

Build Eco-Inspiration, not Eco-Anxiety

Ilan Kelman

Environmental degradation negatively affects our mental health and wellbeing when we do not support people with difficulties. Lack of support refers to not only structural aspects, such as health systems without the suitable personnel, resources, training, or impetus for prevention, but also to cultural aspects. In too many places, mental health and wellbeing issues remain stigmatised, while the eternal doom-and-gloom narratives about the state of humanity and the planet generate major mental health and wellbeing struggles. There should be no denial of the immense and intense social and environmental ills facing us, but we can adjust the way we communicate them to foster positive outcomes for mental health and wellbeing. Even though the challenges are sizeable and continue to develop, we have seen a vast reduction in single-use plastic availability, significant increases in fossil fuel divestment, and continual pushes to reduce subsidies given to fossil fuel companies. Support for healthier lifestyles, pollution prevention, and less consumption expand, alongside plans to stabilise humanity's population. We still need research on comparing the successes with the continual problems. We also need to understand why so much reporting promotes catastrophism, rather than a balanced comparison of the goods and the bads. The uncritical mantra becomes eco-anxiety, climate crisis, grief, and solastalgia (distress due to environmental change). Instead, to support mental health and wellbeing alongside positive action, our research priority should be: How do we develop, communicate, and act on eco-inspiration?