

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

SHORT VERSION

(translated from German)

Developed by

Dipl.-Psych. Jessica Meininger, Psychological Psychotherapist (PP)

Mag. Rima Ashour, Psychological Psychotherapist in Training (PiA)

Dipl.-Psych. Lea Dohm, Psychological Psychotherapist (PP)

Contributors

Dipl.-Psych. Georg Adelman, PiA · Dipl.-Psych. Anika Heck, PP · M.Sc.-Psych. Kathrin Macha, PiA ·

M.Sc.-Psych. Katrin Rosewick · Dipl.-Psych. Lena Maria Voß, PiA

Academic Cooperation

Prof. Dr. Julia Asbrand, University of Jena · Prof. Dr. Eva-Lotta Brakemeier, University of Greifswald ·

Prof. Dr. Christoph Nikendei, Heidelberg University · Prof. Dr. Gerhard Reese, RPTU Kaiserslautern-

Landau · Prof. Dr. Maren Urner, HMKW Cologne · Prof. Dr. Ulrich Wagner, University of Marburg

Translation

Dipl.-Psych. Jessica Meininger, PP · Dipl.-Psych. Anika Heck, PP · Mag. Rima Ashour, PiA

RATIONALE

Compared to many other issues, the climate crisis requires special attention within media coverage, because the climate crisis

1. poses a real and existential danger,
2. affects everyone without exception,
3. affects all areas of life and,
4. each and every individual can contribute to battling the man-made climate crisis through behavioral changes (individual and/or collective action) in addition to necessary changes in politics and economy.

Media coverage of the climate crisis affects people's well-being, as individuals and a society, and their ability to effectively and with self-efficacy. The effects can be unfavorable or favorable. The specific framing of media coverage of the climate crisis is of great relevance, as it can mitigate the unfavorable effects and reinforce the favorable effects.

The climate crisis is very complex, difficult to grasp, and its individual manifestations are not immediately comprehensible. For this reason, informative reporting and regular highlighting of the connections between the man-made climate crisis and other news topics as well as social, political and individual behavior are of great importance. Emotional reactions of individuals should be addressed. Individual options should be pointed out, although not as sole options as this can cause people to feel overwhelmed, helpless, and defensive, and to avoid the topic altogether. References to individual and community-based coping are ideally embedded in political requirements and overall social and economic behavior.

Current research (e.g., the current PACE study by the University of Erfurt, www.pace-studie.de, for more see original version), shows that the vast majority of Germans is concerned about the climate crisis and would like to see more climate protection. At the same time, many people are uncertain about what can be done, and how strongly this position is actually shared by others. Media portrayal can correct the misperception regarding the attitudes of fellow citizens and the options to act and can result in a more favorable mental processing away from helplessness and (news) avoidance towards more self-efficacy and effective action.

We therefore offer constructive advice from a psychological perspective for reporting on the climate crisis, condensed into three general recommendations and an exemplary “Climate Box”. Although not all recommendations can always be applied to all types of reporting, we think that each individual implementation counts. Supporting documents with recommended literature and references can be found in the original version.

The recommendations developed here address print media as well as TV formats, radio, podcasts, digital reporting, nationwide and local media, social media, public service media, and private media. The examples included are intended as illustrative sketches.

A) RECOMMENDATIONS

1.) Addressing the climate crisis

Put the climate crisis on the agenda of the most important issues. Repeatedly point out the existing connections between events/contents and the climate crisis. This applies to both the causes and consequences of climate change on all kinds of topics, e.g., extreme weather, health, economy, politics, travel, education, fashion, agriculture, etc.

Effect: Supports an increase in people's climate knowledge and awareness of the climate crisis.

Example: *Hurricane Exempla hit the coast of ExampleCountry yesterday afternoon at 150 kilometers per hour, causing devastating damage. Hurricanes are not becoming more frequent in number due to man-made global warming, but they are increasing in overall strength and are more likely to lead to higher precipitation, so they can cause more damage. In addition, they are occurring more frequently in areas where hurricanes of this magnitude were not previously observed. (cf. 11 in original version)*

Example (short alternative): *Hurricane Exempla hit the coast of ExampleCountry yesterday afternoon at 150 kilometers per hour, causing devastating damage. Hurricanes are increasing in strength due to global warming and are more likely to lead to higher precipitation. (cf. 11 in original version)*

2.) Validating feelings

Acknowledge feelings that may arise. Point out that these feelings are appropriate and that many people experience similar feelings related to the climate crisis.

Effect: Supports the reflection and acceptance of psychological reactions to the climate crisis. Helps people to develop ways of dealing with their feelings constructively, and to feel connected and encouraged to talk about their experiences of the climate crisis.

Example: *Hurricane Exempla hit the coast of ExampleCountry yesterday afternoon at 150 kilometers per hour, causing devastating damage. According to representative surveys, many people in Germany are concerned or feeling distressed by these and other climate-related developments. In-depth information on this can be accessed on our website under the heading "climate" / [here \(link\)](#) / in the climate section / on page 2 of this issue.*

3.) Highlighting coping strategies

When addressing the climate crisis, there are advantages in highlighting successful solutions and coping strategies at the same time. It is particularly helpful

- to point out regional and cross-regional activities for climate protection,
- to depict promising activities by other people,
- to report on people who are trusted or are perceived as similar to the recipients (to give orientation and provide role models),
- to point out the positive effects of climate protection,
- to offer information on how and where individuals can take action, if they so choose,

- to cover joint efforts and necessities of regional and cross-regional politics and economy, because both together are important for people's perception, and
- to illustrate collaborative action, which is of benefit to more people and more effective than individual action.

We recommend pointing out different options that can be taken up voluntarily. In this way reactance (= defensive defiance) may be reduced, the need for self-determination is taken into account, and neutrality can be maintained.

Effect: Strengthens courage and confidence, promotes the ability to act, self-efficacy, and the experience of control and cohesion. Perceptions about the attitudes and expectations of others can change towards a more realistic appraisal. Motivation for and belief in effective cooperation may increase.

Example: *Hurricane Exempla hit the coast of ExampleCountry yesterday afternoon at 150 kilometers per hour, causing devastating damage. Climate change increases the likelihood of heavy storms. General information on dealing with the climate crisis and contact information for the local ExampleCity's climate protection group can be found in the info box. Group meetings take place every 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month. Donations for affected people and towards protection projects can be made into account no. 1234567.*

B) “CLIMATE BOX” PROPOSAL

The “Climate Box” proposed here is an example of how the recommendations above can be implemented. Similar to the support references that are often presented after suicide reporting, in order to mitigate the so-called “Werther effect” (imitations of suicides after reporting), a “Climate Box” is suitable to be attached to reports that deal with the climate crisis, in order to promote an adaptive approach.

Climate Box (exemplary)

The content of this report is related to the man-made climate crisis. Dealing with it can trigger distressing emotions such as worry, fear, anger, sadness, and despair. In the face of such a threatening situation, these feelings are normal and important to help coping with the situation. They are shared by many people. Climate protection has a health-preserving effect and can be effective and comforting, especially together with other people. (Examples and contact points can be given here.)