

Eco-Emotion Lending Library Game Educator Guide: Grades 4-8

Background

This activity explores the connection between climate change and mental health. Climate change has been identified as the dominant threat to modern health. (1) **Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, especially on their mental health.** Youth are experiencing feelings of helplessness, anxiety, grief, paralysis, and fatalism, as well as an increasing prevalence of psychiatric disorders including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and suicide. (2,3)

Educators play a key role in promoting positive mental health for youth. **A majority of educators feel that the education system is not adequately addressing climate change, but do not feel that they have the knowledge or resources necessary to bring climate education to their classrooms.** (4)

When discussing climate change, the goal is not to eliminate negative emotions but to manage them. One of the priority strategies to help manage emotions is to provide spaces for youth to express their emotions, find community, and feel validated.(5) This activity will help you facilitate the sharing and validation of emotions in your classroom, while creating topical connections to curriculum expectations.

This activity is designed for elementary students, grades 4-8, to support health and physical education classes. The activity also has cross-curricular potential and would work well as a check-in activity following a challenging lesson on climate change in a science, language, or social studies class. The activity itself is expected to take 25-30 minutes, and the additional resources can extend the lesson by as much as is desired. **This kit provides everything needed to run the activity, and includes pre and post activity lesson plans, assessment prompts, and mental health resources for afterward.**



Figure 1: Young Canadian Perspectives on Climate Change Related Anxiety (6)

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Lesson Goals

1. Establish a space to express eco-emotions and create community amongst students
2. Validate eco-emotions and explore the relationship between climate change and mental health
3. Provide support and resources for students needing assistance managing eco-emotions

Materials

- 1 x storage bin
- 1 x educator guide
- 1 x bucket
- 1 set of 20 laminated prompts (See Appendix 1 for printable prompts if using a digital Educator Guide)
- 1 x oven mitt

Pre-Activity Lesson

To begin, the educator must introduce the class to the “[Climate Emotion Wheel](#).” The wheel can be printed and distributed or projected on the board. The class can read over the emotions individually or collectively, and then discuss what the meaning of each word included on the wheel.

Climate Emotions Wheel



Figure 2: Climate Emotion Wheel by Climate Mental Health Network (7)

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Activity: Burning Questions

The activity “Burning Questions” is a musical-chairs style game with embedded prompts connected to the Climate Emotion Wheel. Students will share their opinion on each prompt by moving or remaining still. Students will have the opportunity to observe shared emotions amongst them and their peers. The expected duration is 25-30 minutes.

Instructions

1. Arrange chairs in a large circle. The number of chairs must be one fewer than the number of students in the group. Select one student to be removed from the circle to be the *reader*, and have all others sit in the chairs.
2. The *reader* will read aloud one of the prompts from the bucket. All students who agree with the prompt must get up out of their chair, and race to sit down in a new chair. The *reader* must also race to sit in any chair. One student will be left standing, and that student becomes the new *reader*.
 - a. If racing in a circle is inaccessible due to space or mobility, have students raise their hands instead of sitting in a chair. The *reader* can now be selected by taking turns around the circle, instead of by competition.
3. Continue this cycle until all the prompts have been read.
4. When the prompts are completed, invite all students to sit in the circle. Invite the students to ask each other questions about the prompts they just heard. When a student is asking their *burning question*, they will wear the oven mitt. The oven mitt can be passed in a circle to give each student a turn to ask a question or can be passed to students who volunteer to ask a question.

Post-Activity Discussion

First, it would be beneficial for the teacher to open a discussion with the students to discuss any prompts that were confusing or heightened emotions in the classroom. The content can be connected to curriculum on the topics of social-emotional learning and mental health.

Further, we recommend watching this [4-minute youth-created video](#) that explains what eco-anxiety is and shares some positive coping mechanisms.

For a more detailed follow up activity, the Climate Mental Health Network has created a [document filled with activity options](#) for students of all ages.

For cross-curricular learning, this lesson could be connected to any other lessons on climate change in science, language, or social studies classes. This activity is an excellent way to check-in with the class following a challenging lesson on climate science and our changing environment.

Finally, we recommend sharing the mental health resources listed in this educator guide and making them available to students as needed.

Additional Mental Health Resources

- [Kids Help Phone](#)
- [School Mental Health Ontario](#)
- [Jack.org](#)
- [Good 2 Talk](#)
- [Strong Minds Strong Kids](#)
- [Climate Mental Health Network](#)

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Curriculum Links

Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum

Grade Level	Strand Connections
Grade 4	A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A1.6, D2.5, D3.3
Grade 5	A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A1.6, D2.6, D3.4
Grade 6	A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A1.6, D1.4, D1.5
Grade 7	A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A1.6, D1.6
Grade 8	A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A1.6, D2.4, D3.4

Assessment

The following prompts can be used to assess student learning. The students could respond to the prompts through 3-5 sentence “exit tickets,” formal written responses, or group discussions.

- How do you identify the eco-emotions that you are feeling? What are the physical, mental, emotional, or social signs that you experience?
- Pick one of the eco-emotions from the wheel that you have experienced, and share how our changing climate has lead to your experience of this emotion?
- Name some strategies you use to cope with your eco-emotions when they feel overwhelming. Share an example of emotions you can handle on your own, compared to some emotions that would benefit from help from a trusted adult.
- Reflect on an experience or emotion that one of your classmates shared and explain how you relate or do not relate to this person.
- Share an idea for a school community project or event that could help youth experiencing overwhelming eco-emotions.

References

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3. Abebe N. AMS Sustainability. 2022 [cited 2024 Jan 30]. Exploring Climate Change and Mental Health. Available from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1U63zOtPTPtIQ3vOcvJTgGJCuekaFsX-T/view?usp=embed_facebook
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5. Ford BE. Lesson Plan: Writing About Eco/Climate Emotions and Concerns [Internet]. Climate Mental Health Network; Available from: https://www.climatementalhealth.net/_files/ugd/d424e1_d5f70c438d8d49cfa85f963ded0e8e4d.pdf
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7. CMHN [Internet]. [cited 2024 Mar 18]. Resources | Climate Mental Health Network. Available from: <https://www.climatementalhealth.net/resources>
8. Galway LP, Field E. Climate emotions and anxiety among young people in Canada: A national survey and call to action. J Clim Change Health. 2023 Jan 1;9:100204.

Appendix 1: Printable Question Prompts

I feel anger when I think about the environment
I feel positive when I think about the environment
I feel scared when I think about the environment
I feel sad when I think about the environment
I think my classmates share similar eco-emotions to me
I think my siblings, friends, teammates, and neighbours share similar eco-emotions to me
I think teachers at my school share similar eco-emotions to me
I think adults in my community (eg. family members, neighbours, coaches) share similar eco-emotions to me
I do actions that are good for the planet and that makes me feel hopeful
I feel anxiety when I think about the environment
I feel grief when I see the environment change (eg. the winter isn't cold enough for skating or snowmobiling)
I feel guilt when I think about my own impact on the environment
I feel disappointment when I hear adults talking about the news about the environment
I feel outrage when I hear people telling lies about climate change
I feel powerless when I think about the environment and the Earth
I feel inspired when I learn about environmental changemakers helping the Earth
I feel gratitude when I go outside and connect with nature
I feel empowered when I do actions that are good for the environment like picking up trash or saving water
I think that feeling angry about the environment can be motivating to make change
I think that sharing my sadness about the environment allows me to connect with others

