

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing glasses, a bright orange cardigan over a white top, and patterned trousers, is riding a bicycle. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The bicycle has a large wicker basket on the front, which is filled with a laptop, a white bag, and other items. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and trees, suggesting an urban environment. The lighting is bright, indicating it's daytime.

Sustainability and eco-anxiety

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Workplace
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Introduction

Climate change is a significant challenge that affects the planet through rising temperatures and extreme weather events. It also can have effects on human health, including mental health. Promoting sustainability in your team can help to raise awareness of climate change and encourage behaviours that are good for the environment. Your employees may also be concerned about the environment and want to take steps to help protect it. So, they might appreciate any efforts your organisation makes to be more sustainable.

In this guide, we talk about what it means to be sustainable and what you can do as a manager to support your employees.



Why is sustainability important?

Sustainable practices aim to use resources more conservatively, to protect the environment for future generations. One of the key goals of sustainability is to reduce the effects of climate change. This is something we can all contribute to by adopting sustainable habits.

Burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas releases greenhouse gases (GHG) into the air. These greenhouse gas emissions act like a blanket wrapped around the Earth, trapping the sun's heat, and raising temperatures. The consequences of climate change are not just rising temperatures. It also can lead to:

- intense droughts affecting water availability
- severe fires
- rising sea levels
- flooding
- melting polar ice
- catastrophic storms
- declining biodiversity and food availability
- climate refugee crises
- increased risk from infectious diseases

Climate change can also impact mental health. Those directly affected may experience PTSD, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts. It also can affect people indirectly. Hearing about the devastating effects of climate change may lead to **climate-related anxiety** or **eco-anxiety**.



Role of your organisation in climate change

Your organisation could be responsible for GHG emissions. Energy, manufacturing, and transport industries are among the highest of producers of GHG emissions. But other types of organisations, such as those involved in education, consulting, communications, and finance, can release GHG.

This could be from:



Office hours
and meetings



Business travel to attend
conferences or events



Using materials, such as
for printing and catering



IT usage

Helping worried employees

If your organisation has a sustainability policy or strategy in place, it's worth sharing this with your employees. This can let them know what measures your organisation is taking to be more sustainable. This could be especially helpful to any employees who are worried.

People who are worried about what's happening to the environment may experience eco-anxiety. This may also be referred to as climate anxiety.

Other related mental health effects are eco-guilt and eco-grief. These may result from climate-related losses of animal species, ecosystems, and landscapes.

When someone is psychologically or emotionally affected by environmental issues and disasters, they may show signs including:

- low mood
- helplessness
- anger
- guilt
- loss of sleep

60%

are anxious about the negative impacts of climate change.

45%

of people who are employed were keen to contribute to sustainable and eco-friendly initiatives.

50%

of the UK population said their mental health had been negatively impacted by climate change.

42%

of workers said their mental health at work would be affected if their employer was not taking action on environmental issues.

Helping worried employees

You should support employees who experience eco-anxiety as you would with any other mental health issue. The following tips could be helpful to take their mind off their worries.



Temporarily muting notifications on their phone



Limiting the amount of time spent watching or reading the news



Trying not to look at their phone for at least an hour before bed

If your employees are struggling, let them know what support is available to them, such as an employee assistance programme. Or you could encourage them to speak to a health professional or helpline.

Organisations that you could point them to that provide services for people affected by eco-anxiety include [Climate Psychology Alliance](#) and [British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy](#). You may want to consider supporting initiatives for volunteering such as local conservation groups, litter picks, or beach cleans.

By contributing to the wider community, employees may get a sense of hope.



Encouraging greener living

If your employees are concerned about the environment and are experiencing eco-anxiety, it can be helpful to turn this into positive action. Let your employees know about changes they can make to make a difference.

A commitment to doing good is also beneficial for employees' mental health

Here are some small changes you and your employees can make to help the environment.

Eat plant-based foods more often and reduce meat consumption where possible.



Use a reusable water bottle, coffee cup, and cutlery.



Walk, cycle, run, use public transport, and car share when possible.

Buy second-hand clothes.

Switch to a green energy supplier or tariff.

Do laundry on a cold or low-heat wash.

Recycle anything that can be recycled, including electricals, batteries, clothes.

Hybrid working

The COVID pandemic meant that more people started working from home, especially during lockdown. Although it's now generally considered safe to return to the office, it's important to think about what this means for sustainability.

Commuting to work can contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, especially if you drive to work. Transport also leads to air pollution, which is responsible for 28,000 to 36,000 excess deaths a year in the UK. So, having employees work every day in the office could be harmful to the environment and human health. If it's possible to have your employees work from home more often, this could be better for the environment. Hybrid working could also help to improve your employees' work-life balance.

Here are some ways you and your team can save energy and be more sustainable with your work habits.



Lower the brightness on your screen.

This way you can save energy and reduce eye strain. Check the energy settings on your computer – you can also optimise these to save energy.



Turn your equipment off.

Rather than putting devices in sleep mode, turn off your computer and monitor (if you use one) at the end of the day. Turn off lights and screens when you leave the room, and don't leave devices charging for longer than necessary.



Buy recyclable resources.

You might find that you're using less paper than you did in the office, which is better for the environment. But if you do print at home, consider buying recyclable paper and printer cartridges.



Even emails have a carbon footprint.

Try to send shorter emails, reduce the size of any attachments, and delete emails you no longer need.



Try to recycle as much as you can.

If you're working from home, it's likely that you'll create more waste there than usual. Recycling reduces landfill waste and can reduce carbon dioxide emissions, too.

Resources

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