

Grace Yang, 15

USA

I wake up at 6.45 a.m. and, still bleary-eyed, I stomp downstairs to thirty Slack notifications that I respond to quickly, shoving away a little wave of stress.

Throughout the school day, I obsessively check Slack under my desk during class, and check it right before I go to bed.

I'm Grace Yang, an Asian American climate activist and organizer. I have worked with Fridays For Future, the Sunrise Movement and Youth Climate Strike, as well as many other groups. You may have read articles about how climate activism improves mental health, and everything they say about finding community and purpose is true. But it can easily do the opposite.

I think that if I hadn't joined the climate movement, I'd have lost it. Conference calls keep me going, giving me a sense of purpose and forcing me to keep moving. There were times where I was crying, feeling like everything was falling apart, but having things in my schedule gave me a sense of structure and I would calm down, before getting on a call and feeling less alone. I feel less helpless about the world crumbling around me when I'm working towards a better future. I've learned so much from organizing, and being around amazing, smart, talented activists I'm proud to call my friends. The sense of community has gotten me through a lot.

Still, there's a different side to climate activism. I've felt like I needed to be online all the time, or else things would crumble and burn when I wasn't watching. I've struggled in school, because I was so busy worrying about what was happening in the movement, or checking my phone instead of paying attention in class. Drama

plagues the movement, and we spend hours upon hours arguing online and on toxic conference calls instead of working to make real change.

The youth climate movement needs to remember its original purpose: to fight for climate justice. When we let ego get in the way, drama follows, leaving many drained and stressed, and taking energy away from organizing. We're here to stop the world from burning. We don't have time to waste.

I've simply taken on too much - I've been in countless organizations, and the workload on top of school can be brutal. I've avoided opening my inbox, or my to-do lists, to ignore the overwhelming amount of tasks.

My schedule on weekdays often looked like: get home, recover from an exhausting school day, respond to a heap of emails and messages, hop on a call or two, eat dinner, attend some more calls, then start my homework very late at night. I'm an overachiever, and I know this is not unique to the climate movement.

To all my lovely organizers out there: remember yourself. Don't sacrifice your sanity for the movement. I promise you, the movement will be better off if you get off Slack and Telegram and go to bed.

And that's my advice for other activists out there - don't let it take over your life. When I started giving up my other hobbies and passions to fill that space with activism, my mental and physical health dipped. It's okay to have fun. It's okay to have a life.

You'll still want to do a lot. And you should decide for yourself how much you want to take on. Relying heavily on Google Calendar has been a lifesaver for me, as well as making small to-do lists for myself and giving myself little rewards when I cross something off. Remember that many things will seem urgent, but you

don't need to do everything right this minute. The world of activism can wait while you close your laptop for a bit.