

# Ecological Grief Literacy

A guide for environmental  
professionals

## What is ecological grief?

Ecological grief is an emotional response to losing places, species or ecosystems that are important to us. People working in conservation or environmental professions may be particularly likely to experience ecological grief.

## Helpful principles for dealing with ecological grief

1. Ecological grief is a natural, legitimate response to the loss of landscapes, species and parts of nature that we are connected to and are important to us.
2. There is no 'best' way to respond to ecological grief. What is helpful for one person may not work for another. Some people find it helpful to express their feelings and talk about their experience, and others may express grief through doing an activity. You might need to be creative, do some research and keep trying to find ways that work for you.
3. When approaching ecological grief, the aim is not to 'get rid of' or 'be done' with the feelings, but to lessen the suffering and intensity associated with our grief. Finding ways to help manage ecological grief is important in continuing the vital work of environmental professionals.
4. Many emotions may be involved in ecological loss. There are no time frames for people to adapt to a new reality, and your own responses can vary over time.
5. Although awareness and understanding of ecological grief are growing, it is not understood by everyone. You might not get the social support you need for ecological grief from your family and friends, so it's important to seek it out from (and offer it to) others who do understand, for example, people working in the same field.
6. When interacting with others experiencing ecological grief, it is important to listen and be listened to without judgement, to ask and be asked questions respectfully and sensitively and to help people to find support or resources that match their needs and preferences. If you feel judged or not supported in your grief, you might need to find support from someone else. You could also share this resource with them.
7. Social support is an important predictor of adaptation to loss following bereavement: the experience of being cared for, having assistance available and being part of a social network providing different types of mutual support. Social support for grief can be as different and unique as the people involved, and will depend on your, and others', needs and preferences.
8. Managing ecological grief is a long-term, non-linear process. The activities that you find helpful might change over time. Periodically assess what feels helpful to you and adjust as you need.

## Ecological grief literacy

Ecological grief literacy refers to the knowledge, skills and values that promote understanding of and action towards providing compassionate support for those experiencing ecological grief, including ourselves.

## Activities that can help with ecological grief

- Connecting with others who share similar experiences, either informally (e.g., coffee with friends), or formally (e.g. a peer support network in your workplace).
- Using compassionate or active listening techniques when talking with others about ecological grief.

### Compassionate listening

Compassionate listening is a deceptively simple concept involving listening without judging or offering solutions. It is a powerful way to support people.

One effective exercise is to set a timer with a friend and alternate speaking about your experiences, focusing on listening to each other. You can ask questions to make sure you understand the other person's feelings and thoughts, and reflect that understanding back to them (this is also known as active listening). Deep listening and understanding are the aims, not giving advice or solving problems.

- Learning about other people's experiences of ecological grief in books, blogs or research articles can help to validate your experience.
- Undertaking a project to honour a loss. This could include arts, remembrance events, education and awareness activities, fundraising, conservation or activism.
- Spending time in nature – there is strong evidence of multiple benefits to health and wellbeing, including lessening psychological distress and increasing wellbeing.
- Pausing, resting and recovering; what can feel like 'doing nothing' is just as important as action.
- Taking time for activities you enjoy, unrelated to conservation or climate change.
- Noticing, communicating and celebrating conservation successes.
- Understanding the neuroscience of emotions can help us handle distressing emotions. Mindfulness and meditation exercises, particularly compassion and self-compassion practice, can help with this. Listening to guided meditations can be a good starting point in finding what works for you.

## Finding the right level of support for high distress

If you are feeling overwhelmed or very distressed, adding some extra support may be needed. Contact your general practitioner or the professional association for psychologists in your area. Check that any professional you do talk to is sensitive to and has skills in ecological or climate grief.

Ask questions about ecological grief and any other issues you would like to discuss, when booking an appointment or in the first session.

When people around you are experiencing high distress:

- encourage colleagues who may have a higher need for support or who hesitate to seek support to gain additional support from community or professional services.
- check in on a regular basis and over time with people who have expressed distress to communicate your care.



Additional resources are available at [cbcs.centre.uq.edu.au/ecological-grief-resources](https://cbcs.centre.uq.edu.au/ecological-grief-resources) or by scanning this QR code.

**This factsheet is based on a paper published in *Conservation Letters*. It is available to read for free at: [conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/conl.13018](https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/conl.13018)**

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