

Climate change and mental health:

A growing concern for young people

Teens and young adults have a lot on their minds these days. Over the years, we've seen more children and adolescents getting support for depression, anxiety and trauma.¹

If you have a young person in your life, you may have noticed the impact of everyday stressors. But have you thought about how climate change could be affecting their mental health?

The World Health Organization is drawing attention to this issue. Here's how climate change could be affecting you and your loved ones.

Trauma from immediate exposure

Across the world, we've seen massive wildfires, extreme heat and deadly storms. More than 1 billion children live in countries that are at 'extremely high risk' of climate and environmental shocks. This can include flooding, storms, heat waves, water scarcity and high levels of air pollution.²

If your family has been impacted, your teen or young adult may experience lasting mental health concerns. After a traumatic weather event, one school-based programme saw a 50% increase in the use of mental health services for depression, anxiety, adjustment disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While these concerns waned over time, substance use and suicide increased.³



More than

45%

of teens said that their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily lives

77%

said the “future is frightening”



Ongoing worries

Even if we haven't personally experienced a major event such as a wildfire or flood, we can have anxiety about it. We may worry that it will affect us, our loved ones or even our future children.⁴

While we can all take steps to help prevent further climate change, the effects are already occurring. And with such a big challenge ahead, it can make many of us feel powerless – and even hopeless. In a study of young people, 77% said that the “future is frightening”. More than 45% said that their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily lives.⁵

Think your teen or young adult may need mental health support – related to climate change or for any other reason?

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1. Optum Internal Utilization Data, 2021.
2. UNICEF. One billion children at “extremely high risk” of the impacts of the climate crisis – UNICEF. [unicef.org/press-releases/one-billion-children-extremely-high-risk-impacts-climate-crisis-unicef](https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/one-billion-children-extremely-high-risk-impacts-climate-crisis-unicef). August 19, 2021. Accessed January 26, 2022.
3. Nazeer A. Climate change and child and adolescent mental health in Asia, Middle East and North Africa region: Points to ponder. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*. 2020;59(10):S39-S40.
4. Whitmore-Williams SC, Manning C, Krygsman K, Speiser M. Mental health and our changing climate: Impacts, implications and guidance. American Psychological Association, Climate for Health and ecoAmerica. March 2017.
5. Marks E, Hickman C, Pihkala P, et al. Young people's voices on climate anxiety, government betrayal and moral injury: A global phenomenon. Social Science Research Network. ssrn.com/abstract=3918955 or dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3918955. September 7, 2021.

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