

Increasing nature connection through outdoor learning

A resource pack from the Field Studies Council

We have created this resource pack to share ideas, inspiration and activities that could be adapted and delivered around your school grounds.

These ideas are focused on increasing 'nature connection' amongst your pupils and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing.

What is nature connection?

Put simply, nature connection is a 'love of nature'. A 'love of nature' is linked to 'pro nature' behaviours such as choosing to relax in nature, or planting bee friendly plants.

Research suggests that engaging with nature through simple activities (e.g., smelling a wildflower) is one of the best ways to improve nature connection. This in turn benefits our mental health and wellbeing. Spending time in nature gives pupils opportunities to increase their connection to nature, which could lead them to practice more 'pro nature behaviours', for example using rubbish bins or taking waste home.

Five ways to wellbeing



What is the five ways to wellbeing?

[Developed by the New Economic Foundation, the five ways to wellbeing](#)

is a set of evidence based public mental health messages aimed at improving the mental and wellbeing of everyone.

Many of the five ways messages can be achieved by spending time outdoors which can improve nature connectedness.

Measuring nature connection

Measuring nature connection (or connectedness) includes both a measurement of how much someone 'loves or values nature' and how this links to 'pro-nature' behaviours. More information on the Nature Connection Index (NCI) and how to measure it is available on Miles Richardson's blog: <https://findingnature.org.uk/resources/>

Nature connectedness is an active field of research. The finding nature blog summarises the main findings from the Nature Connectedness Research Group based at the University of Derby, led by Miles Richardson: <https://findingnatureblog.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/naturerelationship.pdf>

Five ways to wellbeing in the outdoors

Ideas to share with your pupils:

Connect: Spend time with others outdoors, connect with nature by drawing a picture, writing a story or recording a video in nature.

Keep learning: Find out how you could improve the nature habitats around your school and keep them healthy.

Be active: Explore the school grounds or nearby green spaces.

Take notice: Be still and take time to focus on things around you.

Give: Be there for someone else, help a friend or volunteer to take part in an activity or a club that spends time outdoors.

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/>

Notice nature every day

Can you and your pupils notice something new each day?

Noticing nature can improve wellbeing; a feeling of being part of something and happiness. Here are some ideas to improve nature connectedness and promote pro-nature behaviours:

- Listen for birdsong.
- Smell flowers or herbs.
- Take a photo or draw a sketch of nature.
- Take time to notice things on different scales; a water droplet, a strand of spiderweb, an ant.
- Cloud gaze.
- Actively look for evidence of wildlife e.g., are there tracks or signs of foxes?
- Spot patterns, colours and textures in nature.

Explore these ideas and more at <https://findingnature.org.uk/>

Best practice

Heighten your happy hormones!

Serotonin: Regulates mood, increases happiness, decreases anxiety and improves sleeping patterns. Walking in nature or spending time outside is a proven way to boost your serotonin levels. 90% of Serotonin is produced in the gut, so a healthy diet (and therefore a healthy gut) is a good place to start.

Endorphins: Help manage pain, increase pleasure and reduce stress. Light exercise or eating a meal with family or friends can encourage your body to produce endorphins.

Dopamine: A reward hormone which makes you happy and keeps you alert. Try reflecting on previous successes and think about positive ways of rewarding yourself.

Activity ideas for nature connection

Try these great activities from our project partners YoungMinds and the Sensory Trust which can be adapted and used around your school grounds:

- Sound activities and magic spot
- Taking notice: How many positives, star qualities, and celebrating achievements.
- Self-care activity: What keeps us going.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/>

<https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/activities>

<https://www.beeinthewoods.co.uk/2016/10/03/mindfulness-nature-children/>

Observation activities from Starhawk's book 'The Earth Path' link to taking care and connecting to nature.

1. Observing the past and the future. What can you see that tells you about this area's history? How might this place change in the future? How can you contribute to a positive future for this place?
2. Ask 'I wonder why' questions. It does not matter if you do not know the answer, try your best to awaken your curiosity.
3. Observe communities. Can you notice interactions, patterns or differences between plants and animals, or plants, animals and you?

Tune into your heartbeat:

Focus on your heart's rhythm, you could put a hand over your heart or rest your fingers on your wrist to feel a pulse. Deep breathing can help reduce your heart rate which can make you feel calmer.

Finding fractals: Research suggests looking at fractals in nature calms and reduces stress. Tree branches and leaves are a good example. Try drawing fractal patterns too.

<https://www.diygenius.com/fractals-in-nature/>