



# Managing climate distress

Cultivating resilience and agency in the face of climate change

# WELCOME

## CLIMATE DISTRESS

- Housekeeping
- Introductions
- Drop in the chat:
  - Location
  - Position or program
  - One word describing how you're feeling today

★ Video recording



# OUR STORY

BeDo is an education initiative dedicated to the wellbeing of impact-driven professionals.

Born from co-founders' first-hand experience, we aim to address the unique mental health challenges facing researchers, activists, and humanitarians.

# OBJECTIVES

## CLIMATE DISTRESS

1. Explore embodied experience(s) of climate grief, despair, and denial;
2. Identify aggravating factors and practice navigating triggers;
3. Define a compassionate approach to climate grief;
4. Discover techniques for restoring agency and a sense of efficacy;
5. Practice cultivating compassion and self-compassion while working towards climate solutions

★ Confidentiality

★ Respect



→ **Learn**

→ **Practice**

→ **Discuss**

# OVERVIEW

## CLIMATE DISTRESS

I. Climate psychology

II. Compassion

III. Emotional spectrums

IV. Collective resilience

V. Overcoming apathy

VI. Hope and optimism



# Introductions

1. Brief description of your research, field site, and methodology.
2. What brings you here today?
3. What is one thing you hope to learn?



CLIMATE DISTRESS

# Climate Psychology



CLIMATE DISTRESS

# Word Cloud

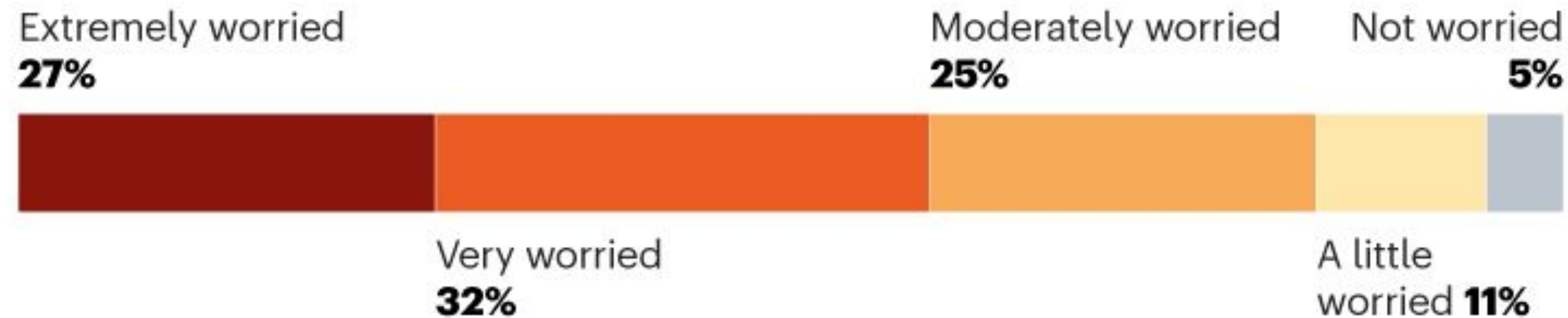




# CLIMATE ANXIETY

A survey of 10,000 young people shows that negative feelings about climate change can cause psychological distress.

## How worried are you about climate change?



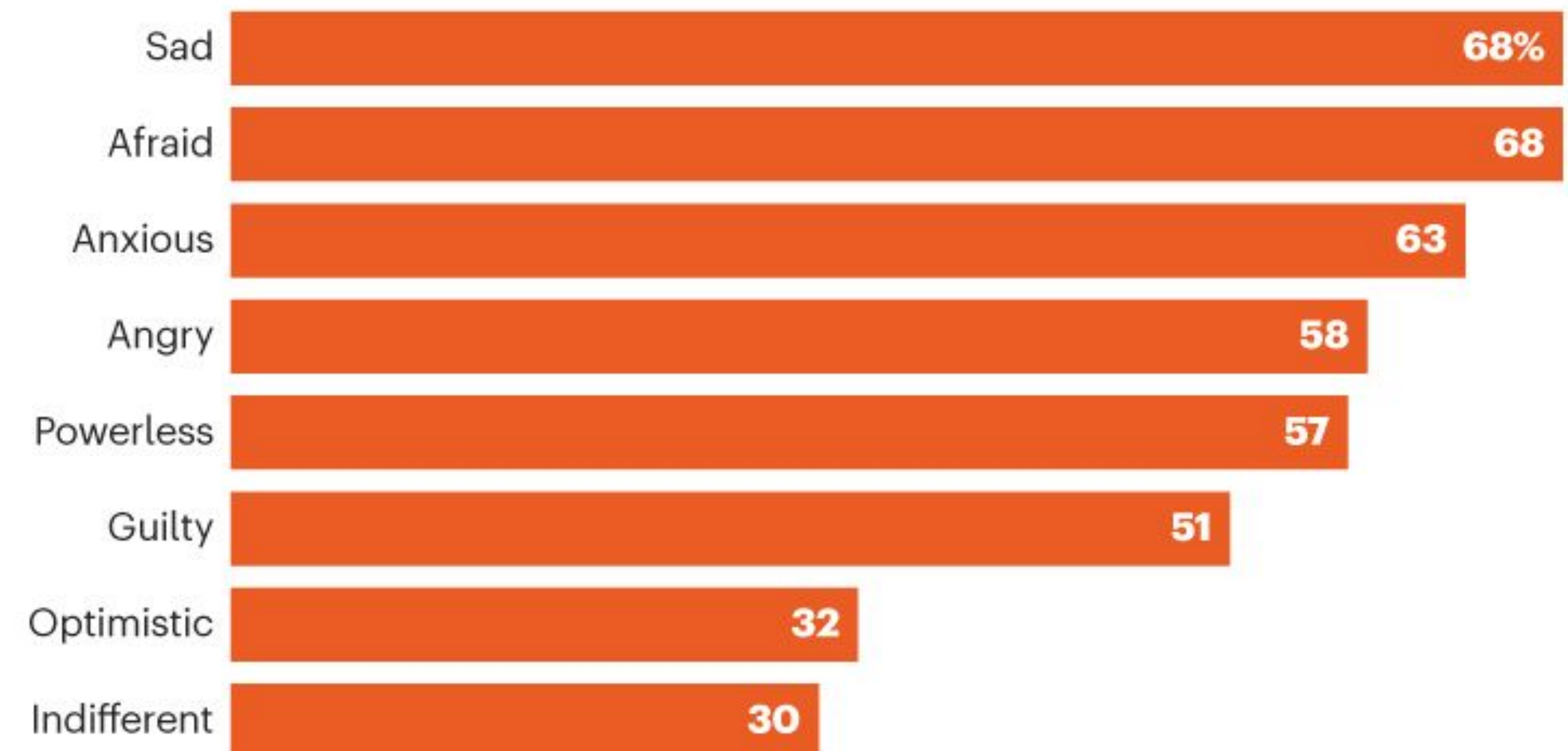
[Marks et al, 2021](#)

>45% of respondents said their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily life and functioning

75% said that they think the future is frightening

83% said that they think people have failed to take care of the planet

## Climate change makes me feel...





*A ruined planet cannot sustain human lives in good health. A healthy planet and healthy people are two sides of the same coin.*

MARGARET CHAN

## New territory

An expanding body of literature

Active threat to individual mental health as well as collective, psycho-social wellbeing ([WHO, 2022](#))

Risks and impacts are accelerating ([Hayes et al, 2018](#))

- Direct, indirect, overarching
- Challenges of attribution
- Dangers of pathologizing



# And at the same time...

Disaster inspires connection, altruism, compassion, and growth ([Ramsay & Manderson, 2011](#); [Edwards & Wiseman, 2011](#))

Balancing our ingrained negativity bias ([Vaish et al, 2008](#))

- We *learn* from negative experiences
- A balancing act ([Tierney & Baumiester, 2019](#))



Image courtesy: [SSCOR Blog](#)



## An intersectional approach

Disproportionate impact on

- Women
- Children and youth
- People of color
- Indigenous communities
- Economically disadvantaged
- Those who reside near especially polluted or damaged areas
- Those who reside in the equatorial hot zone

Environmental justice *is* social justice.



Image courtesy: Ezra Acayan, Getty Images



## Risks for researchers

We are profoundly affected by the people, places, and subjects we study.

- Insistence on rationality/objectivity leads to emotional detachment
- Downsides of compartmentalization

We are less likely to take action when feeling overwhelmed or hopeless ([Bandura, 2002](#); [Lorenzoni et al, 2007](#))

Resilience in academic vs. activist cultures ([Hoggett & Randall, 2018](#))







# Mindfulness Exercise



CLIMATE DISTRESS

Break  
(5 min)



CLIMATE DISTRESS

# Emotional Spectrums





*No aspect of our mental life  
is more important to the  
quality and meaning of our  
existence than the emotions.*

SCARANTINO & DE SOUSA ([2018](#))

## What *are* emotions anyways?

Distress is a *rational* and *functional* response.

Emotions are...

- Subjective
- Physiological
- Motivational

Appraisal = human tendency to label emotions as 'good' or 'bad' ([Arnold, 1960](#))

What you *think/believe* about your emotions matters! ([Suttie, 2019](#))

- Reappraisal ([King & dela Rosa, 2018](#))



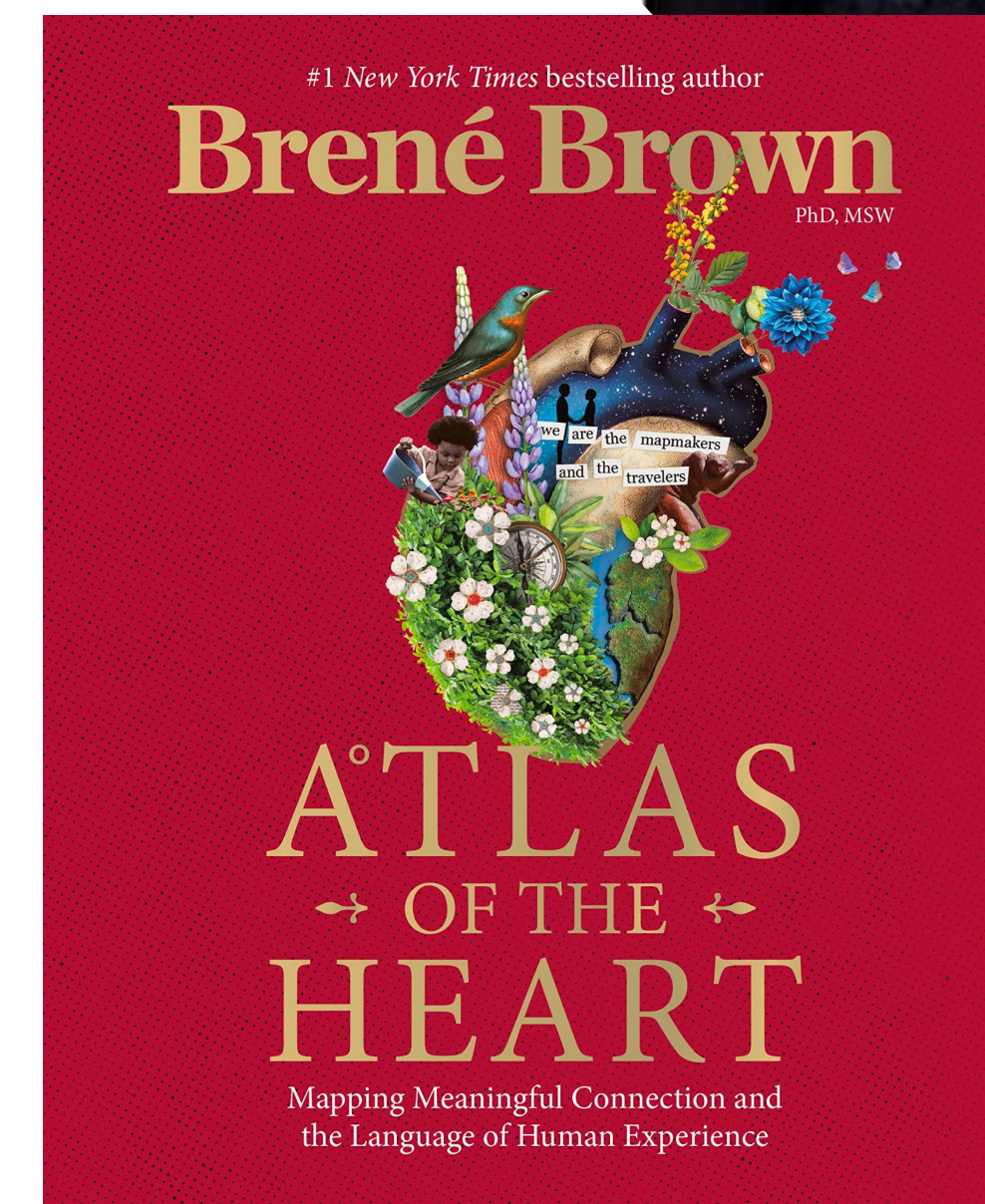


# Emotional literacy

The words we use define our experience  
([Brown, 2021](#))

## New terminology

- Eco-anxiety
- Climate grief
- Eco-despair
- Eco-hope
- Solastalgia
- Imminania
- Topoaversion







CLIMATE DISTRESS

# Harnessing Anger



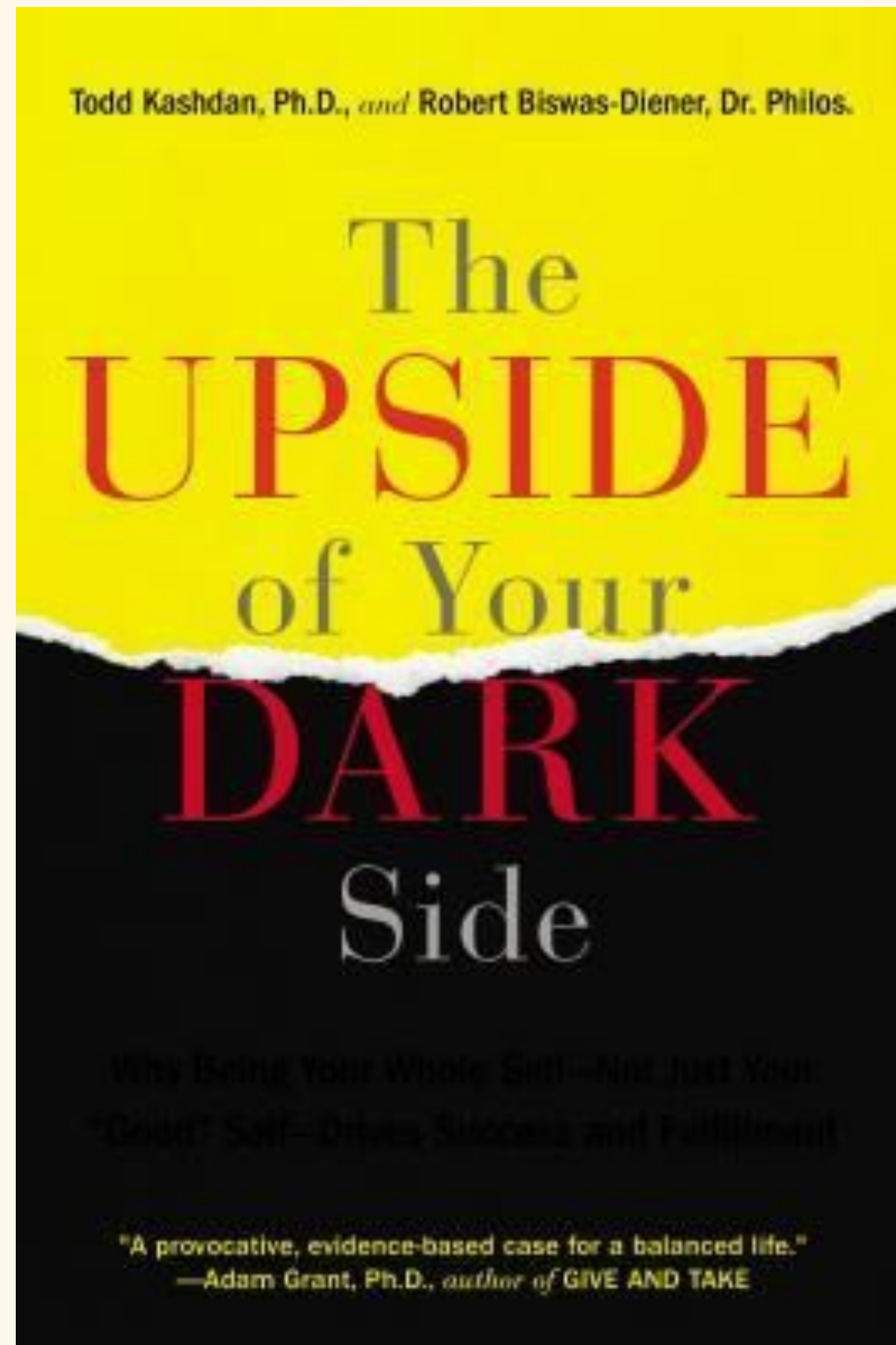


Image from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greta\\_Thunberg\\_02\\_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greta_Thunberg_02_cropped.jpg)

### Why are we so uncomfortable with anger?

- Cultural, social, religious reasons
- Personal associations
- History ([Stearns & Stearns, 1986](#))
- Tropes:
  - The angry activist ([Bashir et al., 2013](#))
  - The angry feminist ([Tomlinson, 2009](#))
  - The angry Black woman/man ([Jones et al., 2016](#))





## The Value of Anger ([Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014](#))

- Anger protects us
  - Evolutionary; sharpens and activates our senses
- Anger makes us aware of injustice
  - “righteous anger”; demands accountability
- Anger motivates us
  - A driver; catalyst for action

Anger Activism Model (AAM) ([Turner, 2007](#))

- Anger and self-efficacy

## How to 'harness' anger for good



- Anger: (can become) problematic when we perceive risk to be accelerating and window for action is shrinking (Riskind 2014, seen in [Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014](#))

90 miles per hour and above: boiling, explosive, violent  
80 miles per hour: infuriated, enraged  
75 miles per hour: irate, exasperated  
65 miles per hour: bitter, indignant  
60 miles per hour: pissed off  
45 miles per hour: annoyed, irritated, frustrated  
40 miles per hour: ruffled, displeased



CLIMATE DISTRESS

# Overcoming apathy





*Of all the dangers we face,  
from climate chaos to  
nuclear war, none is so  
great as the deadening of  
our response.*

JOANNA MACY ([2021](#))

### What is apathy?

a- 'without' + pathos 'feeling'

Deficit of emotion, emptiness of feeling  
- Disengagement

A form of denial? ([Basari, 2018](#))

Or a protective mechanism? ([McLaren, 2013](#))

- Apathy stems from repression
- Signifies a boundary violation
- Shuts down emotional engagement to avoid vulnerability



# Cycles and seasons

Apathy is part of the climate distress cycle

Emotions are ephemeral

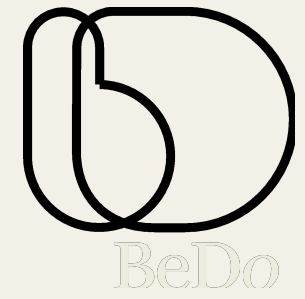
- 90 second rule ([Bolte-Taylor](#))

Partner with your apathy!

- Re-evaluate boundaries
- Reinvest in supportive relationships
- Feel your feelings
- Self-kindness and self-compassion







## Moderating intake

Media/news can be overwhelming

- Sheer increase in reporting ([Hayes et al, 2018](#))
- Sensationalism
- Limited evolutionary capacity to process suffering

All results in emotional overwhelm

Goldilocks conundrum!

Selectivity and balance

- Choose news outlets wisely
- When/where do you consume your news?
- Seek out the good



Image courtesy: [Challenge Blog](#) by the Singaporean Government



# FACING DIFFICULT TRUTHS

Climate Psychology Alliance

**CLIMATE**  
20TH  
NOVEMBER  
**PSYCHOLOGY**  
10AM-4PM GMT  
ONLINE  
**SUMMIT**

**CLIMATE  
TRAUMA &  
RESILIENCE**

HOW CAN WE  
CREATE A SENSE  
OF MEANING AND  
PURPOSE?

**CLIMATE  
ANXIETY**

Climate psychology asks how we can build structures of mutual support to contain these difficult emotions, so we can face where we are and move forward.

We are asking, what is a healthy emotional response to the ecological threats we are facing?

**SAT  
20TH  
NOV**

**SAVE  
THE  
DATE**







CLIMATE DISTRESS

# Hope and Optimism



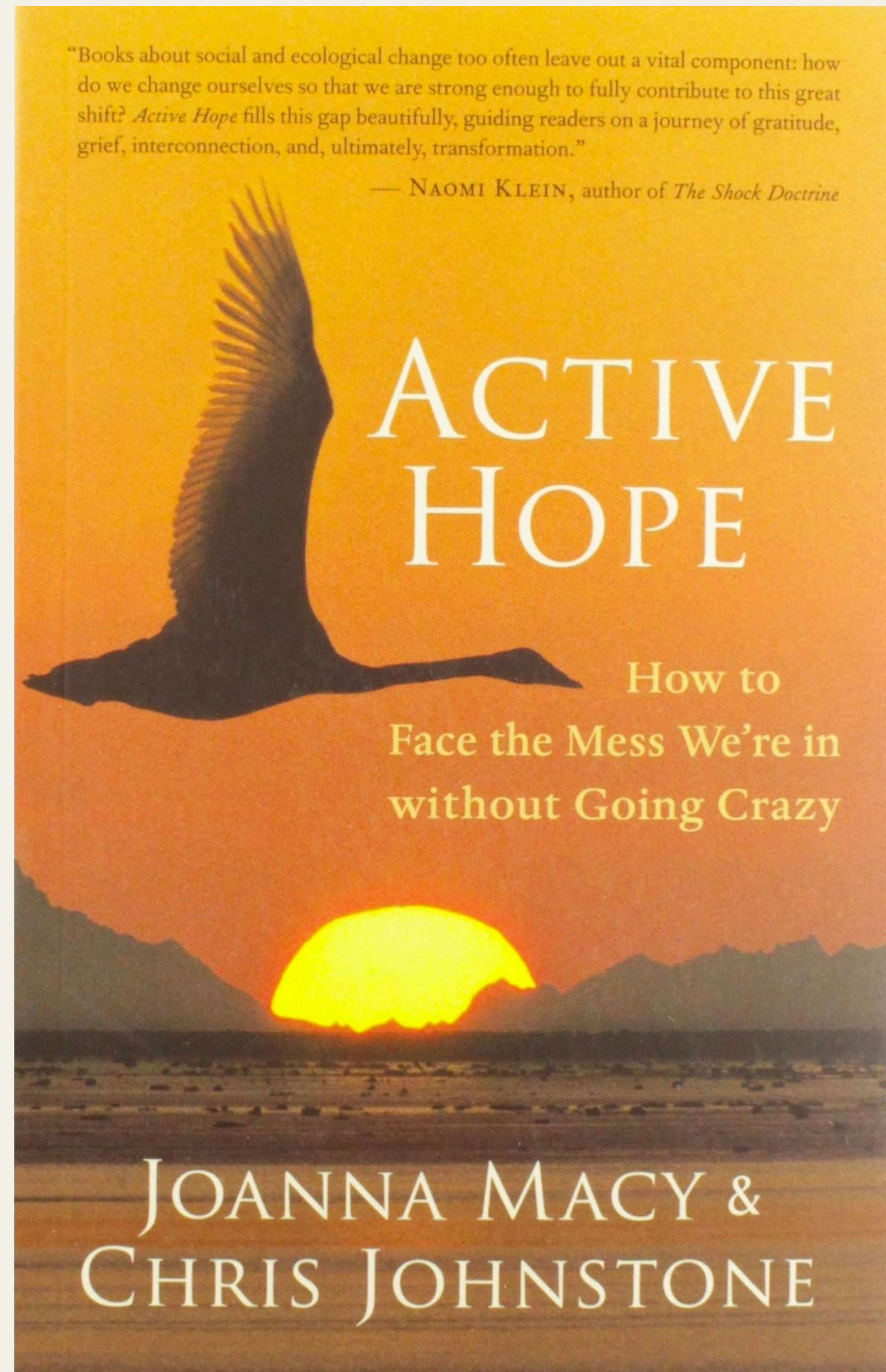


*[Optimism] is not about providing a recipe for self-deception.*

*The world can be a horrible, cruel place, and at the same time it can be wonderful and abundant. These are both truths. There is not a halfway point; there is only choosing which truth to put in your personal foreground.*

SONJA LYUBOMIRSKY





### The power of hope

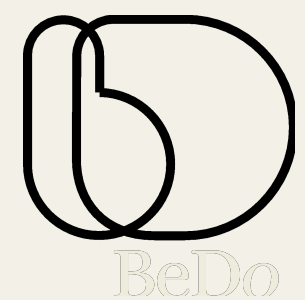
Interventions must be holistic, collaborative, and rooted in 'active hope' ([Hayes et al, 2018](#))

"Finding, and offering, our best response when facing concerns about our world situation" ([Macy & Johnstone, 2012](#))

1. See clearly
2. Know direction
3. Act to change

Constructive hope leads to pro-environmental behavior whereas denialism and pessimism does not ([Clayton, 2018](#))





## Strategies for Eco-Optimism

Seek out the wins

- Harvard's [The Climate Optimist](#)
- Counteracting our ingrained negativity bias

Community

- Powerful tool for supportive
- Pro-social responses ([Bowe et al., 2021](#))

Gratitude

- Positive psychological benefits ([CC Lin, 2015](#))
- Gratitude journaling
- Don't forget the *why*





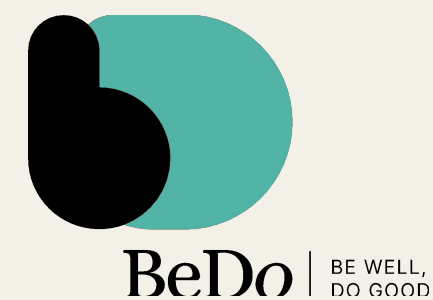
## Awe and imagination

Antidotes to cynicism and despair

“Wonder inspires the wish to understand; awe inspires the wish to let shine, to acknowledge and to unite” ([Wagemann & Weger, 2021](#))

Safeguarding our right to imagine a just and beautiful future.





# Thank you!

Connect with us!

@gowithbedo



gowithbedo.com

