

In partnership with Garfield Weston Foundation

INSTITUTE OF  
GLOBAL HEALTH  
INNOVATION



CLIMATE  
CARES

Mental health in the climate crisis

# EXPLORE: URBAN NATURE

## Climate Change and Mental Health: Class Activities

THE  
URBAN  
NATURE  
PROJECT

**N** NATURAL  
HISTORY  
MUSEUM

# CLIMATE CHANGE AND MENTAL HEALTH: CLASS ACTIVITIES

These teaching resources were developed in partnership with the Climate Cares team at the Imperial College London Institute of Global Health Innovation and the Grantham Institute. They link careers, personal action and developing a sense of agency to young people's responses to learning about the climate crisis. Before undertaking these activities with students, it may be helpful to read our guide for teachers on the current research and evidence around climate change and young people's mental health.

# OVERVIEW

Climate change is the defining issue of our time. We have reached a pivotal moment in establishing Earth's future.

The vast challenges facing the planet can also have an impact on our minds, and many young people are concerned about the future of the world they will grow up in. With growing awareness of the planetary emergency, young people can often feel anxious about the state of the environment but feel unequipped to take positive action and powerless to make a difference. When a concern about the environment begins to impact mental health, it is called 'eco-anxiety.'

Individual and governmental action on climate change is thought to help combat eco-anxiety. Raising awareness of the evidence for the win-wins of policies that can support a healthy planet and healthy minds can help empower young people to have a sense of agency that they can build the world they hope to see.

These activities are designed to support educators in equipping students with knowledge and practical tools for considering positive environmental behaviours they can take in their everyday lives. Considering practical actions to increase feelings of agency can help young people become resilient to the mental health impacts of climate change.

## **KEY TERM: ECO-ANXIETY**

'Eco-anxiety' or 'climate anxiety' are terms used to describe the chronic and overwhelming fear of environmental disaster. Other terms to describe feelings that are similar but do not impact mental health to the same extent are 'ecological grief', 'eco-distress' and 'solastalgia'.

## **ACTIVITY SUMMARY**

These resources are designed to work as standalone activities to be delivered within a lesson and do not need to be taught as a package of work.

### **Activity 1**

#### **How you can help the environment - jobs, skills, and interests**

Students reflect on their own skills and the environmental issues they care about, before working in a group to explore ideas for how they can help the environment in future jobs, regardless of their career path.

### **Activity 2**

#### **Why protecting the environment is so important: identifying 'win wins'**

As a class, students explore examples of policies and behaviours intended to protect the environment and consider their benefits for wider social issues.

### **Activity 3**

#### **Partnering with your local community to amplify your impact**

Students map their spheres of influence and come up with a plan to communicate with people they know to encourage positive environmental action.

## **Prior Knowledge requirements**

Students should have an understanding of why environmental issues are relevant to their lives and have some interest in contributing personally to supporting the environment.



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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What is climate change and why does it matter?

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/what-is-climate-change-why-does-it-matter.html>

What do we know about young people's mental health and climate change?

[www.imperial.ac.uk/news/201393/project-transform-understanding-effects-climate-change/](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/201393/project-transform-understanding-effects-climate-change/)

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY IDEAS

If students are encouraged to take positive action for the environment, here are some suggestions of next steps they can take:

Create a pledge wall to record and share their ideas for individual action.

Complete a homework task to research an environmental policy at a societal scale.

*What changes are needed? Who is researching this area to gather the scientific evidence needed to support policy change? Who is campaigning for change and who is resisting change, and why? What is needed to support action – new laws, technology, changing attitudes?*

Consider what actions the school can take to help protect the environment:

[www.eco-schools.org.uk](http://www.eco-schools.org.uk)

[www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/what-you-can-do-to-help-the-planet.html](https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/what-you-can-do-to-help-the-planet.html)

[www.imperial.ac.uk/stories/climate-action/](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/stories/climate-action/)

# HOW YOU CAN HELP THE ENVIRONMENT - JOBS, SKILLS AND INTERESTS

This self-reflective activity will encourage students to think about the activities they take part in, the skills and traits they have learned and developed as a result, and environmental issues they care about. Using these, they will explore ideas for how they can help the environment in future jobs, regardless of their career path.

This activity will be most effective if it follows on from general lessons on careers including identifying skills and personal strengths, researching future career options and selecting subjects.

## LEARNING OUTCOME:

Students will appreciate that there are opportunities to use their personal skills, interests and future career to help the environment.

## PREPARATION:

If careers haven't been covered prior to this activity then the following can help scaffold the activity for younger students:

1. A list of skills and personal traits can be used to help students identify their strengths in part 1 below.
2. Examples of environmentally friendly businesses and policies could be given to support the class discussion in part 2 below: [www.ecobusinesses.co.uk/](http://www.ecobusinesses.co.uk/)
3. A homework task could be set prior to the lesson, to research the different roles in an organisation and/or career paths they could

take: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-careers>

4. Students could use the [Discover your Skills and Careers tool](#)

**Time: 35 minutes**

(or 25 minutes with 10 minutes of homework)

## INSTRUCTIONS:

*5 MINUTES*

- 1. Ask each student to draw three circles. In each one they should write:**

- A Their hobbies, interests or favorite subjects
- B Skills or traits they already have or would like to improve at.
  - Examples of skills: organisation, maths, drawing, budgeting
  - Examples of traits: friendly, outgoing, passionate, thoughtful, caring
- C Any environmental issues they care about or are aware of

*5 MINUTES*

- 2. Split the class into twos and threes and ask each group to reflect on the environmental issues that they wrote down in part 1C by discussing the following:**

- Do they have similar or different concerns to each other?
- Who do they think could be in a position to do something about these issues?
- Can they think of ways that any organisations they've heard of are working towards addressing

these issues? Either 'Green' organisations that are specifically focused on the issue they care about, or eco-friendly initiatives that organisations are undertaking, whatever the primary focus of their work is.

If students are struggling to come up with examples, provide some to get them started.  
See point 2 in preparation section above.

*10 MINUTES*

**3. Regroup as a class and gather examples of the environmentally friendly organisations that students discussed. These can be added to the white board and grouped if themes emerge. Discuss the following:**

Was it easy or hard to come up with examples?

Would they consider a company's track record or actions on environmental issues when buying a product or service?

What about when they are considering their future employers?

*10 MINUTES*

**4. Ask the groups to each select an organisation from the board and brainstorm all the people and tasks involved in making its work a success.**

These extend to people who work on tasks well beyond those we traditionally associate with the environment. Encourage students to think of as many examples as possible.

If they get stuck, you can suggest some strategies to spark ideas:

- What are the roles that are behind the scenes but essential?
- Who can think of the most unusual job?
- Can you go through the alphabet and list a job for each letter?

For example, a wildlife conservation charity that runs public awareness campaigns on endangered species needs...

Accountants

Conservation researchers (expert in the charity's particular area of science)

Event organisers

Environmental educators

Fundraisers

Graphic designers

Lawyers

Marketing experts

Photographers

Recruitment specialists

Social media experts

Web developers

*5 MINUTES*

**5. Using the discussions so far for inspiration, ask students to look back at the interests and skills they listed in the first task. Can they think of any ways they might like to help environmental organisations like those mentioned above now or in the future?**

Note: even 'random' skills not mentioned above can be used.

For example - an interest in cooking could be used to help start an eco-friendly restaurant or write recipes/articles on greener ways of eating. Alternatively, you could use a love of outdoor sports to find ways to help others appreciate the environment.

# WHY PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT IS SO IMPORTANT: IDENTIFYING 'WIN WINS'

## LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Students will understand that protecting the environment often results in other benefits.
- Students will recognise that environmental actions can create a 'win win' for wider social issues they may care about.

## KEY CONCEPT: CO-BENEFITS:

the wide-ranging benefits of environmental actions (for example, for social justice, physical health, mental health, financial, and energy security).

## PREPARATION:

An introduction to systems thinking can help students think about problems and solutions as part of a wider, dynamic system.

Information about positive environmental behaviours that individuals can take to help the planet will help inform the activity:

[www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/what-you-can-do-to-help-the-planet](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/what-you-can-do-to-help-the-planet).

Time: 30 minutes

## INSTRUCTIONS:

15 MINUTES

**1. As a class, map out some of the co-benefits of the following two policies: (A) improving cycle lanes and (B) protecting or creating new green spaces.**

Try to find them in as many areas as possible. Example areas of co-benefits or win-wins include physical health, mental health, financial/economic,

economic, wildlife/animal welfare, sense of community

Example infographics are on the next page to get students started if needed.

10 MINUTES

**2. Ask students if they can think of an environmentally positive behaviour that they already do, then list the benefits to themselves and the wider co-benefits, as in the previous task.**

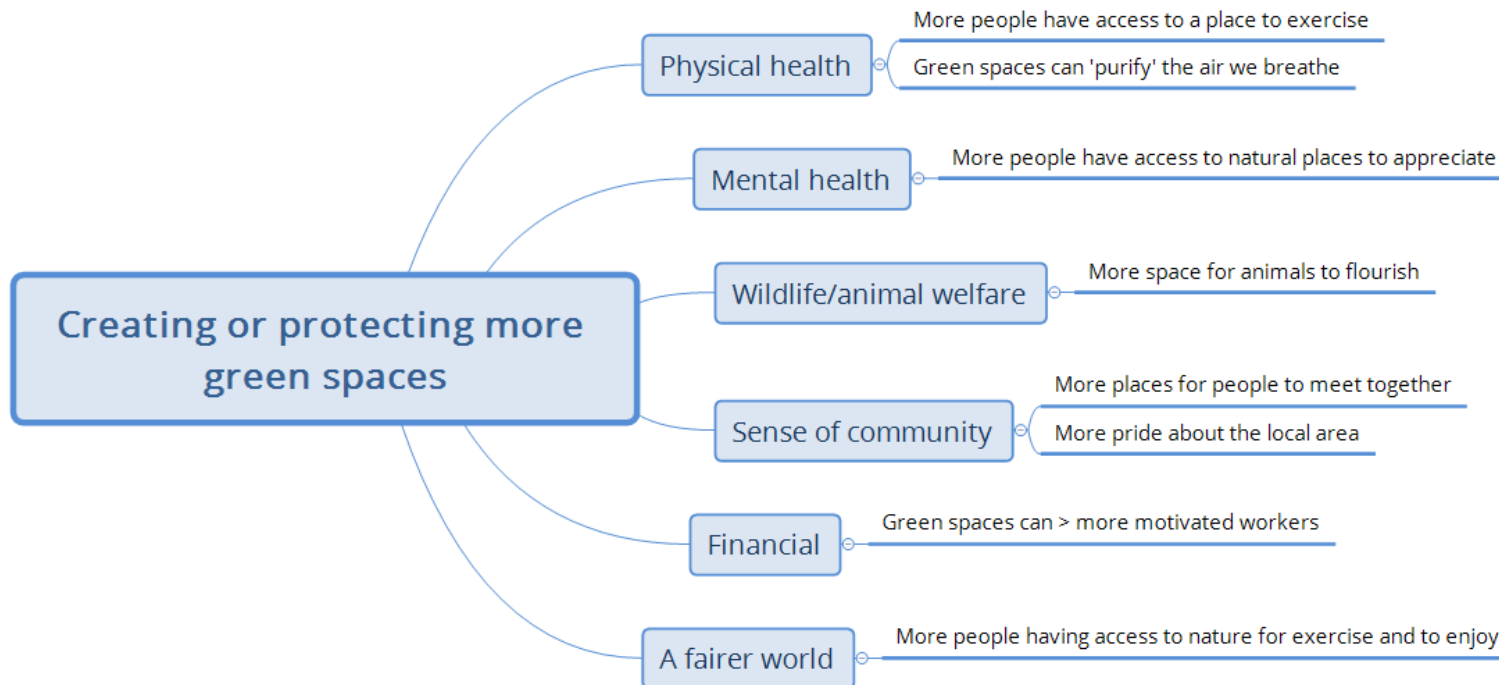
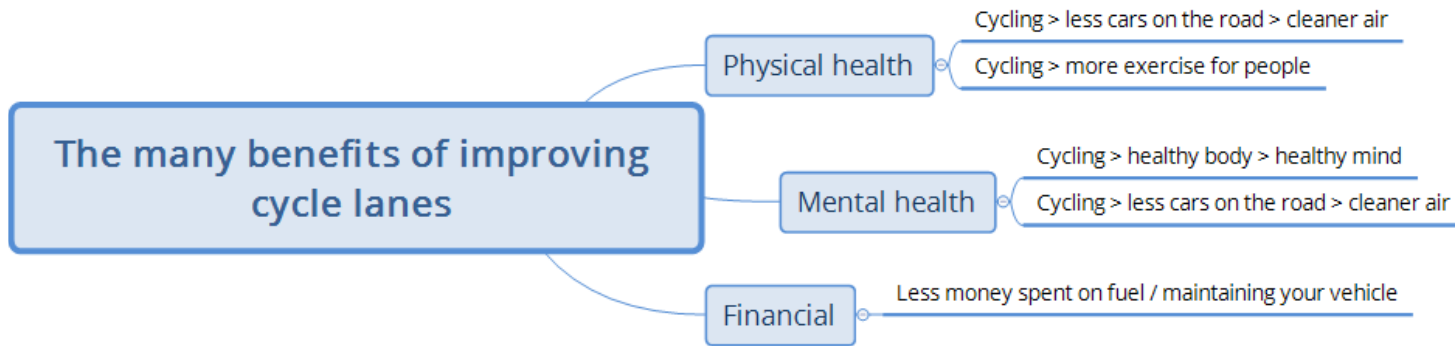
Examples of environmentally positive behaviours they might already do:

Recycling  
Repair, reuse and donate items  
Buying secondhand  
Avoiding single use plastics like water bottles  
Reducing the meat and dairy you eat  
Shopping locally  
Taking public transport  
Saving energy  
Looking after green spaces  
Talking to those with the power to make change, which could include businesses, your local council, MP or school.

5 MINUTES

**3. Ask students to share their favourite actions and 'co-benefits' and discuss these as a class.**

Why are these important?  
Are there any environmentally friendly actions that they would now consider starting?  
Get each student to write down at least one example.





# PARTNERING WITH YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY TO AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

## LEARNING OUTCOME:

Students will recognise that individuals can have an impact beyond their individual-level actions by communicating with people they know.

## Key concepts, to be introduced to students in part 3:

1. **Multiplication:** helping multiple people take the same action to protect the environment. Multiplication requires that you effectively communicate your ideas so that other people understand what you are trying to achieve and are inspired to take action with you.
2. **Ideation:** researching and speaking with people in your community to develop new ideas. Ideation can help solve tricky problems and can help people become unstuck but it requires working together as a team. Ideation requires that you listen to other people's ideas and try and see an issue from their perspective, so that you can come up with new ideas or solutions to a problem together.

**Time: 30 minutes**

## Tips for ideation:

- Defer judgement
- Encourage big ideas
- Build on the ideas of others
- Stay focused on the topic
- One conversation at a time
- Be visual
- Go for quantity  
(you can refine ideas later)

## INSTRUCTIONS:

*5 MINUTES*

- 1. As a class, create a mind map of all the people the students can think of that they know or could get in contact with, in different areas of their lives.**

The infographic on page 10 can be expanded upon to get them started.

*5 MINUTES*

- 2. As a class, create a second mind map of positive environmental actions. Separate this into two halves:**

- A. Map out all the positive environmental actions we can take as individuals.
- B. Map out actions that are too big to tackle alone. These might need support of other community members in positions of power to help enact positive environmental action.

Examples: using renewable energy, insulating our buildings, having more alternatives to red-meat available (e.g., in restaurants or cafeteria), helping people to recycle.

*10 MINUTES*

- 3. Introduce the concepts of 'multiplication' and 'ideation' to the class, referring to the previous discussion.**

Ask students to match actions with people from the mind maps to generate multiplication and ideation approaches to promoting action for the environment that they could do.



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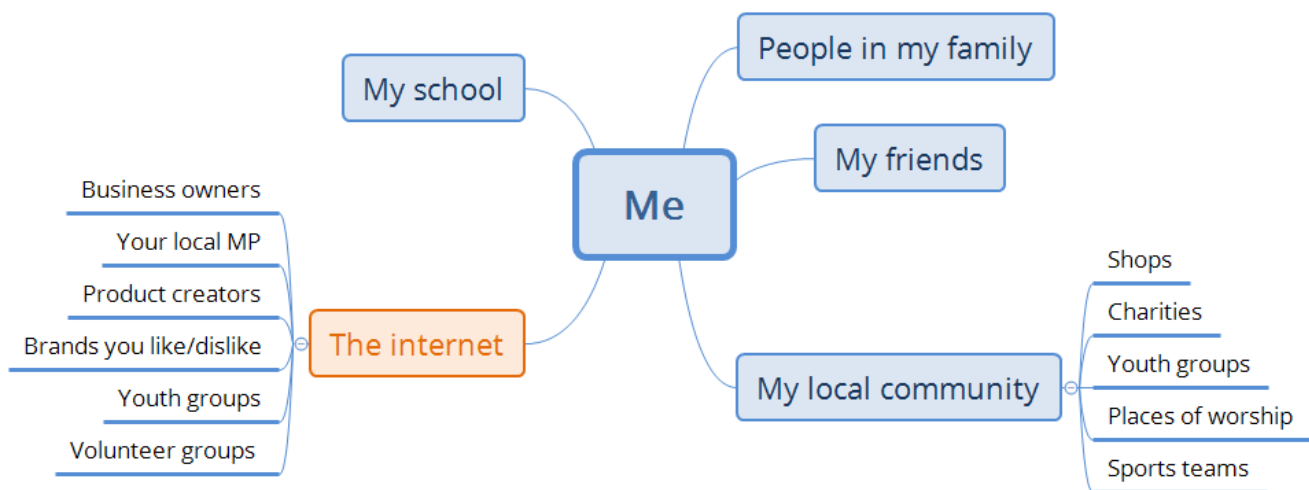
*10 MINUTES*

**4. Using the examples matched from the two mind maps, ask students to consider what barriers they might encounter.**

Ideation and multiplication can help to build enthusiasm and encourage people to tackle an issue together but not everyone will share the same views on a topic or issue. Remind students to consider that people might have strong feelings, motivated by lots of different things, to set the tone for the students thinking carefully about how to communicate in that situation.

- How do they imagine the conversation would go?
- What possible approaches could they take to try and have a positive conversation?
- What are some strategies that it might be helpful for them to aim for and what things might they want to avoid?

**5. If there is time, or as a homework task, have students link all these together to come up with an action plan – what would they like to do to promote protecting the environment, who will they communicate with to do this and how will they approach it.**



## MULTIPLICATION EXAMPLES

***“having multiple people take the same action to protect the environment multiplies the impact by however many people take that action”***

Finding friends who may want to change their habits too (e.g., eating less meat, walking more).

Making it easier for your family to reduce their carbon footprint by reminding them to unplug devices and chargers.

Making it easier for people at your youth club to recycle by getting recycling bins put in.

## IDEATION EXAMPLES

***“researching and speaking with people in your community to develop ideas for how to protect the environment together”***

Speaking with friends to see if anyone has ideas for you with a fundraising project you want to start.

Asking charities or your local MP if they know of any environmental initiatives already taking place in your area you could participate in or learn from.

Speaking with charities to ask if they have any resources (e.g., information posters) you could use to help raise awareness about an issue you care about.

Seeing if there are more environmentally friendly materials or practices take-away restaurants could adopt in your area (e.g., ‘opt-in’ for plastic cutlery), and contacting them to suggest it.

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