Peer Education Project



A Guide for Parents/Caregivers

Mental Health Foundation

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Over the past year, I have realised just how vital it is for me to spend time away from screens and work. It allows me to clear my head and breathe freely, without worries of pending assignments, even if it is just for a short while.

Peer Educator
Peer Education Project

Why is nature good for our mental health?

Connecting with nature is not just about the amount of time we spend outdoors; it is also about building a relationship with nature by noticing and becoming sensitive to what is around us. We use our senses to do this – such as noticing the different cloud shapes in the sky, smelling the scents of flowers and listening to the birds chirping in the trees.

Encouraging your child or young person to build in opportunities to connect with nature in everyday life can improve both the health of their bodies and their minds.

Research tells us that there are many mental health benefits to connecting with nature, such as:

- Feeling happier;
- Feeling less stressed or angry;
- Having more and better-quality sleep;
- Feeling less worried;
- Being more environmentally aware and engaged;
- Increasing self-esteem and self-confidence;
- Improving attention and concentration;
- Encouraging participation in physical activities; and
- Increasing social contact with other people and animals.

Why is nature good for our mental health?

Children and young people are increasingly spending more time indoors than ever before, with research before the pandemic suggesting that three quarters of young people spend less time outdoors than prison inmates.

Research from the Wildlife Trust suggests that children and young people who have the least access to nature also have the worst levels of physical health and mental wellbeing.

So, it's important to work with your child or young person to find ways to connect with nature that work for them, based on what you have available to you.

This guide will provide some ideas to get you started.



Top tips for supporting your child or young person to connect with nature

Inspire curiosity

Being curious yourself can inspire your child or young person to question and take notice of their surroundings. If you go out for a walk together or even if you are just looking out your window, comment on the nature you see.

Ask your child or young person questions and encourage them to ask you questions too! It is important to show you can engage with nature from your window or even just on a trip to the local shop.

Turn to books and other resources

There are plenty of books and online resources available to inspire you and your child or young person to connect with nature. We've put links to some of these below.

Put technology on hold and get outside

It can be difficult to switch off from our phones and other technology, but it's important for us all to have time away from our screens.

Try to disconnect from your own devices at points during the day, especially when you are exploring your local area or nature spots, and encourage your child or young person to do the same.



Top tips for supporting your child or young person to connect with nature

Empower their ideas

Give your child or young person the space and encouragement to explore their ideas and interests. It's important for them to find out what they enjoy and how they like to connect with nature.

If that means getting a little muddy or wet playing outside, then try to encourage that, even if it means an extra load of washing!

Get creative

Nature inspires many people to be creative, be it through painting, drawing, photography or writing.

Why not encourage your child or young person to explore their creative side?

Connect with others

Nature can be enjoyed with others. Encourage your child or young person to think about activities they could plan with others like going for a walk with a friend, playing football, having a picnic outside or joining a community gardening group.



Top tips for supporting your child or young person to connect with nature

Nurture nature

Teach your child or young person to look after the nature around them, and think about ways they can protect it, both closer to home and on a wider scale. Even something as simple as growing herbs at home, will help your child or young person to connect their actions to positive effects, such as watering plants helps them grow.

Activities focused on looking after the natural environment can help your child or young person build a connection with nature and give them a sense of purpose and responsibility.

Slow down and be mindful

Sometimes we forget to slow down and appreciate the nature around us. We can miss the wonders that nature offers by simply not paying attention or giving ourselves the time to look. Mindfulness is the skill of paying attention to what's happening in your mind and body right now, without judgement. It can help focus our attention on the nature around us, and enjoy being in that moment. Mindfulness is a skill that needs to be practiced.

Try and encourage your child or young person to practice being in the moment and use all of their senses to engage with the natural world around them.



Find out more

Get Birding Podcasts

Presented by Dr Mya-Rose Craig, the Get Birding series encourages people up and down the UK to look out of their windows, venture into their gardens and walk through their local parks to get to know Britain's birds, our most accessible connection with nature.
https://shows.acast.com/get-birding

WWF Garden Safaris

A garden safari is a fun way for families and young people to explore their gardens - or other outdoor spaces - and learn more about local flora and fauna using the SEEK app.
https://www.wwf.org.uk/learn/love-nature/garden-safari
https://www.wwf.org.uk/discover-nature-seek-app

#LearnToLoveNature

WWF provide a series of fun 'make-it' activities that have been designed to encourage wildlife into your local area and explore your love of nature.
https://www.wwf.org.uk/learn/love-nature/get-making

Wildlife Competition

Photography is one of the many ways you can get out and embrace the wilderness. Why not submit a photograph to a wildlife photography competition? There are plenty to choose from.
https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/other-ways-get-involved/wildlifephotography

Thriving with Nature guidebook

The Mental Health Foundation and WWF produced a guide on making the most of our natural spaces for our mental health and wellbeing. Take a look at the ideas to connect with nature during each season.
https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/Thriving-With-Nature-compressed.pdf

Geocaching

Why not download the geocaching app and go treasure hunting as a family!
https://www.geocaching.com/play

Find out more



Virtual Royal Botanical Gardens

Travel to the tropics, the desert and the mountains without leaving the house with seasonal footage from Kew Gardens and Wakehurst Place.
https://www.kew.org/about-us/virtual-kew-wakehurst



#GetOutside

Join the #GetOutside campaign and mix up your daily exercise – find ideas and challenge calendars for getting outside and trying new things.
https://getoutside.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/guides/getoutside-inside/



Action for Conservation's WildWEB

If your young person is aged 13-17, encourage them to join this digital programme, which will support them to take action for the environment.
https://www.actionforconservation.org/online



The Learning Pod

The Outward Bound Trust have pulled together 'The Learning Pod' which offers support and advice on how families and schools can approach home learning alongside a range of resources that encourage experiential learning, developing skills, supporting wellbeing and going outside.
https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/the-learning-pod



Get Out with the Kids

A database of family-friendly outdoor adventure ideas.
https://www.getoutwiththekids.co.uk

Get involved!

Read, learn and find opportunities to get involved with the Wildlife Trusts.
https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/get-involved



Mindfulness in Nature

An A to Z of mindfulness nature activities.
https://www.countryfile.com/how-to/a-to-z-of-mindfulness-in-nature/



Learning Through Landscapes

Information for parents and carers.
https://www.ltl.org.uk/parents/

Find out more

Resources to support children and young people living with disabilities to connect with nature

Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA)

With fun activities like riding and carriage driving, RDA provide therapy, fitness, skills development and opportunities for achievement. RDA is an inclusive and diverse organisation. They welcome clients with physical and learning disabilities and autism, and there are no age restrictions.
https://www.rda.org.uk

Disabled Ramblers

The Disabled Ramblers is a small charity working across England and Wales to help make the countryside more accessible to people with limited mobility – which benefits everyone. They run 25 – 30 rambles designed for mobility scooters each year, organised into groups of 3 or 4 in selected areas of the country. They are run from April to October, whatever the weather.
http://disabledramblers.co.uk

Beach Wheelchairs

Beach Wheelchairs is a Scottish Charity which believes that everyone has the right to enjoy our beautiful beaches. All of the wheelchairs have been specially designed to enable individuals with disabilities to get back on the beach. Unlike a standard manual wheelchair they have large, rubber wheels which move easily over the sand. They hire out beach wheelchairs free of charge from each of our seaside locations using local volunteers.
http://www.beachwheelchairs.org

Food Tastes Better Outdoors

Recipes and advice to show how people with learning disabilities can enjoy a combined interest in food and the outdoors.
https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/guidance/widgit-recipes-for-eating-outdoors

Mental Health Awareness Week 2021

We're inviting you to **#ConnectWithNature** to support your mental health!

There are many ways you and your child or young person can get involved.



For more information about this year's Mental Health Awareness Week visit mentalhealth.org.uk/mhaw or join the conversation on social media using #ConnectWithNature and #MentalHealthAwarenessWeek

Mental Health Foundation

Mental Health Awareness Week 2021

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Mental Health Foundation
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