

# Young People's Climate Anxiety is Valid; Not Caused by So-Called "Alarmist" Activism

Recent efforts by two Liberal MPs to link mental health problems in young people to "alarmist" climate activism in an effort to secure extra funding for the school chaplaincy program are deeply troubling. As reported by the [Guardian on 31 August](#), one MP described climate action groups as 'robbing children of hope' and another is quoted to say that climate activism is "alarmist and does cause mental health problems for young people".

These claims are false and misleading.

The facts are:

Distress about climate change in young people can be a healthy, normal response to a real threat. Young people feeling distress about the serious and dangerous situation we face as a result of human induced climate change is not irrational, rather it is an appropriate and healthy response to the current best available science, such as the recently released [IPCC AR6 WG1 report](#).<sup>1 2 3</sup>

Rising rates of concern and anxiety about climate change in young people in Australia include distress at the failure of our leaders to respond effectively to limit dangerous overheating. Young people cope best when they feel genuine trust and hope for the future. Our youth have seen the failure of the Australian Federal government to act in proportion to the real threat of climate change, and they understand all too well that it is younger generations who will suffer the greatest impacts.<sup>2 4 5 6 7</sup>

Denial or minimisation of the young person's real experience of climate change as a threat and the failure of adults and leaders to respond appropriately can be expected to worsen young people's climate distress and mental health outcomes.<sup>3 5 8 9 10</sup>

Validation, including believing young people's distress about real threats and losses from climate change, encouraging values-based action to respond to these, and demonstrating effective responses from trusted adults to the challenge of climate change can improve children and young people's distress and mental health outcomes.<sup>5 9 10</sup>

Young people can and are leading the way in taking action on climate change. A class action involving several young Australians recently secured a Federal Court declaration that the government has a duty to take reasonable care to prevent its actions causing harm to children from carbon emissions. Empowering young people to engage in the public and political discourse about climate action is to be encouraged as a means of supporting mental wellbeing.<sup>11</sup>

There is an urgent need for those to whom young people go for initial support with their healthy, normal distress about climate change - parents, teachers, school counsellors, school chaplains, community and religious groups - to have the knowledge and skills to respond to these real concerns without harmful invalidation or minimisation.<sup>5 9</sup>

If young people experience clinically significant mental health distress in response to climate change, they need access to assessment and treatment from appropriately trained health professionals.<sup>9 10</sup>

Young people's anxieties about climate change can be most effectively addressed by leaders, including the Federal government both acknowledging and acting on the clear medical and scientific evidence and taking strong action to combat global heating and its impacts on their futures.<sup>5 6 7 9</sup>

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