

Climate Anxiety and Wellbeing: Teachers Notes

In 2017, the American Psychological Association coined the eco-anxiety definition as “Chronic fear of environmental doom.” In a study conducted by researchers from University of Bath and Imperial College London, almost two-thirds of 10,000 16–25-year-olds in 10 countries reported feeling being “very or extremely worried” about climate change, while 84% were at least moderately worried. More than 45% of young people in the survey of 10 countries said their feelings about climate change “negatively affected their daily life and functioning”.

While ecoanxiety is the term we hear the most, climate researchers and healthcare professionals around the world are now finding strong evidence that the ecological crisis is having an even more profound effect on our mental health. Terms such as ecological grief, which describes a depressive state of what is there to come and how little can be done, as well as solastalgia, which is defined as, “the lived experience of negatively perceived change to a home environment.”

As fear about the state of the natural world grows, there is an increasing call within us to ‘get back to nature.’ Most of us have experienced a sense of profound awe, peace, and wonder when in a natural environment that inspires us, so why not bring our mindfulness practice to these places?

Exploring mindfulness in nature is a healing practice that nourishes both us and the environment we move through. On a personal level, it helps us to feel connected to the earth and at peace where we stand. As we establish this connection, it guides us to tread more lightly upon the earth and to make choices that respect and protect the planet we are an integral part of. Bringing our attention to the natural world is therefore a mutually-enhancing exercise, one that bridges the spiritual and the material.

As we are aware, climate change is a concerning challenge, possibly even the most serious concern humanity has ever faced.

It is then important to allow your students (and yourself!) to feel sadness, anxiety, guilt, anger, dissonance and fear. These are not illogical nor unwarranted feelings – these are feelings in response to very serious threats, and everyone deserves the proper space to process them.

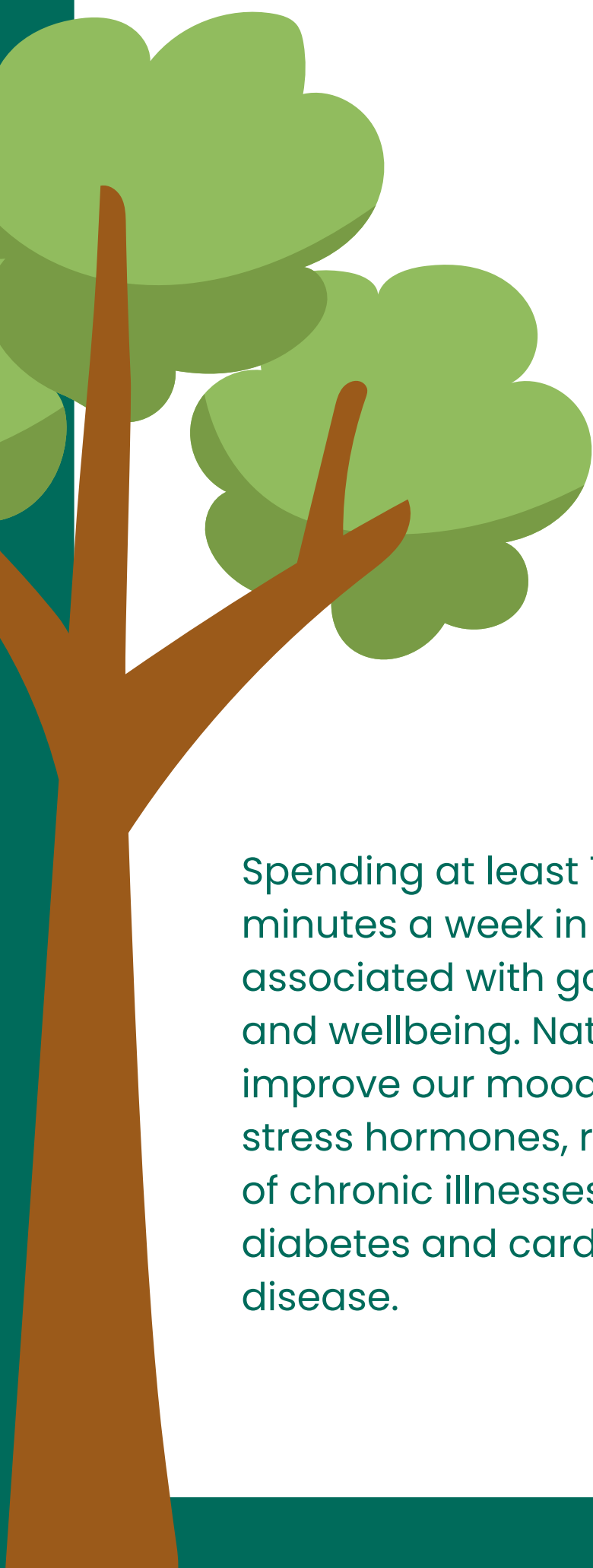
Did you know?



Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. Nature can improve our mood, lower stress hormones, reduce risks of chronic illnesses such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Nature-based activities or green prescribing have played a key part in mental health treatments (anxiety and depression) around the world for centuries.

8 in 10 (83%) of 8–15 y/o children interviewed by Natural England in 2020 said being in nature made them very happy.



Student Activity: Nature Circles

Resources: Outdoor space, Nature items, optional: circular parachute.

Step 1: Ask everyone to look around and find one nature item that represents a worry for them – something they might be feeling anxious about right now, or in general. As you observe these energies, ensure that you are meeting them with non-judgment and curiosity.

Step 2: Ask everyone to create a circle. In the circle ask pupils, if they feel comfortable, to share what their worry is, and put their nature item into the parachute or centre of the circle to represent them sharing. Not everyone has to participate, only if they wish to.

Thank everyone for sharing, and recognise that we can all have worries or anxieties.

Step 3: Ask – How does it make you feel to know that everyone has worries?
What we want to do is find ways to talk about them and ways to help us feel better.

Step 4: Ask everyone to now think of one thing they do already, or will do, to help make their worry go away, or feel smaller. It might be, spending time with friends, playing sports, listening to music, yoga, dance, reading a book, the point is it can be anything, and should help give others' ideas of what they could also do. As they share, they take their worry item out of the circle, taking control of it.

Step 5: Allow time for reflection. Ask how it made them feel to talk about their worries.

This session can be broad or themed, focusing in on worries relating to nature and the environment can help you gain an understanding of whether climate anxiety is a challenge for the young people you are working with.



Mindful nature ideas

Nature Journaling

Here in the natural world, I feel...

If this tree/flower/other plant could speak, it might say...

Here in the natural world, I feel connected to/inspired by...

One seed of intention I would like to plant here is...

Wonderful Wildlife: Biodiversity observations

Find a peaceful nature spot to sit quietly for 10-15 minutes to observe wildlife, this could be pollinators, birds, or simply the sounds of nature.

Art in Nature

Take inspiration from artists like Andy Goldsworthy to create art displays using natural materials.

Guided Meditations

Give your mind and body a rest with these nature-inspired mindfulness cards.

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