Introduction to Transformational Resilience

The Urgent Need to Prepare People Worldwide for the Mental Health and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Impacts of the Climate Emergency

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Even More Than the Pandemic, the Climate-Ecosystem-Biodiversity Crisis is a Civilization-Changing Event!

It is already affecting and will increasingly disrupt Every Aspect of Society

The impacts will significantly harm Mental Health and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Wellbeing!
The Climate-Ecosystem-Biodiversity Crisis is Unlike Any Modern Society Has Faced!

Even with aggressive emissions cuts and ecosystem restoration efforts:

- It will **worsen for decades** and increasingly mix **acute disasters** with **ongoing cascading disruptions** to the **ecological, social, and economic systems** we rely on for **food, water, jobs, income, health, safety** and **other basic needs**.

- It will **traumatize and severely stress everyone**, disrupt vital **social support networks**, aggravate **racism** and **other systemic oppressions**, and undermine the social determinants of health.

- **If we remain unprepared**, the resulting tsunami of **mental health and psycho-social-spiritual maladies** will be **as bad** as the physical impacts **and derail** efforts to reduce the climate emergency to manageable levels.
Despite These Threats, Little Focus Has Been Given to Preparing People for the Profound Traumatic Stressors to Come!

• To the extent that the issue has been addressed, the focus has been on disaster mental health and mental health first-aid.

• Clinical treatment and direct service program assist only a small portion of the population and focus on treating disorders, not prevention.

• While important, neither will succeed without an equal emphasis on proactively preparing the entire population for the mental health and psycho-social-spiritual impacts already occurring and speeding our way!
This is Especially Important Because the Climate Crisis Also Offers The Opportunity for Profound Transformation!

It is a primal truth that, as painful as it can be, adversity is often our greatest impetus for learning, growth, and transformation.
Imagine the Benefits of a Global Preventative Transformational Resilience Movement That Helps:

- **All adults & youth** become **trauma-informed**, **build on strengths**, and develop **quality social support networks** that help them think and act in healthy ways even in **unhealthy conditions**.

- **All leaders** learn to **promote social narratives**, **shift cultural norms** and make their groups **safe, healthy, and just resilience-enhancing entities**.

- **Everyone** learn how to use adversities as **transformational catalysts** to find new **meaning, purpose, and hope** in ways that motivates them to increase **social and ecological wellbeing** as a way to increase their **own sense of wellbeing**.
Trauma and Toxic Stress Are Epidemic Today

High levels of ACEs
Racism, sexism & other systemic oppressions

Pandemic related stresses
Lack or high costs of health care

Loss/lack of family wage jobs
Political polarization

Fear of violence
High Poverty

To these now add the acute disasters and chronic toxic stresses generated by the interlinked climate-ecosystem-biodiversity crisis!
Average Global Surface Temperatures Have Already Risen By 1.8 F (1C) Above Pre-Industrial Levels—with 2/3 of Rise Since 1975

In 2018 the IPCC said emissions must be cut by 45% by 2030 (10 years) and to Zero by 2050 to keep temps from rising more than 2.7 F above pre-industrial levels—which will trigger irreversible catastrophe.

Even if temperatures can be constrained, more frequent & extreme disasters & toxic stresses will continue for a century or more!
Some of the Consequences: More Frequent and Extreme Disasters

Wind, Rain, and Snow Storms

Heat Waves and Temp. Extremes

Wildfires and Smoke Emergencies

Drought and Food & Water Shortages

River Flooding

Sea Level Rise and Storm Surges

And many other surprise disasters...
Equally Important: More Ongoing and Intense (Toxic) Stresses From Experiencing, Seeing, or Worrying About...

- Our future and our children’s future
- Loss of place, community, culture, and natural environment
- Disruption of close family and friend social support networks
- Forced migration
- Water, food, and other resource shortages
- Economic disruptions and job losses
- New illnesses and diseases
- Disaster-triggered crime or violence
- Intensified racism, sexism, and other systemic oppressions
- Many other surprising chronic toxic stresses
**Frontal-Cortex:** "Executive Center"

- Can **direct**, but not **control**, the Fear & Alarm Center.

- **Meaning making center** of brain that sorts out real from false threats, develops beliefs about the world and self, and decides appropriate responses.

- **Memory of past trauma** and mind racing about **future threats** can prevent discharge of hyperarousal.

**Amygdala:** The "Fear and Alarm Center"

- Fear-based survival reaction occurs automatically when senses threat.

- **Releases neurochemicals** into the body that produces hyperarousal to prepare us to fight back, flee, or if overwhelming freeze.

- Works like **smoke detector**—a false alarm is better than mistake—but chronicity produces dysregulation.
“Direct, acute experience with climate change can produce...sudden and severe mental health consequences.”

(Mental Health and Our Changing Climate, American Psychological Association 2017)
Examples of Psychological Impacts of Climate Disasters

Effects depend on the intensity, duration, and level of exposure to the event.

Research shows **20%-50%** of people impacted by extreme weather disasters can experience severe:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- PTSD
- Higher suicide rates
- More

**Examples**

- 30% to 50% of Katrina survivors suffered from PTSD, severe depression, anxiety, or hopelessness, and suicides went up substantially.

- 20% of east coast residents after Superstorm Sandy reported PTSD, 33% reported depression, and 46% reported anxiety.
Similar impacts—plus elevated levels of PTSD—have been found among people impacted by wildfires... sometimes lasting several years. (APA)
Examples of Psychological Impacts of Climate Disasters

Effects depend on the intensity, duration, and level of exposure to the event.

Research shows similar psychological effects from flooding with curious increased impacts on children:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- PTSD
- Higher suicides rates
- Increased aggression in children

Example

In the UK after the 2007 summer floods:

- 75% of the people directly impacted had severe anxiety
- 50% experienced depression
- About 25% suffered from PTSD
Examples of Psychological Impacts of Climate Impacts

Effects depend on the intensity, duration, and level of exposure to the event.

Research shows droughts can produce a similar range of mental health problems and increase substance abuse.

Examples

• Studies in Australia found that family dysfunction, depression, anxiety, hopelessness and suicide rose in mist of drought.

• In US droughts of the 1980s, male farmers and ranchers in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana demonstrated rates of suicide twice the national rate.

• Many studies have found that alcohol & drug abuse rise in droughts.
Examples of *Psycho-Social-Spiritual Impacts of Climate Change*

Effects depend on the intensity, duration, and level of exposure to the event.

Research shows hotter temperatures *alone* tend to increase:

- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Assaults
- Robbery and burglary
- Higher suicides rates
- Interpersonal aggression
- Violence

**Examples**

- One study looked at 30 years of monthly crime and weather data for 2997 U.S. counties and found that as temperatures warmed so did aggravated assaults, simple assaults, robberies, burglaries, larceny and vehicle theft.

- Research in Europe also linked hotter weather to higher crime rates.
Disasters Can Increase Violence
(Canadian Red Cross)

The risk of violence in emergencies increases by up to 300% due to a combination of shocks at the individual, family, community, and societal levels. The main drivers include:

- Collapse of personal or social protective systems
- Increased individual and community stress
- Individuals relying on harmful coping mechanisms such as alcohol or drugs
- Pre-existing risk of violence
- Crowded insecure environments

Research shows increases in violence of up to 300%

Hopelessness is a *Psycho-Social-Spiritual Climate Impact*

Research shows growing **hopelessness** and **helplessness** due to the “**unrelenting day-by-day despair**” of climate change (APA)

**Examples**

- Prolonged drought, insidious impacts like food shortages, rising sea levels, and the gradual loss of natural environments are: “causing some of the most resounding chronic psychological consequences.”

- Mental health problems can also be triggered indirectly from: “Watching the slow and seemingly irrevocable impacts of climate change unfold, and worrying about the future for oneself, children, and later generations.”
Climate Change is a “Multiplier of Injustice”

Quote by Jacqui Patterson, Director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program and ITRC Steering Committee Member

- Indigenous communities, people of color, immigrants, low income populations and other frontline communities often experience climate impacts first and the hardest.

- The impacts are often aggravated by unjust and inequitable norms, practices, and policies that exist before impacts, and are intensified during, and afterwards.
Research shows people who experience continuous trauma can:

• Have difficulty regulating emotions, showing persistent sadness, suicidal thoughts, explosive anger, or covert anger.

• Have altered self-perception, including sense of shame, guilt, helplessness.

• Become preoccupied with revenge.

• Have altered relationships, including isolation, distrust, or search for a rescuer.

• Loose their sense of meaning in life, which may include crisis of faith or spirit or deep sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

These harmful reactions are far more disruptive and difficult to heal!
Traumatized and stressed people often retreat into a self-protective survival mode that leaves them uninterested in external issues like emission reductions.

Left unaddressed, the adverse human reactions to climate impacts threaten to stall or derail efforts to minimize the climate crisis!
Both can cause people to harm themselves, others, and the natural environment.
A Whole New Way of Thinking Is Needed To Respond to a 3-7° F or More Temp Rise!
Most external physical climate resilience and adaptation programs—while important—will increasingly be:

- **Ineffective** because it is very difficult to predict the precise location and scope of impacts or prevent serious harm.

- **Inadequate** because they mostly focus on external physical factors and fail to prepare *people* for impacts to come.

- **Harmful** at times because many seek to maintain business-as-usual, which caused the crisis.
Disaster mental health programs—while vital—will increasingly be:

- **Overwhelmed** (most are already fragile)
- **Stop Gaps** because most are short term and only seek to stabilize people during and immediately after disasters
- **Inadequate** because they do not help people cope with persistent and intensifying (toxic) climate stresses.
Clinical therapy and direct service programs—while vital—will be increasingly inadequate because they are:

• **Not focused on helping** the general public learn mental wellness and resilience skills.

• **Not designed** to alter the cultural norms, social narratives, and community practices and structures that cause mental distress.

• **Not able to assist** the millions of people that will be impacted.
A Whole New Way of Thinking Is Needed to Respond

**Traditional approaches to risk and vulnerability analysis** will be also increasingly inadequate because they tend to...

- Focus solely on high-risk populations—which is important—but fail to realize **everyone** will be impacted by climate disasters & toxic stresses.

- Seek to **eliminate weaknesses** (which can seem endless) rather than **build on strengths** & **enhance protective factors**.

  (Twigg, 2004, IFRC 2012)
A Whole New Way of Thinking Is Needed to Respond

Traditional concepts of “resilience” will also be inadequate because... it will be impossible to “bounce back” to pre-crisis conditions....

And many people don’t want this!

Traumatized and stressed people want to be able to increase their sense of wellbeing above previous levels!
A Whole New Way of Thinking is Needed to Respond

**Resilience vs. Preparedness**

RAND Corp. Assessment

Traditional Disaster Preparedness Programs Have Not Worked Well Enough
And Prevention Works!

- ACEs prevention
- Smoking prevention
- Minimum drinking age laws
- HIV infections
- Childhood immunizations
- Motorcycle and bicycle helmet laws
- Child seat and safety belt use
- Many More Examples!

Adapted from. Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience: Addressing and Preventing Community Violence, by Ruben Cantu, The Prevention Institute Nov 4 2016
A major global prevention movement is urgently needed to **Build a Culture of Transformational Resilience!**
Phases Commonly Seen in Disasters

Pre-Disaster

Warning (years/days/hours)

Impact

“Pre-Crisis”

“Community Cohesion”
Honeymoon phase can last a few days to a few months: often thought of as “resilience”

“Heroic Phase”
Occurs during and right after impact: often thought of as “resilience”

“Disillusionment”
Can last months to years and generate severe mental, social, and spiritual distresses: resilience skills are vital here

“Bounce Back”
If sufficient time exists for recovery, many eventually return to some semblance of pre-crisis levels

“Recovery”
Coming to terms and working through grief can take years: resilience skills vital here

Some People Remain Dysregulated

Another Disaster or Anniversary Reactions Can Cause Regression

Building Population-Level Capacity for Transformational Resilience is *Essential*

(A version of post-traumatic growth)

The ability to constructively cope with climate and other adversities and use them as catalysts to learn, grow, and *increase* personal, social, and ecological wellbeing substantially above pre-crisis levels.

From *Transformational Resilience*, B. Doppelt
(Greenleaf Publishing 2016)
Key Elements of Helping *Individuals* Build Their Capacity for Transformational Resilience

The Resilient Growth Model™: A Framework for Building Mental Wellness and Resilience

Age, culturally, and demographically appropriate:

**Trauma-Informed Skills**

- Basic info on how trauma & toxic stress can affect mind, body and behaviors—and behaviors of groups
- Awareness of symptoms in self and others

**Presencing Skills (self-regulation)**

- Bio-psycho-emotional self-regulation skills
- Robust personal, social, and ecological supports
- Cognitive awareness and control skills

**Purposing Skills (adversity-based growth)**

- Learning and meaning making
- Values-based decisions
- Active engagement to harvest hope

(See ITRC Library on the website for research basis of this model)
Application of Transformational Resilience in Groups, Organizations, and Communities
(From Transformational Resilience, Greenleaf Publishing 2016)

See ITRC Library on the website for research basis of this model.
The ‘Wheel of Change’ for Building a Local Culture of Transformational Resilience for the Climate Emergency

- Embed TR in local organizational and public policies
- Organize diverse group of uncommon partners
- Assess climate traumas & stresses, local strengths, and obstacles
- Continually evaluate, learn, and improve
- Empower residents to take responsibility for Transformational Resilience
- Strengthen and connect social support networks
- Create vision, goals and strategy for population-level Transformational Resilience
- Educate all adults and youth in mental wellness & Transformational Resilience skills
Again--Imagine the Benefits of a Global Preventative Transformational Resilience Movement That Helps:

- **Everyone** become trauma-informed, builds on strengths & enhances protective factors so they can think & act in healthy ways even in unhealthy conditions.

- **All leaders** learn to promote social narratives, shift cultural norms and practices & make their groups safe, healthy, just, and equitable resilience-enhancing entities.

- **Everyone** learn how to use adversities as transformational catalysts to find new meaning, direction and hope in ways that motivate them to increase social and ecological wellbeing as a way of increasing their own sense of wellbeing.
Building a Culture of Transformational Resilience Is Possible!

“The ideas of one generation become the instincts of the next.”

— D.H. Lawrence

Adapted from. Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience: Addressing and Preventing Community Violence, by Ruben Cantu, The Prevention Institute Nov 4 2016
Let’s Launch a Movement to Build a Culture of Transformational Resilience in the U.S. and All Other Nations!
About the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC)

A global network of mental health, social service, education, climate, faith and other leaders working to raise awareness of the urgent need, methods, and benefits of proactively building universal capacity for Transformational Resilience for climate impacts.

• Led by national steering committee and regional steering committees in the PNW and CA.
• Webpage on ACEs Connection Network site and private Basecamp site for ITRC members
• Major conferences held in different parts of the U.S.
• Private and public workshops held in the EU and throughout the U.S.
• Free quarterly webinars with participants often from nations worldwide.
• In 2018 inventoried and assessed resilience building programs across the West Coast U.S.
• In 2019 had SB 1037 introduced in Oregon leg. to make resilience education universal
• In 2019 issued Call to Action on the Climate Mental Health and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Emergency – we ask individuals and organizations to sign on!

This information and more found at: http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/
About the Presenter

Bob Doppelt founded and coordinates the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC). He is the director of The Resource Innovation Group, which is affiliated with Willamette University. For almost a decade he directed the Climate Leadership Initiative (CLI) and taught systems thinking and global warming policy at the University of Oregon. Prior to that he ran a research institute and taught at Portland State University. His academic training is in both counseling psychology and environmental science. He is also a mindfulness teacher (Spirit Rock Meditation Center), and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Instructor (U. Mass. Medical School Center for Mindfulness). In 2015 he was named one of the world’s “50 Most Talented Social Innovators” by the World CRS Congress.

Bob is the author of a number of best-selling books on systems-based individual, organizational, and community change.

His book *Transformational Resilience* (Greenleaf Publishing 2016) describes these and other “Presencing” and “Purposing” principles and skills for building personal and psycho-social-spiritual resilience for the impacts of climate change. His other books include *Leading Change Toward Sustainability* (2003), *The Power of Sustainable Thinking* (2008), *From Me to We* (2012), and *Entering the Watershed* (1993).