



Principles and daily routine with nature and wellbeing in youth work

Karmen Murn

More to read on belongingtonature.com.

There is a lot that youth workers can do to support nature connectedness and thus the wellbeing of young people and interestingly, we do not need the best nature to do so. The quality needed for wellbeing cannot be merely explained as a quality of nature itself. In the article *Human Nature: The Health and Wellbeing benefits of nature in the built environment*, authors argue that the effect of wellbeing ... "are not solely the result of viewing plants and trees." In nature, it is recommended to use other senses, in addition to sight, we should add hearing and smell. Together, these senses bring a greater effect of connecting with nature.

This is also confirmed by the research presented in Article *Ecopsychology: How Immersion in Nature Benefits Your Health*, which mentions that people still overemphasise the importance of visual sensation. So, he advises: "We need to deepen the forms of interaction with nature and make it more immersive."

But to develop a relationship or connection with nature, there is no simple recipe. Study *Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing (2019)* mentions that "Contact with nature is more than just a complex multi-sensory experience, to varying degrees personal histories and meanings, longstanding cultural practices, and a sense of place play some role in the benefits realised, factors which may account for why we did not find the same pattern for health individuals not identifying as White British." This simply means that the contact with nature depends also on personal identity, culture, and possibly other characteristics.

And how to do it? You can organise youth exchange, projects, and workshops. However, here are some ideas to foster daily routine, may it be within your organisation, or outside.

- 1) Encourage young people to spend at least 120 minutes per week in some sort of contact with nature, may that be personal and individual or group experience. If you recognise young people are not able to set individual plans, then think of making regular nature related activities in your organisation or in your community, where young people can connect to nature in organised ways. Make some workshops on bird watching or creating bird houses, do some voluntary work in local animal shelters, create urban gardens etc.
- 2) For the sake of tracking their wellbeing, encourage young people to keep their nature diaries, writing down time they spent in nature, mood they had, things they did,





- 3) Young people are reporting losing touch with nature due to several reasons. In case this happens due to a crowded schedule, first try to offer empathy and understanding. The second you can do is to engage them in some less-demanding activities that do not take much of their time and effort. Nurture connection with nature in small steps, by turning existing activities young people join into outdoor activity. It happens very often that if young people had a connection with nature as children, they would reconnect with nature as adults. Your task is merely to keep them connected in small doses while feeling alienated from it while being young. If young people lose touch with nature due to unfavourable proximity to nature, then simply bring nature to them. Some solutions can be done by your organisation (urban gardens, bird houses, green area in your organisation, adopt a tree), while some can be addressed through the local politics (parks and other nature areas in the town).
- 4) All senses experience. Don't just use words in your work. Offer options such as sound, touch, smell, taste and visual. Invite them to sit outside or on the roof of your organisation and just soak up all the noise of the surroundings, touch every tree, taste things they have not tasted yet etc.
- 5) Considering the description of the theory of Nature Intelligence, then it is good to prepare an educational program for the development of nature's relationship with young people by considering all four dimensions (cognitive, emotional, spiritual and action dimension). It is important to remember that people have differently developed dimensions and that most likely the dimension that reached the higher score is the entry point to the education programme. This simply means that it is advisable to connect young people and nature with the topics that feel familiar and comfortable. If a person feels comfortable in the spiritual dimension, this is your entry point to nature connectedness, and it is up to the young person and your programme if they wish to connect to nature also through other dimensions.

Hopefully, you will find some inspiration, how to bring nature into your daily youth work. Participants may not be aware of it, but these practices can have a long-term benefit for them.

