



Peer Education Project



A Guide for Pupils



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Over the past year, I have learned how important it is to connect with the natural world around us. Whenever I start to feel stressed about school, I now decide to go on a walk to reconnect with myself.

**Peer Educator
Peer Education Project**

Why is nature good for our mental health?



From walking in the woods and sitting in the garden, to caring for house plants and even watching nature programmes, there are many ways we can find to connect with nature wherever we are.

Connecting with nature is not just about the amount of time we spend outdoors; it is also about building a relationship with nature by noticing and becoming sensitive to what is around us. We use our senses to do this.

Connecting with nature not only improves our physical health but our mental health too!

Research tells us that there are many benefits to connecting with nature for our mental health, including:

-  Feeling happier;
-  Feeling less stressed or angry;
-  Having more and better-quality sleep;
-  Feeling less worried;
-  Being more environmentally aware and engaged;
-  Increasing self-esteem and self-confidence;
-  Improving attention and concentration;
-  Encouraging participation in physical activities; and
-  Increasing social contact with other people and animals.

It is helpful to find our own, individual ways for connecting with nature that mean something to us.

This guide will provide some ideas to get you started.

Top tips for connecting with nature

Start small

Spend five minutes paying attention to nature everyday.

This can be when you are at home, at school or outside.

- What shapes can you see in the clouds?
- How many different colours make up one leaf?
- Can you hear any animal noises?

Do what works for you

Connect with nature by doing things you enjoy.

These might be different to others, and that's ok.

Try a few different things and see what you like – you can always try something new!

Switch off

Having a phone is very handy, especially when exploring new places. Yet we can find it difficult to switch off from our devices and social media, especially if we receive notifications!

It can be hard to do but, why not pop your phone on "silent" and enjoy the sounds of nature instead?

Even if you want to use your phone to take pictures, set your notifications to "mute" so you won't get distracted.

Top tips for connecting with nature

Ask for company

Natural environments can be good places to connect with others.

Sometimes, it can be fun to explore new places with friends or family.

Why not suggest an outdoor activity for you and your friend to try?

Use all your senses

Try and use all your senses when exploring your environment – this will help you feel more connected to nature.

Run your hand along the bark of a tree, smell the scent of a rose, listen to the hiss of a grasshopper, notice the way the tree branches move with the wind or even catch a raindrop on your tongue and see what it tastes like!

Slow down and pay attention

Sometimes we forget to slow down and appreciate the nature around us.

Try and be in the moment when you are going for a walk or sitting on a bench.

This is known as being mindful – the skill of paying attention to what is happening in your mind and body right now, without judgement.

Sometimes we can miss the wonders of nature simply by not paying attention or giving ourselves the time to look.

Top tips for connecting with nature

You don't need to go far

Spending time outdoors in your local park or garden can be just as good for mental health as exploring areas further away.

Stay safe

When we explore the nature around us, it is important that we feel comfortable and safe, which not everyone is able to feel in all settings.

Think carefully about the natural spaces available to you and where you would enjoy and feel safe to explore.

If you don't feel safe, that's not your fault - think about what would make you feel safer. You could take a friend or family member with you, and you could even sign or start a petition to make your local area safer.

Take action

You have the potential to make a difference to the nature around you, and beyond, by getting involved in activities that create positive environmental change.

It is important to take time to listen to people's experiences and think creatively about new ideas or plans that could help improve everyone's access to nature.

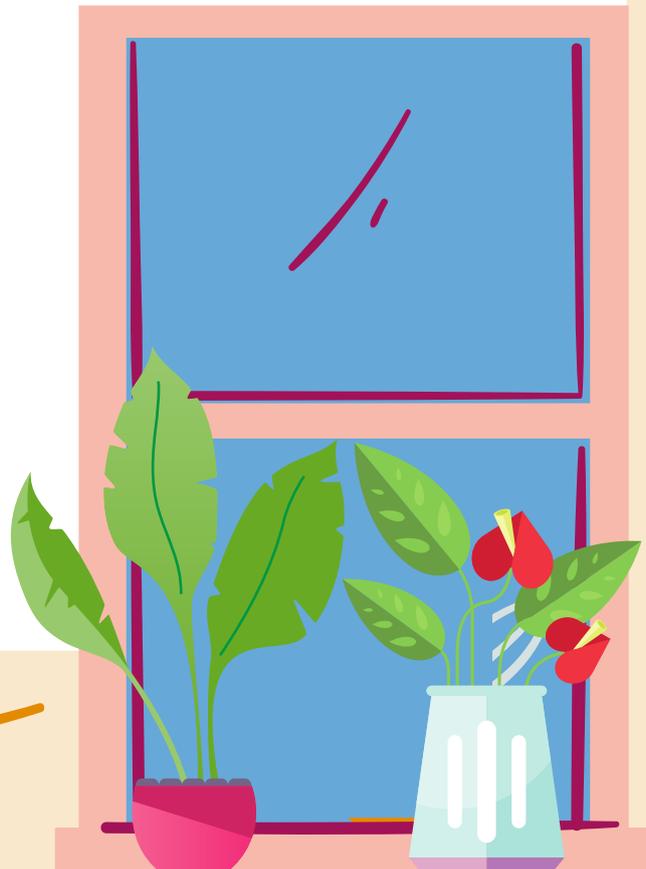
If we come together, we can use our collective voice to campaign for changes such as improving lighting in public spaces such as parks.

Ways to connect with nature

Finding your own space in nature

Bring nature in

- Eat breakfast in front of the window, notice the nature outside.
- Grow vegetables from your windowsill.
- Look after an indoor pot plant.
- Listen to nature sounds such as a waterfall or whale calls to help you relax.
- Watch a wildlife programme.
- Put up a bird feeder, either in your garden or on your windowsill - see if any birds stop by for a snack!
- Sit by an open window and listen to the sounds outside.



Ways to connect with nature

Finding your own space in nature

Get creative

- Try a bark rubbing.
- Take a picture of what nature means to you.
- Write some creative sentences.
- Do a quick sketch of a natural object or your surroundings.
- Write a poem or song lyrics about your favourite nature spot.
- Collect natural objects and make a handmade card for a loved one.



Stay active

- Practice yoga or stretch in the garden or in a local park.
- Go on a bike ride.
- Go for a walk or run.
- Go outdoor swimming.
- Skateboard.



Ways to connect with nature

Finding your own space in nature

Spend time exploring your local natural spaces

- Visit a local park or woods, notice the different flowers and trees.
- Find a local bench to sit on and look up at the sky. Notice how the clouds move, their shapes and colours.
- Take a walk along a river or by the sea, listen to the movement of the water.
- Use an app like Geocaching or Seek to make going outdoors more exciting.

Take a moment to be mindful

- Sit in your garden or on a park bench and focus on your breathing.
- Go for a walk in your local natural space. Use your senses to observe your surroundings.
- Water indoor or outdoor plants.
- Draw or paint the view from your window.

Ways to connect with nature

Connecting with others

Outdoors



- Have a picnic with friends or family.
- Go for a group walk.
- Visit local heritage spots.
- Feed the ducks in the local pond.

From home



- Spend time with your pet or watch live webcams from zoos across the UK from the comfort of your sofa!
- Do indoor or outdoor gardening with your family.
- Follow a nature-focused Instagram account like @bbccountryfile.
- Run a competition with your friends – who can grow the tallest sunflower or the most tomatoes!

In school



- Go on a class nature walk in the local area.
- Organise a big litter clean-up of the school grounds or a local park.
- Sign up to the RSPB Big Schools' Birdwatch.

Ways to connect with nature

Be part of something bigger, take action

- Put out a birdfeeder in your garden or leave seeds on the windowsill for the birds.
- Use reusable drink bottles instead of buying plastic bottled drinks.
- Recycle as much as possible, whether at home, in school or outdoors.
- Grow flowers on your windowsill that are good for bees.
- Pick up litter when you are out for a walk.
- Sign up and share a petition or campaign about protecting our environment.
- Volunteer at a local community garden.
- Take part in or organise a community clean up.



Find out more



21 Planet Saving Tips

There are loads of simple ways we can all make a real difference and give nature a helping hand. WWF's Youth Ambassadors have shared their top 21 planet-saving tips and actions.

https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-03/WWF_Youth_Ambassadors_21Actions.pdf



#Adventures AtHome

Being an adventurer is a state of mind – it's being brave and determined, supporting others and finding fun in everything we do. Check out Girlguiding's adventures at home guides for all ages.

<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/adventures-at-home/>



My Footprint App

This app provides practical advice on how you can introduce positive changes to your life to reduce your environmental impact. There are a variety of challenges for you to take part in, from cutting down your plastic consumption to eating a plant-based meal; each challenge gives you a new opportunity to do your bit for the planet.

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/myfootprint>



Wildlife Photography Competition

Photography is one of the many ways you can get out and embrace the wilderness. Why not submit a photograph to a wildlife photography competition? There are plenty to choose from.

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/other-ways-get-involved/wildlifephotography>



WWF's ways to connect with nature

Read WWF's five top tips for connecting with nature to help our wellbeing.

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/5-ways-connect-nature-help-our-wellbeing>

Find out more



Action for Conservation's WildWEB

Join this digital programme, which supports young people aged 13-17 to take action for the environment.

<https://www.actionforconservation.org/online>



#LearnToLoveNature

WWF provides a series of fun 'make-it' activities that have been designed to encourage wildlife into your local area and explore your love of nature.

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/learn/love-nature/get-making>



Headspace's Mindfulness Exercise

Try this mini-meditation to connect with nature.

<https://youtu.be/nsGbtrl1WkU>



Virtual Royal Botanical Gardens

Travel to the tropics, the desert and the mountains without leaving the house with seasonal footage from Kew Gardens and Wakehurst Place.

<https://www.kew.org/about-us/virtual-kew-wakehurst>



Call of the Wild Podcast

Listen to WWF's podcast series, with each episode digging deeper into environmental threats we are facing.

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/podcast>



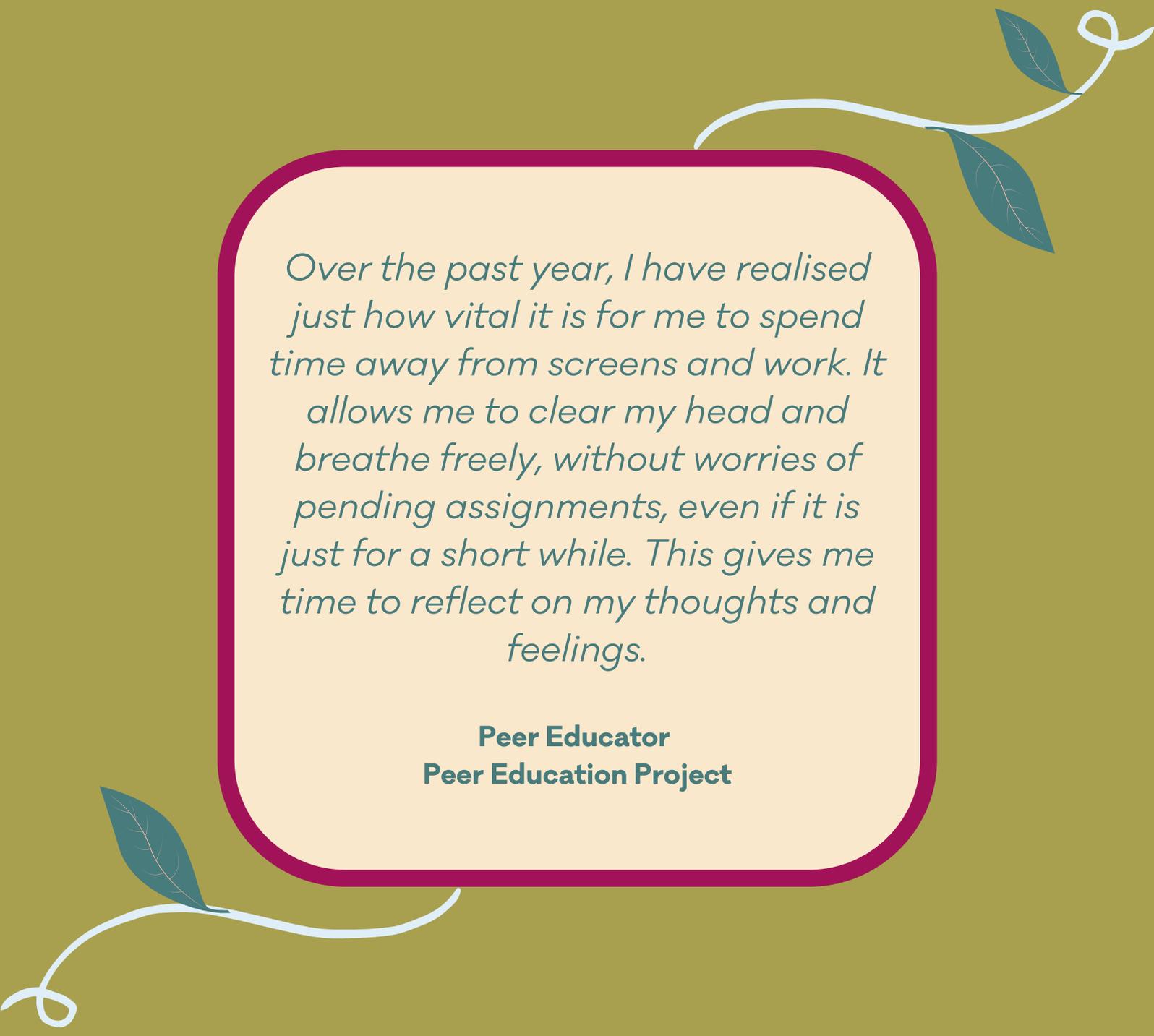
Mental Health Awareness Week 2021

We're inviting you to **#ConnectWithNature** to support your mental health!

There are many ways you can get involved.



For more information about this year's Mental Health Awareness Week visit mentalhealth.org.uk/mhaw or join the conversation on social media using **#ConnectWithNature** and **#MentalHealthAwarenessWeek**



Over the past year, I have realised just how vital it is for me to spend time away from screens and work. It allows me to clear my head and breathe freely, without worries of pending assignments, even if it is just for a short while. This gives me time to reflect on my thoughts and feelings.

**Peer Educator
Peer Education Project**



Mental Health Awareness Week 2021



[mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)



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www.mentalhealth.org.uk

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