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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Middle School - College</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Time</td>
<td>10-15 Min</td>
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| Learning Objective| • 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 | • Students identify their emotions and identify solutions for personal and social problems (CASEL Core Competencies: Self-management and Responsible Decision-making) |
| Strategies        | 4. Encourage and take action  
                      6. Incorporate a trauma-informed approach  
                      7. Use social, emotional, and postivie coping skills  
                      8. Move through grief |
| Materials         | ☐ Student hand-out and a writing utensil |
                        • 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/1tHy1lbJLrg. 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.

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

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

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

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.
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?