



# The Climate Crisis and Mental Health Liberation

## *A Movement Against Conformity*

In order to stop the climate crisis, we will need to do many things that do not feel “normal.” We will need to break out of our passivity, stop over-consuming, and feel difficult feelings about the destruction of the environment and our own climate activism. We will also need to build close relationships to support each other in our climate work, despite a culture that systematically divides and separates us.

*Sustaining All Life* calls this movement against a “normal” culture of conformity, passivity, overconsumption, isolation, and numbness “Mental Health Liberation.”

For society to go on consuming and polluting the Earth’s resources for the financial benefit of the wealthy

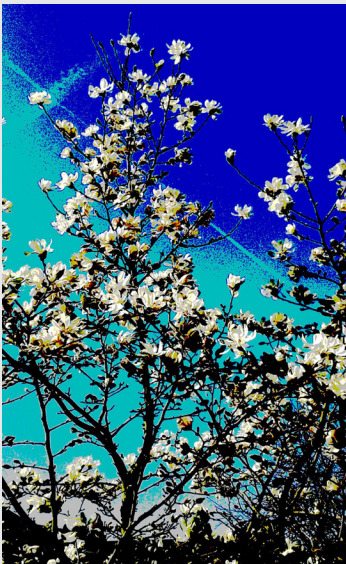
few, the vast majority of people must “behave” and go along with their own mistreatment. Society has many ways of forcing people to do that. We call one of these ways “Mental Health Oppression.” In this oppression, people diagnosed with mental illness are visibly and viciously attacked for stepping out of line - misbehaving - to scare *everyone* into submission to the status quo - the “normal” way that things operate. In this way, Mental Health Oppression affects *all* of us.

For example, if you had a friend or relative who got very upset and then was locked on a psychiatric ward or in a mental hospital, you might avoid thinking about things that feel “too upsetting,” like climate change. If you grew up hearing about a harsh, scary place where people



were sent when they acted “crazy,” you might shy away from taking big, visible, outrageous, or disobedient actions to demand change. Yet, to end the climate crisis, millions of us may need to get upset, show our outrage, and stop going along with what is considered “normal.” Current ideas about mental health promote psychiatric drugs that

disconnect us, numb us out, and enrich large corporations. People who are unhappy are encouraged to choose these drugs over approaches that are low cost, free of harmful side effects, and put us in closer relationship with ourselves, each other, and our environment—such as exercise, meditation, peer listening, and spending time in nature.



*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](http://SustainingAllLife.org)



[UnitedToEndRacism.org](http://UnitedToEndRacism.org)



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*Sustaining All Life* stands against Mental Health Oppression and for Mental Health Liberation. Mental Health Liberation means standing up for everyone targeted by Mental Health Oppression. It also means pulling each other in close to face the feelings that keep all of us from taking action to stop the climate crisis.

The way we do this in *Sustaining All Life* is by taking turns listening to each other in a structured way that creates safety for us to share our

wildest dreams of the change we would like to see in the world and to face, feel, and release the feelings that hold us back from making our dreams a reality.

We are actively seeking to expand our network and to share the theory and practice of Mental Health Liberation with people working to stop the climate emergency. We hope you will join us.





## 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, our energy systems, and our lives in the next five to ten years. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis can be resolved only if we 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 climate change, racism, and exploitation.

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. Our experience is that though people are vulnerable

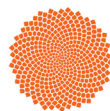
to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a person has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

### **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:**

[www.sustainingalllife.org](http://www.sustainingalllife.org) or [www.unitedtoendracism.org](http://www.unitedtoendracism.org)  
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