The Individual Advocate: Coping with Climate Grief and Ways We Can Fight Back

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Research Question: What are ways environmental activists can cope with the impacts of climate grief?

Background:
- Climate grief is a widespread psychological response to ecological loss for changing climates (see Figure 1)
- Climate grief matters because mass mobilization occurs in social movements. There are many angry people, and not enough direction to guide them
- Developing plans to understand and cope with climate grief can help with these emotional responses and create positive reinforcement, reframing our approach to climate change

Environmental Activist Roles: ways individuals can cope with negative emotions through action

The Reformers: change in law by a community through voting or other means. Political campaigns, committee hearings, petitions. “When young people consistently fail to show up to the polls, its no wonder why we don't have enough [climate policy]. Demand better, because we are capable of being better.” –M. Carmack

The Change Agent: citizen-based democracy to alert and educate the public on existing conditions that violate widely held values. “We can have a conversation in the classroom about our shared experiences, and students know they are not alone. Being in a community makes the issue feel easier to tackle alongside others” –L. Rubinsky

The Citizen: environmental citizens make a commitment to the common good, so others may do the same; sustainability at home and in public. “The best thing a person can do is join your public library’s advisory board, get involved with your school committee… There’s a lot of local, individual things that can make a huge difference to a lot of people” –R. Ameen

The Rebel: resist unjust social conditions to change status quo, often through activist organizations (see Figure 2) and events against climate issues. “Action is a great antidote to despair. Getting involved in our local community, organizing an event or protest… Whatever way you can plug into this climate movement.” –N. Engelfried

Internship & Methods:
- Podcast miniseries on envir. education and communications for the Common Caves for Sustainability Podcast with UW Bothell & Cascadia
- Literary review of how climate grief impacts approaches to climate activism
- Guests were asked about coping with climate grief, ecotourism, social impacts, policy, etc.
- The answers were combined into one of four categories on how the individual can help based on the following environmental social activist roles:

Takeaways:
- Social connections and positive reinforcement help individuals cope with changing climate by providing stable environment to heal and grow in
- Hope is the emotion that will drive systematic change –Grief, guilt, fear, and anxiety are valid emotions and have their place, yet we need sustainable goals
- Problem solving as a community combines coping with climate emotions and climate activism
- Exposure to knowledge of environmental history is a crucial aspect of coping with climate grief, illustrates the kind of future we can build towards (see Figure 3)

Implications:
- Happier stories show younger generations there is a future to be had and a world left to live in
- The podcast miniseries is a permanent form of educational stories for future generations, available to anyone to promote sustainability and connection
- Coping mechanisms will vary, but finding a supportive community and taking action in any way you can are the most effective methods to fight against climate grief

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