



Nature Connection - activity -

prepared by Root Cuthbertson 2020
based on Jon Young, Ellen Haas, Evan McGown & The 8 Shields Institute

The human nervous system evolved in nature, and it is still designed to respond to the signals that nature offers. Some health care providers are now writing prescriptions for time in nature to alleviate symptoms like hypertension, stress, high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression. In her book *Kith*, author Jay Griffiths explores how children who grow up with time in nature have fewer such health problems.

Nature connection – distinct from nature contact – is described by Richard Louv as '**vitamin N**,' a key ingredient for human well-being, and for counteracting '**Nature Deficit Disorder**.' Naturalist Jon Young's research shows that nature connection is beneficial for both sensory integration and emotional regulation. Occupational therapist Kathleen Lockyer prescribes nature connection to ameliorate, and even reverse, symptoms of Sensory Processing Disorders, like Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder.

Try the following exercises, based on Jon Young's work, either as a sequence or one at a time.

Activities

Body Radar

Your body can intuitively lead the way to amazing discoveries and experiences in nature. Pause for a moment of stillness and silence. Close your eyes, and attune to the unconscious guidance of your body. You can Expand Your Senses first (see below) if it helps. Imagine a natural location where you'd like to end up – somewhere leafy, watery, sandy, stony, shady, sunny, grassy, etc. Imagine all the ways your body will feel good when you arrive. Imagine this place is waiting for you, and that your body can help you find it.

Try extending a hand or a finger, like a needle on a compass. Physically turn your body until you *feel* a direction pulling you. That *feeling* may be a tingling, warmth, sensation in the gut, or an unexplainable knowing. Begin moving slowly in your chosen direction. Stop periodically to check back in with your Body Radar. Go wherever your body leads you. Let your Body Radar continue as a Timeless Wander (see below) or until you find the place that was waiting for you.

Timeless Wander

Allow yourself time for some timeless, unstructured wandering. Ironically, setting a time limit on a mobile device may help you relax into timelessness. Wander through the landscape without destination, agenda, or purpose. Let go of thoughts of the future; be present in the moment. Go off-trail, or wherever your curiosity leads. Follow patches of sunlight, or a butterfly, or the sound of water. You have no tasks to accomplish, nowhere specific to go. People typically make plans and follow agendas, which can limit awareness of what else may be happening in nature at this moment. Wandering helps you to notice what nature is offering right now. This is a good way to break old habits, and to connect with nature in your own way.

Sit Spot

Find a place in nature where you can simply be, still and quiet. Sit in this spot alone, often. Visit it frequently so it becomes familiar. Begin to connect with nature in this spot, absorbing the many lessons nature offers. Meet all of the nature in this place with curiosity and wonder. Get eye-to-eye with diverse life-forms in different weather, seasons, and times of day. By sitting quietly, you can become welcome as an accepted member of the natural community, and observe things many humans miss. It may help to set a time limit on a mobile device, or to bring a small square of cardboard or foam to sit on.

A good sit spot can be almost anywhere. Ideally your spot can be somewhere you can get to easily and often; near water, shelter, and food for wildlife. Ideally you can avoid harm, hazards, or damaging a fragile landscape. In urban areas try a park, a vacant lot, a sidewalk/pavement or rooftop garden, a tree-lined street, a ditch behind a playing field, or somewhere with bird activity. In rural areas, learn how to have safe encounters with bites, stings, ticks, bears, or snakes. Children can make cozy places in a backyard/garden and enchant them with magic. It's not about the quality of the spot; it's about the quality of attention you bring to it.

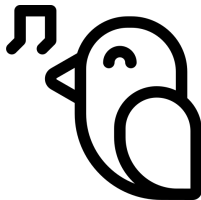
Expand Your Senses

Use all your senses, one at a time, and together. Expand them as fully as you can, stretching out to your edges. Focus your attention on each sense. Widen your sight to include your peripheral vision to notice movements. Listen for the sounds of birds, near and far, the wind or water moving over the land. Smell any scents carried on the breeze. Notice from which direction the sun touches your skin. This kind of sense meditation starts by focusing outside yourself, exercising your sensory awareness of your natural surroundings. When practiced regularly, you may revive, discover, or appreciate other ways of perceiving, and be able to evoke, encourage, or inspire them in others.

Listen for Bird Language

Keep your own presence quiet. Be still and listen. Open your eyes and ears to notice the vocal signals of birds and the body language of other creatures. Perceive all the nonverbal and subtle signals in nature that are that happening and vibrating all around you.

Bird Language offers information about many life-forms in any landscape, with a range of meanings humans can learn to interpret and understand. As they go about their daily activities many birds use four varieties of *Baseline* signals, with a feeling of peace and well-being. These include Bird Song, Juvenile Begging, Companion Calling, and Aggression Calls. They use a fifth variety, *Alarm Calls*, to say “beware.” Maybe a predator is nearby, or someone is nearing their nest. Many recognizable alarms can help you notice what else may be happening in the landscape. (Except for the corvid family – including jays, ravens, magpies, rooks, jackdaws, and crows – who have different patterns in their calls).



Related resources

Self-Care Guide: Nature

References

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