

Supporting Children's Well-being and Building Resilience as Our Climate Changes

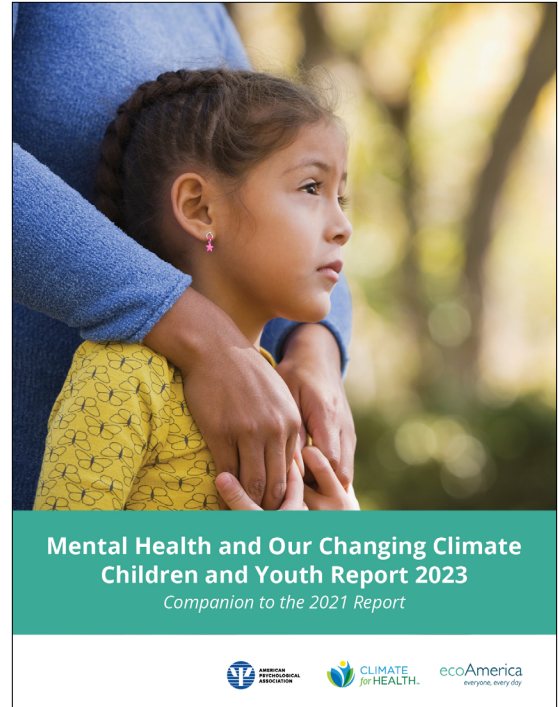
A Guide for Health Professionals

Children are increasingly affected by the mental and emotional toll of climate change and extreme weather. As a clinician, public health worker, or health educator, you hold a unique position of trust. You can play a key role in recognizing early signs of distress and connecting children with the right level of support.

This guide, informed by research from ecoAmerica and the American Psychological Association*, outlines evidence-backed strategies for health professionals to help children navigate climate-related stress and build resilience, i.e., the ability to adapt, recover, and grow through adversity, anxiety, or setbacks.

SCREEN EARLY AND REGULARLY

Why it matters: Many children experience distress during and after climate-related disasters, but signs of emotional distress can be subtle or delayed and often go unnoticed. Beyond disasters, children may also experience stress and anxiety from growing awareness of climate change itself, particularly if they perceive that adults and people in places of power are under-responding or blocking progress. Avoiding or delaying conversations about climate change can worsen children's mental health over time. Regular screenings can help identify those who may need support.



What you can do*:

- ✓ Include **climate-related questions** in routine mental health check-ups
- ✓ Screen at **3 months, 6 months, and 1 year** after an extreme weather event
- ✓ Don't wait for extreme events — bring up climate concerns even in well visits and regular pediatric assessments
- ✗ **Pro Tip:** Ask open-ended questions like, *"How do you feel about the weather changes or climate stories you've seen?"*

SCALE SUPPORT TO NEED

Why it matters: Early support and honest conversations help most children.

Health professionals can adopt a stepped-care approach to provide progressive support*:

● Low-Intensity

Use it when:

Mild distress

Looks like:

Reassuring and validating conversations

● Moderate

Use it when:

Ongoing worries

Looks like:

Group sessions or peer support networks

● High-Intensity

Use it when:

Persistent anxiety/trauma

Looks like:

Individual therapy

USE WHAT WORKS

Why it matters: Children and youth who experience trauma or prolonged stress can heal and become more resilient with the right tools. Many evidence-backed mental health interventions can help children recover from climate-related stress, anxiety, and trauma. **These include*:**

- ✓ **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** It effectively manages anxiety and reframes fears
- ✓ **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR):** It can help children process traumatic experiences
- ✓ **Trauma-informed care:** It provides a holistic framework that centers children's emotional and developmental needs

* The content of this guide is adapted from the [Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Children and Youth Report 2023](#), a collaborative publication by ecoAmerica and the American Psychological Association. Please refer to page 37 of the report for additional guiding resources specifically for Mental Health Professionals.

To learn more about caring for mental health in a changing climate at any age, also refer to our [Mental Health and Our Changing Climate, 2021 Edition](#).

THINK CLIMATE-AWARE

Why it matters: Many children and young people feel anxious about climate change even without firsthand experience of disasters. Being **climate-aware** means recognizing these impacts and incorporating that understanding into care, conversations, and support.

How can health professionals help?

- ✓ Learn about **eco-anxiety** and its impact on children and youth
- ✓ Ask about climate stress; integrate climate awareness into mental health assessments and public engagement
- ✓ Refer families to **climate-aware providers***
- 🔍 *Explore ecoAmerica's [ClimateRx](#) campaign for tools and resources for health professionals to support patients and engage colleagues in protecting their health from climate change.*

FINAL TAKEAWAY

By identifying concerns early, scaling support, and integrating climate-aware care, YOU — the health professional — can help children and youth navigate the climate future with confidence.

→ **Peer-reviewed tools and resources** to support these recommendations can be found in the report linked below.