



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

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1

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



2

2

# Why do we care about nature connection?

3

3

## 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

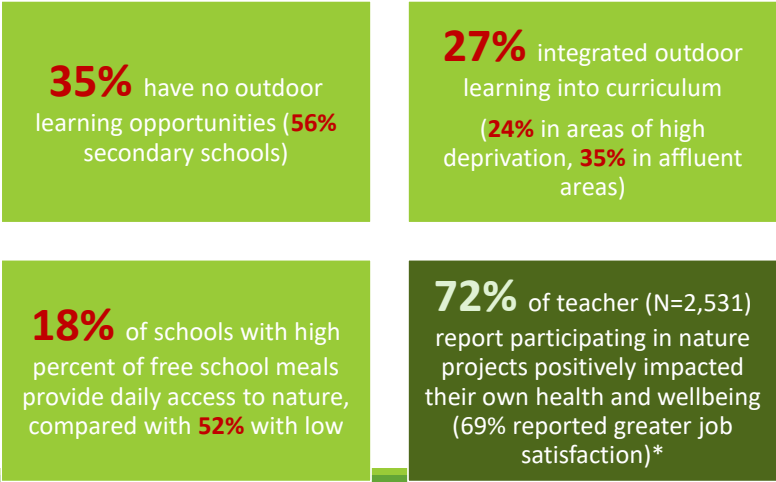
Findings from The Children's People and Nature Survey, 2024 (see [here](#))

4

4

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

Survey responses from 1,885 schools in 2023



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

# 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](#))



## Evidence for benefits of connecting to nature

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7

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## Benefits of spending time in nature

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Associations with pro-environmental behaviours

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

Associations with physical health

Associations with wellbeing

8

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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.

## 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.

## In practice:

- pathways
- keep it simple
- inclusivity



11

## 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.



12

12

# 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.



13

# Take away activities – keep it simple



Wakehurst autumn © RBG Kew



14





## 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.**

15

15



## 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".

16





## 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** (Friedmand et al 2025).
- **Hybrid spaces**.
- **Rhythms:** sitting and roaming; pacing and rest.

17

17



## Nature as ally

Ecological community (Fan et al 2025)  
Nature as stakeholder

18



# 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.

19

19

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

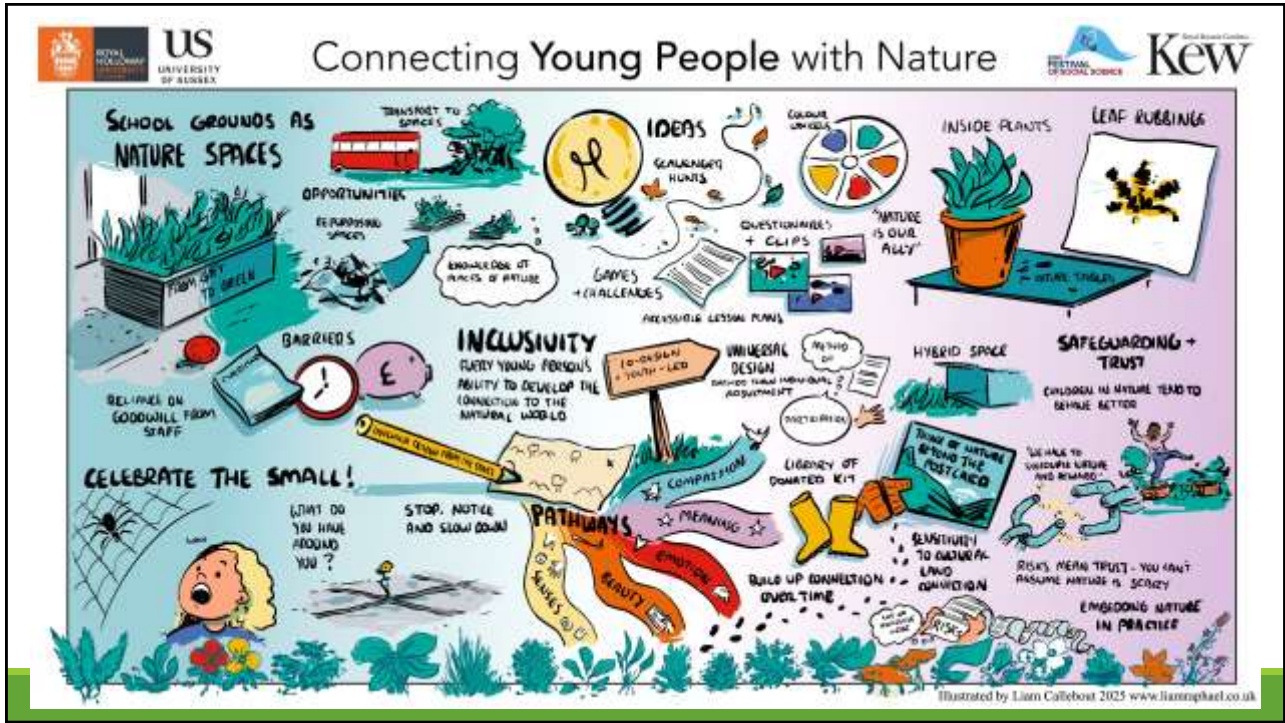


What are the opportunities, challenges and barriers?

20

20





21

# Where do we go from here?

CALL TO ACTION

22



Thank you!

