

My Idea by serge twagirayezu

Imagine waking up each day to a flood of headlines—wildfires raging uncontrollably, oceans filled with plastic, ice caps melting at an alarming rate. For today's youth, this isn't a distant future nightmare—it's their present reality. Every scroll, every news report, every conversation reminds them that the planet is in crisis. But it's not just the environment that's suffering; the mental health of our youth is hanging by a thread. The term **eco-anxiety** doesn't even begin to capture the sheer weight of the fear they carry.



Why does this generation feel so overwhelmed? Why are they consumed by an anxiety so deep that it's affecting every aspect of their lives?

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Here's why: **they know**. They know that the future of the planet rests on their shoulders. They are hyper-aware of the climate emergency, more so than any generation before them. They see it unfolding in real-time, not as abstract statistics but as the scorched landscapes, polluted skies, and collapsing ecosystems that will define their future. And the more they know, the heavier the burden becomes.

But how can you expect them to fight when they are drowning in fear? How can they lead the charge against climate change when they can barely manage the crushing weight of their own anxieties?

Let's face it: **eco-anxiety is paralyzing our youth**. It's not just a fleeting worry; it's a chronic fear that invades their thoughts from the moment they wake up to the moment they fall asleep—if they can even sleep at all. They're consumed by the thought that no matter what they do, it might not be enough. The planet is burning, and they are being told they are the generation that has to fix it. But how can they save the world when they feel so powerless to even save themselves from this overwhelming dread?

This is more than just a personal issue. It's a societal crisis. The constant pressure to act—combined with the magnitude of the problem—is leading to a generation that is mentally exhausted before the real fight has even begun. Anxiety, depression, and a crushing sense of helplessness have become their norm. The ripple effect is devastating: academic performance suffers, relationships fray, and the once-passionate drive to make a difference becomes a suffocating fear of inevitable failure.

Imagine the consequences if we don't address this now. An entire generation lost, not to climate change itself, but to the crushing mental toll of trying to fix it. Eco-anxiety isn't just impacting individual lives—it's threatening the very collective action we need to combat climate change.

This isn't just a mental health crisis—it's a crisis of leadership. If we do nothing, we risk losing the very leaders who have the passion, drive, and vision to enact real change.

But there is a way forward. **We must give our youth the tools not only to fight climate change but to manage their mental health in the face of it**. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is taking steps to bridge the gap between climate education and mental health resources. By combining the two, they are equipping young people to not only understand the challenges ahead but also cope with the anxiety that comes with that knowledge.

The stakes have never been higher. If we want to win the battle against climate change, we must first win the battle for the minds and hearts of our youth. Because if they fall, we all fall.

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