

Young people's climate anxiety

Why is the new generation worried about its future?

Climate change is proving to have a negative effect on young people.

A vast survey carried out in a dozen countries reveals that anxiety young people are fed up with climate change. Three-quarters of 16-25 year-olds consider the future to be frightening, and feel that they have been abandoned by their governments. A new phenomenon called "climate anxiety".



Abandoned plastic bottle, Cologny, Geneva, January 2021

A study published on September 14, 2021, by the University of Bath in the United Kingdom shows that two-thirds of teenagers on the planet suffer from stress and anxiety due to climate change. 45% of young people aged 16 to 25 surveyed in 10 different countries say that eco-anxiety affects their daily life and 59% say they are very or extremely worried.

Among 10,000 teenagers questioned, 75% consider the future to be frightening and 56% believe that humanity is sentenced.

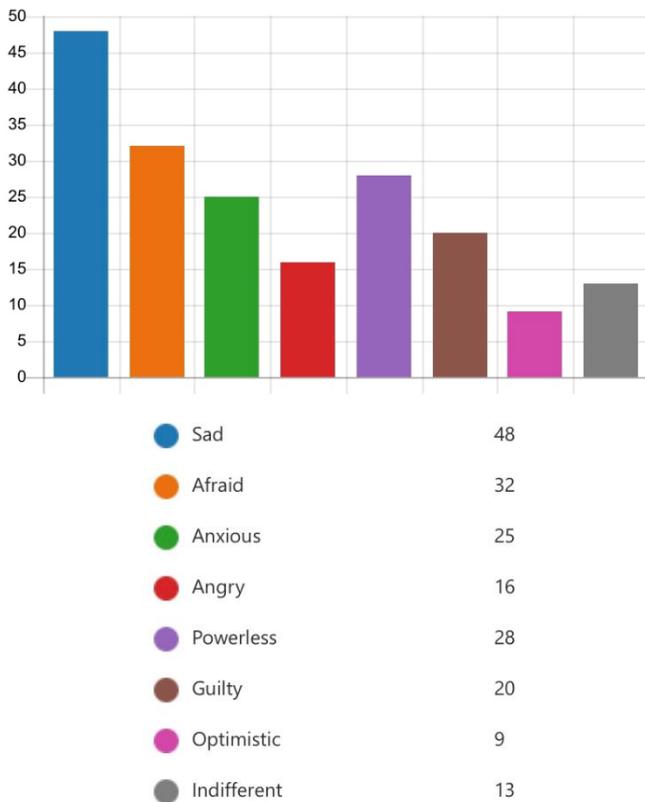
They feel afraid, sad, anxious, angry, powerless and even guilty. 4 teens out of 10 teens also say that they are hesitating to have children. The results of this international study also show that it is almost unanimously agreed

"we have failed taking care of the planet". More than half of them also believe they have fewer opportunities than their parents.

*"We realize that young people are extremely worried. They put enormous pressure on their shoulders. They feel like they have a big responsibility concerning climate change. They want to save the planet. They consider the future to be frightening and sometimes they even think that humanity is sentenced says **Virginie Lovens**, our school psychologist.*

We also carried out a small survey in our school to prove what we said, 92 people responded.

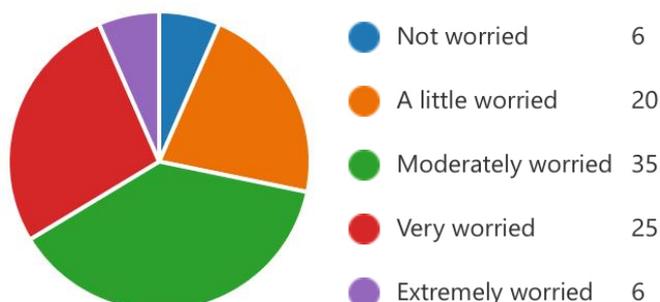
Our research shows that most of the people feel sad, afraid, powerless and anxious about climate change :



Who experiences climate anxiety ?

Climate anxiety is more common among those who care more about environmental issues or who have experienced some impacts of climate change. Susceptibility to climate anxiety will also vary according to personality. Research shows that the personality trait of neuroticism is associated with vulnerability to psychiatric disorders.

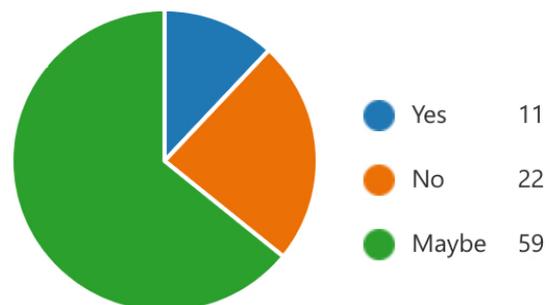
Most of the teens in our survey moderately to very worried about climate change :



Climate change is real

We've been trying to deal with heatwaves, forest fires, the air pollution, cyclones and typhoons, earthquakes and tidal waves for years. The increase in pollution and its impact on health, the loss of biodiversity, the accumulation of rubbish in the oceans, water stress and water shortages, the overexploitation of natural resources, deforestation as well as the rising sea level among others, people's anxiety is quite understandable. *"There is ecological mourning that young people have to do and as in all mourning there are several stages : denial, anger, helplessness in the face of how can we change things, depression sometimes and above all, huge guilt because young people are also somehow responsible, we all participate in the destruction of the planet. And then there is something else too is that young people feel betrayed by the governments which had made promises and didn't keep them. It also sometimes affects sleep and eating."*

Only 11 people think that we will overcome climate change :



The two major stress

"There are two major forms of suffering linked to climate change: first there is eco-anxiety, which is a prospective distress, that is to say that we imagine what will happen and it affects the daily life of young people. This suffering is becoming legitimate because climate

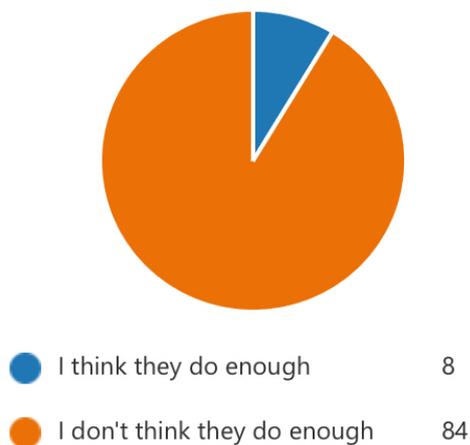
change is materializing and getting closer and closer. So this eco-anxiety, is a pre-traumatic stress, it means that it is anticipatory, it is the fear of what will happen.”

“The second major form of suffering is called solastalgia and that is retrospective distress, which means that we suffer from the loss or degradation of an environment that we have known before and that we risk to never find again. It is perhaps the syndrome "it was better before". So this, solastalgia, is post-traumatic stress. This means that disasters have already happened.”

Climate behavior

In a way, climate change anxiety could serve as a source of motivation to encourage behavioral engagement with the issue of climate change. On the other hand, climate anxiety could serve as a source of eco-paralysis : inhibiting people from taking effective actions.

Our survey shows that teens feel like governments aren't doing enough to avoid climate disasters :



How can we manage our stress ?

- Talk to people, you can talk to a family member who will listen to you, share his/her opinions with you. Talking to someone can be a big stress reliever by helping you break things down.

- Take a break, it can help you think of new ideas of how to take action.

- Knowing the enemy is fundamental and that is where climate change education comes in. Raise your own and others' awareness of the problem.

- Avoid those little things that pollute, take action, even if you're frustrated that people are not doing anything, you can do something yourself which can feel empowering such as : turn off your lights when you're not using them, reuse and recycle, stop leaving the tap running or throwing chewing gum on the ground, because even the smallest detail counts.

In conclusion, to face this climatic insecurity and somewhere stop sacrificing the present because we are afraid of the future, it is important to integrate the notion of uncertainty. Because uncertainty is part of our daily lives and more generally we don't know how the planet will evolve, we have ideas but with the new generation who can perhaps change certain things, we have no certainties. It doesn't prevent you from being lucid, but it's anticipating events while showing resilience. Resilience is when you transform a trauma into something positive.

The good news in the fight against climate anxiety is that climate problems are causing a change in awareness of the need to take care of the planet among a large part of the population.

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