



Resilience Group Says Global Warming is a Mental Health and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Emergency

ITRC issues *Call to Action* for mental health, public health, education, social justice, climate, faith and other leaders to rapidly build psychological and psycho-social-spiritual--or transformational--resilience.

Individuals wanting to sign this *Call to Action to Build Human Resilience for Climate Traumas* [click here](#)

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In response to the personal and collective traumas caused by Hurricane Dorian, and as a follow up to the *U.S. Call to Action in Climate, Health, and Equity* priority 9 to build resilient communities, the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC)* today called on all mental health, public health, ACEs, climate, social justice, education, emergency response, faith and other leaders to rapidly build widespread capacity for psychological and psycho-social-spiritual--or Transformational--Resilience to prevent climate traumas.

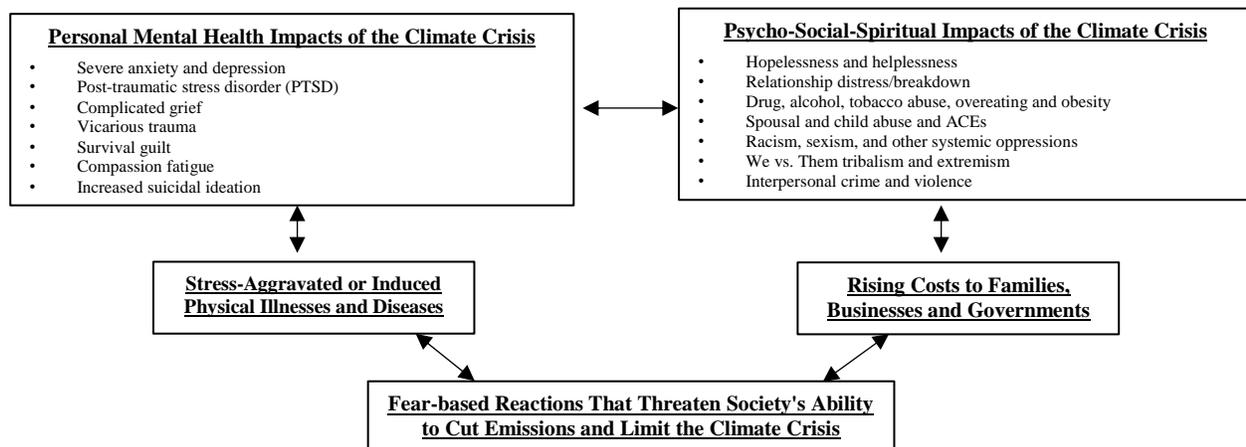
The Climate Crisis is Rapidly Accelerating Childhood, Adult, Cultural, and Intergenerational Traumas

Rapidly reducing greenhouse gas emissions, transitioning to a clean renewable energy economy, protecting and restoring forests and other ecosystems that sequester carbon, adapting and hardening infrastructure, and strengthening physical health programs must be priorities to address the climate crises.

The more frequent and extreme disasters and toxic stresses generated by the climate crisis, however, are generating accelerating mental health and psycho-social-spiritual disorders. Left unaddressed, these maladies will undermine the health, safety, and wellbeing of children, adults, and communities everywhere. They also threaten to stall or block efforts to cut emissions and reduce the climate crisis to manageable levels. *These dangers unequivocally make climate trauma a mental health and psycho-social-spiritual emergency.*

Is it therefore equally important and urgent now to help all individuals, groups, and communities learn Transformational Resilience information and skills to build their capacity to constructively cope with climate adversities and use them as powerful catalysts to increase personal, social, and ecological wellbeing.

How Climate Traumas Impact Mental & Physical Health, Community Wellbeing, and Climate Solutions



Climate Trauma is Intensifying All Common Forms of Trauma

Psychologists often use a three-part framework of personal, cultural, and intergenerational to describe how humans experience trauma. The climate crisis is intensifying and expanding each of them.

- *Personal trauma* occurs when an overwhelming event or toxic stress shatters an individual's deeply-held and often unconscious beliefs about the world and themselves. The blow activates their instinctive "fight, flight, or freeze" mechanism so powerfully that they cannot make sense of, or cope with, the experience. The disasters and toxic stresses caused by the climate crisis are rapidly accelerating the number and types of personal traumas seen in the U.S. and worldwide, resulting in rising personal mental health and psycho-social-spiritual disorders.
- *Cultural trauma* results from a horrific event that profoundly alters the collective memory and sense of identity of a group. The 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center is an example of an event that fundamentally altered how Americans view the world and themselves. As seen in Paradise, California, that a wildfire burned to the ground in 2018, and by the recent destruction Hurricane Dorian caused in the Bahamas, the climate crisis is destroying entire communities and accelerating cultural traumas.
- *Intergenerational trauma* can result from personal trauma, such as when adults that were abused or neglected by their parents when they were children inflict similar hurts on their offspring and hasten Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). It can also occur when people are severely traumatized by racism, misogyny, or other systemic oppressions and pass their distress on to the next generation. As the climate crisis accelerates, many forms of intergenerational trauma will grow.

Climate Trauma Is Intensifying Each of These Traumas and, Left Unaddressed, Will Cause Far More Harm Than the Other Three Combined

- *Reduced Time for Healing:* Most traumas are caused by events that end, which provides time for recovery. As temperatures rise, the disasters and toxic stresses generated by the climate crisis will be continuous, reducing and often eliminating the time individuals and groups need to heal.
- *Repetitive Traumas Are More Impactful Than Single Events:* Similarly, although a single traumatic event can leave long lasting psychological scars, even more detrimental to the human psyche are repetitive traumas. As the disasters and toxic stresses generated by the climate crisis become relentless, the ability of individuals, families, and communities to cope and heal will be greatly diminished.
- *Both Single and Repetitive Traumas Aggravate Social Injustices and Inequities:* At least initially, climate disasters and toxic stresses often impact low income communities, people of color, single women, and other marginalized groups the hardest. These populations tend to live in high hazard zones, have little capacity to protect themselves from disasters, lose their few assets during an event, have little to no resources available to recover afterwards, and have minimal capacity to access assistance offered by disaster relief agencies. The climate crisis thus intensifies and expands social injustice and inequity and the mental health and psycho-social-spiritual distresses they can create.
- *Traumas Knowingly Caused by People and Institutions Are Far More Difficult to Cope With:* Traumatic events purposely caused by humans, such as violence, are typically much harder for people to cope with than accidents or natural disasters. But today's climate disasters are not "natural." They result from human actions, and in particular the deeds of fossil fuel industry executives who know their products are harmful but continually torpedo solutions anyway, and by government officials who know the science but fail to enact policies to slash emission and prevent catastrophe. The anger that results will make coping and healing far more difficult and generate many personally and socially harmful reactions.

- *Contemplating the Loss of Community and End of Civilization is Extremely Traumatic*: While the other forms of trauma affect individuals, families, or groups, the climate crisis threatens entire communities. Further, without rapid dramatic changes, our species is facing the most horrific event imaginable: the end of civilization as we know it. This awareness is creating debilitating anxiety, depression, grief, and hopelessness among both young and older people alike.
- *Left Unaddressed, Climate Trauma Threatens to Stall Emission Reductions*: Moreover, because traumatized and stressed people often withdraw into a self-protective survival mode that leaves them uninterested in external issues, the detrimental mental health and psycho-social-spiritual effects of climate traumas threaten to stall or block efforts to reduce the climate crisis to manageable levels.

Particularly Harmful Impacts of Climate Trauma

- *Accelerating Self-Destructive Coping Mechanisms*: The severe anxiety, depression, PTSD, and other mental health problems experienced by traumatized individuals lead many to try to self-medicate by abusing alcohol or drugs, overeating, becoming hyper-vigilant, or withdrawing from those around them. If unresolved, these and other coping mechanisms often become self-destructive.
- *Accelerating Psycho-Social-Spiritual Maladies*:
 - * *Snowballing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)*: The harmful coping methods adopted by adults impacted by climate traumas cause some to abuse, ignore, or in other ways traumatize their children, leading to more ACEs. Research has determined that physical, verbal, or sexual abuse, neglect, bullying, living with a caretaker who is an alcoholic, drug addict, or is incarcerated, and other ACEs cause children to feel fearful, unloved, and helpless. ACEs constrain a child's brain development, which leads to poor decisions and behaviors. If unresolved, when they become adults, people impacted by ACEs often repeat the same behaviors with their children. They also tend to have more employment, relationship, and mental and physical health problems than the average person. Ignoring climate traumas will greatly increase ACEs and their long-term consequences.
 - * *ACEs Can Produce Violence in Adults*: Linked to the above, when they become adults, children impacted by ACEs have a greater chance of committing violence. An August, 2019 LA Times OPED by Jillian Peterson and James Densley described their research on the life history of mass shooters. They found that most "experienced significant early childhood trauma and exposure to violence at a young age." This underscores the huge risks involved with ignoring the effects of climate traumas.
 - * *Increased Aggression, Hostility, and Violence*: Traumatized individuals can turn their angst outward and become hostile, aggressive, or violent toward their neighbors or people they believe look, speak, or act differently. And, research has found that hotter temperatures *alone* can increase violence. Unresolved climate traumas thus run the risk of accelerating aggression, hostility, and violence.
 - * *Accelerating Hopelessness and Loss of Spirit*: Grief is a normal reaction to loss. The loss of a loved one or community due to climate disasters, and growing worries that humans will not stop the climate crisis, however, are generating debilitating feelings of hopelessness and loss of spirit, while also causing some people to knowingly engage in activities that make the climate crisis worse.
- *Accelerated Existing and New Physical Health Problems*

A growing body of research shows that persistent stresses can worsen existing, and/or increase the risk of a new physical illnesses and diseases including obesity, heart disease, some cancers, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, depression, gastrointestinal problems, and more.

Building Capacity for Transformational Resilience Can Prevent These Harms and Promote Wellbeing

Core Elements: Transformational resilience is a prevention framework, not a specific resilience building method. It involves teaching all adults and youth simple age, culturally, and demographically appropriate:

- *Trauma impact Information* including basic material about how overwhelming events and stresses can affect their mind, body, and behaviors, and the thinking and behaviors of groups
- *"Presencing"--or self-regulation--skills* that enable people to calm their mind, body, and emotions when distressed so they can think and act in healthy ways even in unhealthy conditions
- *"Purposing"--or adversity-based growth--skills* that enable people to use climate adversities as catalysts to find new sources of positive meaning, direction, and hope in life.

The combination of this information and skills helps people find constructive ways to cope with disturbing events. They can also motivate people to use climate (and other) adversities as powerful catalysts to increase their own sense of wellbeing by assisting other people and/or helping to heal the planet.

Implementing Initiatives to Build Capacity for Transformational Resilience

- *Adults can learn Presencing and Purposing resilience information and skills through programs offered by:*
 - * Community college and university programs
 - * Continuing education and professional development programs
 - * Libraries and civic organizations
 - * Many other organizations
- *Youth can learn Presencing and Purposing resilience information and skills through programs offered by:*
 - * K-12 schools
 - * After school sports, theatre, music, arts and crafts, outdoor education, faith-based, and other programs
 - * Summer camps and related programs
- *Communities can promote Presencing and Purposing resilience information and skills by:*
 - * Forming "resilience councils" in neighborhoods and communities composed of local leaders who jointly promote new social narratives emphasizing safe, healthy, and resilient responses to climate traumas and help organize, support, and secure funding for Transformational Resilience educational programs.
 - * Enacting policies at the federal, state, and local levels that authorize and fund resilience education and skills-training programs offered by K-12 schools, high education institutions, non-profits, private organizations, state, and local health, emergency management and other departments, and more.

Universal Resilience Education Will Offer Benefits Well Beyond Preventing Climate Traumas

The information, skills, and tools involved with enhancing the capacity for Transformational Resilience were not created specifically for the climate crisis. They were developed to prevent and help people heal from other traumas. Thus, making Transformational Resilience education and skills-training universal will prevent and help people heal from many forms of adversities beyond climate traumas including:

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Many physical illnesses and diseases
- Human-caused disasters such as community violence and school shootings
- Non-climate related natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis

In sum, building universal capacity for Transformational Resilience can alter hearts, minds, spirits, and lives.

Applications and Benefits of Building Transformational Resilience for Climate Change



How You Can Be Involved in Building Transformational Resilience for Climate Traumas

- Learn how trauma and toxic stress can affect your body, mind, and emotions, and the thinking and behaviors of groups, and how to spot the symptoms in yourself and others.
- Learn your own age, culturally, and demographically appropriate Presence (self-regulation) and Purposing (adversity-based growth) skills--and then learn how to share them with others.
- Get involved with, or form your own resilience group, and help build Transformational Resilience among children, families, in the workplace, with civic, business, and government leaders, or other populations.

For more information and the research that supports the issues discussed in this Call to Action go to the ITRC Library found at: <http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/intl-tr-coalition>

The Climate Crisis is a Mental Health and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Emergency!

We call on all mental health, public health, education, social justice, climate, emergency response, faith and other leaders to prioritize building psychological and psycho-social-spiritual--or transformational-- resilience among all adults and youth. Enhancing personal and collective resilience will be vital to help people constructively cope with climate traumas, and use the adversities as powerful catalysts to increase personal, social, and ecological wellbeing.

Please Endorse Our Call to Action and Become Engaged in Building Resilience!

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* The ITRC is a network of over 400 mental health, social service, education, social justice, disaster management, faith and other leaders working to educate the public and decision makers about the urgent need, methods, and many benefits of building widespread capacity for psychological and psycho-social-spiritual-- or Transformational Resilience. For more information go to: <http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/>