

Article by Daniel Groves