

# Addressing Climate Distress and Building Resilience with Saskatchewan Youth: the Break The Divide Approach

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*Break The Divide*

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# Today's Agenda

Introduction

Understanding Climate Emotions

Addressing Climate Distress

Actionable Steps





# Abhay

- From Surrey, BC
- Regina, SK - University of Regina
- Break The Divide
- Care about climate change, mental health, justice
- Hockey, piano





Environmental Identity























A dramatic landscape photograph featuring a massive, dark, swirling storm cloud formation, possibly a supercell or a developing tornado, dominating the sky. The clouds are dark and textured, with some lighter areas where sunlight hits. Below the storm, a field of tall, golden-brown grass is visible, swaying in the wind. The horizon line is low, showing a line of trees and a small white building in the distance. The overall mood is ominous and powerful.

# Climate Change and Mental Health



A small, vibrant green seedling with several leaves is growing out of a crack in a dark, textured asphalt surface. The background is a blurred, warm-toned sky with a bright light source, possibly the sun, creating a soft glow. The overall image conveys a sense of resilience and growth despite a harsh environment.

How does climate change make you feel?



# Overview of Climate Change & Mental Health

## ACUTE EXPOSURE



**hurricanes and typhoons,  
floods, wildfires, extreme  
heat**

- PTSD
- Anxiety and depression
- Suicide
- Substance use
- Interpersonal violence
- Direct biological impacts

## CHRONIC EXPOSURE



**drought, famine, loss of land,  
displacement, civil conflict**

- Loss of identity
- Grief
- Existential distress
- Suicide
- Direct biological impacts

## VICARIOUS EXPOSURE



**climate awareness, news  
media, social media**

- “eco-anxiety”
- “solastalgia”
- “pre-TSD”
- Fear, rage
- Disaffection



# Youth Mental Health in Crisis



Canada: Suicide second leading cause of death for youth




73% of Youth: Future is Frightening;  
50%: "Humanity is doomed"  
37%: Feelings about climate change  
negatively impact daily functioning.



There is a demand for more climate  
education.





# Links Between Climate Change and Mental Health

Climate Grief, Solastalgia

Eco-Anxiety, Fear

Powerlessness, Helplessness

Guilt, Hypocrisy




# Climate Terminology Resource











# *A Deeper Toll:* Young People and the Climate Crisis

Climate grief, anxiety, stress,  
burnout, political inaction,  
burden of the future



September  
2020





# Climate Change Exacerbates Existing Inequalities

Existing mental health issues in Canada  
(biological interaction with medication)


- BC Heat Dome - 2020

Systemic oppression: racism, ableism,  
homophobia, poverty

- Trauma builds up and is stored in the body.
- Pre-emptive climate stress and negative experiences of climate change add on to existing stress.
- Climate change and violence

Cultural differences and stigma around  
mental health





# Racialized and Indigenous Youth Engaging in Climate Action

## Severe burnout

- Viewing the world through the lens of climate change

## Experiencing racism, micro-agressions in climate spaces

- Extractive Industry: harm on the land and communities

## Policy work:

- Inducing feelings of helplessness and powerlessness



The background features a large blue semi-circle on the left side. In the top left corner, there is a small green circle and a yellow triangle. In the top right, there is a large green circle and a vertical yellow dashed line. In the bottom right, there is a yellow square and a series of green dashed lines.

# Addressing Climate Distress in Youth

Break The Divide's Approach

# Break The Divide's Approach

- Partnering with High Schools
  - Creating school curriculum for teachers
  - Hosting climate emotions resilience circles





# Solution

1

Develop emotional intelligence:

Understanding and naming emotions

2

Foster connection

With environment, identity, community

3

Build resilience and belonging

Peer facilitation and climate justice organizing to build community



# 1 – Developing Emotional Intelligence



A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a small green plant with tiny white flowers. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, reaching towards the center. The background is a soft-focus forest scene with sunlight filtering through the trees, creating a warm, golden glow and bokeh effects. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful, suggesting a connection with nature.

# Eco-Anxiety as a Natural Response to Systemic Harm

# Why is knowing climate emotions language important?



## Understanding

Helps us better understand ourselves and normalize our emotions (recognize, acknowledge, accept, regulate)



## Connection

Having the right terminology to describe what we are feeling removes the feeling of isolation & allows us to connect with others (removal of stigma)



# HYPERAROUSAL

Use mindfulness,  
grounding, Breath work

Overreactive, unclear thought,  
Emotionally distressed

Can't calm down

# WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

The body is in its optimal state, Can access both  
reason and emotion, Mentally engaged

Shutting Down

Depressed, lethargic,  
numb, unmotivated

Use mindfulness, breath work,  
physical activity

# HYPOAROUSAL



# Individual Strategies



Understanding and Expressing Your Emotions – Sharing, Journalling, Art



Regulate - Breathing, Meditation



Time in Nature – Creating a Personal Relationship with the Natural World



Media Consumption – Positive Stories



# How to Regulate:

## Anxiety:

- Ground yourself in the present when experiencing anxiety
- Calm the nervous system down
  - Box breathing

## Other Emotions:

- Response may look different based on the emotion (justice lens)
  - Anger, Sadness, Fear
- Who is allowed to express these emotions in our society?



## 2 – Fostering Connection





# Environmental Identity

- We all experience climate change differently
- Not just about current location
- Past environments
- Family history of environment and interaction with environment (values and culture of environment)

# Community Knowledge



What is community?




How do communities create knowledge?



What happens when we connect communities?





# Connecting to Community Knowledge and Resilience

## Connecting with diverse communities

- Recognizing that we have resilience and wisdom to learn from

## Examples of Resilience:

- Sikh Knowledge and Resilience – Chardi Kala
- Queer Communities – Queer Joy Amidst the AIDS Crisis
- Black Joy – Holding Pain and Injustice in the Form of Joy
- Indigenous Wisdom – White Buffalo in Siksika First Nation


Even if the world is ending, where can we find joy?

- Hope, love, resilience



## 3 – Building Resilience and Belonging





# Peer to Peer Connection Model for Resilience Building

Training	Training youth facilitators on climate emotions dialogue facilitation
Allowing	Allowing youth to show up authentically
Facilitating	Facilitating conversations on connection to identity, community, environment, emotions, and action



“Action is the  
Antidote to Anxiety”



A photograph of several white wind turbines against a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. The turbines are positioned in the lower right and bottom center of the frame, with their blades extending upwards and outwards. The sky transitions from a light blue at the horizon to a deeper blue at the top.

# Community-Centred Climate Action

# Intentional Climate Action



## Identity

- Deep Sense of Who We Are As
- Recognizing Obligation to Take Action Because of Positionality
- Incorporating Climate Action into Our Careers - Being Leaders



## Community


- Learning from others, understanding complexities behind issues
- Working *with* and *alongside* communities you are connected to
- Existing spheres of influence  
→ systems of influence



## Emotion

- Recognizing the climate emotion you're feeling
- Action may be different based on the climate emotion
- Emotionally-informed climate action





What types of climate  
action connects to your  
identity, community, and  
emotions?

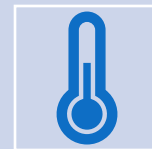
# Climate Emotions Resilience in Saskatchewan



Hosted 3 dialogues in Regina over the past year



Using climate justice organizing to build more diverse youth-led coalitions and build spaces of belonging and community



Rising to the challenge of climate adaptation in the prairies





A close-up photograph of a pair of hands gently cradling a small, colorful globe of the Earth. The globe shows the continents of North America, South America, and parts of Europe and Africa, with various geographical labels like 'OCEAN', 'Beaufort Sea', 'UNITED STATES', 'CANADA', and 'UNITED STATES'. The hands are positioned as if protecting or nurturing the planet. The background is a soft, out-of-focus brown. Overlaid on the lower half of the image is the text 'Is mental health an existing part of our climate adaptation strategies?' in a white, sans-serif font.

Is mental health an existing part of our climate  
adaptation strategies?

# Social Resilience and Climate Adaptation



Very important for disaster response and climate adaptation



Social connections can buffer the negative impacts of stress, lowering the risk of **mental health conditions**



Strong social networks, trust, and collaborative relationships within a community: help communities recover more quickly



Connections enable people to support each other during crises, ensuring that no one is left behind



A photograph of a red wooden pawn and a group of yellow wooden pawns on a dark wooden surface. The red pawn is on the left, and the yellow pawns are on the right, arranged in a line. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey. The text "Mental Health and Climate Adaptation Go Hand in Hand" is overlaid in white, with the "G" in "Go" being red.

Mental Health and Climate Adaptation  
Go Hand in Hand



Starting Climate  
Emotions Conversations  
in Your Own Community



# Solution: Break The Divide



Since 2017: 1000+ Students Engaged in 10 Countries



3-month School Program




Anxiety to Empathy to Action



Partnered with 20 Schools







“Before this program, I felt so lost  
and scared about the future. Now, I  
see that we can use these emotions  
to connect and create change”

- Christina, 13



A close-up photograph of a small, vibrant green seedling with several leaves growing out of a crack in a dark, textured asphalt surface. The background is a blurred, light-colored area with some reddish-brown streaks, suggesting a bright, sunny day. The text "Break The Divide Across the Prairies" is overlaid on the left side of the image in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**Break The  
Divide Across  
the Prairies**



A man and a woman are seen from behind, embracing each other in a field of rubble. The man is wearing large headphones and a dark t-shirt. The woman has blonde hair and is wearing a dark top. They are standing in front of a large pile of debris, including wood, metal, and other unrecognizable objects. In the background, there is a thick layer of smoke or fog, and some trees are visible through the haze. The overall atmosphere is somber and desolate.

# Mental Health in Crisis

What's the cost if we **don't** take action?



# Vision

Empowering youth with  
resilience and connection



Climate change and mental health are  
*inextricably linked.*

**To heal the planet, we have to  
collectively heal ourselves.**





# Thank You! Questions?

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