



Climate Emotions Toolkit for Educators: Activity 1



Climate
Mental Health
Network




NEEF National
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Activity 1 Lesson Plan: Teflon & Velcro – The Brain’s Negativity Bias

This activity introduces students to the brain’s negativity bias and provides them with practical tools for dealing with negative emotions. You can encourage students to apply this technique towards their climate emotions, but you can also point out that this approach can be used in other areas of their lives. One suggestion is to preview this activity before teaching about climate change, and then having students complete the table and reflect on what they learned at the end of the lesson or sequence on climate change.

When students have completed listing and describing their negative and positive climate emotions, remind them of the goal of the activity – to practice countering negative emotions with 5 positive ones. Invite students to turn and talk to a classmate sitting next to them about their experience coming up with their list of emotions. If students are willing to share their reflections as a class, hold space for a reflective discussion.

<p>Materials:</p> <p>Student Handout 1: Teflon & Velcro - The Brain’s Negativity Bias (digital or print copy for each student)</p>	 <p>Learning Target:</p> <p>I can apply my understanding of negativity bias to counter negative thoughts and experiences with positive thoughts and experiences.</p>
<p>Time:</p> <p>15-20 minutes</p>	

Accommodations:

If students are having difficulty coming up with five positive emotions or thoughts about the earth or climate, consider ensuring them that it can be difficult to counter negativity bias, but that it is possible. Provide them with some prompts to scaffold their brainstorming, such as, “What is a place you find beautiful or inspiring in nature?” or share some examples of environmental success stories that they could research. You could also share something that you find positive as a way to model the activity. Consider showing students the [Climate Emotions Wheel](#) if they need help brainstorming positive emotions.

Extensions:

News media and social media often perpetuate the negativity bias. They use dramatic reporting to gain clicks. This can be its own form of misinformation that can fuel doomerism. A quote from this [UN Article](#): “That’s the news story. It’s a ‘start’ story ... a ‘yes’ story. It’s activism of ‘yes’ and it’s for journalists. It’s been too easy to write the scary stories.”

This could be expanded into a 5–10-minute search to find five Yes Stories and discuss how easy/difficult it was to find them, and how or if it shifted emotions. You can share [The Daily Climate Good News](#) as a resource if students are having a hard time finding Yes Stories.

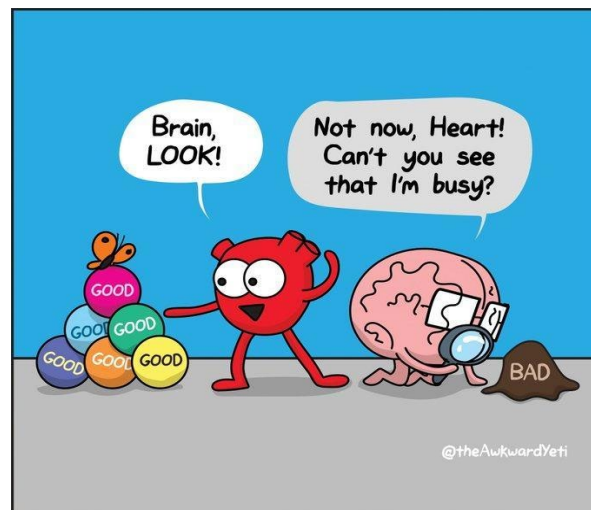


Student Handout 1: Teflon & Velcro – The Brain’s Negativity Bias

Name:

When you learn about climate change, you might experience a wide range of emotions. All the emotions you feel are normal and valid. But, if those emotions become overwhelming and difficult to manage, there are many tools and techniques that can help promote resilience, feelings of hopefulness, and counter the negative feelings.

Did you know that our brains are hardwired to learn quickly from bad experiences and to ignore or learn more slowly from good experiences? This is called the brain’s **negativity bias**. Understanding the way our brains work allows us to take steps to counter our hardwiring.



Dr. Rick Hanson, a psychologist, describes the **negativity bias** as, “It’s like having a brain that’s Velcro for the bad, but Teflon for the good. And, we know what that’s like, every little bad thing kind of sticks to us, and all these good facts, good experiences, good moments, kind of wash through us like water through a sieve.”¹ One takeaway is that we need to make an active effort to counter negative thoughts and experiences, ideally with a ratio of five positive thoughts or experiences for each one negative thought or experience. Let’s take a few minutes to practice.

Some examples of positive climate emotions are:

- **Interest** - the desire to learn, know, or take part in something.
- **Empowerment** - the state of being empowered to do something: the power, right, or authority to do something.
- **Inspiration** - the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something.
- **Empathy** - identification with or sharing of another's feelings, situation, or attitudes.
- **Gratitude** - the feeling of being thankful.
- **Hope** - a feeling or chance that something will happen the way one wants it to.

¹ Hanson, Rick. “Velcro for the Bad, Teflon for the Good - Rick Hanson, Phd.” *Rick Hanson, PhD - Inner Strengths for Challenging Times*, 25 Oct. 2022, rickhanson.com/velcro-for-the-bad-teflon-for-the-good/.



<p>Name one negative emotion or thought you have experienced when learning about climate change.</p>	<p>List and describe five positive emotions or thoughts you can think of that relate to the earth, climate, and the work people are doing to make the world a better place.</p>

