

WELLBEING RESILIENCE TOOLKIT



FOR YOUTH CLIMATE JUSTICE LEADERS
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Who is Project 90 by 2030

Project 90 by 2030 is a social and environmental justice organisation inspiring and mobilising South African society towards a sustainably developed and equitable low-carbon future.

What is the Youth Support Hub

Project 90 by 2030's Youth Support Hub is a youth-led initiative which aims to bring young people in the climate justice movement together and develop their skills, by connecting them to each other and to expert coaches who can help them grow. More information here: www.youthsupporthub.org.za

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**TOOLKIT
OUTLINE**



INTRODUCTION



Mental health and wellbeing are a crucial component of a sustainable climate justice sector. When climate justice actors invest in their health and wellbeing, they are better positioned to work effectively and efficiently in the sector. They are also often better positioned to foster a healthy work-life balance.

Climate justice activism focuses on ensuring that vulnerable and marginalised communities are not excluded from decision-making and climate action, which is deeply fulfilling and impactful. However, it can also be demanding, which can take a toll on the emotional, psychological, and physical health of climate justice leaders and allies within the climate justice sector.

Climate justice leaders invest their mental strength and resources into combating systemic injustice and addressing climate harms. Climate justice leaders often encounter people in distress, serve as first responders in disaster or crisis situations, and engage with information and situations that are high-risk or potentially traumatic. This contributes towards mental health challenges such as stress, traumatisation, compassion fatigue, and burnout.

A wellbeing resilience plan aims to combat the mental, emotional, and physical burden that emerges as a result of activism. It challenges the myth that climate justice leaders should not be vulnerable and should be comfortable engaging in high-risk activities. It promotes the understanding that wellbeing and advancing mental health rights are an essential form of resistance and sustainability. When climate justice leaders engage in healthy mental health practices and look after themselves, they are better equipped to advocate for justice, equity, and fairness. They also build resilience, and empathy, and develop healthy strategies for navigating a difficult and often hostile environment.



UNDERSTANDING WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE



Resilience

The ability to successfully adapt to stressors and maintain psychological wellbeing in the face of challenges.

Wellbeing

A combination of someone's physical, mental, emotional, and social health factors.

How are resilience and wellbeing connected and why is this important?

Resilience and wellbeing are deeply connected. Having a sense of resilience and a positive wellbeing ensures that someone is able to approach situations, challenges, and other people with confidence and optimism. Individuals are better equipped to navigate difficult situations with the resources they have, and explore healthy ways to replenish their emotional and mental capacities, when they have encountered stressors.



An individual's mental health is determined by various dimensions of wellbeing. These are the emotional, social, intellectual, cultural, spiritual, environmental, occupational, psychological, and financial dimensions. Human beings are complex, and each dimension represents an area of a person's life – they are dynamic and interconnected. As a result, a change in one dimension of wellness can impact on the other areas.

Climate activism can have positive impacts on an individual's spiritual and social dimension by providing a sense of purpose, fulfilment and connectedness within a community of climate justice actors. This positive impact often serves as a motivator for climate justice leaders to continue working passionately despite encountering resistance and challenges within their context. Conversely, this may also impact on other dimensions such as the financial dimension, particularly when there is limited remuneration for their work, and there are additional financial demands that emerge from working in the context, or in many cases where climate justice leaders are advocating within low-income or under-resourced communities.

Climate activism often emerges with a psychological burden due to the high risk, and high demands of the sector which may result in burnout, limited investment in self-preservation practices such as self-care, and the emotional cost of working with injustice and in some cases, deprivation. As such, it is imperative that climate justice institutions and movements are cognisant of integrating wellbeing as an approach to holistic health and resilience building to enhance sustainability within the sector.





FOSTERING WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE



Fostering mental health, wellbeing, and resilience can be achieved through ongoing mental health practices such as self-care and collective care. The key determinants of good mental health include:

- **Social factors:** relationships (family, friends, colleagues etc.), immediate community, religious and cultural influences.
- **Psychological factors:** sense of identity, relationship with oneself, personality, decision-making and coping strategies, and lived experiences.
- **Physiological factors:** physical health, genetics, and neurological capabilities.

3.1 Self-Care

Self-care can be described as the range of activities and practices that an individual commits to in order to enhance their mental health and wellbeing. Self-care is effective when it is integrated into an individual's lifestyle as an intentional part of managing daily life stressors and balancing wellbeing.

Climate justice actors who work in under-resourced contexts often encounter stress and emotional challenges that are related to their work and commitment to confronting climate injustices. Self-care is a critical component of promoting mental health and wellbeing, serving to mitigate burnout, stress, and vicarious trauma.



3.2 Collective Care

Collective care is a component of wellbeing and an important aspect of self-care, with an emphasis on collective wellbeing in organisational, group or community settings. Collective care takes into consideration that people are members of diverse communities and systems, and that people within their communities are interdependent. As such, there is a collective responsibility for climate justice leaders within a community of climate justice to gravitate collectively towards wellbeing. Similarly, it is crucial that historical structures and socioeconomic systems that contribute towards climate harms are held accountable for the roles that they continue to play in compromising the quality of life of people who are in climate vulnerable contexts.

Managing mental health through self-help strategies and care is difficult for people who are surrounded by the contexts that contribute towards the ongoing strain on their wellbeing. As such, it is important to practice self-care but also foreground that practitioners and climate justice leaders should be cautious of individualising and pathologizing mental health difficulties as separate from the context of climate change and climate anxiety.

In settings where climate justice leaders are prone to conflict and trauma, collective care is inclusive and incorporates the needs of the collective. This includes the process of co-creating an environment which is continuously safe, and alert to safety risks. Safety risks are not limited to physical harms, but also incorporates the psychosocial safety needs that often remain unseen or unnoticed.

Collective care also focuses on mutual respect and resilience as members of a group share the wellbeing burden of climate justice work and provide peer support where possible.

Below are strategies and opportunities for collective care in organisational and community settings:

- Regular Check-in sessions
- Rest Awareness, self-care breaks and other wellbeing activities
- Celebrating collective achievements
- Peer support through the Buddy system and other group activities
- Teambuilding activities
- Workshops focused on stress management, psychosocial safety, healthy communication etc.
- Mental health services
- Group debriefing, mentorship, coaching and supervision
- Upskilling programs
- Mindfulness practice, meditation, and relaxation sessions
- Flexible work schedules, accessible leave options, and work-life integration



There are key approaches which climate justice leaders can embark on to promote collective care and resilience, and mitigate negative impacts on mental wellbeing. These include:

- Ongoing activism through advocacy campaigns and litigation which focus on reparations and restoration of natural resources
- Demand for systemic change through protests to raise awareness and pause harmful projects and activities
- Joining solidarity networks which unite and amplify voices of vulnerable groups
- Advocating for the recognition of climate trauma and climate anxiety
- Social and cultural rituals and practices to foster connectedness, honour diverse experiences, and reignite a sense of hope
- Group and peer support groups to foster connectedness acknowledge the mental health impacts of climate change

A healthy group culture allows teams and communities to connect and support each other regardless of how difficult the situation may get. Supportive team members endeavour to co-create safe spaces where there is an understanding of how trauma and injustice (and their legacies) persist in different contexts and emerge as discord in interpersonal relationships and community connectedness.

3.1 Self-Care within the Dimensions of Wellbeing

There are practical activities that individuals and collectives can embark on and integrate into both lifestyle and organisational culture in order to promote wellbeing and healthy resilience. These are outlined below:

Psychological wellbeing: a key component of mental health and mental illness. Psychological wellbeing comprises of aspects of a person that allow them to function adequately in different contexts, to learn, develop, and thrive. It includes the ability to cope with life stressors, adapt to changing environments, and return to a state of balance when there have been disruptions to life.

Self-Care Actions: focused on promoting mental health and preventing mental health decline.

Examples: Seek therapy, read about mental health, join a support group, establish healthy coping mechanisms

Emotional wellbeing: is characterised by one's capacity for self-awareness, their ability to understand and regulate their emotions, and to respond to situations with a good sense of emotional integrity. It includes emotional expression, which is appropriate to the situation or context and is not harmful to oneself or to others.

Self-Care Actions: focused on promoting self-awareness and emotional intelligence.

Examples: Journaling, self-reflection, expressive and creative arts, spending time with loved ones



Physical wellbeing: involves developing and maintaining a healthy body through healthy nutrition, physical exercise, sufficient rest and sleep, as well as good hygiene practices.

Self-Care Actions: Focused on exercise and a healthy lifestyle, and is also characterised by avoiding behaviours and habits that are harmful and contribute to health decline such as excessive intake of alcohol, drugs, sugar etc.

Actions: Eat healthy food, sleep, exercise, go for regular medical check-ups, hydrate

Social wellbeing: is centred on developing a sense of self and a sense of community. This is often achieved through healthy relationships, a sense of belonging and connectedness to others, as well as being able to contribute positively to your various communities.

Self-Care Actions: focused on developing and sustaining healthy relationships in all areas of one's life; identifying characteristics and ways of being that develop into unhealthy relationships or disconnect people from their loved ones. Self-care is located in communities of support and connectedness that promote trust, a sense of belonging and enjoyment.

Examples: Family time, conflict resolution sessions, honour your boundaries, engage in your hobbies

Spiritual wellbeing: is grounded in values, beliefs and mores which contribute to one's broad understanding of the meaning of life. This dimension contributes towards one's sense of purpose and how they make sense of themselves as more than their physical being, and is often linked to religion, faith, ethnicity etc.

Self-Care Actions: focused on aligning one's daily life with their values and beliefs. Climate justice can be located in one's values and connection to a sustainable earth for humanity; a spiritual connection with the earth; as well as morality, integrity, and selflessness.

Examples: Prayer, meditation, joining a religious community, creating a sacred space, learning about spirituality

Financial wellbeing: is characterised by the resources that someone has access to, which contribute towards quality of life and the ability to use financial resources to plan for the future. It is also centred on one's ability to live within their means and make good decisions about the finances and other resources that are at their disposal for purposes of stability and survival. Financial wellness further alludes to the notion that limited finances are a significant life stressor, which leaves entire families vulnerable to threats.

Self-Care Action: Accessing and managing finance-related resources for financial literacy and financial empowerment.

Examples: Explore income opportunities, create a budget, save for emergencies, reward yourself



Environmental wellbeing: refers to one's relationship with their immediate surroundings and the ability to maintain a healthy and safe living environment, where there is an appreciation of the value of natural resources, shelter, and housing.

Self-Care Actions: focused on ensuring that one's environments are safe, stable, and free from threat.

Examples: maintain a safe and hygienic living environment, connect with nature, minimise environmental waste

Occupational wellbeing: is centred on being positioned in a career or vocation that fulfils a diverse range of one's basic needs. It is amplified when a person receives satisfaction from the work that they do, there is a healthy working environment, good work-life balance, and one can maintain good relationships with their colleagues.

Self-Care Actions: focused on developing and promoting a healthy work-life dynamic.

Examples: Set career goals, develop work-life boundaries, take regular breaks, attend training or upskilling initiatives

Intellectual wellbeing: involves the ability to learn, develop, and problem solve. It involves the understanding that learning is a lifelong activity which takes place in many settings. It is enhanced by the efforts one makes to upskill and strengthen their knowledge and understanding about important matters that align with who one is.

Self-Care Actions: focused on remaining mentally stimulated and exercising one's capacity to think, feel and/or be creative.

Examples: reading, listening to podcasts, learning new skills, engaging in dialogues

Cultural wellbeing: is characterised by cultural identity, a sense of belonging and connectedness to one's cultural, ethnic, or spiritual heritage. It is enhanced when someone has the freedom to participate in cultural activities and practices.

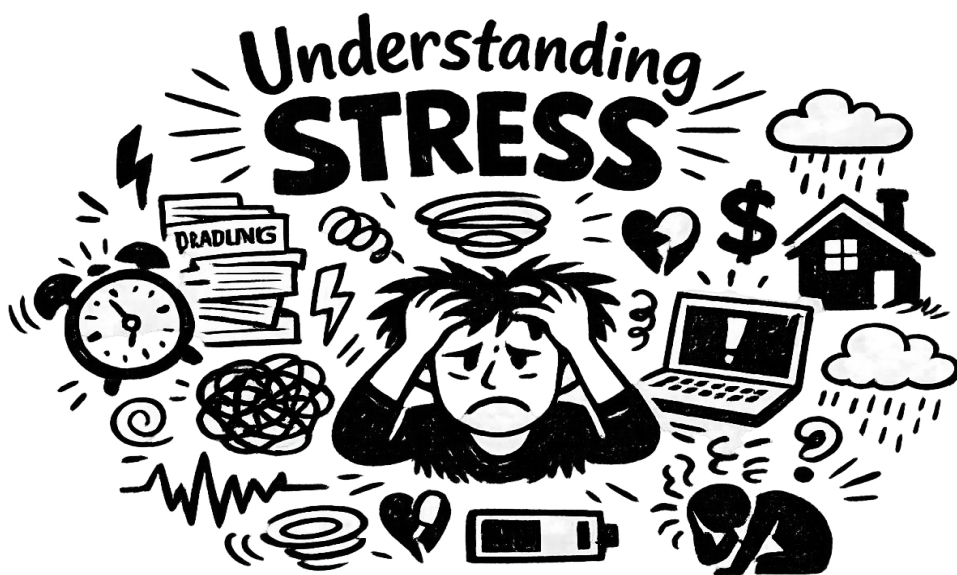
Self-Care Actions: focused on exploring one's cultural sense of identity for a deeper sense of self.

Examples: Learning more about your heritage, learning a language, attending cultural celebrations

While it is valuable to have access to mental health and psychosocial services in one's community or organisation, it is equally important for people to manage their mental health daily through self-help strategies and techniques that promote emotional wellbeing.



UNDERSTANDING STRESS



In the climate justice sector, stress is an integral part of the nature of the work. Each day emerges with new opportunities, challenges, and experiences. Stress is a physical and emotional reaction to challenging or high-demand situations. It occurs when a person feels overwhelmed or unable to cope with internal or external pressures. Stress can be a result of a wide range of situations and contexts. These include daily work challenges or personal life stressors.

Stress is common in areas where there is violence and trauma due to the need to respond to ongoing threats to life, safety, and harm. Climate justice leaders who work in these contexts are prone to fluctuating stress due to the environment within which they work and are acculturated to.

It is vital that climate justice actors understand the difference between good stress and bad stress. Stress can show up in the body in various ways. These can be clustered into emotional, mental, behavioural, and physical signs. It is important for climate justice actors to identify how their bodies are responding to and carrying stress.



SIGNS OF STRESS

Emotional




Irritability
More suspicious
Feeling gloomy
More fussy
Feeling tense
Drained, no enthusiasm
Emotional numbness



Cynical
Feeling nervous
Less satisfaction in life
Demotivated
Reduced self esteem
Work dissatisfaction
Anger outbursts

SIGNS OF STRESS

Mental



Indecision
Memory loss
Loss of concentration
Bad dreams
Excessive worry
Confused thoughts
Restlessness



Making frequent mistakes
Agitation
Hasty decision-making
Impaired judgement
More short-term thinking
Brain fog
Distractibility
Pessimism




SIGNS OF STRESS

Physical



- Tension headaches
- Indigestion
- Heart Palpitations
- Breathlessness
- Nausea
- Muscle spasms
- Tiredness



- Body aches and pains
- Skin irritations/rashes
- Excessive sweating
- Fainting Spells
- Clenched jaw
- Persistent health issues
- Weight-loss/gain
- Vision problems

By understanding what constitutes good stress and bad stress, climate justice actors are better equipped to foster a sense of balance and lean into their resilience in a healthy way. It is important how people identify psychosocial stressors such as family dynamics, work challenges and issues of safety, and eventually manage them.





4.1 Good Stress

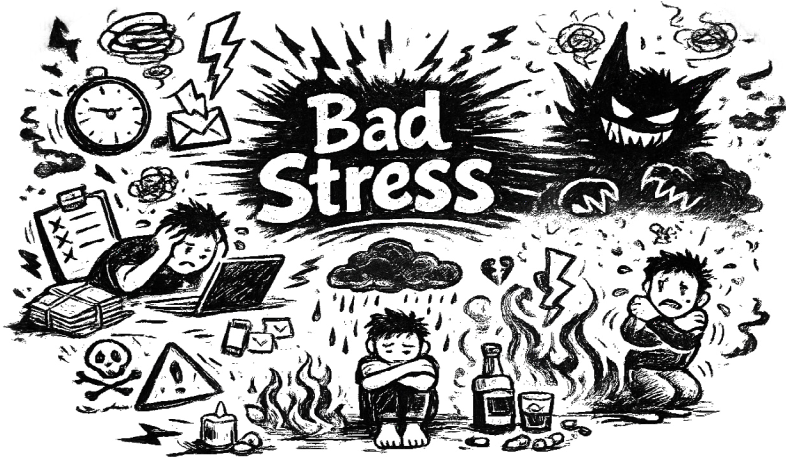
Good stress refers to the aspects or situations in one's life or broader society that motivate an individual to engage in work or an activity. This type of stress (eustress) is positive because it facilitates action, and also keeps a person invested, energised, and potentially excited to be engaging with the work or situation.

Good stress is often short-term, yet it contributes towards personal growth, productivity, and recognising one's potential and accomplishments. The positive outcomes in the form of motivation and successfully navigating a situation or task contribute towards developing a positive sense of self.

Examples of good stress for climate justice actors include:

- Learning new skills to enhance one's work capabilities
- Planning activities and interventions in alignment with promoting climate justice
- Advocacy opportunities
- Innovative projects
- Engaging in dialogues around climate change and human rights
- Participating in protests and marches
- Awareness raising and recruitment into the climate justice agenda
- Media coverage and increased climate justice visibility
- Reasonably timed tasks
- Resistance from anti-climate justice entities

Essentially, the above are work-related and can contribute towards exhaustion and burnout. However, when they are aligned with one's purpose, personal interest and values, the drive to continue with the work is centred on good stress. Climate justice leaders can utilise good stress to ensure that they remain motivated. It is vital that good stress is balanced with self-care to ensure that there is a reasonable amount of rest and reflection to mitigate the onset of burnout.



4.2 Bad Stress

Bad stress refers to the aspects or situations in one's life or broader society that leave an individual feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, unaccomplished, and dissatisfied. Bad stress or distress is negative and may leave an individual feeling unsuccessful in achieving their goals.

Bad stress can be short-term or long-term. Often when stress in vocation or other places of work is prolonged, it is referred to as burnout or chronic stress. Bad stress may result in demotivation whereafter an individual may start to disengage due to a sense of helplessness. The negative outcomes contribute towards the onset of a negative sense of self.

Examples of bad stress for climate justice actors include:

- Deteriorating environmental structures and ecosystems
- Intense climate shifts that have immediate impacts
- Planning activities and interventions under difficult circumstances
- Advocacy opportunities where there is significant resistance or oppression
- Threats to life and safety
- Exposure to traumatic situations and people in distress
- Resistance during protests and marches
- Unrealistic plans or expectations
- Disagreements between colleagues

Bad stress can have emotional, social, psychological, physical, and behavioural consequences, often leaving individuals emotionally and mentally exhausted.



4.3 Stress Management

Stress management is achievable through healthy coping strategies and decision-making abilities. When people are not equipped to identify and manage their daily life stressors, the stressors can begin to negatively impact on their wellbeing. Stress management can involve embracing good stress and mitigating the onset of bad stress. The following strategies can be employed:

- Identifying stressors
- Differentiate between good stress and bad stress
- Set meaningful goals
- Acknowledge accomplishments
- Establish healthy boundaries
- Practise self-care
- Engage in grounding activities
- Develop healthy coping skills
- Seek psychological support
- Establish a sense of community
- Engage in activism work



UNDERSTANDING BURNOUT



Burnout is a state of emotional, psychological, and physical exhaustion that occurs due to prolonged or chronic stress. Burnout is often prevalent in the lives of climate justice leaders who work in high-demand and high-risk environments, particularly when there are high workloads and organisations or movements are understaffed. It is exacerbated by ongoing violence and contexts where people are negatively impacted by crises, there is low accessibility to resources and ongoing instability in their everyday life.

Burnout is difficult to mitigate or avoid when working with climate justice due to the ongoing psychosocial stressors and emotional distress that vulnerable groups encounter due to climate harm. Dedicated personnel and climate justice leaders can be left feeling like the efforts are not meeting the needs of victims and survivors of climate change, despite that the needs are quite extensive and often complicated. Hence, it is imperative that there are wellbeing and psychosocial support mechanisms available to ensure that mental health support is being prioritised and made accessible.



Behavioural Signs and Symptoms of Burnout

Procrastination
Decreased Productivity Increased Use of Energy Boosters
Increased Irritability Substance Abuse
Undereating Low Motivation
Increased nicotine intake Missing Deadlines
Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms Expressing Frustration
Aggression
Decreased Work Short-temperedness
Performance Overeating Isolation
Delayed Tasks Increased alcohol consumption
Increased drug use

Emotional Signs and Symptoms of Burnout

Emotional Exhaustion
Decreased Satisfaction Pessimism
Digestive Problems Persistent Sadness
Helplessness Loneliness
Isolation Cynicism
Loss of Motivation Despondency
Overwhelmed Disengaging
Hopelessness Sense of Detachment
Self-doubt Resentment



Physical Signs and Symptoms of Burnout

Lowered Immune System Functioning
Hypersomnia
Muscle Tension
Shortness of Breath
Digestive Problems
Restless Sleep
Chronic Fatigue
Delayed Healing and Recovery
Lethargy
Disturbances in Appetite
Persistent Illness
Insomnia
Recurring Infections
Migraines
Sleep Disturbances
Nausea
Startle Response
Body Pain
Hormonal Dysregulation

Cognitive Signs and Symptoms of Burnout

Negative thoughts
Thoughts of inadequacy
Increased Irritability
Attention Difficulties
Forgetfulness
Anxiety
Memory Problems
Reduced problem solving abilities
Difficulty remembering
Indecisiveness
Impaired Judgment
Self-consciousness
Decreased Work Performance
Reduced Creativity
Mental Fatigue
Lowered processing speed
Concentration Difficulties



5.1 Differentiating between Burnout and Stress

To understand burnout comprehensively, it is useful to be able to identify the similarities and differences between stress and burnout as a form of prolonged stress. When climate justice leaders are aware that they are nearing a state of burnout, they are better able to manage their wellbeing.

	STRESS	BURNOUT
Nature of the Experience	<p>Stress is the short-term response to specific pressures or demands. Reactions to stress can be physical or psychological. Contributors to stress include high workloads, short or rigid deadlines, and challenges in daily life (everyday life stressors). Stress can result in exhaustion, and since it is caused by external factors, the stress levels are reduced or diminished once the stressor has been managed or removed.</p>	<p>Burnout is the result of prolonged stress and pressure over an extended period of time. It is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by chronic stress. The ongoing stress has psychological impacts, where a person feels depleted and is unable to connect to themselves, their loved ones, and their work in a healthy and effective way. Hence burnout is not easily managed through sleep. It requires in-depth processing and behavioural change to promote burnout recovery.</p>
Emotional Impact	<p>Emotions such as frustration and anxiety are heightened. One may feel overwhelmed but still believe that with time and effort, one can cope with the challenges.</p>	<p>One may feel detached, exhausted, or emotionally drained. Feelings of helplessness and numbness persist; and despite all efforts being invested, the situation is not changing.</p>



	STRESS	BURNOUT
Energy Levels	Stress often serves as a driver of increased activity. One may feel overwhelmed, yet still motivated to problem solve or respond to a situation. The increased motivation and capacity to problem solve is not sustainable if the stressors outweigh one's energy, and with time, this results in exhaustion and fatigue.	As a result of prolonged stress, burnout is a state of physical and emotional exhaustion where one's mental, physical, and emotional energy is depleted. Levels of motivation are low, and people do not feel energised despite having had an opportunity to rest.
Cognitive and Behavioural Impact	During stressful conditions, cognitive abilities such as planning and making good decisions become compromised. The stressors may keep a person engaged and distracted, but they may still have the capacity and intention to do well and manage their goals and targets.	Burnout negatively impacts cognitive functioning and behaviour. A common feature is "brain fog" which involves difficulty concentrating and problems with memory. This negatively impacts how one engages with their work, compromises one's ability to gauge how to manage their targets based on their energy levels, and they may become disinterested in their work which results in reduced work performance.
Physical Symptoms	Stress often results in short-term physical symptoms such as muscle tension, headaches, sleep and appetite irregularities, rapid heartbeat, and increased blood pressure. These symptoms often diminish or can be managed when the stressor is alleviated.	Burnout requires intentional approaches to recovery and the implementation of lifestyle changes to manage one's mental health and wellbeing in relation to their work.



	STRESS	BURNOUT
Sense of Achievement	Good stress can serve as a motivator for achieving goals or meeting targets. One might feel under pressure, anxious or overwhelmed, but still have a drive to work and achieve a sense of accomplishment. However, this is not a long-term and sustainable approach.	Burnout is often accompanied by feelings of underperformance and failure. Chronic stress and fatigue lead to disconnection, cynicism, and an impaired ability to acknowledge and celebrate accomplishments.
Duration and Intensity	Stress is usually a short-term reaction to a specific stressor such as an activity or a situation. The stress responses may be heightened and intense, but they tend to diminish once the stressor has been resolved or moved.	Burnout is a state of being which develops over a long period of experiencing intense stress, coupled with a limited ability to rest mentally and physically. Burnout remains even after external stressors are diminished or removed.
Outlook on life/work	While stress may make a person feel like they are not being productive, they are often motivated to continue to manage their stressors and to retain a sense of hope.	Burnout may make a person feel like they are helpless and hopeless, despite the efforts that they are making. They often experience a sense of disconnection from self and others, become withdrawn, and have a pessimistic approach to life.
Conclusion	Stress can be managed by brief-term interventions linked to the stressor, such as problem-solving, time management, relaxation techniques, debriefing, and other emotional support avenues like friends and family.	Burnout requires intentional approaches to recovery and the implementation of lifestyle changes to manage one's mental health and wellbeing in relation to their work.



Psychological symptoms of vicarious trauma include:

- Persistent feelings of sadness, anger, or fear.
- Feelings of helplessness and inadequacy in one's endeavours.
- Intrusive thoughts or images related to others' trauma.
- Changes in beliefs about safety, trust, or the goodness of people.
- Difficulty separating work from personal life.

Practitioners who work with vulnerable groups and other people who are often in emotional distress can also start to experience discomfort and pain in their own bodies. This happens due to connecting empathically with victims of injustices, and traumatic experiences, as well as the ongoing stress related to the working context.

Chronic Fatigue **Nightmares**
Headaches **Increased Heart Rate**
Tension and Muscle Aches
Digestive Problems **Shortness of Breath**
Dizziness **Delayed Healing and Recovery**
Disturbances in Appetite
Persistent Illness **Sweating and Trembling**
Heightened Sensory Awareness
Sleep Disturbances **Hypervigilance**
Hyperventilation **Startle Response**
Hypersensitivity to Noise and Light

Compassion Fatigue is a form of vicarious trauma that is experienced by people who are working with and supporting vulnerable groups and people who are at risk of victimisation. It is a state of emotional and physical exhaustion that results from caring for others who are suffering, often over a prolonged period without adequate self-care or emotional boundaries.

Compassion fatigue primarily affects a person's ability to feel empathy or compassion, leading to detachment or numbness. It can also reduce job satisfaction and performance. Signs of compassion fatigue include:

- Emotional exhaustion or burnout.
- Reduced empathy or compassion for others.
- Irritability, frustration, or resentment toward those they are helping.
- Physical symptoms like fatigue, headaches, or sleep disturbances.



UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE ANXIETY

Climate anxiety is a distinct mental health issue related to climate change and the consequential climate vulnerability that people experience. Climate anxiety in underprivileged contexts persists due to the intersections of histories of economic oppression and inequality. It is a collective, existential threat, where external factors negatively impact on the mental health and wellbeing of populations through persistent (natural and manmade) disasters, limited systemic support, and limited resources to improve or sustain a good quality of life.

Climate anxiety is the experience of fear and uncertainty that is caused by climate-related stressors such as intense and unpredictable weather conditions as well as environmental degradation due to industry and practices that are harmful to the environment. For many people, particularly in less-urbanised contexts, this is exacerbated by the unavoidable reliance on sectors that require a stable and predictable climate and environment (e.g. farming and agriculture). This negatively impacts on the psychological wellbeing of residents who are faced with material threat as disasters and limited governmental service provision translates to threats to daily life provisions and survival and perpetuates an uncertainty about the future.

Climate anxiety is related to:

- Negative health impacts and loss of life
- Loss of livelihood for individuals, families, and communities
- Loss of homes and access to basic resources due to structural damage
- Food and water insecurity
- Loss of ancestral land, barriers to practice traditions, and spiritual and cultural practices
- Experiences of powerlessness where solutions are beyond the control of community members
- Distress and suffering that is caused by organisations and institutions which are profiting from the predominant contributors to climate change

It is imperative that climate anxiety is not clustered as an irrational psychological response or mental health issue that is located in the individual who experiences it. It is a response to strenuous and tragic situations which persist, and are often beyond the immediate control of the people who are affected. The failure of historical systems of oppression to commit to reparations and protection of vulnerable groups perpetuates the anxieties that are experienced.



MAKING REFERRALS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT

People may not respond to ongoing stress and strain, or sporadic violence and traumatising situations in the same manner. As a key component of holistic wellbeing, it is recommended that mental health and wellbeing support is integrated into all processes of climate justice action and emphasised in distressing situations to mitigate traumatisation and promote wellbeing. The below recommendations for referral apply to climate justice actors. Refer for further professional help if/when:

- They have experienced significant trauma.
- The individual remains emotionally stuck in the crisis situation and is constantly thinking about the most distressing aspects of the situation.
- The individual starts to express thoughts of dying and self-harm; and expresses that they are feeling suicidal or engages in behaviour that implies suicidality.
- The individual is unable to return to a routine or structure that they maintained prior to the incident.
- The individual is not functioning at the level that they had achieved prior to the incident.
- The individual begins to exhibit physiological symptoms of shock.
- The distress is not alleviated after an extended period.

Referring climate justice actors for mental health support should take place when there are signs that their traumatic experiences are negatively impacting on their daily functioning and impairing their ability to cope with daily life stressors.

8.1 Support Hub interventions – Wellbeing and Psychosocial Support

Providing wellbeing interventions such as one-on-one or group debriefing support for climate justice actors is crucial, as they often face high levels of emotional exhaustion, stress, and burnout due to the demanding and emotionally taxing nature of their work. Climate justice leaders frequently deal with systemic injustice, environmental destruction, and the urgency of their cause, which can lead to feelings of demotivation, anger, despondency, grief, and moral injury. The Project 90 by 2030 Wellness Hub offers a safe space to process these emotions and experiences in the form of 1 on 1 online Wellbeing Support; Group online Wellbeing Support; Debriefing support; and crisis interventions.



PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID



Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an emergency or crisis response intervention that focuses on supporting people who have survived a disaster or crisis. It is designed to provide containment and grounding to individuals immediately after a traumatic event, a crisis or any natural or unnatural disaster. Psychological first aid aims to acknowledge the individual's immediate needs, assist with distress management, develop coping skills, and foster a sense of emotional stability in potentially traumatic situations.

When people are in a crisis situation, they are often hypervigilant or feel afraid. As a safety response, they lean towards other people and spaces for comfort and to foster a sense of security. Hence it is key that practitioners and other first responders who work with climate justice leaders, human rights defenders and protestors are equipped in holistic, trauma-informed and human-centred crisis response and support interventions to provide a sense of safety and stability.

Common situations where PFA is used:

1. Natural disasters e.g. floods, earthquakes, tornados
2. Personal crises e.g. accidents, home invasions, hijacking
3. Violence or conflict e.g. riots, clashes with law enforcement, acts of terrorism
4. Occupational crises e.g. structural collapse, workplace accidents
5. Collective crises e.g. violent and sustained protests, mass shootings



Common issues that are encountered during protests where a protestor would benefit from PFA:

1. Distress due to a turn of events
2. Anxiety/Panic attacks
3. Intense fear responses
4. Flashbacks, delusions or hallucinations

9.1 Why PFA?

PFA is a brief-term intervention that takes place when distress is heightened. It is a human-centred approach that is grounded in compassion and support, with the aim of stabilising people in the aftermath of a crisis.

When a person is in distress, it is difficult to navigate a situation rationally and gravitate towards what is urgently needed. PFA practitioners assist people to feel calm, recognise the extent to which how they have been affected, and take necessary steps.

PFA helps to stabilise not only the people involved, but also to prevent the situation from escalating further and causing more damage or destruction. This minimises the ripple effect and mitigates the extent of the crisis and further traumatisation.

PFA is an essential community support methodology, as it can be used in situations like protests, and minor conflicts where distress or rage can intensify a crisis situation. Hence, climate justice leaders who have received basic training in PFA are able to conduct psychological first aid. One does not need to be a health professional to be proficient in psychological first aid.

¹ Holistic – aware of other crisis response needs that an individual may need e.g. medical attention, evacuation, reunited with family or loved ones, disability needs, referrals etc.

A key value of PFA is in its adaptability to different cultural contexts. A person conducting PFA may make use of culturally appropriate, gender-sensitive and age-appropriate ways of communicating and providing support. Hence, in the Southern African context and other collectivistic societies, there are diverse ways to provide support that may resonate with the individual.

When PFA is facilitated effectively, it promotes both short-term and long-term adaptability by supporting an individual to identify their specific needs or refer them to an individual or organisation that provides specialised care.

PFA is also useful for people who are in prolonged situations of psychosocial stress or hypervigilance such as activism and human rights defence, as a response to a high-risk situation or interaction.

Engaging with an individual in distress in a calm and humane way provides the opportunity to identify specific needs or specialised interventions. PFA facilitators may then provide the appropriate referrals or resources.



9.2 What PFA is and what PFA is not

PFA is...	PFA is not...
Calming i.e. a crisis response to reduce distress	Counselling, psychotherapy, or debriefing
Crisis response intervention to foster a sense of safety	An intervention limited to mental health professionals
An intervention that promotes resilience and adaptability	Risking one's safety to attend to a person in distress
Time focused i.e. aftermath of a crisis	Forcing an individual to talk
Non-intrusive i.e. focused on basic and immediate needs and concerns	A long-term intervention
Protective, where PFA practitioners protect people from being revictimized when they are in a distressing situation	A replacement for another medical or emergency intervention
A non-traumatic method of engaging with an individual who is hurt or in distress	A one-size-fits-all methodology
An approach that can be used by anyone who has received basic training	
Asking for a course of events that has led to the distress – this aids a PFA	



PFA is...

practitioner to provide appropriate and necessary support.

A point of connection for individuals to access resources they may need

PFA is not...

9.3 Core Principles of Psychological First Aid

The core principles for the implementation of psychological first aid for climate justice leaders includes:

- Safety – ensuring that the environment that a climate justice leader is in, is physically safe and there are no immediate or pertinent threats to the safety.
- Calmness – promoting a sense of emotional safety and regulation to alleviate the distress caused by the crisis or traumatic event.
- Self-empowerment – encouraging climate justice leaders to identify what is in their control, and gain control of their situation.
- Connectedness – encouraging climate justice leaders to remain connected to family and friends, and people who are within their community for support. This retains a sense of stability and predictability.
- Hope – drawing from human-centred approaches, promoting a sense of optimism allows climate justice leaders to lean into their resilience and reduce a sense of hopelessness.





9.4 Practical Elements of Psychological First Aid

PREPARE: The entry phase of PFA refers to the process of assessing the situation

- What types of reactions can be expected from the people who have been affected?
- What capacity does each person have?
- When to reach out for help or support from the PFA team?
- What approach will they use to support each other in the situation?
- How do they anticipate they will feel when working with people in crisis or distress?
- Has provision been made for debriefing during and after the PFA interventions?

The four L's of psychological first aid are Look, Listen, Link and Live. They guide PFA practitioners to provide contextually relevant and culturally sensitive support to survivors of a crisis or traumatic event. The main objective of PFA is to provide the opportunity for survivors to acknowledge the magnitude of the traumatic experience.

PFA is conducted by personnel who are trained to respond with compassion, recognise distress and mitigate further traumatisation.

LOOK: Observe and assess the situation to understand the immediate needs of the climate justice leaders who have been affected by the crisis situation or disruption to the protest.

- Look out for vulnerable people within the gathering who need additional support (e.g. minors and people with disabilities)
- Look out for further threats to safety e.g. active police or public retaliation, fire breakouts, unstable structures
- Look out for people with critical or life-threatening physical injuries
- Look out for climate justice leaders experiencing shock, rage, or psychological distress
- Look out for threats to the safety of first responders
- Look out for other emergency and support services who are present

LISTEN: Provide a safe space for climate justice leaders to talk about what has happened and express their emotions and experiences.

- Listen to the individual and allow them to share any part of their experience
- Listen patiently and allow the individual to speak at their own pace
- Listen attentively, and pay attention to non-verbal communication
- Listen to their main concerns and respond empathetically and appropriately
- Listen to what the individual is saying and ask about their primary needs



Listening DO's

- Respect that a person's position and beliefs in the situation are valid
- Respect a person's sense of autonomy to make healthy decisions when they are not in distress
- Be honest and cultivate a sense of trust which is very important for climate justice leaders
- Be conscious of your own emotional state, and how you would respond in a similar situation
- Be conscious of your own beliefs and position in the situation to ensure that they are not projected onto the individual
- Recognise that you may have differing beliefs and values, and set them aside

Listening DONT's

- Do not express your discomfort with the climate justice leader
- Do not deflect the conversation and set unrealistic expectations
- Do not express your impatience or frustration due to the individual's distress
- Do not make physical contact without the individual's consent
- Do not interrupt an individual if they are telling a distressing recollection
- Do not provide inappropriate advice or make judgmental comments
- Do not share your own personal stories or direct the conversation away from them and towards you
- Do not probe for details about the distressful situation that are not required for containment

LINK: Connect climate justice leaders to additional services, information or resources that they may need, and that are readily available for further assistance

- Link to medical services
- Link to safe housing
- Links to counselling services
- Link to family members and close friends
- Link to social support services
- Link to cultural and religious support groups

LIVE: Create an emotionally supportive space for the climate justice leader to retain a sense of emotional safety and recovery from the shock of the distressful situation

- Focus on a strengths approach and positive steps for the immediate future
- Develop healthy coping methods which the climate justice leader can commit to for the next 14 days
- Commitment to developing a practical structure to achieve their daily activities
- Commitment to staying connected with loved ones