

STILLNESS THROUGH ART

a guide to overcome

ECO ANXIETY



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An Australian Government Initiative



Bendigo Bank Community Enterprise Foundation™



FOREWORD

This short book embarks us on a lifelong journey into the surrounding world at the same time as into our inner world. In doing so, it opens dimensions of living as a sensitive participant.

The anxiety created by nature's crisis is the starting point. Eco-anxiety is felt by all who feel part of nature. It is a response to the helplessness individuals feel in the face of natural and social forces ranged against our connectedness with the environment.

Anxiety is a diffuse, disturbing, disabling feeling of threat. But its defining feature is fear without an object. Fear of something definite such as bushfire, flood, drought affected trees or a wounded animal we can respond to. Anxiety is the fear this will happen more and more without our knowing where or when or being able to change it. Eco-anxiety is the uncertainty of a destructive process going on around us outside our control.

In the face of anxiety, it is easy to be disheartened, despondent even powerless. But the solution to anxiety is to move beyond it and find a basis for action. The action has to be wider than the anxiety and this book offers exactly that.

By showing how to activate artistic faculties and leading this by a steady sequence out into the nature, brings us into relationship with our home. Anxiety separates us, but the meditative art we are introduced to brings us back to relationship with the world we are a part of.

We cannot change all we want that is wrong in the world, but if we bring ourselves into relationship with our artistic, spiritual and natural being, we take a step in the reconciliation that our world needs. This is a change anyone can make.

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Dr Rob Gordon

Clinical Psychologist

INTRODUCTION

This guide book contains information and activities that can help with eco-anxiety. Some activities are designed for adults, and others for children. They are for you reader an opportunity to really experience some of the ideas presented. They are designed to be effortlessly healing, so be sure to do them!

For those of you who learn best by doing, you can even do the activities without first reading the accompanying information. Or, use the information to refer to after, or during doing the activities.

The activities involve some form of artistic expression, but you don't need to be an artist to do them. You just need to be prepared to free yourself to fully participate in whatever way suits your own personal expression.

Approach the activities with an attitude of complete acceptance of yourself and your expression. You will get the most out of them if you treat yourself without judging, and relax into the activities with a playful curiosity. The same goes for the children's activities - encourage a sense of playful exploration, and allow the freedom for their expression to naturally unfold.

How are eco-anxiety and climate change related?

Eco-anxiety comes from worrying about what is going to happen in our natural environment, and what effect this might have. It also comes from not knowing what to do with that feeling of uncertainty and not being in control.

The way eco-anxiety is experienced in Australia is based on the accumulation of previous natural disaster events a person has gone through. When Australians experience eco-anxiety, it emerges from lived experience- a fear that what happened in the past might happen again. In Australia and especially in drought and bushfire affected areas, eco-anxiety happens because of natural disasters made worse by climate change.

In this way, it differs from climate change anxiety, which is mostly experienced by people living in northern hemisphere countries where people have usually not been directly impacted by natural disasters, but they fear what might happen due to climate change and what they have seen happening in the media. "In richer northern hemisphere countries, eco-anxiety stems not from the immediate impact of climate change but from uncertainty over what is yet to come"

What triggers eco-anxiety?

Climate change (heat stress, changing temperature, seasons perturbed, rising sea level)

Natural disasters (drought, bushfires, flood, storms)

Endangered animal welfare

Stress on freshwater resources

Not knowing what the future holds

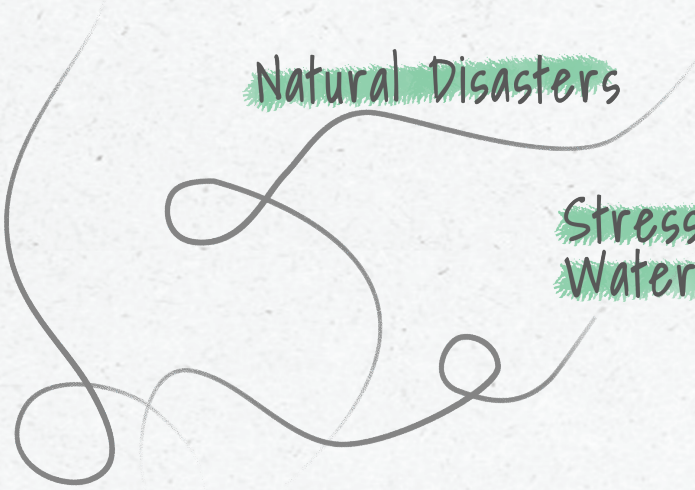
1 <https://time.com/5735388/climate-change-eco-anxiety>

Animal Welfare

Climate Change

Natural Disasters

Stressed
Water Resources



ECO ANXIETY

What does the future hold?

Linking the physical and psychological impacts of natural disasters²

Natural disasters are known to affect us physically and psychologically, on an individual and on a Community level. Our physical health can be affected due to rising temperatures, air dryness, smoke from bushfires, or even loss of water quality and quantity. These changes can contribute to physical trauma, respiratory issues and allergies. These then increase risks of asthma, heat related illness, and reduced fitness. They might impair fetal development or lead to miscarriage. They can increase exposure to pests and toxins.

On a wellbeing level, natural disasters can threaten our autonomy and personal identity, they can trigger complicated grief, and/or strain our social relationships. This can lead to substance abuse, depression, sense of loss, stress, anxiety, and in extreme cases post-traumatic stress disorder.

Communities in their journey to recovery face increased interpersonal aggression, crime, violence and domestic abuse. On a psychological level, they need to resolve a disrupted sense of continuity and belonging. Their transportation network and energy infrastructures are affected. Food security and crop production is disrupted. These Communities need support for their economic sectors and services to recover so human livelihood can be restored.

2 Clayton, S., Manning, C. M., & Hodge, C. (2014). *Beyond storms & droughts: The psychological impacts of climate change*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica.

Hopelessness

Depression



Mental health emergencies



Substance abuse

Stress



Sense of loss

PTSD



Anxiety

Threat to personal identity



Complicated grief

Strains on social relationships



Threat to autonomy



What action can we take?

Talking about eco-anxiety helps those who suffer to feel less alone. Silence, and its extreme opposite, drama, are of no support. Acknowledging that eco-anxiety is a reality is a first step towards supporting each other. Let's share a smile, it can be that simple.

Media abound with heartbreaking news though rarely mention all the good things that people are on to! Balance each bad news with one good news. There are so many great initiatives happening out there, look into it, do your research!

Discover some inspirational groups or organisations near where you live. Take action! Join the band! Engage with proactive people who care and connect with your Community.

Change your lifestyle, meditate, surround yourself with plants, treat water like a precious gift, greet the small things that make life so good... be in the moment and let the thoughts about the unpredictable future go.

IMPORTANT

If during the reading of this guidebook you, any other adults or children observe significant distress, consider referral to one of the supports listed at the end of this guide book.