



Valuing embedding time for nature: Why, how, and what next!

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**NATURE CONNECTEDNESS
DESCRIBES AN INDIVIDUAL'S
SENSE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE NATURAL WORLD**



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Why do we care about nature connection?

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Children & Young people report:



91% agree
being in nature
makes them
happy



81% who
perceive nature
improvements at
school reported
greater school
enjoyment



29% report
most of their
time in nature
was at school
34 - 43% for
Black, Asian and
mixed ethnicities



23% report
low connection
to nature
20% moderate
57% high

Findings from The Children's People and Nature Survey, 2024 (see [here](#))

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Schools for nature report (2024, see [here](#))

Survey responses from 1,885 schools in 2023

35% have no outdoor learning opportunities (**56%** secondary schools)

27% integrated outdoor learning into curriculum
(**24%** in areas of high deprivation, **35%** in affluent areas)

18% of schools with high percent of free school meals provide daily access to nature, compared with **52%** with low

72% of teacher (N=2,531) report participating in nature projects positively impacted their own health and wellbeing (69% reported greater job satisfaction)*

*Natural Connections Demonstration Project, 2012-2016: Final report ([Natural England, 2016](#))

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Why explore connection to nature?

Global societal challenge

- 18% of 7- to 16-year-olds and 25.7% of 17- to 19-year-olds have a clinically diagnosable mental health condition*
- Wellbeing declines between 10-12 years

Children with anxiety disorders are unlikely to access support services.

- 1 in 5 access mental health services



Spending time in nature is associated with physical fitness, learning and attention, wellbeing, & mental health.

Social prescribing nature?

*Findings from Mental Health of Children and Young People Surveys, 2022 (NHS Digital; see [here](#))

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Evidence for benefits of connecting to nature

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Benefits of spending time in nature

Associations with pro-environmental behaviours

Associations with better self-regulation (cognitive, affective, and behavioural)

Associations with physical health

Associations with wellbeing

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Schools' nature engagement...

Evaluation of a hands-on engagement in 21-week nature engagement programme

With >500 child participants, we found positive increases in mood, wellbeing, resiliency & connection to nature.

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Research collaboration RHUL & RBG Kew



Following 30-minute walk in nature children had improved connection to nature and wellbeing, in particular those who were initially low. Connection to nature predicted positive change in wellbeing.

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In practice:

- pathways
- keep it simple
- inclusivity



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How do you connect with nature?

Imagine your favourite nature spot?

Close your eyes, use your 5 senses and take time to reflect on what you notice.



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Techniques: 5 pathways of connecting to nature

Senses — Exploring and experiencing nature through all the senses.

Beauty — Seeking and appreciating the beauty of the natural world.

Emotion — Noticing and welcoming the feelings nature inspires – sense of awe and wonder.

Meaning — Celebrating and sharing nature's events and stories eg dawn chorus, equinox, sunrise and sunset.

Compassion — Helping and caring for nature.



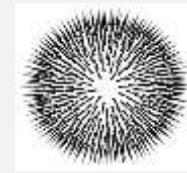
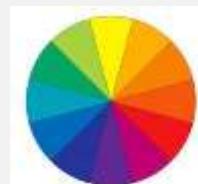
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Take away activities – keep it simple



Wakehurst autumn © RBG Kew



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What is *inclusivity* in nature connection?

Creating opportunities for every young person to develop a relationship with the natural world.

Regardless of background, identity, ability, or life circumstances.

Inclusion isn't an adjustment — **it's the culture of the space.**

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Core principles

- Co-design (Waite et al 2023, p. 54) or youth-led (King et al 2025).
- Universal design and individual flexibility.
- Emotional and physical safety.
- Multiple modes of participation.
- Agency and consent.
- Co-created boundaries and routines, e.g. "stay where I can see you".

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Designing sessions

Instead of one activity, one pace, one norm.

- **Choice** (group/solo; active/quiet).
- **Predictability** (visual schedule, clear transitions).
- **Provide** tools (e.g. kit).
- **Building mutual trust** (Friedman et al 2025).
- **Hybrid spaces.**
- **Rhythms:** sitting and roaming; pacing and rest.

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Cultural relevance and curiosity

Instigate curiosity in cultural nature relationships.

Activities can include:

- Beyond the postcard:
“Nature isn’t elsewhere — it’s here, where we live.”
- **Planting** culturally meaningful crops/herbs (mint, maize, coriander, callaloo).
- **Storytelling** around land, migration, belonging.
- Exploring **ancestral** environment relationships.

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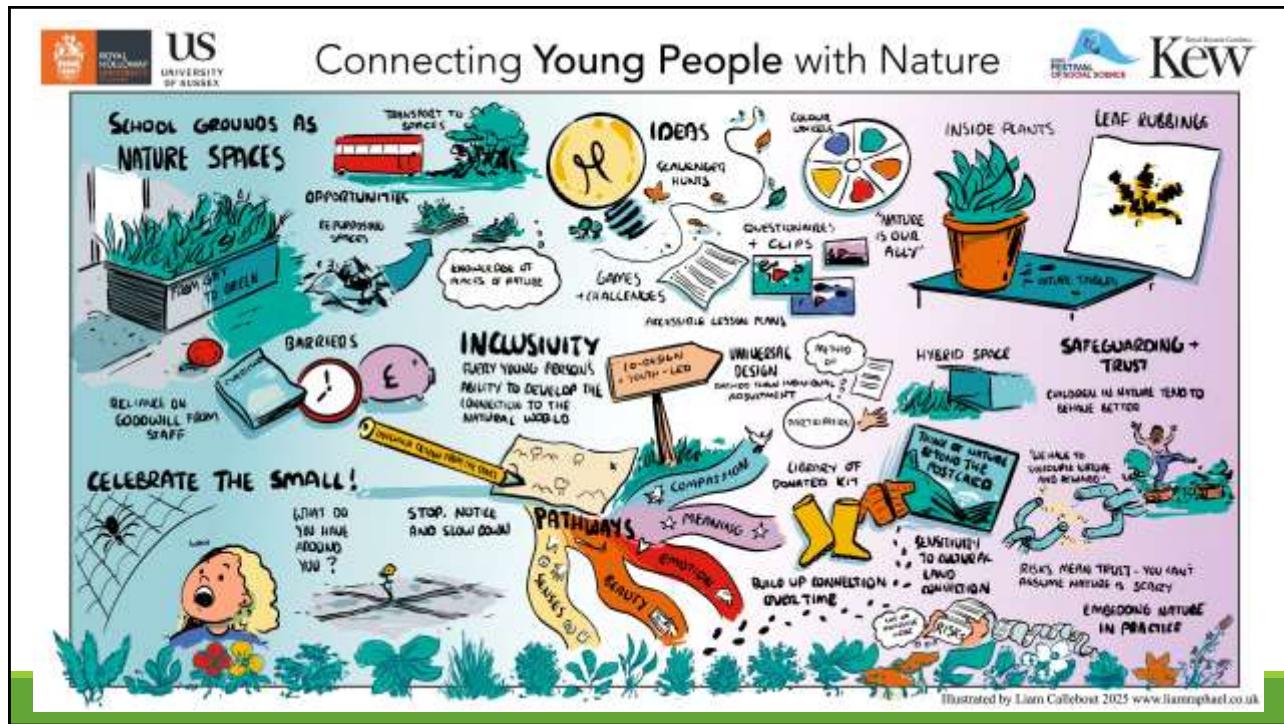
What are you already doing in terms of connecting to nature or even learning outside at your organisation

What are the opportunities, challenges and barriers?



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Where do we go from here?

CALL TO ACTION



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