



Climate Mental Health Activities

Climate change is increasingly becoming a [topic](#) laden with anxiety, grief, anger, and other emotions, especially for today's youth ([Marks et al., 2021](#)), leading to a need for educator resources that can help address these emotions. To support the whole student, the following activities explore the relationship between climate and mental health, focusing on accessible, youth-friendly resources that aid teachers in

approaching complex and sensitive topics in the classroom.

Educator strategies for teaching climate change and mental health

- **Prioritize Self-Care:** Before approaching sensitive conversations in the classroom, check in with yourself, identify if you are feeling prepared to support the discussions of the day, and do any grounding work that allows you to feel comfortable.
- **Practice Validation and Appropriate Referral:** In the case that strong emotions arise amongst students it is important to validate their experiences and then assess how to move forward. This may mean making a referral to parents or school counselors to further support the student.
- **Establish Community Guidelines:** When approaching these topics, it can be helpful to create a class contract or shared guidelines that are referred to when issues arise or when the class needs to be re-centered on the discussion topic.
- **Respect Diverse Lived Experiences:** Teachers will encounter students with diverse backgrounds, varying in race and ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, and religion. With this, students may have a wide range of personal and communal experiences with the intersections of mental health and climate change.

Importantly, we believe the mental health and well-being of teachers should be safeguarded while discussing climate and mental health. We suggest you follow the educator strategies to the left when presenting these activities to students.

We recognize that teaching about climate change may give rise to controversy in some classrooms. For strategies to help facilitate difficult discussions, please see the [CLEAN teaching support pages](#) on managing climate change discourse.

The activities in this set are structured by objectives, overview, and delivery method. They are also aligned with a social emotional learning focus and the strategies listed in the graphic on the next page.



Discussions on climate and mental health can elicit strong emotions and reactions from students and teachers. It is important to invite students to these conversations and allow them to choose their level of engagement. The “Strategies to move yourself and your students beyond doom and gloom towards climate empowerment” offered here and on the [CLEAN Climate Mental Health webpages](#) can help provide support as well. Becoming familiar with these strategies will be useful to teachers and students both inside and out of the classroom.

Please note that while each activity lists an approximate instructional time, it’s important to be flexible when teaching about mental health and climate change to meet the specific needs of each classroom and to address the questions and emotions that may arise when focusing on these topics. Explore the [Climate Mental Health Network](#) to learn more.

STRATEGIES TO MOVE YOURSELF AND YOUR STUDENTS beyond climate doom and gloom towards empowerment

	<p>1 Self-care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be kind and compassionate to self • Practice good sleep habits and exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use self-soothing strategies • Talk with a trusted friend • Acknowledge this is tough • Ask for help
	<p>2 Integrate climate justice into center of conversations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know people from marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted by climate change • Know they experience climate grief more deeply than the majority population • Include diverse sets of voices, especially those most impacted • Include other ways of knowing 	
	<p>3 Listen and validate feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without trying to solve, fix, or dismiss • Provide compassion, care, empathy • Share that many people are working on this problem; not solely up to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show authentic curiosity • Remind they are not alone in feelings • Invite all voices to the table • Be aware of “settler privilege” • Create a safe environment for sharing, group norms and restorative practices
	<p>4 Encourage and take action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local & place-based • Student-guided & personally relevant • Foster care of nature through play • Support collective problem-solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurture personal agency • Focus on solving one small part of the climate crisis vs. the whole thing • Take action to influence policy • Be aware of intersectionality • Share successes of youth taking action
	<p>5 Join and create community and connection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join or create climate café groups to talk about emotions • Create opportunities for shared solidarity • Normalize conversations about emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support connection with family, friends, or special interest groups • Encourage collective action
	<p>6 Incorporate a trauma-informed approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize trauma-related reactions • Be conscious of potential triggers • Create a safe, and caring environment • Build trust through transparency • Identify & reinforce positive peer support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge strengths, encourage youth voice and choice • Challenge stereotypes and biases, acknowledge oppression
	<p>7 Use social, emotional, and positive coping skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help youth identify and express feelings • Facilitate empathy with others • Encourage self-compassion • Help youth tolerate ambiguity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice meditation • Vision about a positive future • Practice gratitude • Guide discussions around resilience
	<p>8 Move through grief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust feelings, admit there is a problem • Be curious • Be aware of how our ideas may be distorted • Focus on <i>what we can do</i> not <i>what have we done</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of physical feelings • Take a break when burnt out • Heal from past trauma in order to reconnect with the natural world • Look for beauty and meaning • Join support groups
	<p>9 Cultivate hope & resilience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach hopefulness • Use cognitive interventions to reframe negativity to be more objective & realistic • Give examples who love & care for nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide free time in nature for agency • Use sustainable practices to focus on behavior towards the future, multiple solutions, act in small steps, etc. • Reframe <i>eco-anxiety</i> to <i>eco-compassion</i> • Share examples of hope: people, stories



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Check out <https://tinyurl.com/Climate-MH-Strategies> for a list of strategies

These activities were created by:

The Climate Mental Health Network: <https://www.climatementalhealth.net/resources>

The Climate Literacy and Energy Awareness Network: <https://www.cleannet.org>

The Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences:

<https://cires.colorado.edu/outreach/>



The Emotions Wheel - Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

Emotions wheels have been a visual tool used by psychologists for decades to help people better understand and interpret their own feelings. This Climate Emotions Wheel is based on the research of Panu Pihkala at the University of Helsinki and particularly his 2022 paper Toward A Taxonomy of Climate Emotions. It is not intended to be comprehensive or definitive, and it is not to scale; positive emotions are not typically identified in most research as often as other emotions on this scale. Our hope is that looking at this wheel will help you and your students identify emotions about the climate and learn to work with them. This activity is for people of all ages and can be done with family members, in a classroom, with friends, work colleagues, etc.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	Elementary - College
Instructional Time	5-10 min
Learning Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To make the connection between diverse emotions and climate topics. To create a safe and supportive space for emotions that arise when processing the impacts of climate change. To provide language and validation for the range of emotions that can arise when discussing climate change.
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying one's emotions (CASEL Core Competencies: Self Awareness)
Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Self-care Listen and validate feelings Use social, emotional, and positive coping skills
Materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing paper and utensil
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toward a Taxonomy of Climate Emotions Climate Mental Health Network: To learn more check out the Self Care & Taking Action Worksheets, Creative Arts Therapy Guide, Resources Page and Parents Guides. Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html



Instructional Process

1. Show the climate emotions wheel to students. Tell students that any emotions that they feel about the climate crisis are normal and valid. Students will explore and connect with these emotions using the Climate Emotions Wheel Activity. Give students 1-2min to sit quietly and think about what emotions they have when processing climate change.
2. Hand out the blank Climate Emotions Wheel and tell students to write and draw whatever representation of the climate emotions they most often feel in each segment. Please refer to the complete Climate Emotions Wheel for possible emotions to include.
3. When they are done, have them share with someone about what they created, why, and discuss ways to address their emotions & practice self care.



Notes: Each level of the wheel, moving from the center outward, adds a layer of complexity. For younger students, consider only using the center ring. Include more rings (layers of complexity) depending on students' ages and abilities. Consider printing the wheel as a handout for students to refer to in any applicable classroom activity.

Closure

Once all pairs have had a chance to share, invite each group to highlight any common emotions and/or major differences.

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Climate Emotions Wheel

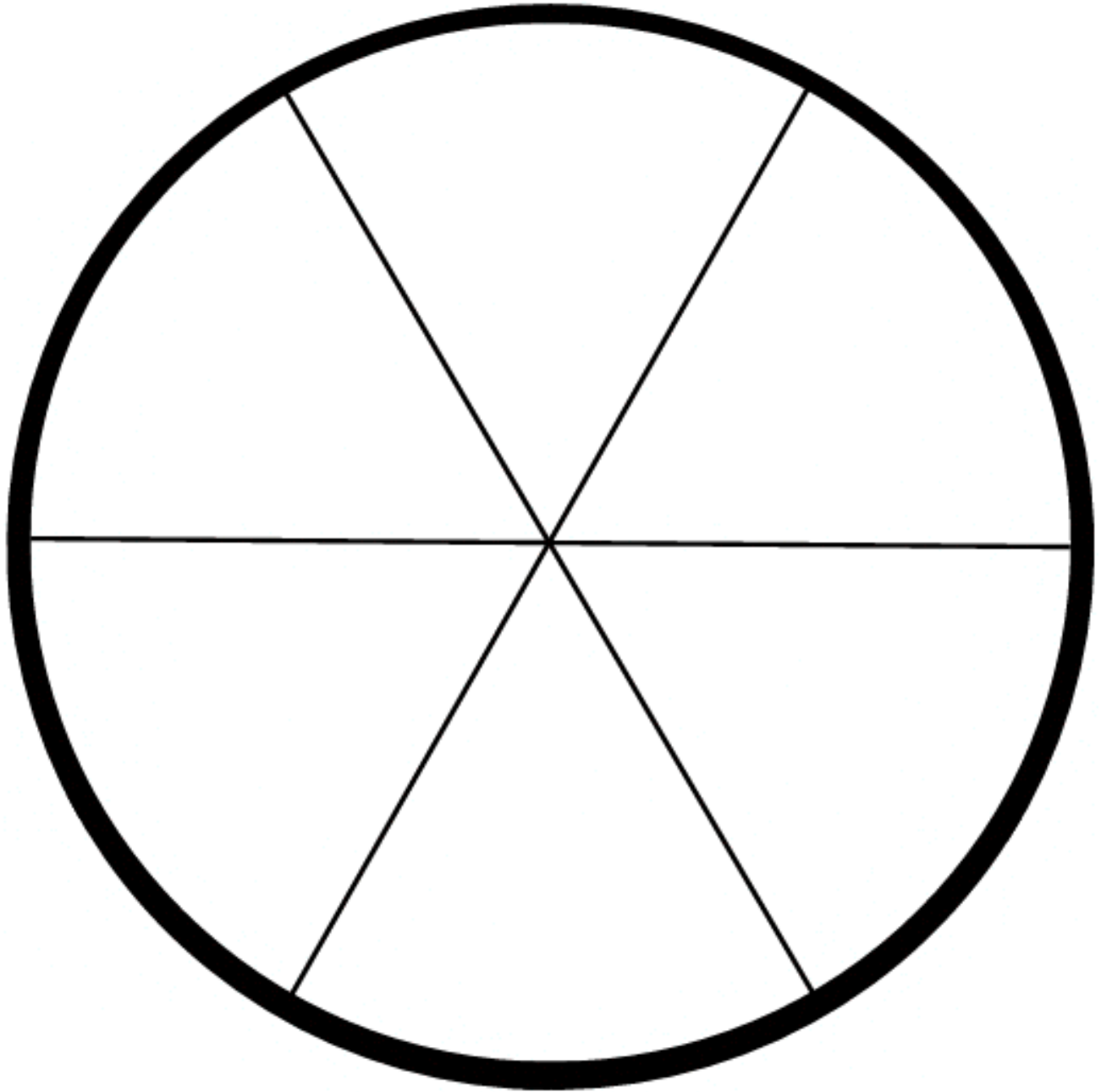


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Framing Environmental Issues and becoming a climate leader for mental empowerment

Climate Emotions Wheel Activity Sheet



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Active Listening Skills - Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

In this lesson, students will identify emotions they experience as they learn about the impacts of climate change. In pairs, students will practice active listening skills as one student describes their emotions to the partner who applies active listening skills. They then flip roles and the other student describes their emotions while the partner listens.

Note that it takes time to become comfortable with Active Listening, it might be helpful to include it as a regular practice in your teaching.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	Middle School- College
Instructional Time	15-20 minutes (<i>total time needed</i>)
Learning Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand how the power of listening to others can create positive relationships with others and create empathy for others To use active listening skills that support healthy relationships and classroom dynamics
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students identify their emotions, in a think-pair-share model students share their emotions while their partners use active listening techniques to understand their partner's thinking and emotions (CASEL core competency: Relationship Skills)
Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Self-care Listen and validate feelings Incorporate a trauma-informed approach Use social, emotional, and positive coping skills
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Slide deck <input type="checkbox"/> Stopwatch
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active Listening Technique Climate Mental Health pages from CLEAN: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/empowerment/index.html Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html



Instructional Process

- 1) First, prompt students to think about climate change or follow up on a previous lesson focused on climate. Learning about the impacts of climate change causes many different feelings in all of us. On a piece of paper write down the emotions you feel as you are thinking about climate change/[or *name the topic of the lesson*].
- 2) Refer to the graph on slide 2 in the [slide deck](#). Ask students to identify if the emotion they wrote down is listed in the graph and what percentage of youth describes similar feelings around climate change impacts.
- 3) Introduce Active Listening Skills using slide 3 in the [slide deck](#), refer to the link in the speaker notes for instructions on the Active Listening skill steps.
- 4) Divide students into pairs. Let students know that they will share the emotions that each experiences when learning or hearing about climate change. Instruct the students to spend 2 min talking while the partner uses the Active Listening skills. Remind students to practice the six steps of active listening and let the partner speak uninterrupted while paying attention. Encourage students to use body language but don't interrupt or respond. Set a timer for 2 min.

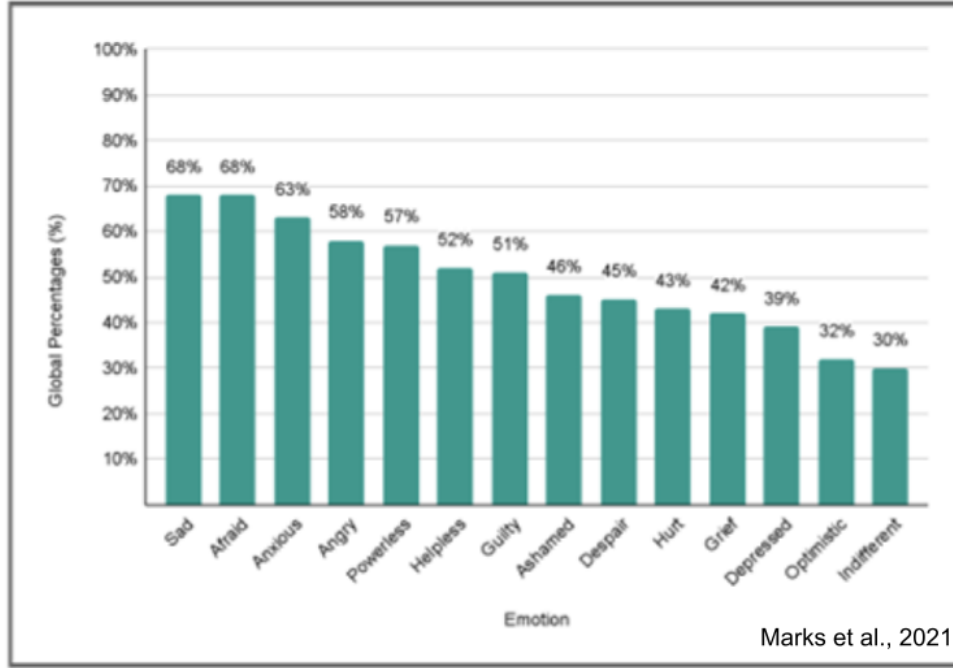
Adaptation Suggestion: If any student is uncomfortable with describing their feelings to other students, they could instead i) tell a related story about someone else they have known or have heard or ii) a video they may have watched, or iii) speak in general terms about climate emotions by reflecting on the infographic in slide 2.

- 5) After 2 min, ask student pairs to switch and remind students of the active listening steps.

Closure

Debrief with the class classroom by asking how the Active Listening went or encourage students to share thoughts about the content they shared or heard.

Guided [meditation](#) or a physical activity (jumping jacks or stretching) will help students transition.



6 KEY ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

- 

1. PAY ATTENTION.
- 

2. WITHHOLD JUDGEMENT.
- 

3. REFLECT.
- 

4. CLARIFY.
- 

5. SUMMARIZE.
- 

6. SHARE.

Center for Creative Leadership



Grief in the context of climate change- Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

In this lesson, students will identify where they are in the grief process within the context of climate change, and reflect on how they can move through this grief process.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	Middle School - College
Instructional Time	10-15 Min
Learning Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be able to identify what place in the climate grief cycle they are. To move forward in the grief process by identifying solutions to mitigate climate change.
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students identify their emotions and identify solutions for personal and social problems (CASEL Core Competencies: Self-management and Responsible Decision-making)
Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and take action Incorporate a trauma-informed approach Use social, emotional, and positive coping skills Move through grief
Materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Student hand-out and a writing utensil
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate and Mind; Emotional Resiliency in the Era of Climate Change: A Clinician's Guide by Leslie Davenport, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017. Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html

Instructional Process

1. Ask students to determine where they are in the five stages of climate grief (see student hand-out) on the next page. If helpful and appropriate in your classroom, consider showing this brief clip from The Simpsons outlining the stages of grief- <https://youtu.be/1tHy1bJLrg>. If more detail on each of the stages would be helpful, or you would like to provide students with additional background information, consider



reading through the “Climate and Mind” article referenced in the sources. The article can be read individually, as a class, or assigned as homework before or after the lesson.

2. Tell students that it is okay to have whatever emotions they have. They don’t need to be “fixed”.
3. Ask students to pay attention to where they feel this grief in their bodies (ex. Tension in shoulders, upset stomach, etc).
4. Sometimes we avoid distressing emotions through distraction or other ineffective behaviors. Examples of distracting behaviors include things like watching tv, playing video games, watching Tik Tok, etc. Truly staying in the present moment with these emotions and feeling them fully can help move through the grief process. Ask students to reflect on the grief stage they are in: How can they fully experience and feel this stage? What do they need to be able to just feel their emotions and move through the grief process? Examples include noticing how they feel through meditation, talking with a trusted person, visualizing a past upsetting event, and imagining how they can be more resilient in the future).

Optional: If you feel enough trust exists between students, have students do a think-pair-share, and share their reflections with each other.

Closure

Ask students to brainstorm a list of things they can do to help mitigate the effects of climate change. Moving towards action and self-efficacy can help students move forward in the grief process.

Consider following this activity with the Visioning Possibility lesson from this set in order to move to a positive outlook after exploring grief.



Student Hand-out: Climate Grief

Where are you on the climate grief scale? Circle the stage (or stages) where you think you are and answer the question on the other side.

1) **Climate Denial**, where people ignore consequences or evidence out of fear of the implications.

What this looks or feels like:

Not believing the science
Making excuses
Avoiding
Ignoring
Not wanting to change your opinion

2) **Climate Anger** in those who oppose climate action or who are angry towards the people and systems that caused the climate crisis.

What this looks or feels like:

Exaggerations
Outbursts
Protests
Anger over perceived mistreatment or insult
Justification (showing something is right)

3) **Climate Bargaining** in which we downplay or avoid facing climate impacts by wishful thinking and token efforts.

What this looks or feels like:

Magical/unrealistic thinking
Positive spin
Minimal efforts
Defending privilege (rights or status)
Greenwashing: Giving a false impression that you are more sustainable than you really are

4) **Climate Depression** involves acceptance of the reality; but feeling hopeless and not motivated to act.

What this looks or feels like:

Overwhelm
Hopeless/helpless
Anxiety
Intrusive thoughts
Lack of energy and enthusiasm
Confusion

5) **Climate Acceptance** is ultimately where we hope to move ourselves and our children. In this stage, we have accepted reality and our feelings, but we have the opportunity to diminish the impacts on ourselves and our loved ones through collective action.

What this looks or feels like:

Engaged
Self-care
Initiating Change
Community Connection and Action
Advocacy



Where do you feel this grief in your body (ex. Tension in shoulders, stomach upset, etc.)?

Sometimes we avoid distressing emotions through distraction or other ineffective behaviors. Truly staying in the present moment with these emotions and feeling them fully can help us move through the grief process. How can you fully experience and feel the grief stage you identified? What do you need to be able to just feel your emotions and move through the grief process?



Facilitating Discussions and Creating Solidarity- Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

Talking about emotions related to climate change can help youth to process emotions, move on, and develop trust and connection with others through shared solidarity. In this lesson, students will discuss their thoughts and feelings about climate change with others, and learn how to reframe some of their thoughts. Consider teaching the Emotions Wheel and Active Listening activities before this in order to help students develop language and discussion skills.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	Middle School - College
Instructional Time	15-30 min
Learning Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be able to identify and explain emotions related to climate change. To be able to understand someone else's perspective by listening to and summarizing what they said. To be able to develop positive relationships by sharing similar thoughts and feelings with others.
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students identify and explain their emotions, understand their partner's thinking, offer support, communicate effectively, and develop positive relationships (CASEL Core Competencies: Self-awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills)
Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Self-care Listen and validate feelings Join and create community connection Use social, emotional, and positive coping skills Move through grief
Materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Board to write down question prompts
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional Resilience Toolkit for Climate Work Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html

Instructional Process



1. Set up a “safe space” by setting up norms with the group. Consider: inviting feelings, keeping what is said confidential, using “I” statements, practicing self-care (like stepping out of the group if needed), using listening skills, being curious and open-minded, demonstrating empathy and compassion, etc.
2. Have students get into pairs or small groups. One student is the listener, and the other(s) is the respondent(s). Students will discuss the following prompts:
 - What have you been feeling lately related to the climate, the environment, activism, and the future?
 - What makes you angry, scared, or apathetic about the future?

Have each person talk about their feelings related to the grief and loss of climate change. Each student should be given five minutes to talk and answer questions. Respondents should list emotions and thoughts that come up off the top of their heads. The other individual should listen attentively, say “Thank You”, and then seek to understand their partner’s perspective by summarizing what their partner said, stating “What I hear you saying is....” The listener should repeat the question to get the speaker to talk more, or move on to the next question.

3. To build solidarity within the group, ask the group if anyone would like to share out their personal feelings with the larger group (not their partner’s).

Optional:

For older students, listeners can also ask the following questions to help the answerer reframe their thoughts to try to make them more helpful and realistic.

- Is this thought helping you right now? What is something you can focus on right now that would be helpful?
- Is this [negative] thought 100% true? How can you replace this thought with a more realistic thought?

The instructor should model an example:

Answerer: I am so worried that my house will burn in a wildfire.

Listener: Is this thought helping you right now? What is something you can focus on right now that would be helpful?

Answerer: I can make an emergency to-go kit and educate my community about how to reduce wildfire risk.

Answerer: All of humanity is doomed.



Listener: Is this thought 100% true? How can you replace this thought with a more realistic thought?

Answerer: The future on this planet will look different from what it looks like right now.

Closure

Facilitate a Group Reflection around healing and coping: What is a way that you take care of yourself? What do you love about the world? What gives you hope for the future? Consider following this activity with the Visualizing Past and Future lesson to shift to a hopeful focus.



Nature Appreciation- Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

In this lesson, students will play, explore, appreciate, and practice perspective-taking in nature. All of these actions help positively connect youth to nature, and instill an ethic of care for the environment.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	Preschool – College
Instructional Time	30 min – 1 hr
Learning Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be able to take part in role-play or write about someone else’s perspective to demonstrate one’s ability to empathize. To be able to spend time exploring nature to manage stress and appreciate nature. To be able to name and implement actions that care for plants or animals.
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perspective taking, empathy & support, identifying emotions, expressing gratitude, using stress management techniques, identifying solutions for social problems (CASEL Core Competencies: Self Management, Social Awareness, Responsible Decision-making)
Strategies	4. Encourage and take action 7. Use social, emotional, and postivie coping skills 9. Cultivate hope and resilience
Materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor area, with natural components if possible <input type="checkbox"/> Magnifying glasses/bug boxes for younger students <input type="checkbox"/> Journals and writing utensils for older students
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional Resiliency in the Era of Climate Change by Leslie Davenport, Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2017 Using science investigations to develop caring practices for social-ecological systems For more on scientific drawing, see this lesson from the California Academy of Sciences. Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html



Instructional Process

Preschool – Elementary: Engage students in nature play.

1. Take students outside. If you have them, take some magnifying glasses and bug boxes with you. (Even if you don't have direct access to a natural area, youth can always find bugs around).
2. Ask students to observe, think about, or make what they think the animals or plants need to survive in their environment. For example, students might make a "home" for a bug, including water and food in that "home."
3. Model and encourage the use of "I notice, I wonder".
4. Have students role-play being a plant or animal to encourage perspective taking, for example, they may label animals in their environment with personal pronouns (he/she).
5. Try not to use the words "be careful" very often and try not to share any of your own fears (like snakes or bugs) with your students.
6. Bring students together and facilitate a discussion about what they like in nature and what they are thankful or grateful for.

Middle – High School: Engage students in personal reflection in nature.

1. Have students take a walk outside, silently paying attention to what they notice about the natural environment.
2. Have students find a comfortable spot to sit, and ask them to first calm their breathing: Breathe in for 6 seconds, hold breath for 2 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds. Have them do this for 90 seconds.
3. Guide students through the following meditation to help them focus on the present:
 - a. Notice four things that you can see in your environment
 - b. Notice three things that you can feel
 - c. Notice two things that you can hear
 - d. Notice one thing that you can smell
4. Journal using the following prompts:
 - a. Appreciating the natural environment: Write or draw what you appreciate about the natural world, or what you are thankful for. Thank those whose green actions support the environment. Thank yourself for having the courage to show up and make changes.
 - b. Perspective-taking with the natural environment: Imagine yourself as a plant or an animal. Write about what it would be like to be this plant or animal- what would you need in your environment? How would you react to changes in your environment?



Optional: Perspective taking with people disproportionately impacted by climate change:

- c. Now think about your own privilege and what sorts of things you take for granted when it comes to resources and/or personal impacts related to climate change. How are your experiences different from other groups? How might your experiences be different from other groups if your community was affected by a natural disaster? Why do the differences matter?

Closure

Brainstorm things that can be done to care for the natural world in the students' own backyards, schoolyards, or communities, and make plans to implement some of these ideas in the future

Extensions

Consider multiple sessions in order to make comparative observations over time. Even 5-10 minutes of observation each month can help students connect to their local environment.

Assemble a group display of scientific drawings focused on students' observations. Label and describe each drawing and display within or outside of the classroom.



Connecting with Special Places in Nature - Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

In this lesson, students will take time to connect to a place that is special to them. They are asked to sketch the features of their special place and prompted to think about how they interact with that place. In pairs, students share their drawings and responses with a classmate. Lastly, they are given time to individually reflect on how their actions can care for their special place and share those actions with other students as part of an end-of-class group discussion.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	Elementary-College
Instructional Time	25-30 minutes (<i>minimum time needed, if possible consider extending to at a full hour or more</i>)
Learning Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify emotions that students have for places in nature through drawing To identify students' everyday connections to nature To help students build reciprocal relationships with natural places
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students identify their emotions, explain their thinking to a peer, and consider caring actions (CASEL Core Competencies: Self-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making)
Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Listen and validate feelings Encourage and take action Use social, emotional, and positive coping skills
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Materials for drawing such as copy paper, colored pencils, markers, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Student-facing display such as a whiteboard for end-of-class discussion <input type="checkbox"/> (Optional) Sticky notes for group display of caring actions
Material Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have materials ready for students at the start of the lesson for drawing
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lesson modified from activity in S. Semken's Geology of the American Southwest college course Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html



Instructional Process

- 1) **Identify a place in nature:** Ask students to think about a place in nature that is special to them. You can provide examples that draw from the local environment (a family farm, city park, camping location, one's backyard, neighborhood street). Emphasize that places can be urban or rural, and located at different scales (neighborhood, city, region). Once students have a place in mind, ask them to describe what their place means to them (e.g. what makes it special).
- 2) **Draw features of the place:** Using the copy paper provided, ask students to draw the physical features of their special place. Encourage students to label the features and to write down any words that describe their place or words that they associated with their place. *If time allows, consider the optional extension activity (right) to help students consider other students' place meanings.*
- 3) **Identify connections:** Ask students to annotate the drawing to show how they interact with that place. Pair students together to have them describe their connections to their special places. Encourage them to think about how their interactions with their respective places might be similar or different and why.
- 4) **Consider reciprocity:** Prompt students individually to consider what actions they can take to show that they care for their special place. Encourage students to start small and think about caring actions that they could take on any day. Have students consider how their actions give back to nature and how that, in turn, helps nature give back to them. Ask students to write one caring action on a sticky note to place on the classroom whiteboard. Read the contributed actions aloud to the whole class, noting any themes in the actions the students suggest. Write any additional actions on the whiteboard next to the sticky notes.

Optional: If more class time is available, consider having students share out one or two examples of their place drawings to the entire class (after completing step 2). This can help other students consider different place meanings that they might want to incorporate into their own place drawings.

Closure

To close the class, use the student action ideas to help summarize the take-home lessons from the activity: a) how small actions can have a collective impact and b) how humans are part of nature through their interactions with special places.



Framing Environmental Issues and becoming a climate leader for mental empowerment

Potential extension:

Use this as a pre-post activity, having students engage with the process as they enter the academic year/semester and then asking them again as they exit. Compare and contrast their drawings, meanings, interactions, and ideas for caring action and have students reflect on how their ideas may have been influenced by what they took away from the course/instruction.



Visioning Possibility - Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

In this lesson, students will find inspiration from innovative solutions, envisioning a hopeful future and their role in it.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	3rd Grade - High School
Instructional Time	30 min - 1 hr
Learning Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To envision a resilient and hopeful future. To envision one's role in a resilient future.
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying solutions for social problems, Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being, Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts (CASEL Core Competencies: Responsible Decision-Making)
Strategies	4. Encourage and take action 7. Use social, emotional, and positive coping skills 9. Cultivate hope and resilience
Materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Computers and Internet Access to help inspire solutions
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional Resiliency in the Era of Climate Change: A Clinician's Guide by Leslie Davenport, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017. Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html

Instructional Process

1. Have students close their eyes and imagine what a resilient future would look like- a world in which people can withstand or recover from difficult conditions. For some classes and students it may be helpful if the teacher provides models this activity by closing their eyes and describing what they are seeing and feeling in their own vision of a resilient future. If students are having trouble, have they take a look at <https://solutions.enactingclimate.org/> and visualize a world in which one of the listed solutions was fully enacted.



2. Engage students by sharing innovative and interesting ways that address climate change.
 - [Feeding cows seaweed could decrease their methane emissions](#)
 - [8 Crazy Inventions That Can Save the Planet](#)
 - [Solutions | Project Drawdown](#) (Drawdown Solutions adapted for your students can be found at enactingclimate.org)
 - [Green Revolution](#)
 - [Ecochallenge](#)
3. Ask students to brainstorm their own innovative ideas about how to address climate change. The sky is the limit! Encourage innovation and ingenuity. Have students draw what their innovations look like, and share them with the rest of the class. *Note: Students will need some prior knowledge of climate change science and its impacts in order to think of solutions.*

Closure

Ask students to reflect on the impacts that their invention could have on their community and the environment. What current or future role can they have on their community and in mitigating the impacts of climate change?



Climate Solutions - Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

In this lesson, students will participate in a short scavenger hunt to familiarize themselves with climate change mitigation strategies and solutions for decreasing heat-trapping emissions.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	3rd grade - High School
Instructional Time	15-30 minutes
Learning Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be able to consider and identify different personal strategies for mitigating climate change effects within one's own family and community. To be able to encourage conversations within one's family and community about effective and concrete strategies for decreasing climate change effects.
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	Responsible decision-making: The ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations. (CASEL core competencies : Responsible Decision-Making)
Strategies	4. Encourage and take action 5. Join and create community connection 9. Cultivate hope and resilience
Materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Internet browser access for each student open to: https://drawdown.org/solutions/table-of-solutions <input type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Pencil/pen
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Drawdown Hawken, Paul. Drawdown. Penguin, 2017. For a 5th-grade adapted version of Project Drawdown solutions, which includes a glossary, visit enactingclimate.org. Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html

Instructional Process

Students answer the following questions individually on a piece of paper with the Project Drawdown web page open, then discuss in pairs or small groups.



Go to [Project Drawdown Table of Solutions](https://enactingclimate.org) (or enactingclimate.org for Drawdown solutions at a fifth-grade literacy level) and answer the questions below. If using Project Drawdown directly, begin clicking on the “scenario 1” column to sort solutions using this scenario from highest to lowest impact (this is the way in which the enactingclimate.org solutions are sorted).

1. List the top five solutions (the higher values in the scenario columns are the more impactful solutions).
2. What three solutions in the table are doable for you and/or your family starting today?
3. Choose one solution that is challenging to understand, read about it, and explain it to a friend or family member.

Students pair up and explain:

1. What they chose to expand upon in #3 with their partner.
2. What is most challenging for them about climate change solutions.

Closure

As a class, discuss:

1. What surprised you in the table of climate change solutions from the Drawdown Project?
2. What do you find most challenging about this topic?



Mindfulness Practices & Guided Meditation - Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

Learning about the climate crisis can bring up feelings of anxiety, grief, despair, and guilt. These emotions are hard to manage during the school day, but taking a moment to process them can help students and teachers practice self-care and compassion. In this lesson, students will participate in a short guided meditation to practice self-care and emotional regulation.

When used regularly, meditation can help students build emotional regulation skills and build a community of compassion and respect.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	Elementary - College
Instructional Time	10-20 minutes
Learning Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To use breathing practices to reflect on physical and emotional feelings that arise.
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students strengthen self-regulation through practicing meditation (CASEL Core Competency: Self-Management)
Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Self-care Use social, emotional, and positive coping skills
Materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Guided Meditation Recordings or Script <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Leslie Davenport Support for Emotional Resiliency in the Era of Climate Change <input type="checkbox"/> MindSpace Mindfulness Relaxation Exercise Script <input type="checkbox"/> Heal the Body and Mind Guided Meditation
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining meditation for students Meditation in Schools Resources Pause, Refocus, Assess: Meditation in the Classroom (Edutopia) Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html

Instructional Process



1. Introduce the idea of meditation - a practice centered around breathing that builds self-regulation skills. Consider using the "defining meditation" section from here- <https://upliftkids.org/blog/teach-meditation-to-kids/> to introduce students to the concept of meditation who may not be familiar.
2. Create a quiet, calm space. Dim the lights and ask students to find a comfortable place to sit.
3. Play one of the recorded meditations, or read the script for a guided meditation from Mindspace.
 - [Leslie Davenport Support for Emotional Resiliency in the Era of Climate Change](#)
 - [MindSpace Mindfulness Relaxation Exercise Script](#)
 - [Heal the Body and Mind Guided Meditation](#)
 - [Tree-Guided Meditation for Elementary Classrooms](#)

Closure

At the end of the meditation, end by asking students to notice any changes in their bodies. Invite them to think of a positive feeling or word that they would like to carry with them for the rest of the day.



You are a Climate Leader - Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

In this lesson, students will read brief biographies of youth climate activists and then reflect on how they can take climate action in their own lives. This lesson is best suited as the end of a unit or lesson on climate change as it requires some background knowledge on the causes of current climate change and potential mitigations or solutions.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	Middle/High School
Instructional Time	30-60 minutes
Learning Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To see examples of youth climate activists taking small actions To see themselves as capable of action on climate change solutions and mitigation
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students identify their emotions, explain their thinking, and understand their partner's thinking (CASEL core competencies: Self-Awareness and Social Awareness)
Strategies	2. Climate Justice 4. Encourage and take action 9. Cultivate hope and resilience
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher access to a web-enabled device for displaying or printing leader profiles, graphic organizer, and social media templates <input type="checkbox"/> Student-facing display such as whiteboard, flip chart, or shared digital document <input type="checkbox"/> (optional) Materials for creating an example post such as paper, pencils, markers, etc.
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find more information on climate change and mental health on the CLEAN Mental Health pages. Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html

Instructional Process



1. Ask students how climate change makes them feel. Use the [emotion wheel](#) to help students voice an emotion. Record students' responses in a public place and point out recurring emotions and themes. Validate these emotions by reassuring students their emotions around climate change are common. If teaching in a politically polarized region or classroom, consider reviewing [Controversy in the Classroom: Strategies for managing climate change discourse](#) before teaching this lesson.
2. Have students read the [profiles of youth climate activists](#) and any profiles of local climate activists you can find or create. As they read, have students record the following information in a [graphic organizer](#):
 - i. How did this person get started in climate activism?
 - ii. How do their actions create social change and what is that change?
 - iii. Choose one profile of a person who inspires you to take action and explain why.

Modification:

- Create a jigsaw of the [activist profiles](#). Students do a close reading of 1-2 profiles and then share a retelling with a small group.
- Add movement to this activity by printing the activist profiles and placing them in different locations around the room as stations.
- Include **local examples** in the leader profiles, or provide the opportunity for students to write their own leader profiles. There is always someone in your community or school who organizes trash pick-ups, plants trees, runs a resale shop, or who chooses to carpool to reduce their carbon emissions. Check the local newspaper for articles or write your own brief profile of that person.

3. With a partner or small group, students share which activist inspires them most and why. Discuss what actions they could do or already do in their life that are similar and feasible with the time and resources available to them currently.
4. Ask students to use one of the social media post [templates](#) (text, photo, or video-based) to talk about climate actions that they have taken as climate activists or use their posts to inspire others to take action.



Modification:

- If an example social media post is not appropriate for your group of students, substitute it with a newspaper article, public service announcement, or poster.

5. Conduct a gallery walk of posts

Closure

Have students individually reflect on the lesson in writing (sticky note, digital). Ask if or how their feelings changed over the course of the lesson and how. You may want to ask them to write yes or no if they want an individual check-in or conversation about their feelings with you.



Visualizing the Past and the Future - Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the [Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction](#)

Activity Summary

In this short activity, students will participate in a visualization meant to decrease stress or anxiety about disaster events and build resourcefulness and resilience. This visualization helps students to change their relationship with their thoughts and feelings surrounding an emotional event related to climate change, which can help to decrease the intensity of these thoughts and feelings in the future.

Instructional Overview	
Grade Level	Middle School - College
Instructional Time	10 min
Learning Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be able to use visualization practices to transform negative emotions from past events in order to increase psychological preparedness for future emotional events.
Social-Emotional Learning Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students use stress management strategies to manage their emotions and demonstrate personal agency (CASEL Core Competencies: Self-management)
Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Self-care Incorporate a trauma-informed approach Use social, emotional, and positive coping skills Move through grief
Materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Quiet Room
Sources and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr. Julianne Pearson Keeping the Brain in Mind: Practical Neuroscience Advice for Coaches, Therapists, and Practitioners Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html

Instructional Process

Teachers may want to scaffold this activity by practicing it ahead of time with something they see in their environment first to help give them an idea of how to visualize and play around with an image, and then move on to a memory. Teachers may also choose to just do the practice with their students, so that they know how to use it, and then encourage them to use it on their



own anytime in class when they are feeling less than resourceful (when they felt like they didn't have the knowledge, skills, or resources- equipment/tools, safe spaces, people that can help).

Begin the visualization by dimming the lights (if possible), and having a quiet room. Give students the choice as to whether or not they participate in this activity. If they don't want to participate, they can sit quietly and listen to their headphones.

Have students get in a comfortable position, close their eyes if they would like. Ask them to do a full body scan, starting with their heads and moving down to their toes, asking them to notice how each of these body parts feels. A couple of examples of body scan scripts/audio guides can be found on the [Mindfulness Exercises website](#) or the [Greater Good in Action website](#).

Read the prompts below to guide the visualization.

We're going to practice a guided visualization. This is a practice used to reduce stress and anxiety and build a feeling of resourcefulness and resilience. Begin by sitting in a comfortable position. Put away anything that might distract you, and close your eyes.

Visualize a specific event where you felt vulnerable, like you didn't have control of the situation, or didn't have the knowledge, skills, or resources to deal with the situation. This could be something like weather events (hail storms, tornados, dealing with a really hot/cold day), natural disasters (flood, fire, drought) or a time you weren't successful in your actions to support the environment (trying to recycle when no bins in site, not able to convince others to listen to you or change their behaviors to support the environment). It may take students time to identify an event so give extra time for this step.

Visualize the event as if you were in a movie theater, watching a movie scene of the event. Watch the movie scene, and notice how your body feels. You might feel your heart rate speed up, or your chest tightens, and that's okay.

Now, change some of the features of the movie. First, change the tempo. Speed it up and watch it on double time. Slow it down, and watch the movie in slow motion.

Next, change the lighting of the scene in the movie. Make the movie in black and white. Change the colors to blue or yellow tones in the movie.

If there are voices in the scene, change the pitch of the voices to high-pitched and squeaky, or low and deep.

Zoom in on an object in the scene, and now zoom out high above the scene so you can see the whole state.

As you change the features of the movie, notice how your body feels. Feel your heart rate slow and become calmer. As you start to feel calm, imagine floating into the movie scene and playing



a role in the scene. Instead of watching the scene, be part of the scene. Rewind the scene and play it again, but this time feeling calmer. Let your body remember what it's like to live through the scene, and how your body feels different now.

Now, imagine taking this more resourceful state you are in, a calmer, more confident state, to a future world that you are anxious about. Imagine that you float through this future world with more resourcefulness and capability.

Take a moment to take a few deep breaths.

You can practice this type of visualization technique, like fast-forwarding, zooming in and out, and rewinding to feel more perspective and resourcefulness in any challenging area of your life.

Closure

Ask students how they feel now compared to before the activity. Encourage students to practice this activity to help manage stress around potential future disaster events.