

GUIDELINES ON FOSTERING ECO-VALUES AND FORMING
ECO-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTAL MINDSET
FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS



НАЦІОНАЛЬНА

ПСИХОЛОГІЧНА
АСОЦІАЦІЯ

УКРАЇНИ

In 2019 National Psychological Association of Ukraine, along with over 50 world's professional associations signed the proclamation of collaborating efforts to fight climate change supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Current recommendations were created by the NPA's working group on climate change prevention and mental health preservation.

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Find out more about us: <https://npa-ua.org/climate/>

WHY

DO PSYCHOLOGISTS TALK ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) the consequences of climate change will be catastrophic if we do not arrest the growth of the temperature on the planet till a maximum of 1.5°C (IPCC, 2018).

According to the International Meteorological Organization (WMO, 2019), extreme climatic risks and consequences include changes in the pH level (increasing acidity), lower oxygen levels in the oceans, increased floods due to glacier melting, and in some regions - droughts and bushfires. These catastrophes result in human losses. The report of the Secretary-General to the UN General Assembly 2012 on Human Rights and Migration estimated that up to 250 million people may be relocated due to climate change by 2050. Humanity will face significant economic losses and crises due to crop failure, famine, and changes in the planet's resources.

Climate change affects mental health. The consequences of natural disasters and catastrophes are shock reactions, PTSD, depression, anxiety and phobic disorders, suicidal behavior. The experience of other countries, where experts have studied the consequences of natural disasters on mental health, shows serious mental health problems in about half of the victims (Bryant et al., 2014; Lowe, Manove, & Rhodes, 2013). In addition to bad harvests and economic losses, landscape changes evoke feelings of solastalgia - a special kind of grief and sadness due to the loss of significant sites and places (Albrecht, 2020, Cunsolo Willox et al., 2012). Urbanization and reduced contact with nature are a source of stress and mental stress (Lankadurai et al., 2013). Bad air quality in cities and industrial areas can provoke neuroinflammatory processes in the brain, which can cause mental disorders (Khan, Plana-Ripoll, Antonsen et al., 2019). Rising temperatures and abnormal heat affect our endocrine system and increase the level of aggression (Simister & Cooper, 2005). Among the most vulnerable categories are children, elderly people, pregnant women, people with chronic diseases. Problems with physical health also affect well-being. Every day we receive many alarming signals that our world is changing, future generations will live in new conditions. This raises environmental anxiety (Albrecht, 2011) and guilt over our own daily habits, which destroy our environment.

We, the psychologists of the National Psychological Association, have prepared a guide for all our colleagues who seek to contribute to saving the planet and supporting mental health. With reasonable orderly actions and decisions we are still able to protect this world. Psychologists cannot solve all environmental problems quickly. However, we work with people every day and we can talk about these issues, promote environmental values, eco-friendly behavior, and help to cope with the challenges of a new reality in a changing world. Our goal is to form and evoke ecological consciousness among the general population.

Below you will find advice for professionals who work in three areas: education, private or institutional psychological practice as counselors, psychotherapists or clinical psychologists. Our goal is to remind you of the best opportunities and ways to share trustworthy and reliable information to colleagues, clients and patients based on your work competencies and ethical standards.

YOU HAVE ENOUGH RESOURCES TO START ACTING TODAY!



IF YOU ARE A PSYCHOLOGIST IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

IF YOU WORK IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS - USE THE «PSYCHOLOGIST'S HOUR» TO COVER ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Children and adolescents know the importance of preserving nature, but this knowledge is usually detached from deep understanding. You should discuss relevant topics, explain how the environmental situation affects physical and mental health, offer some tools, give specific examples. Working with biology, geography, health teachers, class teachers, educators, and class leaders might be a good support for you. Try to use extracurricular activities for this topic: get an excursion to the recycling stations, nature conservation organizations, environmental organisations; invite environmental activists, organize environmental supportive campaigns, flash mobs, talk about habits that can help reduce the usage of resources.



Take a look at some interesting ideas for organizing special events for students of all ages with the Climate Education Week Toolkit



We have prepared a calendar of important dates for you, so you can make your events thematic

IF YOU WORK AT HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS - USE SUPERVISION OR MENTORING

Most Ukrainian universities have supervision. University teachers can organize various events and interesting places as extracurricular activities and broaden students' mindset. This allows us to talk about the environmental situation. Try to avoid formalities and moralizing. Instead get opinion leaders involved, refer to real facts and recent research. Encourage your students to write research papers on environmental topics.

IF YOU ARE A RESEARCHER - DO THE RESEARCH

Dig in! Discover new opportunities, introduce environmental psychology as a topic to Ukrainian scientists, organize conferences and round tables.

The Ukrainian-speaking scientific community is struggling with the newest and up-to-date information about ecology, climate change, environmental consciousness, nature-friendly behavior, ecological stereotypes, myths and prejudices, and the influence of these topics on mental health.

IF YOU ARE A PSYCHOLOGIST IN AN ORGANIZATION

HAVE LECTURES AND WORKSHOPS ON ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS BEHAVIOR

Many people are interested in environmental issues. However, most lack basic information on how to introduce environmental behavior to their lives. You can address topics of rational daily use of water and electricity, philosophy of minimalism and conscious consumption, advantages of reusable items over the disposable ones, recycling, etc. For these educational meetings you can use our materials, which have many ideas of environmentally friendly habits. It will be interesting to discuss fears and prejudices one may encounter on the path to environmentally conscious behavior.



We collected a lot of materials that you can use as a starting point when preparing your own workshops, meetings or speeches.

PLAN OPEN-AIR RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Walking in nature has a positive effect on well-being and productivity (Steg et al., 2019). Inform your colleagues on how nature is an extremely powerful resource for the human psyche. The positive effects include improved cognitive functions (memory, decision-making, attention recovery) and reduction of stress factors.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE CHANGING HABITS IN ORGANIZATION'S ACTIVITIES

Take into account the implementation of environmental values and staff's capacity to apply the environmentally friendly habits in the workplace when developing mental health programs in the organization.

For example, if an employee is concerned about energy efficiency and waste sorting at home, a failure to do the same at the workplace can reduce employee's loyalty and increase stress levels. Do the research on the environmental habits and values of employees or encourage such research. Help create workplace conditions that foster implementation of such values and habits.

Suggest placing the sorting containers, installing the energy-saving lamps, motion sensors, and tap aerators. Make sure that all relevant materials on this topic are created as correctly as possible in terms of perception psychology and content.



Check out our «Recommendations for creating a nature-friendly office, center, and conference hall»

IF YOU ARE A

COUNSELOR / PSYCHOTHERAPIST, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

CHOOSE PSYCHOLOGICAL CENTERS WITH ECO-VALUES

Pay attention to how the space is organized: limit the use of extra food packaging (for example, for tea or sugar) or substitute the disposable solutions (such as plastic cups, shoe covers) with alternatives, check whether there are containers for sorting garbage, etc. Feel free to ask about this when you sign up for a consultation or choose a venue for events. Centers that support the principles of reasonable consumption will be happy to share their success stories regarding this topic, while centers that are not involved in such activities will be able to know what is needed for their clients. Request better environmental conditions from your lessors.

LEARN MORE ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOTHERAPY

Many people are looking for outdoor recreation. And rightly so - within environmental psychology* there are several evidence-based theories that use the concept of «recreational environment». In other words, researchers are talking about psychotherapy using the environment. A large number of research confirms that the natural environment promotes recovery more than urban or artificial one (Pretty et al. 2005; Maller et al., 2006; Beyer et al. 2014). Let's briefly look at the two theories.

** environmental psychology - a discipline that studies the psychological aspects of human interaction with the environment.*

Stress Reduction Theory. When humans interact with nature, the activity of the sympathetic nervous system (responsible for the arousal reaction) and the main stress markers decrease: level of cortisol in the blood, heart rate, blood pressure, and skin conductance (Ulrich, 1983; Ulrich et al., 1991).

Attention Recovery Theory. A person's professional and educational activities require sustaining voluntary attention during the day, which can lead to so-called mental fatigue (especially in conditions of excessive distractors). One of the main mechanisms of recovery is the ability of the environment to attract attention without cognitive effort (spontaneous), which leads to improved concentration, memory, and decision-making ability (Kaplan, Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1995).

Thus, time spent in nature is the right choice when it comes to planning the activity. It not only helps to recover through the mechanisms described above but also encourages physical and social activity, which ultimately improves our well-being. Such activity indirectly increases the value of nature and promotes pro-environmental behaviour.

USE PLANTS IN THERAPY

Interactions with indoor or outdoor plants have a positive effect on people who are recovering from stress, hypertension, anxiety or depression (Lee et al., 2015; Park, Mattson, 2009; Nieuwenhuis et al. 2014). This form of therapy is related to the concept of biophilia, according to which humans have a genetic connection with nature. Interaction with plants facilitates the production of serotonin and develops a sense of responsibility. It is convenient and affordable for most people. Gardening allows you to splash out negative experiences and emotions through simple actions, such as weeding or undercutting. Gardening is soothing and allows feeling the pleasure of watching the results of your work. Plant therapy can be successfully combined with traditional approaches to psychotherapy and drug therapy (McMane 2013). The purpose of plant therapy is to help patients develop self-confidence, strengthen social ties, increase empathy and spend more time in nature.



More information on this topic can be found on the website of the American Horticultural Therapy Association

USE THE «WALK AND TALK» APPROACH IN THERAPY

This approach successfully combines conventional conversational psychotherapy with light physical activity or a walk. Usually, psychologists and their clients choose a cozy and peaceful place in nature and spend sessions walking. Everything as always, just outside the office, in comfortable clothes, shoes and in motion. If the movement is tiresome, you can always relax in recreational areas. We have already mentioned above that staying in nature itself has a healing effect, and here we add more movement and work with a psychologist.

Altogether it enhances the effect and promotes the synthesis of neurotransmitters needed for recovery and wellness. The «walk and talk» approach has a good impact on reducing anxiety and aggression, treating depressive disorders, overcoming the effects of stress and lowering blood pressure. Staying in nature along with psychotherapy normalizes sleep, develops positive thinking and enhances communication with nature. Of course, a specialist should take care of the safety of the place, assess all possible risks and provide conditions for the stability of such work (DeAngelis 2013).



To learn more about how to organize the work better, you can read the British Psychological Society Guide on Talking Therapy Outdoors

You can expand or modify all of the above recommendations in any acceptable way. It is important that you have interest in implementing your own environmental values and see it as a resourceful activity. Keep in mind that your behavior can be a role model. Therefore, it is important to remember the following:

DEVELOP ENVIRONMENTAL HABITS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Save resources, recycle, consume rationally, give preference to local products, avoid disposable items, if possible use public transport as opposed to private, give a second life to old things, reduce meat consumption.

TALK ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES AND YOUR POSITION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

You are not alone. There is a specialized working group in the NPA which unites psychologists for the public discussion on the importance of ecology and climate change.

Distribute educational materials on mental health and the environment. We are trying to generate interesting and relevant content for the Ukrainian-speaking community. Your informational support is very important. Remember, you are trusted and you are heard as specialists.

Materials on the topic can be found at: <https://npa-ua.org/climate/>

Our hashtags on social networks:

#ClimateChangeNPA

#stop_climate_change

#NPA_loves_Earth

Express your own position, share information in the community of colleagues.

Now you know for sure that together we can do great things, and we already have all the tools for change!

If you want to share your experience and tell us how these tips helped you - write to us at office@npa-ua.org

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