

Talking about climate solutions

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Climate change can be demoralizing. For years, scientists have been carefully documenting how the Earth is warming ever faster. One inglorious climate record follows another; 2023 was by far the warmest year since measurements began. The consequences can be felt as extreme weather events all over the world. Meanwhile, global

greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, while effective international climate policy measures are still lacking.

Reports in the media on [climate](#) change consist primarily of information on its extent and dangers, focusing on [extreme events](#), disasters and records. The negative messages are frightening and depressing. People's reactions to this are varied. Some are indifferent, others turn away, some doubt. There are also more and more people who are seriously worried about their future or that of their children. This is known as climate anxiety or eco-anxiety.

Those affected are overwhelmed by the flood of bad news. They lose hope, and with it the will to stand up for what is important to them. As a climate researcher, this development worries me almost more than climate change itself.

I often talk to people about their attitudes to climate change. Many people are surprised when they realize that, despite my work on this crisis-ridden topic, I don't feel any fear, but on the contrary, I'm hopeful. People then usually ask me why this is the case.

First, I'd like to emphasize that it's a privilege not to be afraid—because that's not something you can make a conscious decision about. Studies show that specialized knowledge helps. The more a person knows about the climate, the less climate anxiety they have. But that on its own isn't enough.

I suspect that in my case it's mainly because I can research effective climate strategies. When you look at solutions, it changes your perspective: the crisis doesn't seem hopeless; prospects open up. You can sense that there's a chance for improvement, and you start to see progress, however small.

Climate solutions instead of climate anxiety

So I study how various greenhouse gases effect the climate, and I understand that reaching net zero CO₂ emissions is sufficient to prevent further warming of the atmosphere—even in the event that the expected tipping points up to 2°C of warming are activated.

And I see the slow but steady progress in government climate pledges, which mean we will no longer end up with 4° to 5° of warming, but with around 1.9°—that's still far too hot and only a promise, but it is at least progress.

I'm also aware of the 1.1 trillion dollars that were invested in climate action last year, mainly by China. And I've noticed that more and more companies are pursuing robust climate strategies and expecting corresponding standards throughout their supply chains.

This is just a selection of the positive aspects that I find motivational. But I don't want to play down the situation. There are also many things I find demoralizing. So far, only two dozen countries have really started to reduce their [greenhouse gas emissions](#). The challenges are huge, and progress is far too slow.

On the other hand, we're no longer just setting out. A lot has happened in terms of climate policy over the past 10 years. The reality of anthropogenic [climate change](#), which was still controversial in certain circles until recently, is now widely accepted. And the fact that the final text of a world climate conference contains an (albeit completely non-binding) call to transition away from fossil fuels would have been simply unthinkable before.

In favor of constructive discussion of solutions

So, the moment seems right to adapt our social discourse. Instead of dissecting the problem in all its facets and conjuring up the [worst-case scenario](#) for every extreme event, we should focus on the solutions and on what we gain. As Steve de Shazer put it: "Problem talk creates problems, [solution](#) talk creates solutions."

By the way, most of the solutions are already there. We don't need to invent them first. However, as a society we must make a choice: How much do we want to focus on low-emission technologies, and how much on sufficiency? How much solar, wind, water, geothermal or [nuclear energy](#) do we want? How much of it in our own country, and how much from abroad? The challenge lies in finding compromises that few will find perfect but are viable for society as a whole.

Constructive discussion of solutions helps us in many ways: it promotes confidence, enables [climate action](#) and alleviates climate anxiety.

More information: Hannes Zacher et al, Environmental knowledge is inversely associated with climate change anxiety, *Climatic Change* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s10584-023-03518-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-023-03518-z)

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