

# CLIMATE ANXIETY ~ AN EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

**Climate Anxiety can leave teenagers feeling unmotivated, distracted, and in particularly severe cases, depressed or even suicidal, adding to the mental health crisis generally afflicting young people today.**

A national EdWeek Research Center survey found that 37% of teenagers feel anxious when they think about climate change and its effects, and more than a third feel afraid. Many also said they feel helpless and overwhelmed.

The consequences of climate-related distress are profound for youth. The fear of climate change is influencing their decisions about where to attend college, whether to stay in their hometowns as adults, and even whether to have children. In some cases, these feelings can adversely affect young people's ability to function on a daily basis, experts say.

The term **climate anxiety** encompasses all the difficult emotions—*anxiety, fear, sadness, grief, anger, helplessness, powerlessness, and guilt*—that people can experience when confronting the climate crisis.

Climate anxiety is a natural response to a real and existential threat. Present in people of all ages, but most prevalent among young adults, and experienced by high schoolers, middle schoolers, and even children as young as eight. Solutions for this crisis aren't reconcilable by any individual; anxiety naturally occurs when a person feels like they aren't in control and aren't able to find a solution.

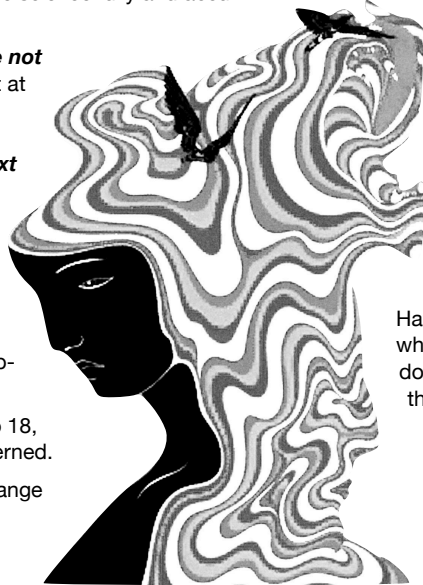
Experts warn that school counselors or teachers aren't prepared to help students emotionally grapple with the climate crisis—something that both social-emotional and climate advocates are hoping to change. Climate change education is spotty and limited across the country, and many teachers don't receive training or support to teach the science fully and accurately—to say nothing of its social-emotional toll.

**"This is an existential human crisis that I think teachers are not prepared to address,"** said Chelsey Goddard, a vice president at the Education Development Center who leads the global non-profit's health, mental health, and behavioral health work in the United States. **"Just to address climate change in the context of science [isn't] addressing the social-emotional and social science aspect of this crisis."**

The EdWeek survey, conducted in October, presented teenagers a list of 11 emotions—ranging from angry to optimistic to uninterested—and asked them to select all that apply when they think about climate change and its effects. The top response? "Anxious," followed closely by "afraid" and "helpless."

Just 17 percent of the teenagers, who ranged in age from 14 to 18, said they felt optimistic. Only 8 percent said they were unconcerned.

Meanwhile, a quarter of teenagers said the threat of climate change has affected whether they want to have children.



The EdWeek data bolsters what other researchers have found: A global study of 10,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 25 found that 39 percent say they're hesitant to have their own children one day because of the climate crisis.

There's a growing movement for mental health professionals to be trained to treat climate anxiety. And some universities are in the initial stages of starting to offer climate stress therapy for students. But so far, this conversation has been largely missing from K-12 schools, where there are already not enough school counselors to meet young people's growing mental health needs.

**The Climate Mental Health Network** is working with partners to develop resources for middle school teachers to incorporate social-emotional learning practices into science lessons and discussions on climate change.

Experts say that teachers should foster a sense of agency and self-efficacy among students when they discuss climate change. While climate change is largely driven by corporations, individuals can still take action—and more than half of the teenagers who responded to the EdWeek survey said they wanted to learn in school what they could personally do to lessen the effects of climate change. About a quarter said when they think of climate change, they feel motivated.

Climate crisis is an opportunity for educators to teach about collective action and working with others toward a common goal. Feeling like a part of something bigger can help build self-esteem, it can be restoring, too, from a mental health perspective.

While teenage activism around climate change often makes headlines, few survey respondents said they've attended climate demonstrations or contacted elected officials in the past two years. Thirty-seven percent of teenagers say they haven't taken any actions related to climate change during that time period.

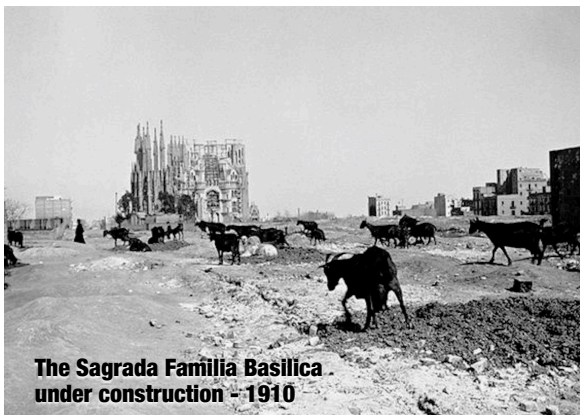
One potential barrier to schools' helping with the social-emotional toll of the climate crisis? Politics. While most American adults believe in human-driven climate change, more Republicans than Democrats believe climate change is caused by natural patterns, and Democrats are more likely to have substantial concerns about the environment, surveys show.

This work also may require a mindset shift among the adults in school buildings: adults will have to come to terms with the fact that young people have a different mindset than they did about their futures.

Have compassion for that and get curious about really trying to understand the granularity of what climate anxiety feels like—how it can make a young person feel futureless and abandoned by older generations, which is profound psychological distress that can tear away at the social underpinnings of wellbeing.

**A Greenfuse Radical remix with apologies to Madeline Will**  
[edweek.org](http://edweek.org)  
[climatementalhealth.net](http://climatementalhealth.net)

## 3,000 RESIDENTS IN THE WAY OF A GRAND FACADE



**The Sagrada Família Basilica under construction - 1910**

The Sagrada Família is the best known landmark in Barcelona, with its crown of magnificent towers punctuating the city's skyline. The intricate gothic design was modernized with the Art Nouveau pizzazz typical of its maker, the visionary Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí. With construction starting 140 years ago in 1882, the church's millions of annual visitors are often surprised to learn that it so far remains uncompleted.

As for local residents, however, it is said that most have given up hope of seeing the finished basilica in their lifetimes. The project has been delayed over the decades invariably by civil war, underfunding (progress has predominantly relied on private donors), conservation, and lengthy permit applications. A completion year of 2026—the centenary of Gaudí's death—was finally suggested in 2019, but this optimistic target was also thrown off course by the pandemic.

Not everyone has been disappointed by these interruptions, however, as the basilica's completion is not welcomed equally by all the city's inhabitants. As anyone who has been forced to live in close proximity to building works for an extended period might understand, a growing movement of locals have grievances about the construction. Those who have the most at stake? The 3,000 residents of an apartment block that will have to be razed in order to realize Gaudí's vision for the grand entrance of the building.

Desperate residents are clinging to hope that they can save their homes by arguing that the elaborate Glory facade was not even part of Gaudí's original plans. Their argument, which has formed the basis for a law-

suit filed against the city council, hinges on the fact that a fire destroyed the architect's original papers.

Gaudí's intentions have been pieced together and inferred from surviving photos, preliminary sketches and the claims of his assistants, and the Glory facade's staircase is one of the more contentious elements of this reconstruction.

Activists with the **Association of Neighbors of the Sagrada Família (Associació de Veïns i Veïnes Sagrada Família)**, a group formed to help local residents raise their voices on the topic, confirm that Gaudí's idea was that people arrive to the church by walking among the houses so it would be integrated into the urban web: the only aspect to respect in that case would be the visibility of the building.

It has hardly helped local residents warm to the basilica that it is now a tourist hotspot. Frustration about the overwhelming influx of visitors is a gripe that resounds across the city of Barcelona, which has seen rental prices shoot up in response to the popularity of Airbnb, less space on sidewalks and public transport, and the booming business for restaurants, bars and souvenir shops at the expense of other endeavors.

*The district of El Poblet was a rustic village when construction began on the Sagrada Família. It has been transformed into a theme park; activists want a district for living. Their opinion is that "the only acceptable tourist should be one that respects local life and who comprehends our beautiful city."*

Progress towards some sort of resolution for the residents was made in early 2020 during a meeting between the city council and nine interested organizations.



The meeting established four key points to consider: **respect towards housing rights, the maintenance of public facilities and green areas, tourism control, and the completion of the basilica.**

But what few advances were made were soon derailed by the pandemic. The meetings never started up again after lockdown.

Still, some hope emerged in the spring of last year when the city council allegedly summoned both associations to a meeting with Janet Sanz, a councillor specializing in Ecology, Urbanism, Infrastructures and Mobility, and the council's chief architect Javier Matilla. The associations agreed with three alternate urban plans that were proposed as possible compromises between all the interested parties. The council has since proposed a fourth plan.

The results of Municipal elections held in late May this year could influence any council decisions made on future plans.

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