



## What we do about how we feel about climate change...and why that matters.

Notes by Jo Hamilton following the Low Carbon West Oxford Climate Café,  
9<sup>th</sup> March 2019

### Intro:

Sometimes it's hard to talk about climate change (laden with guilt, judgement, preachy), sometimes hard to talk about emotions (may bring up grief), and sometimes very hard to talk about how we feel about climate change, leads to a *double climate silence*.

Not talking about the issues, how they are affecting us, and how we feel can be isolating, we may assume we're the only ones feeling that way. If we don't have an outlet, not acknowledging our feelings can contribute to things which can get in the way of taking action. It's really tough stuff, and to take the long view of climate change we need to be able to develop a relationship with a whole range of feelings that climate change may trigger. These include our own feelings, and others which are projected onto us. Who else has been called 'green killjoys' / 'carbon police' / 'righteous hair shirt brigade'? This comes up a lot, and it's a way of other people not wanting to deal with their own feelings about climate change or the impacts that it might have, both on lifestyle, and life.

If don't acknowledge our own feelings, and how they influence our actions, then things can get a bit wonky. This is an emergency... and in emergencies our responses go a bit wonky too. We can get into **fight, flight or freeze responses**. Are these appropriate here? Sometimes we can go into frenzied action – yes things need to happen – which can lead to burnout, a feeling that nothing you do is ever enough, or communication which isn't effective or even counterproductive. A 'freeze' response would be overwhelmed by too much information and not knowing what to do with it, and sometimes presents as apathy or numbness. Desperation can lead to blame, fragmentation, and polarisation into 'us and them'.

What other approaches may be helpful?

Of course, you might be feeling hopeful and inspired – great! But we generally can't get to a sustained grounded hope by skipping over the not so pleasant feelings...



## So what to do about all of this?

- Noticing your feelings, and what they might be attached to – on your own, with another person, as a practice in your group (such as a check in at the beginning of meetings).
- Action is a great way- meeting people, feeling less isolated. Loads in Oxford to get involved with, but don't neglect the importance of reflecting how your feelings may be influencing your actions, or your stories of change.
- Coming to a workshop / series of workshops which explore how your feelings influence what you do, and how you do it.

## Reflective questions:

1. On your own, in silence write down one word that expresses how you feel about climate change. Notice any thoughts and feelings that might accompany it.
2. Another question – what do you do with those feelings? Do they ever get spoken? Do you push them down, or do something else with them?
3. Now take a moment to notice if how you feel influences your approach to engaging with climate change, however you define that engagement (it could be listening to or reading about it, coming to a meeting, taking a form of action, being involved in a group).

Share your responses (or the parts you are happy to share) with someone else or as part of a group.

Working out from individual responses to climate change, it's important to consider how feelings can impact communication and action, either as a one-to-one conversation, part of a group, or part of an organisation.

## Three resources are useful here:

**1. Carbon Conversations handbook:** Chapter 6 has v good introduction and advice for having conversations about climate change. Well worth a read, it's v accessible and will take around 15-20 mins. You can download it from here: <http://www.carbonconversations.co.uk/p/materials.html> . Note: you'll need to register first, this is so they can track number of downloads

**Some brief key points:** Reflects on the importance of acknowledging emotions in a conversation, and that facts only make sense when you are ready to hear



them. They ask ‘when has communication about climate change gone well?’ and reflect that this is often when the person communicating feels calm, is feeling confident, positive and interested in the other person, does more listening than speaking, and paradoxically, is not desperate about the outcome. If a person who is trying to get a message across is anxious or angry, the conversation is unlikely to go well – get support for this first.

Importance of empathy – the more people feel understood, the more they are open to reflecting and changing mind.

## **2. Transformational Resilience book: Bob Doppelt. Website:**

<http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/transformational-resilience>

Looks at the relationship between psychological impacts of climate change on individuals and organisations. Explores ways of constructively dealing with this in organisations.

**Brief background (from website):** ‘policies and programs to address the climate crisis have focused on reducing carbon emissions and adapting external physical infrastructure and ecosystems to warming temperatures. Mental health and public health programs have focused almost exclusively on providing short term assistance during and after major climate change-enhanced disasters.

Missing from this work is a major focus on preparing people to constructively cope with the rising interlinked psychological and psycho-social-spiritual traumas and toxic stresses generated by climate disruption and use them as transformational catalysts to come together across racial, religious, ethnic, and gender lines to do what is needed to reduce the climate crisis to manageable levels and create tangibly better conditions for everyone.’

**3. Active Hope:** Book and resource which draws on The Work that Reconnects, which facilitates participants to acknowledge and express their emotions around social and environmental issues, in a safe group work format that can help transform our relationship to the feelings to enable us to ground and sustain our action. More info here: <https://workthatreconnects.org/#>



Description: *Active Hope* is about finding, and offering, our best response to the crisis of sustainability unfolding in our world. It offers tools that help us face the mess we're in, as well as find and play our role in the collective transition, or *Great Turning*, to a life-sustaining society.

Link : <https://www.activehope.info/>

Note: if you're interested in becoming part of a 6 week group exploring this together, or finding out about upcoming workshops drawing on The Work that Reconnects, email jo: [johamilton121@gmail.com](mailto:johamilton121@gmail.com)