



## Tool 1.4

# Acknowledging climate emotions

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### **CLARITY Competence Area:**

Taking care of climate emotions and trauma

### **GreenComp Competence Area:**

Acting for sustainability

### **Why use this tool?**

This tool enables learners to become familiar with different methods that they can mobilize, either individually or with others, including in small groups, to engage with their climate emotions at a deeper level. This can be particularly valuable for older students who study climate change on a prolonged basis, or for students who are very sensitive to climate change impacts, and are looking for sustainable ways to feel and navigate such emotions, including climate grief. This tool also helps experience the benefits of community care for our emotional and mental wellbeing.

## Activity 1.4.1

# Climate circles/cafes

### Overview

A climate circle or climate cafe is an opportunity for people to come together and share about the emotions they feel in relation to climate change, in a supportive setting that is meant to be as safe as possible because of shared agreements between members. The method we share here is only meant for participants to feel, practice open-sharing and deep-listening in relation to climate emotions. This is not a space to talk about solutions to the climate crisis and its impacts. Learners will get more benefits by taking part in climate circles regularly. They can also access training to run youth-led climate circles themselves.

This activity works best when being offered on a regular basis for learners who feel the need to talk about their climate emotions, and/or wish to start building or restoring their emotional and mental health and wellbeing. It can then support learning and action associated with climate change across a variety of disciplines and projects.

### Curriculum linkage

Any discipline or class during which climate change is discussed.

### Competences built

Self-compassion, emotional literacy, emotional regulation



### BASIC INFO

#### Age range:

18+

#### Duration:

5 minutes per participant;  
maximum 60 minutes.

#### Group size:

Group size can vary according to the time available, but should not exceed 10-12 people. Subgroups can be created for allowing all members of the group to participate.

#### Level of difficulty:

Intermediate

#### Materials/space required:

Material can include drawing material, or other materials to assemble and represent emotions. Spaces where participants can sit in a circle.

#### Location:

If done in a public space, the activity should be undertaken in areas that feel confidential enough, and not open to the walking through of strangers.

#### Engagement of external stakeholders:

None.



## Prep Work

Participate in a climate circle/cafe yourself first, preferably several times, to understand the role of the host/facilitator.

Join a climate circle host training (see reference section).

## Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

Tool 1.1 - Fostering a trauma-informed learning environment.

Tool 3.3 – Listening. Especially activity 3.3.2 - Deep listening to others.

## Steps in the activity

1. Try out in class
  - a. Introducing the principles of the climate circles
  - b. Hosting the climate circle
  - c. Welcoming reflections on the climate circle experience
2. New habits

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## Step 1: Try out in class

### Introducing the principles of the climate circles

1. Explain that some might know this activity as a 'climate cafe' and that we will introduce the principles that we will follow in this space to make it as safe as possible.
2. Inform learners that this activity is an invitation to express their climate emotions in a group and that they can choose to opt out.
3. Have the drawing or other material ready in case participants would rather draw or represent their emotions physically instead of talking about it.
4. Explain the three main principles of the climate circle: (1) open-sharing, (2) deep-listening, and (3) confidentiality.
5. Explain that open-sharing consists in learners having the opportunity to share all the emotions they feel in relation to climate change. It may be worth adding that there is no right or wrong, or good or bad emotions. Learners are welcome to speak without interruption (keeping in mind the other participants in the room) or not to speak at all. Learners are also welcome to share their emotions through drawings, sculptures, assemblages



or other art forms. Learners are welcome not to speak and just to listen in. When a learner is done sharing, they should give the name of another learner for them to have an opportunity to speak.

6. Explain that deep listening for this exercise consists in giving one's undivided attention to what the other learner is saying, to notice when the mind starts to wander and to come back to practicing deep listening when noticing that we were not listening anymore. Deep listening also means being mindful of what is happening in our own bodies while listening, and practicing breathing exercises or other movements to enable us to remain present without feeling overwhelmed. For more information about Deep listening, see activity card 3.3.2.
7. Explain that climate circles are confidential spaces, and that participants in climate circles commit to keeping all the information they hear confidential.
8. Explain to learners that they will speak one after the other, and will not engage in a (moderated) conversation. The climate circle is not about solving each other's issues, giving unsolicited advice or recommendations, or discussing how to act on climate change. Those latter discussions are needed but should take place in other contexts.

## Hosting the climate circle

1. Open the climate circle by giving one learner the opportunity to speak first, or by speaking first as the climate circle host if no learner wishes to speak first.
2. Invite participants to stick to the principles of open sharing and deep listening if they start engaging in a dialogue.
3. Close the climate circle once each learner has expressed what they wished to express, after checking that there is nothing else to add.
4. Once the climate circle is closed, invite learners to take one minute to breathe and reflect on the experience.

## Welcoming reflections on the climate circle experience

1. Recall the purpose of the climate circle at the end of the session and invite any reflection from learners about their experience in taking part in a climate circle.



2. Offer to share more resources about emotional and mental wellbeing in relation to climate change to learners who feel the need to learn more or get extra support. Point to other climate circles/climate cafes they can access if they wish to continue joining such spaces.
3. Allow a few more minutes for learners to breathe and integrate what they have discussed before returning to their class or assignment.

## Step 2: New habits

4. Organize a climate circle on a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly basis to ensure that learners have regular access to a safe space to process their climate emotions.
5. You can also encourage your learners to learn more about climate circles and to get trained in climate circle hosting so as to be able to offer such climate circles to their fellow learners, and/or to different members of their community.



### Dos and don'ts

#### Do

- Model open-sharing and deep listening as a climate circle host.
- Listen to learners who feel overwhelmed by the exercise, and/or express the need for additional support during or at the end of the exercise, and provide them with the information they need to access this support.
- Follow up with the learners who appear to be in a crisis or to be meeting mental health challenges.

#### Don't

- Don't give unsolicited advice or recommendations
- Don't turn the climate circle space into a dialogue or a moderated discussion about climate action or solutions to the climate crisis
- Don't dismiss or invalidate the emotions shared by any of the learners
- Don't try and end the climate circle on a positive note

#### Adaptations

- If your learners are not comfortable with each other, nor trusting of one another, a tool that focuses on expressing emotions individually (e.g. journalling) followed by an activity involving movement to calm climate anxiety (e.g. activities in competence area 1.3.) is probably a better choice.



- If your learners struggle with expressing emotions through words, modelling multiple examples of expressing emotions through drawings, collages, assemblages, sculptures could support them.
- If your learners come from different cultures and speak different mother languages, you could offer them the opportunity to create groups by languages and share emotions in their own languages as it could bring more ease and spontaneity to the exchange.
- We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by considering their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how *you* want to be treated, but how *they* want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

## References

This activity was designed by One Resilient Earth.

Broad, G. (2024). "Ways of Being' When Facing Difficult Truths: Exploring the Contribution of Climate Cafés to Climate Crisis Awareness" in Anderson, J., Staunton, T., O'Gorman, J., & Hickman, C., *Being a therapist in a time of climate breakdown*. In Routledge eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003436096>

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