Climate Change & Mental Health

A crash course on our new role as ecologist-activist-therapists
Sara Weekly, MD
60% of surveyed teens reported being “very” or “extremely” worried about climate change.

**Differential diagnosis and comorbidities:**

- OCD and other anxiety disorders
- MDD and other mood disorders
- PTSD, Acute Stress, and adjustment disorders
- Delusional or other primary thought disorders
The number of cases of psychological trauma from any form of disaster exceed those of physical injury by 40 to 1.
The Hidden Costs

The psychological burden of climate change is rarely addressed in policy and planning.

- 1% increase in suicide for every 1 degree C increase in temperature
- Severe distress, PTSD, and substance use rise following extreme weather events
- Disproportionate toll of climate change on those with mental illness
- Interruption of services
- The insidious trauma of “othering”
- Social inequality
Another ACE?

- Mental health is inextricably linked with physical health.
- Which already-identified ACEs are impacted by climate change?
- What other impacts of climate change might you add as potential ACEs?
What can we do?
Treat the fever and the infection.
• Broaden our focus
  o Ask! Name! Validate!
• “Rewilding”
  o Take it outside
• Incorporate a “Nature Language”
  o Find new ways to follow old patterns
• Emphasize agency
• Foster curiosity over criticism
“Social Prescribing”

- Suffer together!
- Advocate
- Witness
- Define values and make a plan
- Engage the family system
Lead by Example

- Put on your oxygen mask!
- Get involved
- Use your voice