



Staying Hopeful and Engaged in the Climate Emergency

Those of us working to end the climate emergency face a very challenging situation.

Climate change is accelerating as those currently with power to cause change fail to address the root causes. We are facing many challenges as we work on many fronts at the same time: wars, genocide, racism and other oppressions, pandemics, economic struggles. We must take actions to ensure our long-term survival as a species. We face well-funded opposition to taking the actions needed and not many of our governments are taking large enough meaningful steps. Decades of lies about climate change have slowed the growth of our climate movement.

But now our movements are growing as more and more people are engaging to end this crisis. Climate extremes are being publicized. There are countless opportunities to reach people with our message about the necessity and possibilities for change. People are seeing them personally and are more open to considering new ideas. And we keep coming up with new and better solutions.

We want our minds to stay engaged in this challenge and thinking of possibilities. To do that well, we want to be hopeful. Feelings of despair and hopelessness confuse us and cloud our thinking. We can decide to take action whether

we can feel hopeful at that moment or not—and it makes sense to do that. But taking action while being hopeful allows us to access more of our thinking and helps other people see more and new possibilities.

Holding out hope for the future is a key tool for climate activists. People need to see some hope for the future if they are to take action. Having a hopeful tone and injecting a hopeful perspective can bring people along with us and create more possibilities to move people forward. It appears that the situation with the climate will get worse for many years. We don't want to become bogged down in feelings of despair. We want to be able to assist others to understand why it makes sense to stay engaged when the news is so bad. It's time for us to reclaim our hope and have a strategy for how to stay hopeful in the face of difficult times.

Even though our situation is difficult, there is reason to be hopeful. We live on a beautiful planet. There are millions of lifeforms here with us; each of us precious and unique. Humans have the capacity to love one another deeply across any barrier, cooperate to accomplish huge challenges, think our way through complex situations, carry out difficult strategies for significant change, and celebrate our many accomplishments



and relationships. Billions of acts of kindness, caring, support, intelligence, and needed action happen every day.

The climate emergency is a problem humans created, and it is a problem humans can solve. We even know what to do to solve it! We know what steps to take and the solution is within our reach. We simply need to bring enough people along with us as we make demands that cannot be ignored and we create needed changes in human activities.

Real change, from small to large, is possible. For example, in our own communities:

- We can protect natural carbon sinks (forests, wetlands, peat bogs).
- We can back the development of extensive public transportation.
- We can support publicly-owned renewable energy projects.
- We can end fracking and fossil fuel extraction.



Sustaining All Life (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) consists of a wide diversity of people in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from emotional harm resulting from oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging the release of painful emotions, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



[SustainingAllLife.org](https://www.SustainingAllLife.org)



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Organizing for local projects builds our strength and our base to join with global efforts. Local successes build hope.

RECLAIMING HOPE AND STAYING HOPEFUL

In *Sustaining All Life* (SAL) and *United to End Racism* (UER) we have learned that the despair and hopelessness we feel are rooted in our earlier experiences. Young humans arrive into a world full of challenges. Every young person wants to be part of making things right in their world. But children are small and adults disregard their efforts. We were often left feeling discouraged about making change. The oppression we experienced further diminished our sense of ourselves. Few of us grow up thinking of ourselves as agents of change.

In SAL/UER we work to free ourselves from the effects of hurtful incidents in our past so they do not limit our future. Our experience is that we can heal from these hurts if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to express our grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of an inherent healing process we all possess, the outward signs of which are talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By intentionally releasing these feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and oppression.

We can choose to use this natural healing process to stay hopeful through the climate crisis. We can listen awarely to one another in pairs (listening exchanges) and in groups (listening circles) to open up and express our feelings of hopelessness. We can talk about times we got discouraged when we were young or last week. Building an ongoing group to do this healing work on a regular basis makes an important difference to our well-being and our functioning. SAL/UER can help you find a network near you or to build your own.

Many people feel more hopeful when they take action to address the climate emergency, especially when taking action together with other people. Taking action can pull people out of feeling resigned and alone, and lead to fresh ideas and new relationships. Without taking action, we can't build the future we want. Taking action for change makes this healing process more accessible, just as doing personal healing work makes us stronger activists.

We can also pay attention to the many hopeful developments in the present and remind ourselves of these facts when we feel discouraged. Talking about hopeful developments can sometimes help us release the painful emotions attached to old hopeless feelings.

Some of us might be drawn to reading the same bad news over and over, not for information, but compulsively. If so, we will want to ask someone to listen to us to help us break this bad habit. Keeping hopeful thoughts in our minds is much more fruitful.

We don't want to pretend that the climate crisis isn't dire or claim that we're certain to solve it. We don't actually know how things will turn out. But that's not a reason for despair; that's a reason to stay thinking and connected to others, engaged together to do what is possible.

If we stay engaged in emotional healing work as the climate emergency develops, we will be more able to develop our strategies to fit the new situation and take whatever action makes sense, all while keeping a hopeful perspective.

We can do hard things. We can face whatever we need to face. We are part of a global network of people working to end the climate emergency.

What makes you feel hopeful today? What actions can you take to help you stay hopeful? How can you bring your hopeful perspective to others?





The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—if we make some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live in the next decade. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis can be resolved only if we by simultaneously address racism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations (including populations of people who are elderly, disabled, and very young). Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings that it's too late and any actions will be ineffective, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the climate emergency, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

The role of oppression

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional harm we experience is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though people are vulnerable to acting in oppressive

ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a person has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal harm

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other harmful behavior is neither quick nor easy work. Many of us resist this personal healing work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the harm done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this harm.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing emotional pain in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



Sustaining All Life



For more information, see:

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