



Parents and Climate Change: Building Support and Unleashing our Power

Our love and caring for our children is powerful. It inspires us to take action for climate justice. We are deeply aware of what growing, young humans need. We know they need clean, healthy air and water. We know the climate crisis must be solved to meet these current and future needs. At the same time, the demands of parenting and the worries about our children's future can feel overwhelming and make it hard for us to be clear-headed about the steps we need to take as climate activists and as parents. We are up against so much as parents. We need each other for support.

We are struggling against economic oppression. Parents are not paid for the work of raising children, work that is most important to the well-being of society. On top of that, in our paid jobs, we have to work increasingly long hours

for less pay, making it difficult to support our families. We don't have enough time for our children, our partners, or our extended families. Then we feel bad about ourselves because we can't parent the way we would like to. Nevertheless, we are good parents—it is the system that is the problem, not us.

Since the society doesn't support us to parent, we ourselves need to build support around us. Parenting with support is a key part of building a just and caring society with a healthy environment. Talking and listening to each other helps us realize that our struggles are similar to those of other parents. It's important that we not blame ourselves or each other for our struggles as parents. By coming together with other parents, we can build a different kind of culture, one based on caring and meeting human needs.



Mutual support also helps us think about how to talk with our children about climate change in a way that will empower them and not just scare them. We can learn to back our children if they decide to take action or take leadership. We can stand up for them when adults dismiss their thinking. We can figure out how to play, laugh, and be light-hearted as we tackle the bigger problems.

As parents we are keenly aware of how we and our children get targeted for

racism, sexism, classism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and other oppressions. These oppressions also divide us, making it difficult for us to come together and address climate change. We can take a firm stand against racism—people targeted by racism are the group most affected by climate change. We can use our listening skills to overcome the divisions and realize our full power as we fight together for climate justice and a safe environment for generations to come.



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.



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As parents, we are in a unique position to influence the people around us. We are in contact with many other parents and we interact with schools and other institutions that affect families. We have the authority to speak about issues having to do with young people and families. We can be bold in loving people and sharing information about climate change.

Sustaining all Life/United to End Racism (SAL/UER) offers skills that we can bring back to our communities and use to build ongoing support for ourselves and other parents. We can connect with each other and provide the safety and caring we need in order to talk about what we are up against as parents and overcome

the fears and other emotions that impede us from taking action on climate change. This kind of ongoing support can sustain us as we fight for our children and a healthy, hospitable planet.

Sustaining All Life/United to End Racism teaches parents how to listen to each other so we can unload the worries and discouragement that immobilize us and keep us from taking action. We can find hope together. We can realize our power to make lasting change. The tools of SAL/UER help us understand that we can be effective leaders.





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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