



## The benefits of contact with nature on mental health – some research findings

### **What are the Benefits of Interacting with Nature?**

Lucy E. Keniger, Kevin J. Gaston, Katherine N. Irvine, and Richard A. Fuller

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3709294/>

‘... interacting with nature may have specific psychological well-being benefits for children. In a study on children’s mental and social health, Maller [Kuo F.E., Sullivan W.C. Aggression and violence in the inner city: Effects of environment via mental fatigue. *Environ. Behav.* 2001;33:543–571. doi: 10.1177/00139160121973124.] found that direct contact with nature, as facilitated by curriculum-based nature activities in schools, had a positive impact on self-esteem and mental-well-being. These studies rely primarily on data derived from the perceptions of parents and teachers; experimental research designs that utilize objective assessments of the psychological well-being effects of interacting with nature on children in a series of controlled environments may be useful for further investigating these effects. Despite the limitations of the reviewed studies, it is clear that interacting with nature may deliver several positive psychological well-being benefits to children.’

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12233806/>

### **Greening healthcare: practicing as if the natural environment really mattered.**

Irvine KN<sup>1</sup>, Warber SL.

‘The literature reviewed provides evidence to support the intuitive belief that interaction with the natural world is a vital part of biopsychosocial-spiritual well-being.’



<http://heapro.oxfordjournals.org/content/21/1/45.full>

## **Healthy nature healthy people: 'contact with nature' as an upstream health promotion intervention for populations**

Cecily Maller,, Mardie Townsend, Anita Pryor, Peter Brown and Lawrence St Leger

'Early research found that in the act of contemplating nature, the brain is relieved of 'excess' circulation (or activity) and nervous system activity is reduced ([Yogendra, 1958](#)). Furnass found an experience of nature can help strengthen the activities of the right hemisphere of the brain, and restore harmony to the functions of the brain as a whole ([Furnass, 1979](#)). This is a technical explanation of the process that occurs when people 'clear their head' by going for a walk in a natural setting.'

'Empirical, theoretical and anecdotal evidence demonstrates contact with nature positively impacts blood pressure, cholesterol, outlook on life and stress-reduction ([Moore, 1981](#); [Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989](#); [Hartig et al., 1991](#); [Ulrich et al., 1991a](#); [Ulrich et al., 1991b](#); [Kaplan, 1992a](#); [Rohde and Kendle, 1994](#); [Lewis, 1996](#); [Leather et al., 1998](#); [Parsons, et al., 1998](#)). These outcomes have particular relevance in areas of mental health and cardiovascular disease, categories that are set to be the two biggest contributors to disease worldwide by the year 2020 ([Murray and Lopez, 1996](#)). Whilst the extent to which contact with nature can contribute to human health and well-being is in need of further investigation, the strength of this evidence alone is sufficient to warrant inclusion of 'contact with nature' within population health strategies...'

'...natural areas can be seen as one of our most vital health resources. In the context of the growing worldwide mental illness burden of disease, contact with nature may offer an affordable, accessible and equitable choice in tackling the imminent epidemic, within both preventative and restorative public health strategies.'



## Overview of workshop

Infants (6-8 years)

**For pupils to make a collection of 'important' things, things that make them feel good.**

Activity one - a collection box

Each pupil is given a box to collect things in. This could be just a plain box but a sectioned box is better as then items can be displayed more easily. An egg box is a good option. For more sections chocolate boxes are good.

Pupils go outside and collect items from the grounds that they like. They collect one item for each section of the box.

Display the boxes and discuss the different things collected - have people chosen colourful things? natural things? soft things? smelly things? things that were living? things that have never been alive? Were there common things collected? Was this because of where you were collecting from or because they were things that the class really liked? Keep the display up within the classroom.

Juniors (9-11 years)

**To create poems based on words that describe places and express emotions.**

Walk around outside and explore different places - this might be inside or outside the school grounds. Visit places that are quiet, others where lots takes place, places to walk, places to sit, places to learn.

Work with pupils to come up with a list of descriptive words i.e. adjectives that could describe those places. Write these on luggage labels and hang them on a tree or fence.

Then think about words that describe the different things you might do in those places. Write these on labels and hang them on another tree or space.

Finally discuss how you might feel in the different spaces - come up with words that describe those emotions. Add these to a final set of labels.

As you do this ask pupils to think about how the way the spaces were made you think that you should behave in certain ways. In a some places you know straight away that it is somewhere to be peaceful, whilst another space might be somewhere where you can be noisy. Talk too about how these different spaces make you feel - and why that is. Are there some places that you would like to spend more time in than others? Why might that be?

Taking a word from each group start making phrases, then sentences, then poems.



Secondary

**To find out how colour can impact on mood.**

To start ask pupils if they think that different colours change their moods?

Take a walk around the site and look for different colours. Ask participants to write down what they feel when they see the colour. Discuss what they thought.

Following this pupils investigate how research has shown that different colour can have an impact on mood. Useful websites include:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/homes/design/colour\\_psychologyofcolour.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/homes/design/colour_psychologyofcolour.shtml)

<http://psychology.about.com/od/sensationandperception/a/colorpsych.htm>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color\\_psychology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color_psychology)

It is recommended that the information is printed out rather than pupils researching directly from the internet.

Give participants a range of places and situations and ask them to recommend colours that would work best in these places. These might be:

- Places to relax
- Places to eat
- Places to get active
- Places to learn in

Discuss why being outside might be seen as a positive place to be for good mental health if you think about the dominant colours outside?