

Eco-Anxiety Tips for Helping Professionals

How You Can Help Your Clients with their Eco-Anxiety

Eco-anxiety refers to a phenomenon that occurs as a result of our reaction to stressors, real or perceived, in our environment. Environment can include the natural world as well as other types of environments such as home, work, school, etc. Stressors may range from traffic jams, to major natural calamities. Physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual symptoms occur as a result, so it may be helpful to encourage multiple therapeutic solutions.

Recognize your clients may be in denial and illusion about what has been happening to the environment. They may have turned a blind eye towards the environment, disconnecting themselves, and now the result of this disconnection is right in front of them. This can be shocking when truly recognized. Help them come back into reality – what is going on?

Symptoms such as depression, anxiety, difficulty focusing, mood swings, drug or alcohol use can all be indications of eco-anxiety. Include an ecological perspective in your assessment.

The global warming “craze” will cause your clients to go into extremism fueled by fear. Know your facts, so you can help them with moderation. People need to feel empowered by taking action. Educate the person about their options. Simple steps help:

Turn off lights when leaving the room.

Turn off the computer, t.v. when not in use. Unplug chargers.

Washing only when the load is large.

Take shorter showers.

Close blinds on a hot day. Dress lightly instead of using air conditioning.

Dress warmly, add layers, turn down the heat.

Keep air filters
on furnaces and air conditioners clean.

Plant a tree.

Learn as much as
they can about global warming.

Buy less, consume less.

Where are you, the therapist in denial? Deal with your own eco-anxiety. Be resolved yourself.

Coming out of denial may be traumatic and can register as a
loss. Make sure you know how to
deal with trauma and
grief.

Help clients understand that their anxiety comes from worry
about the future. Teach them how to live
in the present.

Get them in touch with their body. They are disconnected. Connect head and heart.

Slow them down enough to feel their emotional
reactions. In our fast-paced world, we
have forgotten
how to focus.

Teach people that the environment is an aspect of
themselves. People will not protect what
they cannot identify
with.

Fuzzy ego boundaries enable fuzzy environmental boundaries.
Teach the basics of personal boundaries.

Help them change their consumer appetite to an appetite of
self improvement/self growth.

Show them where their energies towards self and other are
destructive, and turn them towards constructive
behaviors, thoughts,
beliefs, actions.

Helping professionals need to know the options so they can teach people how to get involved instead of feeling like they are helpless. We need to develop new cultural and personal habits.

Melissa Pickett

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"Recently a Chinese journalist asked me some good questions. I share the questions, and my answers here. Hope they help.

As an eco-anxiety expert, what is your definition of "eco-anxiety"? Is there a particular group of people who are much easier to be eco-anxious?

Eco Anxiety is our response to what is occurring on the planet. When I first began to talk about this, it was mostly associated with the degradation to the environment, but I could expand it now to all of the challenges of collapse of systems and structures. Any one, any age, gender, race, background can experience eco anxiety.

Could you please give me some extreme examples of people coming to you with worries to polar bear, Arctic sea ice or other creatures threatened by global warming? And how did you heal these clients?

Extreme examples would be people who didn't want to leave their house, who were haven't alot of difficulty sleeping, crying for no apparent reason, felt difficulty in day-to-day functioning. Generally, naming their experience, helping them to verbalize their worry, fear is very helpful. Normalizing how they are feeling so they don't feel alone in their reaction. The natural survival instinct is challenged, and people's fear of death may come up. So investigating that can be helpful. I wouldn't say I have seen what I would call really severe cases. I would say it is more abnormal to read about what is going on all over the world and have no concern. However, many people are still living in denial. The main thing is to help people become conscious about how they truly feel about what they are reading, aware of, and help them be resolved about what is going on. Helping them find ways to feel empowered is also important.

The latest news is revealing that the Bush Government has hided the secret evidence of global warming from the public. Have you seen any patients suffered from eco-anxiety caused by this or other media coverage?

I don't know about Bush. Certainly media coverage is the main source of information about global warming as a main source would have an impact.

Aparting from media, what do you think might cause people overreact to environmental problems?

First of all, I don't think in general people are over reacting. I think they are under reacting, by virtue of being in denial and not wanting to make needed changes in their life. This is a situation that ultimately is about loss. Loss of habitat, loss of life, loss in income, loss in many forms. People have a tendency to go into extremism about this issue, especially when their survival is threatened. So tahere is a balance about knowing the facts and staying out of extreme reactions. This can be challenging.

Could you give some suggestions to our readers on how to rise concern about our worsening environment without worrying about it too much? I mean, how to find the balance?

This is a very important question. Balance is key. Staying out of extreme reaction is necessary. Be educated about what is

really going on. Read the facts (which sometimes can be difficult to ascertain) and make your own decision. In many cultures, feelings are not valued, but it is important to know what our feelings are about this issue. The way we deal with losses in general will spill over into the way we deal with environmental losses. We need to think about losses in our lives, how we have dealt with them, and what we need to do to be functional when loss occurs. Reflection on this is important. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross work with grief pertains to this. The stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. These stages are not linear, they can happen out of sequence. They apply because there is great grief that occurs with eco-anxiety. IT IS A LOSS. In order to be in balance we have to know how to grieve.

Here are some proactive things to do:

- Evaluate how you deal with loss. Do you have things in your life you need to grieve?
- Write down how you feel about what you know about global warming and world collapse. What do you really know, and how do you feel about it?
- Form circles of community. Get to know your neighbor, support your local economy, eat foods grown close to home if possible.
- Take social or political action in that interests you.
- Look for the ways you can have a smaller impact on the environment.
- Write down your fears. What is unconscious will control you. Make your worries, fears, anxieties known.
- Spend time in nature.
- Focus on what is beautiful in your life and do more of it.
- Do art, take up a hobby. Do more of what is nourishing. (This can be challenging in cultures where work is valued above the person)
- What are your beliefs about what is happening.
- If you don't have a spiritual practice, consider getting one.
- Pray, meditate, do something good for another person.
- Study how nature deals with the natural cycles of birth and death. I believe everyone is indigenous, but we have forgotten how to relate to life in

that way.

- Slow down, be present in the body and in the moment. Learn how to live in the body. Many people live in the head and are dissociated and don't even know it. This crisis must be addressed from a new place. Old ways and old solutions and ways of coping will not work. Find the deeper part of yourself and listen to that.
- Educate yourself on crisis response. Evaluate how you would handle an extreme situation of food, water, shelter, power, etc were taken away. What do you need to keep yourself functioning and healthy.
- Eliminate unnecessary stressors.
- Be educated in the realities of collapse.
- It is important not to pathologize reactions to what is going on, but to be informed and find whatever support you need to help.
- Develop tools such as rituals, art, prayer, meditation, group support journaling, things that help you to stay positive even in the midst of trying times.

Our reaction to global warming, peak oil, etc comes down to our fear of death. Collapse, change, etc. are a natural part of life. It is we, humans, who have a problem with that. While we can each take steps to make positive changes, limit consumption, etc., we must be willing to accept that change, even death is a part of life. We need to be less human centric and more able to be in the flow and cycles.

No one guarantees this life is without challenge. Our job is not to try to focus on controlling the change, but rather, how we work with the change that comes our way. We have all contributed to where we are as a world. We are reaping what we have sown.

I have learned through my own experience of dealing with health issues, that contemplating my own death has caused me to be more alive. No morbid preoccupation with death, but rather a focus that has helped me to appreciate the little things in my life, because those are the big things.

Here are some more questions:

- What makes you feel most alive?
- Do you allow yourself to feel emotion?

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Do you feel connected to nature? To others? Do you feel separate? If so, what do you need to change?

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What brings you comfort?

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What can I do to make a difference?"