

Since changing the climate is the biggest thing humans have ever done, with the gravest implications for the future, it stands to reason that it produces all kinds of emotions—conscious and unconscious—in those who apprehend it. This fine book helps grapple with those feelings, in thoughtful and empowering ways.

—**BILL MCKIBBEN**, AUTHOR OF *HERE COMES THE SUN: A LAST CHANCE FOR THE CLIMATE AND A FRESH CHANCE FOR CIVILIZATION*

At a moment when many feel overwhelmed or paralyzed, this book offers a welcome path that honors our grief while steadily guiding us back into agency, connection, and meaningful action.

—**CHRISTIANA FIGUERES**, HEAD OF THE UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONVENTION
2010–2016

This book is rich with practical wisdom for all climate feelers, thinkers, and doers. Leslie Davenport believes in us. *Transforming Climate Anxiety* will leave you saying, “I do too.”

—**KATHARINE K. WILKINSON, DPhil**, AUTHOR OF *CLIMATE WAYFINDING: HEALING OURSELVES AND THE PLANET WE CALL HOME*; COEDITOR OF *ALL WE CAN SAVE: TRUTH, COURAGE, AND SOLUTIONS FOR THE CLIMATE CRISIS*

Leslie Davenport is a guiding light for me and many others who are struggling to process the climate crisis and to parent through it. This book is another wise and welcome offering that will be an invaluable resource for individuals and communities.

—**ANYA KAMENETZ**, AUTHOR, *THE GOLDEN HOUR* NEWSLETTER AND *FALLING IN LOVE WITH THE WORLD AGAIN: FINDING YOUR WAY WHEN EVERYTHING FEELS BROKEN*

In *Transforming Climate Anxiety*, Leslie Davenport helps us stay with the emotional weight of the climate crisis without turning away. Grounded in climate psychology, this workbook brings together clear insights and practical exercises to help readers work through difficult emotions while staying connected to purpose, community, and action. This is an important book for anyone trying to remain engaged with the climate crisis, even when the realities feel overwhelming.

—**IMOGEN R. HERRICK, PhD**, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF STEM EDUCATION,
DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND TEACHING, UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS,
LAWRENCE, KS, UNITED STATES

With grace, elegance, and expansive compassion, Leslie Davenport takes us on a very compelling journey. Through accessible and gentle exercises, she helps us move from very personal internal distress to meaning, expression, and external collective action on behalf of our community, future generations, and the wider planetary ecosystem we call home. For anyone who loves living on planet Earth, the journey offered in this workbook is subtle, accumulative, and unmistakably powerful—expanding step-by-step our capacity to stay in the uncertain with curiosity, connection, and care.

—**REBECCA B. WESTON, JD, LCSW**, CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CLIMATE
PSYCHOLOGY ALLIANCE OF NORTH AMERICA

Leslie Davenport's workbook pulls no punches in confronting the fossil fuel industry and its ongoing role in driving the climate crisis. With clarity and urgency, she lays bare the scale of environmental damage and the systemic forces that have allowed it to persist. Davenport argues that the industry's complicity is no longer debatable—it is documented, measurable, and deeply entrenched. Yet, rather than leaving readers in despair, she challenges us to reckon with this reality and consider what accountability, transformation, and collective action must look like in the face of an escalating global emergency.

—**BARBARA EASTERLIN, PhD**, PRESIDENT OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, CLIMATE
PSYCHOLOGY ALLIANCE OF NORTH AMERICA

Transforming Climate Anxiety: A book that is grounded in care, resilience, and a world where we can nourish our relationships with ourselves.

—**ISAIAS HERNANDEZ**, ENVIRONMENTALIST, EDUCATOR, QUEERBROWNVEGAN

This well-researched and informative book, based on the recognition that climate change is a problem not only for environmental health but also for mental health, gives practical exercises to help people who are feeling worried and anxious to understand and cope with their responses. Davenport makes the case that both personal and ecological resilience will benefit when we acknowledge and strengthen connections to wider social and ecological networks.

—**SUSAN CLAYTON, PhD**, WHITMORE-WILLIAMS PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY,
PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT, THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER, WOOSTER, OH,
UNITED STATES

At once practical and deeply resonant, this workbook is a timely and much-needed contribution that will be of benefit to anyone feeling the pain of climate anxiety and grief. As we navigate our climate emotions during these challenging times, we are fortunate to have Davenport's knowledgeable and wise presence guiding us along the pathway, through our feelings and toward the connection and meaning at the heart of resilience.

—**LAURA CARTER ROBINSON, PsyD**, ECO- AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST;
AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION'S CLIMATE CHANGE PSYCHOLOGY
ADVISORY GROUP

Climate change evokes emotions in all of us, albeit in different forms. Leslie Davenport has been a forerunner in developing constructive methods for engaging with climate emotions, and this book offers people both succinct information and easy-to-use practices—warmly recommended!

—**PANU PIHKALA, PhD**, LEADING INTERDISCIPLINARY SCHOLAR OF
ECO-EMOTIONS; ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, THEOLOGY AND HELSINKI
INSTITUTE OF SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE HELSUS, UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI,
HELSINKI, FINLAND

This book is for everyone who cares deeply about climate change and needs practical skills to resist overwhelm and burnout. It shows you how to do the internal emotional work, connect it to the external community work, and help build a better world. I promise, you will come back to it over and over again.

—**JADE S. SASSER, PhD**, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIETY,
ENVIRONMENT, AND HEALTH EQUITY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE,
CA, UNITED STATES; AUTHOR, *CLIMATE ANXIETY AND THE KID QUESTION:
DECIDING WHETHER TO HAVE CHILDREN IN AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE*

Leslie Davenport's book is a must-read for anyone experiencing the emotional toll of climate change. Through thoughtful activities and teachings, this is a straightforward guide to taking meaningful action that also fosters essential self-care. Action and well-being are intertwined, and Leslie's accessible and impactful book helps build these essential skills.

—**SARAH NEWMAN**, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CLIMATE MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK

Climate psychology is genuinely complex work. It asks us to hold difficult emotions alongside the need to stay engaged, and keep our hearts and minds open. Leslie Davenport navigates that terrain with steadiness and skill. She has been one of the most trusted voices in the emerging field of climate psychology, and this book makes plain why. Reading this author's work feels like sitting with a compassionate guide, drawing on her clinical wisdom and warm intelligence. The result is a grounded, practical resource that so many of us in this field have been needing. It is an important contribution, and it confirms Leslie's place as one of climate psychology's essential voices.

—**RENÉE LERTZMAN, PHD**, AUTHOR OF *ENVIRONMENTAL MELANCHOLIA:
PSYCHOANALYTIC DIMENSIONS OF ENGAGEMENT*

Put this book on your bookshelf; it is one of the good books about psychology in the face of the climate crisis, climate anxiety, and how to navigate these challenging times. Practical, readable, relatable, thoughtful, and kind, it gives us a deeper understanding about how to find a way through these times with heart and soul. Well worth a read; it will be a good companion to go back to again and again.

—**CAROLINE HICKMAN**, CLIMATE AWARE
PSYCHOTHERAPIST AND RESEARCHER

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INTRODUCTION

COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO A COLLECTIVE PROBLEM

We are confronted every day with news about floods, droughts, and raging wildfires. An August 2023 report from scientists on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned us again that a disturbing level of severe ecological degradation from climate change is occurring much sooner than anticipated.

Researchers use the term *eco-anxiety* to describe the worry, fear, and grief associated with environmental change. It is easy in these times to fall into eco-anxiety or despair, but those feelings mean that we are paying attention and care about what is happening. As climate impacts increase, so too does climate-triggered emotional distress. In November 2023, Google reported that searches for “climate anxiety” or “eco-anxiety” had increased 4,590% from 2018 to 2023 (Moench, 2023).

However, even with more of us becoming aware of the climate crisis, business as usual persists. Why do we continue living the way we do given the overwhelming evidence of the damage our lifestyles are causing to ourselves and the entire biosphere? What can we do to make a difference when we feel so small in the face of such a complex crisis? How can we work with the waves of overwhelming feelings?

Transforming Climate Anxiety is for anyone who feels overwhelmed, anxious, stuck, burned out, or heartbroken about the

climate crisis. Whether you are a parent, activist, scientist, journalist, student, or educator—if your heart is awake to what is unfolding on our planet and you are ready to make a difference, you belong here. Through clear guidance, reflective prompts, somatic practices, and grounding psychological tools, you will learn how to regulate the nervous system, expand your emotional capacity, and transform distress into purposeful engagement. The goal is not to suppress emotions but rather to understand them as a sign of our deep care. This book will support you in staying connected to what matters without losing yourself in the process.

This book brings psychological principles from the emerging discipline of climate psychology to provide insights and approaches to help you cope, adapt, and even thrive. The readings and practice exercises will help you reduce emotional overwhelm caused by climate-triggered eco-anxiety, grief, and other expressions of distress while finding ways to participate in the creation of a safer, healthier world. Our planetary health crisis is calling for us to take a deep dive into the true origin of our suffering: our separation from the natural world and the planetary crisis we have created as a result. The readings and practice exercises will help you discover the truth of our profound interdependence with the natural world and to regard it not as something we visit, or to which we connect, but as a living system of which we are an inherent part. You will explore how the cultural delusion of separation from our bodies, from each other, and from the Earth has contributed to environmental degradation and personal distress and how reclaiming our sense of belonging can restore emotional balance and clarity.

By strengthening your felt sense of relationship with the environment, you can cultivate resilience, reduce anxiety, and experience a deeper sense of meaning and connection. Decades of research confirm that even brief experiences of connecting with nature can regulate the nervous system, reduce rumination and stress, and increase

prosocial behaviors and environmental stewardship (Berman et al., 2008; Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Ulrich et al., 1991; Weinstein et al., 2009). When we rediscover the visceral memory of being an inseparable expression of the natural world, we support our emotional healing and are inspired to protect the places and communities we love.

CORE THEMES

The emerging field of climate psychology understands that addressing the climate crisis requires both internal and external trauma-informed strategies. Clarifying and then connecting our thoughts, feelings, and nervous system (internal) to social justice and community-oriented engagement in meaningful change (external) are essential paired therapeutic activities. We see frequent examples of how the use of just one of the two strategies (i.e., only internal-informed strategies or only external-informed strategies) creates inherent problems. For example, youth activists, climate scientists, and environmental workers in government and nonprofit organizations report high levels of burnout and chronic stress related to the ongoing nature of the climate crisis (Pihkala, 2020a; Climate Burnout Report, 2023; Hickman et al., 2021). These frontline workers often lead with external strategies, advocating for policy change, community resilience, or environmental protection, yet they may lack the internal resources needed to support the intense climate-triggered distress that accompanies their efforts (Clayton, 2020; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018).

We also see people experiencing eco-anxiety or eco-grief who seek relief primarily through internal strategies, such as climate-aware therapy, mindfulness practices, or nervous system regulation. However, without opportunities to participate in meaningful, values-aligned climate action, many continue to feel helpless or disempowered in the face of the accelerating crisis (Pihkala, 2020b; Schwartz et al., 2022).

Research consistently shows that both psychological coping and collective engagement are necessary for reducing distress and fostering a sense of agency in a rapidly changing climate (e.g., Lawrance et al., 2022; Schwartz et al., 2022).

This book will help you do both the internal and external work necessary to emotionally cope with the climate change crisis while working to build a more just and sustainable world. By reading these chapters and completing the practice exercises, you will work to heal yourself, your community, your environment, and your world, from the inside out.

Internal Work

Internal landscape work begins with the assumption that the lived experiences of eco-anxiety and eco-grief, and the many expressions of climate-invoked dread, are a natural, empathic response to an unhealthy and perilous situation. I propose a new definition of *emotional resiliency*. The conventional definition asks how quickly we can bounce back to our emotional baseline after a distressing event. But in a rapidly warming world, there is no solid ground to return to. As climate impacts increase, our emotional distress rises in tandem. This book will help you build a new kind of emotional resiliency, one that cultivates the ability to remain present, open minded, and empathic in the face of increasing stress: an enhanced ability to bear witness and be present to more of our changing world and all the feelings that accompany it. A wide array of tools for self-regulation, derived from research on the brain's neuroplasticity, are provided. A robust range of behavioral science approaches and philosophies, including trauma-informed narrative therapies, eco-psychology, evolutionary psychology, mindfulness practices, neuroscience, systems perspectives, and expressive arts therapies, are interwoven throughout.

External Work

We have long known that taking empowered action to change a source of distress reduces anxiety and depression, and that is especially true with respect to the impacts of our warming world. This book provides external strategies to guide you, the reader, to participate in creating a healthier, safer, more just world. The traditional definition of *advocacy* is expanded to show how everyone can make a difference by drawing on their own interests and talents within their existing circle of influence. And because the climate crisis is rooted in insidious and unjust systems, environmental and social justice are both foundational themes of the book.

PRACTICE EXERCISES

This book is considered a workbook for a reason. Each chapter offers several practice exercises that are designed to help you incorporate important concepts into your daily life. The heart of the book lies in these practice exercises, so I invite you to give them a try. I have intentionally kept the chapters brief so you have plenty of room to explore the exercises at your own pace. As you move through the book, you will discover the practices that resonate most deeply for you. Readers who wish to delve further into the research and scholarly foundations of the exercises can consult the References at the end of the volume.

The practices are adapted from the following therapeutic approaches, which are supported by decades of research.

- *Mindfulness* cultivates the awareness necessary for noticing our thoughts and emotions without being swept away by them. Mindfulness has been repeatedly shown to reduce rumination, stress, and emotional reactivity (Creswell, 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

- *Cognitive behavioral strategies*, an approach supported by decades of empirical study (Beck, 2011; Hofmann et al., 2012), help loosen the grip of patterns that fuel anxiety and hopelessness.
- *Somatic practices*, drawn from research in neurophysiology and trauma-informed regulation, help the nervous system find balance (Porges, 2011; van der Kolk, 2014). Calming our bodies is especially important when climate stress becomes physically activating.
- *Existential exercises* help one address the deeper questions of meaning, responsibility, and belonging that environmental change often brings to the surface (Wong, 2012; Yalom, 1980).

Although these practices originate from different traditions, they share a common purpose: to help us stay present, steady, and connected to what matters most when we are faced with uncertainty or overwhelm. Together, these evidence-based approaches form a comprehensive toolkit for meeting the realities of climate change with clarity and resilience—one grounded breath, one compassionate thought, and one courageous choice at a time.

MY BACKGROUND

I am often asked how I found my way into the practice of climate psychology, which is an emerging specialty in the mental health field. Like many colleagues doing this work, my path is woven from professional, scientific, and deeply personal threads. I have been working as a licensed marriage and family therapist for more than 30 years to help people develop the inner skills they need to face difficult realities with stability and agency. Early in my career, I cofounded one of the nation's first hospital-based integrative medicine programs. My work as a member of an interdisciplinary medical team taught

me that true healing happens when we bring multiple lenses to a crisis—not just medical resources but also psychological, relational, and creative ones. That experience laid a foundation that allowed me to bring a psychological perspective into climate conversations where scientists, policymakers, and engineers were already at the table. I saw very clearly that so much of what therapists are trained to do—work with denial, navigate grief and complex emotions, support behavior change, and facilitate difficult relationships—was exactly what the climate space needed.

My own awakening to the severity of climate change began more than 20 years ago, and I shifted both my personal and professional lives toward addressing the crisis. One of my defining moments was when a close friend lost her home in a California wildfire. Witnessing her grief, as well as her resilience, had an enormous impact on me. It led me into training with the Pachamama Alliance (<https://pachamama.org/>) and into on-site work with a Red Cross Disaster Mental Health team (<https://www.redcross.org/about-us/our-work/disaster-relief/disaster-mental-health.html>) as well as collaborations with several other groups.

My professional career as a modern dancer dates back to an even earlier stage of life, and I continue to hold a deep belief in creativity as an essential element of our humanity and our healing. Creativity expands what we think is possible, and in the context of climate change it helps us imagine new futures and think beyond existing systems and limitations.

Today, my work sits at the intersection of psychology, climate science, and social change. I teach climate psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies, consult with environmental organizations and journalists, and speak internationally about how we can stay emotionally grounded while working toward a livable future. I am excited to share with you what we in the field of climate psychology have learned about healing ourselves and healing the world. In the

chapters that follow, we will explore together the emotional, relational, and practical tools that make that healing possible.

OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

The book begins by tracing the living connection between our inner landscapes—our beliefs, feelings, and nervous systems—and the outer landscapes of a world that is undergoing rapid environmental, social, and political change. In Chapter 1, we are introduced to the full range of climate emotions people may experience as well as the many different ways that climate change is unfolding. We start building a toolkit to help us stay grounded, present, and responsive to both our inner experience and the realities unfolding in the world around us. Uncertainty about how and when climate change will affect us can stir up powerful feelings of dread and disorientation, but it also carries the seeds of creativity. Chapter 2 focuses on how to cope with this uncertainty by inviting us to imagine new possibilities and pathways forward.

Another key aspect of our climate-focused emotions is the ambivalence that can emerge when we try to make sustainable choices while living in a society built on fossil fuels. Chapter 3 helps us navigate through this murky tension and our conflicting feelings without getting stuck or losing our sense of momentum and purpose. In Chapter 4, we turn to *eco-grief*, the deep ache that arises when we face the losses and damage that are transforming our world. The practice exercises in this chapter invoke a tender, embodied presence that supports our heart and body as we explore the various ways that grief makes itself known.

Even when we clearly recognize how the warming world is reshaping our lives, we are all influenced by our *cognitive biases*—those unconscious tendencies that distort, distract, or distance us from fully understanding and engaging with reality. Chapter 5 illuminates

these obstructive patterns and helps us uncover them in ourselves and one another with greater insight and compassion. We are aware that a quick technical fix cannot solve the scale and complexity of environmental breakdown; the hard scientific facts have made that abundantly clear. Chapter 6 looks beneath the surface to explore how true change requires a deeper transformation of humanity, a shift in our sense of belonging, imagination, perception, and connection.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 trace an ever-widening arc of connection. They begin with practical ways to foster community and then move into the deeper belonging we share with the more-than-human world—and, finally, we extend ourselves across time to build intergenerational alliances grounded in eco-justice. Chapter 10 concludes the book by weaving the learning journey into a wider existential frame that touches the deepest roots of what it means to be human. It also offers practical guidance for continuing forward with clarity and intention.

The Appendix contains a curated list of resources: sources of individual and group therapeutic support; tools for parents and educators; and recommended organizations, books, and films that inspire deeper exploration.

COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS

Although this book provides state-of-the-art tools for transforming climate distress and finding our purpose in this era of climate crisis, it takes the form of an exploration rather than a litany of answers. As human beings, we are on completely new ground when it comes to climate change. As we learn how to work more and more creatively, our collective solutions will gradually reshape the climate crisis and lead us into a future where we can more consciously coauthor our human story.

Whatever has shaped the path that brings you to this moment, it is clear that we need each other if we are to surmount the greatest

challenge of our time: addressing the climate emergency. We need everyone's perspective—scientists', Indigenous wisdom-keepers', parents', grandparents', students', activists', economists', medical workers', artists', teachers', policymakers', engineers', farmers', and children's—if we are to understand the entire landscape of the required transformation. All of our talents are essential for creating far-reaching change. Addressing the climate crisis should not rest on the faulty and unsustainable belief that “I have to do it all!” It does ask that we all participate by contributing our time and talents to help build a culture of sustainability within our circles of influence.

Courage. Engagement. Critical thinking. Creativity. Empathy. Follow-through. Self and community care. A bone-deep understanding of our interbeing with all of life. These capacities become our trustworthy guides when we begin working deeply with the many questions and challenges of our era that are brought dramatically into focus by climate change. Let's use every single one of our feelings and experiences to help us grow our resilience and discover how to make sustainable changes for a safer, healthier, and more just world.