Active Hope

This is a place where you can face the climate and nature crisis without turning away, and discover what your own response might be.

The thinking behind Active Hope

Active Hope draws on the work of Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, and in particular their Spiral of Active Hope. The Spiral describes a pathway to guide us from acknowledging the challenges of our time towards finding our own ways to respond.

It has four interconnected stages. Although described in sequence, this is not a linear process. We can return to each stage as our understanding deepens and new possibilities emerge.



The path: Four stages of the Spiral

1. Coming from gratitude – honouring what we love

We begin by noticing and appreciating what sustains us: the natural world, the people we love, the communities we belong to and the many things that support our lives.

Gratitude is more than a positive mindset. It helps us reconnect with what matters, strengthens our sense of belonging and gives us a foundation from which to face difficult realities. By recognising what we love, we also become more aware of what is at risk and what we want to protect.

This stage encourages curiosity, openness and a willingness to look beyond what we already know.

2. Honouring our pain for the world – allowing ourselves to feel

Grief, anger, anxiety and despair are understandable responses to the damage being done to the natural world and the uncertainty of our future. These feelings can be difficult to express, it may seem easier to put them aside and continue business as usual.

Active Hope invites us to break through that silence. Rather than suppressing painful feelings, we make space to acknowledge how our pain is an expression of our care and our connection to life.

Sharing these feelings with others can be surprisingly energising. We discover that we are not alone, and that we can bear witness to one another's experiences without becoming overwhelmed by them.

We may use the Truth Mandala, a simple group ritual developed by Joanna Macy, to give expression to the different feelings we carry.

3. Seeing with new eyes – discovering a wider perspective

What becomes possible when we see ourselves as part of something much bigger than our individual lives?

Drawing on ancient wisdom and contemporary ecological understanding, this stage invites us to explore the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life. We begin to see the world from a wider perspective, beyond the boundaries of individual self-interest, and to recognise our place within a living system.

Practical exercises might include:

- The Deep Time Walk – that reminds us the planet has created us very recently and had existed long before humans existed.
- The Council of All Beings – an imaginative exercise inviting us to speak from the perspective of our more-than-human fellow inhabitants of the planet.

These experiences can shift our sense of identity and belonging, allowing us the pleasure of reconnecting with what resources us and opening up new ways of thinking and imagining.

4. Going forth – finding our part to play

The final stage brings our attention to what we want to stand for and how we can put that into practice.

What kind of future do we want to help create? What is ours to do? What practical steps can we take, individually and collectively, to move towards that vision?

Active Hope is not about predicting a positive outcome or waiting until we feel certain. It is about choosing to participate in creating the future we want, even when the outcome is uncertain.

We explore possibilities, make commitments and identify actions that matter to us. Sharing these intentions with others can strengthen our determination and create momentum beyond the programme itself.

The programme

The programme comprises six online sessions of 2½ hours, spread over 12 weeks. Alongside the sessions, participants undertake activities and reflection between meetings, working with a buddy and including opportunities for outdoor nature enquiry.

The time between sessions is an important part of the process. It allows participants to explore ideas in their own lives, notice what is changing and bring new experiences and reflections back to the group.

Some of the principles that inform our approach

Experiencing, reflecting and learning

We learn not just through information and discussion, but through experience. By taking time to reflect on what we have experienced, we can develop a deeper understanding of ourselves, our assumptions and the possibilities open to us. This cycle of experience, reflection and learning runs throughout the programme.

Being with what is, rather than turning away

Meaningful change begins with acknowledging where we really are. When we allow ourselves to face the reality of our feelings and circumstances, rather than resist or deny them, we can become more open to learning, change and new possibilities. This is sometimes described as the paradoxical theory of change: accepting what is allows us to move beyond it.

Recognising our interdependence

We are part of a much larger living system, connected to and dependent on the natural world and one another. Seeing ourselves in this wider context can shift our sense of identity, responsibility and belonging.

Moving beyond guilt towards responsibility

We are all part of the systems that have brought us to this point, with all the contradictions and human frailty that entails. Recognising this need not leave us trapped in guilt or blame. We can acknowledge our part, find compassion for our human frailty and choose to put our energy into a different path.

Reconnecting with our capacity to imagine

The future is not predetermined. Rather than simply reacting to what is happening, we can put our intentions into imagining and becoming the change the world needs.

About the facilitators

Our role is to support the quality of attention and reflection needed for you to think well together, listen deeply and explore what matters to them.

We bring information and resources to help participants understand the climate and nature crisis, alongside a range of carefully chosen exercises, practices and experiences. We invite people to engage with these challenges in their own way, at their own pace, and to discover what they can contribute.

Our way into this vital work is through the heart as well as the head: reconnecting with our love for the world and building the courage and determination to work towards positive futures.