

"Learning from the Land: Growing emotional resilience in the climate crisis"

Jen Johnson

Private practice

Mental Health Symposium 2025

Thursday, May 15

[2025/05/15 10:27] Carolyn Carillon: Hello everyone.

Today's presentation is being transcribed so those without audio or who require text only can participate in real time. The presenter may also use a teleprompter (speak easy) in local chat.

A little explanation about this service.

Voice-to-text transcriptionists provide a translation of the key ideas discussed, NOT a word for word transcription.

Voice-to-text services provide an in-the-moment snapshot of ideas and concepts, so that those who are unable to hear or to understand the audio program are able to participate in real-time.

You will see the transcription in local chat.

Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.

The transcriptionists are Carolyn Carillon & Elektra Panthar

The following initials in the transcription record will identify the speakers:

JJ: Jen Johnson

<<transcription begins>>

LT: I'm Lorin Tone and I've been in world for 18 years
I'm here to introduce Jen Johnson

JJ: I'm Jen Johnson and I'm very new to SL
I'd like to thank the kind folks who helped get me ready
I'm here to talk about learning from the land and growing emotional resilience during the climate crisis
I'd like to start with a story
This photo is of our coast in North Carolina
It's a ghost forest
The first time I saw one, I lost my breath
Light against these bare tree trunks
The majority were bald cypress trees
Like the ones from my childhood
They're beautiful but dead
In an instant, I had a recognition of all I had loved and lost from my childhood
Grief and awe mixed together
My mother gave me a love of nature
I found refuge in the trees when the chaos of her addiction took over
After her death, I developed a degenerative eye condition that called into question my identity as a photographer

The deaths of the coastal forests is profound
It destroys habitats
As the forests yield to saltwater marshes, the climate is changing
How will we adapt?
The ghost forests led me back to photography
It taught me balance
It taught me to see clearly from my heart
What in nature do you love?
What's calling you home?

Topics:

- Climate trends + impacts
- How the nervous system responds to stress
- Strategies for reducing anxiety and tending grief
- Taking climate action

This graph is from the CDC

You can see that climate change is bringing about lots of changes

Impact of climate change on human health

-- Rising temperatures -> More extreme weather -> Rising sea levels -> Increasing CO2 levels

Extreme heat -> Heat-related illness and death, vascular failure

Severe weather -> Injuries, fatalities, mental health impacts

Air pollution -> Asthma, cardiovascular disease

Changes in vector ecology -> Malaria, dengue, encephalitis, hantavirus, Rift Valley fever, Lyme disease, chikungunya, West Nile virus

Increasing allergens -> Respiratory allergies, asthma

Water quality impacts -> Cholera, cryptosporidiosis, campylobacter, leptospirosis, harmful algal blooms

Water and food supply impacts -> Malnutrition, Diarrheal disease

Environmental degradation -> Forced migration, civil conflict, mental health impacts

Keep breathing

It's tempting to hold our breath

We feel overwhelmed

We're also experiencing other crises

That are exacerbating these impacts

We see climate justice concerns

"the suffering of the many pays for the luxuries of the few" - Greta Thunberg

Breathe, because that's my most intense slide

Climate Mental Health Impacts

Solastalgia – longing/nostalgia for pre-environmental land or life

•

Grief

•

Depression

•

Anxiety

-

Insomnia

-

Increased attempted and completed suicides

-

Higher rates of aggression and violence

-

Increased mental health emergencies

-

Increased sense of helplessness, hopelessness, fatalism, despair

-

Intense feelings of loss / grief

-

Acute Stress, Post Traumatic Stress

-

Increased substance use disorders

White et al, 2023; Clayton et al, 2017; Liu et al, 2021)

These are important to name because a lot of us are feeling these things

What this says is that we need more skills for coping

How is the global uncertainty impacting you?

Feelings

Sensations

Thoughts

After this conference, journal

Ask about your own feelings

What sensations do you feel in your body?

What thoughts do you have on a regular basis?

As we move through this strange experience

Again, take a deep breath

Action is an antidote to fear

What can I do?

- Talk about it

- Adopt a regenerative worldview

- Increase personal & community resilience

- Let the world's beauty and your gifts and strengths inspire you toward action

Research shows this helps

Let's Talk About It

Two in three Americans (67%) say they "rarely" or "never" discuss global warming with family and friends." (2022)

Spiral of Silence – hesitancy to talk about it reinforces incorrect perception that others aren't concerned about it.

"The most important thing you can do to fight climate change is talk about it." –

Katherine Hayhoe, Canadian Climate Scientist

Climate Change in The American Mind. Yale Program on Climate Change Communication & George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication. April 2022

We're now seeing a more complex spiral of silence
As the current administration has pulled us out of the Paris Accord and has decreased funding
We need to talk

Adopt a Regenerative Worldview
Recognize interconnectedness.
Develop reciprocal relationship with nature.
“Paying attention is a form of reciprocity with the living world, receiving the gifts with open eyes and open heart.”
--Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass

I'd recommend Kimmerer's book
We can practice this by going outside or looking out our window
And asking what in nature is calling our attention
We can practice being present
Where there is sorrow, there is opportunity for awareness and healing
We can practice appreciating nature
Open your heart to what nature can teach you

Personal Resilience
The capacity to recover quickly from difficult or stressful events and face future difficulties with greater ease
Inner strength
Flexibility
Adaptability
One way we can connect with our personal resilience is to think about when we've been resilient in the past & how can we use that to cope now?

Emotional Resilience
Increase ability to be with difficult experiences
(grief, fear, anxiety, anger)
+
Increase pleasant experiences
(inner peace, hope, gratitude, love, connection, awe, beauty)

We're not turning to pleasant experiences to escape but to find refuge
Here is where we practice being with grief and appreciating beauty
(JJ reads quote about resting with grief and feeling free)

[2025/05/15 10:49] Beth Ghostraven: I like that, not escape but refuge

[2025/05/15 10:49] Carolyn Carillon: JJ: We want to practice touching grief and then stepping out of it with a resilience practice
One way we can do that is to meditate
Journalling about grief and gratitude
3 -5 minutes
Time limits give us a container
Some people are facilitating climate cafes

Online

They're often low cost or free
We can read poetry
We just titrate our experience
If you're interested in poets
Mary Oliver
Jane Hirshfield
and Joy Harjo

We can just start by being aware of what's in our body
I'll walk through this
We sit or lie comfortably
Feel free to close your eyes
Notice sounds
In the room or outside
Notice sensations of air on your face
Notice the body for a moment
Are there any dominant sensations?
Lightness? Discomfort? Relaxation?
Be aware with an attitude of kindness and non-judgment
Turn to the emotional body, or the heart
What are your dominant feelings?
Or is your state neutral?
Allow it to be as it is
Notice it with kindness
Now notice your state of mind
Notice if you're focused on the instructions or is your attention wandering?
If wandering, is it thinking about something in particular?
Or just thoughts?
Observe with kindness and non-judgment
Now focus on your breath
Breathe in
Let it go
Slowly open your eyes
Just a simple brief practice
For noticing sensations beyond thoughts
Our climate stress responses are similar to cues of safety and danger in our lives

Climate Stress Responses
Fight or flight
Fear, anxiety, avoidance,
frustration, anger, rage

Resilient zone
presence, calm, curiosity,
compassion
social engagement

Freeze
denial, apathy, avoidance,

numbness, hopelessness

If we feel safe, we're likely to feel calm and engaged
If we feel danger, we'll feel flight or fight
Or freeze

A lot of people come to me feeling depressed
It's a sense of freeze
It's helpful to check in with yourself
If we're feeling threat and there's no danger, we can work to manage our response and our level of stress
There are skills we can use

Grounding Skills for Resilience

10 slow deep breaths
Recall compassion
Awareness of sounds
Awareness of breathing
Overhead side stretch
Feel your feet on the floor
Bilateral tapping
Take a sip of water
Name objects you see
Sighing or humming
Some people say 3 deep breaths
That doesn't get me far, but 10 will
You can feel your body reset
When you recall compassion, you think about suffering and wanting it to end
There's a lot of research on cognitive-based compassion training

[2025/05/15 11:00] Elektra Panthar: Awareness of breathing it helps anchor us, paying attention to our body as it breathes
It can also help, stretching as you breathe

Bilateral tapping - my favorite is butterfly tapping
If we can't move arms we can also tap with our feet
Name objects you see can also be sounds
These all help our present moment awareness

Resilient Mindset

Acceptance = This is happening. Now what?
What actions can I take?
Acceptance doesn't have to be defeat

Practices to Grow Resilience

Journaling – gratitude, joy
Random acts of kindness
Live from your strengths
Practice mindfulness & meditation
Connect with nature

Express creativity

Any creative expression helps

This is one of my favorite practices:

Seek, Notice, and Savor Good Experiences –

Rick Hanson

Our brain works on negativity bias to help us survive, but we can counteract the negativity

Cultivate Joy & Appreciate Beauty for 20 to 30 seconds can help us tremendously, as keep those positive feelings with us

It can be so many things

Beauty

Trees, flowers

Taste of tea

Birdsong

Feel of cool water

Blue sky

Clouds

Sound of rain

Love

Compassion

Awe

Will Grant – Pachamama Alliance talks about

4 Levels of Climate Action

- Individual action
- Friends and family
- Community and local institutions
- Economy and Policy change

Personal Climate Action

- Increase personal resilience - we can feel more empowered
- Increase home energy efficiency
- Pollinator gardens in your garden or a community garden
- Compost + Reuse + Recycle
- Reduce food waste
- Increase Plant based diet
- Reduce use of fossil fuels
- Support climate orgs, financially or by volunteer work, or even going online and sharing their posts

Community Climate Action - this is one of the most effective according to researchers

- Get to know your neighbors
- Learn about environmental justice concerns - listen
- Attend city council meetings
- Encourage creation of city climate action plan
- Encourage walkable cities, bee cities, clean energy, carpooling

Climate Action Policy Change

- Vote for candidates who support climate action and policy

- Encourage political candidates to support climate action and policy
 - Join groups, volunteer
- You can call and email representatives

Finding Your Place in Climate Action

Many people want to know how to do this

Find the place where your gifts that bring you alive intersect with the world's deep need.

AuthenticHappiness.com [<https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/testcenter>]

VIA Strengths Survey

The more we learn from our strengths the better we feel

On that website you can find questionnaires that help you determine your strengths if you are not sure which they are

What aspects of nature do you love?

We will try to save what we love.

People with greater self-reported Connection to Nature in Place perspective (C2NP) are more likely to engage in individual-level climate action (Galway et al, 2021; Whitburn et al, 2020)

I'd encourage you to think of 3 things in nature you love, whether it's a bird or a tree, anything - I'm a big bird lover and have built habitats for them

And then delve deeply about what you love, for example I did so with the ghost trees

There's opportunity for awareness, self discovery and resilience in nature, and also in virtual worlds

Can you capture it in art, receive its gifts, and offer it your gratitude?

If you'd like to connect with me there are a few ways

Everyday Mindful

<https://jenjohnson.substack.com/>

<https://jenjohnson.com/>

Any questions?

[2025/05/15 11:14] Trinny Mizin: 🎵~~🎵~~APPLAUSE~~🎵~~🎵

[2025/05/15 11:15] Buffy Beale: awesome presentation!!

[2025/05/15 11:14] Mook Wheeler: COMMENT: I saw a video where an Amazon community was shown modern images/videos. When shown men walking on the moon, they said: "...It worries us. [...] There were never as many eclipses before. You must have disturbed it. We've noticed changes here. It's getting warmer and warmer. There is less cool air than before..." This video was made about 24 years ago, so effects of climate change were already being felt deep within the "lungs of the world". The people in the video are as worried and anxious as we are, but I doubt anyone is addressing *their* fears and stress, or providing them an explanation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eafOkWXjqjc>

[2025/05/15 11:16] Elektra Panthar: JJ: Thank you Mook

We are living on stolen land in the US and other countries

It's heartbreaking how we have ploughed over their ways of caring for the land

They are more upset as we are because they see how it affects the land, I'm glad people are starting to notice and respect what they do.

[2025/05/15 11:16] Warthog Jun: Are there any public data on the sounds and rivers surrounding the ghost trees in NC?

[2025/05/15 11:18] Namaara MacMoragh: C: Kimmerer's book "Gathering Moss" is also excellent on this topic.

[2025/05/15 11:18] Elektra Panthar: JJ: there are a small handful of research articles about ghost trees

In NC State uni there was a researcher, but I don't think there are papers dealing with the sound aspect

[2025/05/15 11:19] Warthog Jun: more looking for water chemistry changes over time

[2025/05/15 11:19] Elektra Panthar: JJ: there are more focused on the basin, we have high levels of pollution in the water

Salt water intrusion due to climate change is a big factor

Water chemistry changes is related to the salt water intrusion as far as I know but I'm not updated on it, I'm not a scientist

[2025/05/15 11:20] Sylph (Sylph Falconvale): ?? How do you recommend confronting nihilism in response to the climate crisis, both in ourselves or others?

[2025/05/15 11:22] Trinny Mizin: I have reached this point, so I shall be interested

[2025/05/15 11:21] Elektra Panthar: JJ: big question

Confronting nihilism that denies there's meaning in life is very far from my experience

Something that can have impact is encourage them to think of the impact this will have on future generations, to generate compassion, if they are not concerned about their own fate

[2025/05/15 11:24] Sylph (Sylph Falconvale): Thank you for your response!

[2025/05/15 11:20] Stealth (Cicero Kit): Comment: In addition to sharing news stories relating to climate change with other people, I regularly share things that I refer to as "joy scrolling," and encourage others to share such stories as well. These are the opposite of doom scrolling, and serve as a reminder of the good things, and why we care.

[2025/05/15 11:24] Elektra Panthar: JJ: yes please keep 'joy scrolling'

Connecting with joy and beauty helps so much

I had a section about bluebirds in my column and a person hugged me because he said I inspired people to love nature

We can inspire people to care about nature by experiencing its beauty and the joy it gives us.

Warthog Jun: Having family that have been there for many generations, how are you handling the stress of dealing with people not known to be friendly to tree huggers?

JJ: I don't say I'm a tree hugger, it's valid for those of us concerned about these topics to find a common language

I communicate through the images I take of the ghost trees

We need to focus on positive aspects to leave an impression on people

[2025/05/15 11:27] Lady Tigress Bonded (pet Karu): thank you Jen

[2025/05/15 11:27] Tricia Funizza: Jen....thank you

[2025/05/15 11:28] Sylph (Sylph Falconvale): Thank you Jen

[2025/05/15 11:28] Namaara MacMoragh: Thank you for a terrific contrasting approach to climate change and anxiety.

[2025/05/15 11:28] Elektra Panthar: PK: Thank you Jen, great job learning SL so quickly and for an awesome presentation!

JJ: Thank you everyone, hope to see you on Substack!

[2025/05/15 11:28] Querida Faun - Thorne (LibertyHawk Resident): One of my big passions are animals and I saw a video a few weeks ago about a man who lived and worked in South Africa rescuing lions in a reservation and they asked him what he would say to the last lion on earth I do hope we can come up with a solution to help them animals out

That was a very mindful presentation glad to be part of this

[2025/05/15 11:29] Elektra Panthar: <<transcription ends>>