

# The Five Stages of Climate Grief

*University of Montana Professor, climate scientist, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Steve W. Running has written about "The 5 Stages of Climate Grief." Modeled after Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief model, Running's essay focuses on understanding each stage to move to the final stage of acceptance more easily. Running explains how people must accept global warming as a problem before they resolve to do something about it.*

## Denial

Denial occurs when people just do not want to believe the Earth is become warmer. Or people may deny they are the cause. As of 2011, measurements of atmospheric CO2 levels conducted by the Earth Observatory at NASA confirm a yearly increase of the gas since 1957. Many people dismiss this increase as a natural occurrence, but scientific evidence helps reduce the number of people in denial. CO2 levels have steadily increased due to burning of carbon-based fossil fuels.

## Anger

Many people jump from denial to acceptance once the evidence becomes clear. Those who enter the anger stage do so because of a single realization: Accepting the problem means they will have to change their lifestyle substantially. Many people do not like change and are content with the status quo. The subconscious tends to make people think that if they ignore a problem, it either does not exist or will go away. Some people find it easier to ignore a problem than take action against it, especially when it does not seem like a direct threat.

## Bargaining

Bargaining, in reference to climate grief, manifests as a combination of denial, anger and acceptance. People in this stage tend to accept climate change as par for the course and begin to think it might not be so bad. Making cold places warmer could be a good thing, for example. In the bargaining stage, people look for positive aspects in hopes that global warming won't be as bad as scientists predict.

## Depression

People become depressed when they realize the speed of warming is unprecedented and reversing the damage is likely impossible. People who reach Stage 5 often sink back to Stage 4, depression, on occasion. Solutions to the growing problem of global warming may seem overwhelming at times.

## Acceptance

Acceptance means acknowledging scientific evidence and beginning to search for solutions in both the personal and policy arenas. Those who have entered this stage are willing to make necessary changes within their own lifestyle and help others through the five stages of climate grief. Running acknowledges the lack of evidence showing the possibility of stopping global warming but adamantly states, "Doing nothing is unconscionable."