



Sustaining Ourselves as Activists and Organizers

I have chosen to change the world using my full intelligence.

The future needs me well-rested, well-nourished, and well-exercised. My health is important.

The past is a useful source of information, but never a substitute for my thinking now.

If I am not enjoying what I am doing, then there is something wrong with how I am doing it and I will correct it.

We environmental activists and organizers care deeply about the Earth, its inhabitants, and have made important gains. We have much to be proud of. But we can easily forget our accomplishments in the daily struggles of organizing.

Many of us feel discouraged when in the face of powerful opposition our efforts to

make change are unsuccessful. We may also feel powerless, exhausted, not smart enough, alone, and overwhelmed by what we need to do. When we feel these ways, it can be hard to stay motivated to make change.

We often try to ignore the feelings and keep working for change, but without addressing the feelings we may sacrifice our own health and well-being; not be able to identify with and connect with others; or even criticize, get angry at, or undermine each other. We may be unable to think of solutions and give up being activists, organizers, and leaders. We may no longer have the energy to do the work we care so deeply about.

We all struggle with living in an oppressive society. We are oppressed by and witness racism, classism, sexism, the oppression of Indigenous peoples, and many other oppressions. We can't



help but internalize their messages. The internalized oppression makes us doubt ourselves, feel inadequate, and struggle in our relationships with each other. Divided by internalized oppression within or among our organizations and communities, we may compete with each other for power, control, recognition, or resources. This keeps us from seeing or acting on the common interest we have in a just and sustainable future.

To sustain ourselves over time, we need a strong support system. We need relationships where we trust and rely on each other--fellow activists and organizers with whom we face difficulties as they arise, overcome them, and move ahead. We need to collectively free ourselves from internalized oppression. If we have these relationships, we can grow, thrive, and bring our full selves to ending the climate emergency.



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) is a group of people of all ages and backgrounds, 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 the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, 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



UnitedToEndRacism.org



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We can heal from oppression and other hurts and regroup ourselves in our common goal to end the climate emergency. In *Sustaining All Life* we work to (1) create awareness of the emotional damage that interferes with thinking about and acting to end environmental degradation, and (2) undo this damage on an individual and collective basis, by listening to each other attentively and allowing each of us to show and express the grief, fear, and other painful

emotions these hurts have caused. Using this process allows us to think more clearly about the environmental crisis, build and strengthen alliances, and enjoy working together to set the world right. It helps us build courage, stamina, and the confidence that we can create a just, sustainable future for everyone.





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—and some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live are needed for this to happen. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on people targeted by these particular oppressions. 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 of discouragement and powerlessness, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the escalating damage to the earth's climate, 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 damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though humans are vulnerable to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a human has been

hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal damage

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. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist this work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this damage.

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 distressed 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 racism.



Sustaining All Life



For more information, see:

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