



Resiliency 1: Unravel and Process Our Emotions For the World

Note: [Click here to submit your work anonymously](#) for your mentors to read. This will help us improve our program for future students and track your volunteer hours, which will be added to your certificate at the end of the program.

Purpose:

Learn to create space to process our thoughts and emotions we have about the destruction of our Earth and crises of our planet.

*“When We Allow Ourselves to Feel, We Allow Ourselves Grow.”
-Anonymous*

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Preparation for Emotional Work	5
3. Practice	6
4. References	8

1. Introduction

“The way the water knows just how to flow, not forcing itself around a river rock; then surely I can stretch myself in the shape my own path is asking of me”. -Corina Fadel (Emergent Strategy, p.124)

Our emotions are like water, they too know how to flow, carry energy, and must flow to filter. But like water, if we get in the way and try to stop our feelings, rather than to let them find and resolve their own path, our water-body of emotions will rise and overflow. What does it mean to step out of the way of our emotional currents, accept that emotion by its essence must flow, and learn from how it passes through us? This activity will help you access and process any negative emotions you may hold for the state of the Earth and our future. If we do not allow ourselves to feel what might be there, they remain beneath the surface and can contribute to stress, anxiety or otherwise we may feel.

When we practice processing and create space to feel our uncomfortable emotions, we strengthen our ability to learn from and let them pass instead of getting stuck and making us feel heavy. This is a skill we can work on in life, which will make us stronger and more emotionally resilient to the challenges we face, particularly as changemakers. This exercise will help you learn to do that processing in a healthy way, which can give you momentum in life, rather than keeping you feeling down or paralyzed with stress or anxiety. As Joanna Macy describes in her eco-emotional work *Coming Back to Life*, “opening our feelings is about honesty, not about cultivating emotions we don’t have. We are allowing what is there, or not, to emerge peacefully” (Macy, 106).

What is resilience? According to Adrienne Marie Brown, it is “the ability to become strong, healthy and successful again after something bad happens. The ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, bent, etc. an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change” (Brown, 123).

Resiliency in life can come from believing in and embracing the perspective that all things happening or which have happened carry a gift and opportunity for growth. Our experiences invite us to learn and to create intention in our lives following those lessons. Intention is what gives our lives direction and purpose, for what we

intend guides our actions in the world. So even in our lowest times, we can choose to embrace those moments and happenings as a gift in the form of a lesson. Imagine the benefit to your life experience, if you can learn to truly believe and trust that everything in your reality is happening *for* you, rather than *to* you.

Many of us experience negative emotions when we think about the state of the world -- a changing climate, an uncertain future, the destruction of our ecosystems, and continued harm to our human family. When we experience negative emotions our reaction may be to hide, ignore them, push them out or run away. At a deep psychological level, this is normal because we are trying to escape the feeling of pain to keep us feeling safe. This is an evolutionary response -- our brains' natural function to keep us safe. But those emotions, and the suffering itself, carry important information as feedback in our experience. This is our experience talking to us through our senses, to tell us where we have an opportunity to heal or grow -- like a flag saying, "hey, look at me!" and if you do, you will find growth, always.

Feeling negative emotions about our Earth shows you that you are a being, with the capacity to feel your connection to the interconnected biosphere in a way that extends beyond your own mind and physical body. It shows you that your identity extends beyond your physical and non-physical body and that you are capable of suffering with your world, which is actually very special and necessary for change. Feel grateful knowing that your experience has chosen you to be one of the healers of the world, as someone capable of feeling deeply for all others, while many others are not yet able to.

Your own personal consciousness, which allows you to feel for the biosphere, is not actually separate from the consciousness in the natural world: they are one. Consciousness is not only our "thinking mind." For example, while you think about what you're reading, there are many other levels of awareness and consciousness happening through you -- you are processing information from your senses, your subconscious is processing new memories and past learned knowledge, your body is keeping you alive without needing you to think or even understand what is happening, your DNA is rewriting itself at every nano-second. While we may not always be "tapped into" or aware of these other layers of consciousness, they are happening all at once. Moreover, they are also happening in relationship to other forms of consciousness, not in isolation -- your DNA is responding to your body and your external environment, your subconscious is reading the world around you

to process information, and your emotions for the biosphere are responding to the conditions you observe in the natural world. Imagine these aspects of consciousness like instruments in a symphony. Each instrument has a unique voice, but is playing with others to create the symphony as a whole experience.

All levels of consciousness in our human experience were developed over billions of years as part of the overall evolutionary story of the expanding universe. At the root of the evolution of all living things is a consciousness seeking to grow, complexify and find harmony -- a self-organizing "life force." Every organism is connected to this consciousness, because we all came from it; all living things today came from a single organism which eventually diverged into new species, becoming new expressions of itself in greater complexity. As a human being, you are not *within* or *separate* from the natural world, you *are* the natural world -- you did not come *into* this world, you came *out* of it. As humans, one of the most recent versions of that evolving consciousness which has been present since the first organism of planet Earth, we arrive now with the ability to be aware of being aware of ourselves. If we are an expression of this life-force-consciousness of the universe, and we are aware of ourselves, we might say we are the universe experiencing itself. That is to say, as an organism of nature, you are a conscious expression of an ever-unfolding universe, who through time, space and evolution became aware of being aware of itself evolving. Woah! Your distress for the Earth, is the Earth distressing about it's own well-being.

And so, the feelings and understandings happening through you related to the destruction of the planet, is nature itself recognizing where it is sick and can heal, adapt and change to be a better version of itself, in the same way a plant knows how to release a diseased leaf and grow a new one. In this way, your emotions for the planet are natural and needed, not a problem waiting to be solved. Instead, they are a part of the greater intelligent evolutionary life-force activating your emotions as a human able to perceive and feel the destruction of our home, who can act for the betterment of Earth.

Unraveling those emotions, following what your heart feels is true and making changes to yourself and your actions is some of the best work you can do to change the world. By healing yourself and your own connection to the earth through your conscious efforts, you heal a part of the collective body of consciousness experiencing those emotions with you. You become a model for others to see they too can heal and move toward a better world and self.

2. Preparation for Emotional Work

It is always important to prepare ourselves to feel clear and safe before exploring negative emotions. This will help us go deeper, and let emotions pass by, while allowing us to come back refreshed after we process them.

Breathwork is our body's natural tool for regulating our body and mind. When our breath is fast or shallow we are usually in some state of short term or long term stress. When our breathing is slow, long and deep we feel safe and relaxed. Luckily, we can consciously use our breath to prepare our bodies to remain or become relaxed again (thanks nervous system!). Before you begin the activity, take a minute to get calm through six deep, slow breaths. As you breathe in, thank yourself for allowing time to breathe, process and reflect. Feel gratitude for the opportunity for growth, clarity, and learning from your emotional experience.

As you do the emotional work below, remember:

- Welcome the emotions, let what is there come out, even if it is painful. Can you view negative emotions equally to the good emotions you feel in other times, without labelling them as “bad for you?”
- As emotions come up, remember to breathe, let them flow and pass.
- Have gratitude for the emotion and what it is showing you or the messages it carries.
- You are the best judge of your emotional thresholds. If you feel any overwhelm that begins to be too much to be learning, stop and take six deep breaths and/or take a break. It is always your choice how deeply you engage and needing a break to or stop is not a failure, it's self-compassion ([Breathing exercises](#), Healthline).
- Remember to thank the emotions that arise, as they show you that you are capable of feeling for the world and receiving the information necessary to change it.

3. Practice

This work has been influenced by and adapted from Joanna Macy's work, Open Sentences on Honouring our Pain (Coming Back to Life, p. 109)

Set aside at least 20-30 minutes of quiet sitting to write and reflect on the questions below. It is important to complete this reflection in one sitting, and to not feel rushed. You may choose to create a nice space reflection and journaling such by sitting on a mat, surrounding yourself with plants or nature, or playing soft music.

Explore Your Emotions: Reflect on the questions below in your preferred journal:

- What concerns me about the world today is...
- When I think about the world I am inheriting, what concerns me about the world and my future is...
- When I think about the world we will leave our children, it looks like...
- When I see what's happening to the natural world, what breaks my heart is...
- When I see what's happening in our society, what breaks my heart is...
- Feelings about all this, that I carry around with me, are...
- The way my body feels these emotions is... (do you feel tightness anywhere? What sensations are in your body, as you experience the emotions coming up for you?)
- Ways I avoid these feelings are...
- Ways these feelings negatively impact my life are... (Eg. Mood, bad habits)
- If I were to harness these feelings in a productive way, it would look like...

3.1 Post-Activity Reflection Questions

- Did I learn anything about myself through my experience? (Journal freely or highlight your takeaways)
- In what way do I believe my feelings are guiding me? What did I learn from listening to my feelings? What actions can I take or intentions can I make, in response to the messages my emotions carry? (Write your actions or intentions out as clearly as you can)
- How do I feel this activity created an opportunity for growth in myself?

3.2 Closing

When you are done, thank the emotions you felt for stopping by. If you are feeling heavy, take a few deep breaths through your nose, with your feet planted on the ground. With each breath out, feel the energy of your emotions being released and absorbed by the earth. You may choose to hold a stone or plant your hands on the Earth and ask either to help absorb the remaining negative feelings you have with thanks. As you breathe in, feel a fresh replenished positive energy fill you up as your breath creates space in your body. If you choose, you do not need to hold these emotions as you go about your day. [Check out other breathing techniques here](#) (Healthline).

Affirmation:

I accept my feelings as true to me, love myself with self-compassion for whatever I feel and feel grateful to be able to process, reflect and grow from creating space for my emotions to flow through me.

4. References

Joanna Macy, Molly Brown (2014), *Coming Back to Life*, Book, New Society Publishers ([More Info](#))

Adrienne Maree Brown (2017), *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Shaping Worlds*, book, AK Press.

Healthline (2019) 8 Breathing Exercises to Try When You Feel Anxious, *Healthline*, web. Retrieved from <https://www.healthline.com/health/breathing-exercises-for-anxiety#lions-breath> Nov 2, 2020.

Academic references in (Healthline, 2019):

Breathing exercises. (2018).

lung.org/lung-health-and-diseases/protecting-your-lungs/breathing-exercises.html

Breathlessness and anxiety: What it is and how to manage it. (2012). my.dchs.nhs.uk/Portals/0/Health%20Psychology%20Breathlessness%20and%20Anxiety_1.pdf

Kim SH, et al. (2013). Mind-body practices for posttraumatic stress disorder.

pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a315/8b5f6759f3a28bb6273151430146612afc6b.pdf

Relaxation techniques: Breath control helps errant stress responses. (2018).

health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/relaxation-techniques-breath-control-helps-quell-errant-stress-response

Steffen PR, et al. (2017). The impact of resonance frequency breathing on measures of heart rate variability, blood pressure, and mood. DOI: [10.3389/fpubh.2017.00222](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2017.00222)