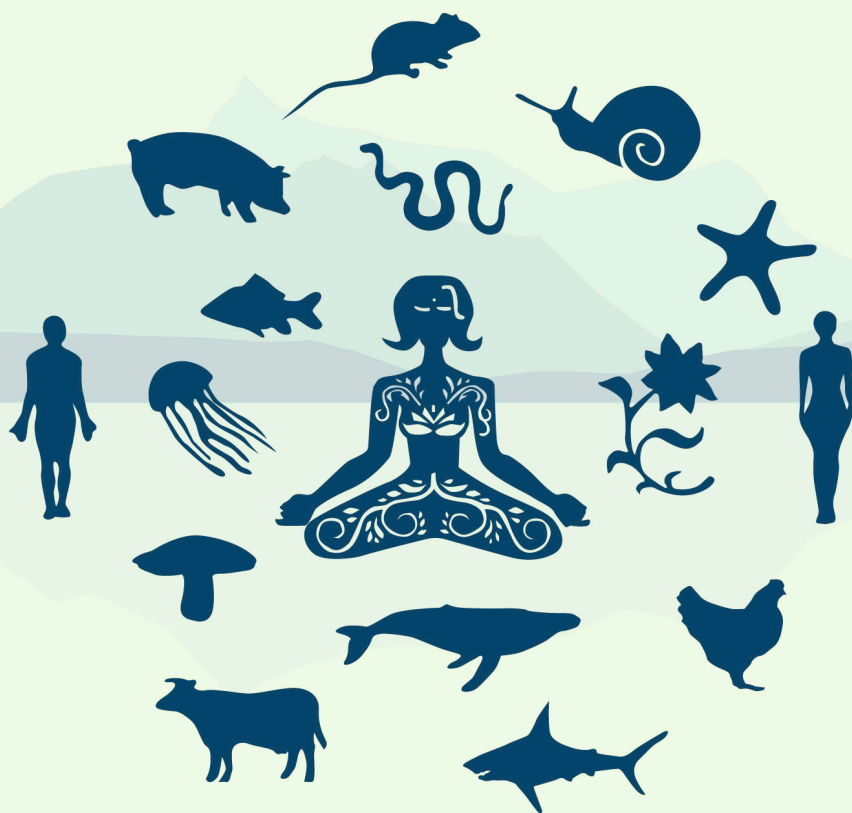


# Mindfulness & Nature

A TOOLKIT FOR YOUTHWORK



mind your mind

This publication is a result of the KA2 project “Mind your Mind: Synergies between mindfulness and nature-based methods” that was kindly supported and co-financed by the Erasmus + programme.



This publication was jointly prepared by:



The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the sponsors of the publication.

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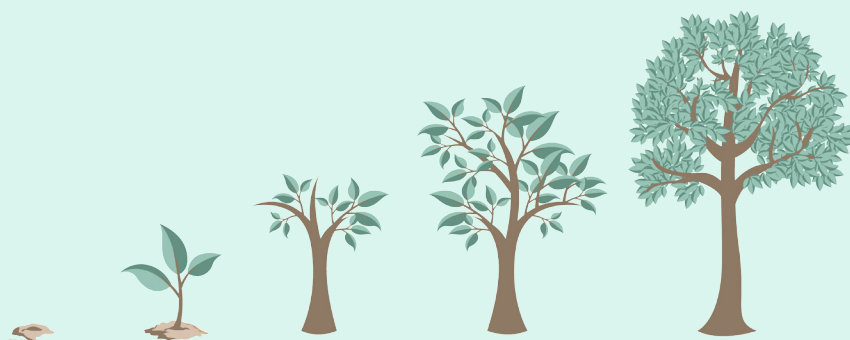
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# 1. SETTING THE SCENE



## 1.1 Understanding this book

This publication responds to the growing abuse of permanently connected technological devices in addition to the decreasing contact youngsters, as well as adults, have with nature, by providing innovative and inclusive non-formal educational tools for interested youthworkers, facilitators and educators.

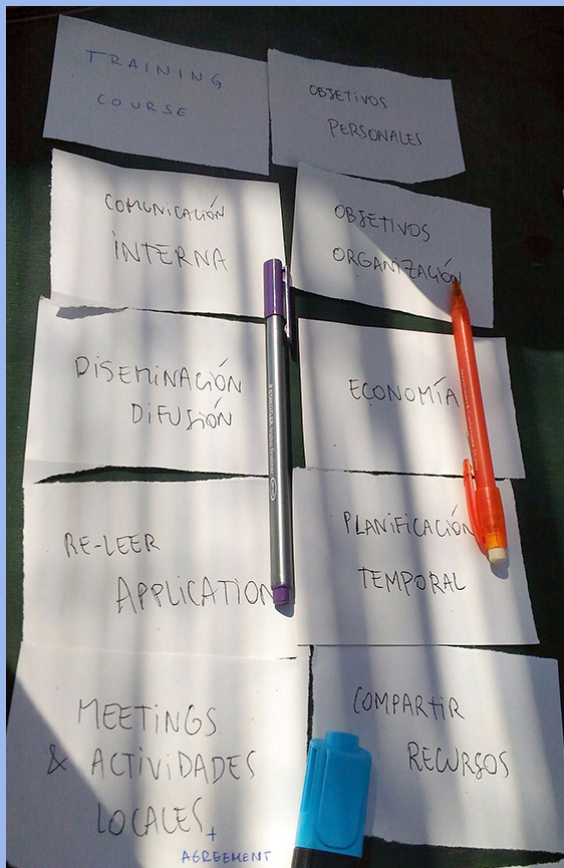
Nowadays, we are all becoming more and more used to using our mobiles and other screen devices all day round. This translates into a craving for quick access to content, permanent stimulation, generating “continuous partial attention”, which experts link to the undermining of social interactions, creativity and academic performance.

Another side to this urban, sedentary, screen-based lifestyle is the loss of contact with nature. Richard Louv, whom we interview in this book, has established the nature deficit disorder as a possible condition which especially affects young people detached from natural environments, also known as “ecological illiteracy”. Numerous studies have shown the importance of interacting with nature as it contributes to the health and well-being of young people, increasing their ability to concentrate and better manage emotions.

To address these issues, this manual provides specific non-formal tools based on the synergy of mindfulness and nature-based methodologies as well as complementary resources to implement them. We find that nature and mindfulness tools together have the potential to offer deep, meaningful and self-reflective experiences capable of providing real added-value to youthwork.

In this book you will find an introduction to the above mentioned topics, interviews with experts, our proposed activities, testimonials and extra resources. In other words, everything you will need to incorporate the nature and mindfulness in your work as facilitator or educator.

Additional materials are available at <http://mindandnature.site>, we would especially like to invite you to watch the videos that were specifically produced to explain the activities mentioned here.



Items to discuss in our initial meeting

## 1.2 Introduction to the Mind Your Mind project

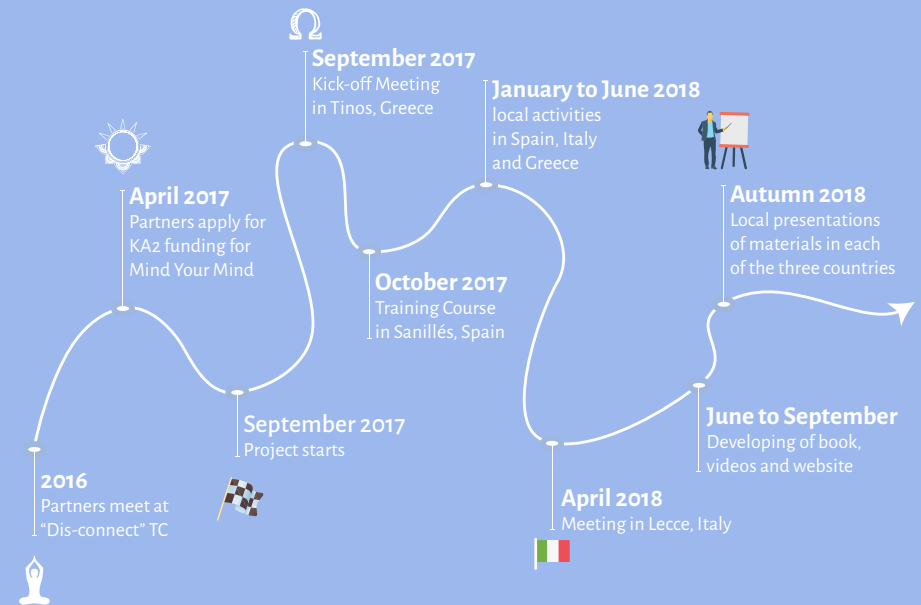
This book is a product of the project **Mind your Mind: Synergies between mindfulness and nature-based methods**, which “aims to offer innovative and inclusive high-quality non-formal education tools based on the synergistic combination

of mindfulness and nature-based methods”. Mind Your Mind was born from the need to address wellbeing issues affecting European youngsters, namely the excessive use of technological devices and the lack of contact with the natural environment.

Between September 2017 and November 2018 the project was carried out by three partners from Spain (*Viaje a la Sostenibilidad*), Italy (*Vulcanicamente*) and Greece (*Hellenic Youth Participation*), which have implemented local activities to develop and test the activities collected in the book.

The project coordinators created the proposal in a synergistic way using col-

laborative tools and frequent meetings with local young people. Once the project got approved, we met in **Tinos**, a picturesque Greek island where every phase of the project was addressed and discussed. In October, 15 youth workers met in **Sanillés**, in the Spanish Pyrenees. We had the opportunity to connect, interact and create a common understanding ensuring that the local activities in each country were following the *Mind your Mind framework*. New activities were created, networks were enriched and future



Milestones of Mind your Mind

partnerships were formed. In the following months, each organisation, together with its youth workers, carried out different local activities to develop and test the activities you will find in this book. Although the weather was not always our ally, we promoted the connection to nature regardless of the conditions and in various surroundings. Some activities were held in parks, in forests, in archaeological places, in rivers and by the sea. Working constantly in collaboration with our youngsters allowed us to adapt the activities and learn new approaches. During these months we had the chance to practise mindfulness and meditation, find the rhythm of our body and sync with our breath. Moreover, we enjoyed the opportunity to connect with people from the same city

who are also looking forward to connecting with nature.

In April, we had our last meeting, in city of **Lecce**, Italy. For four days, we went through every aspect of the project, we considered the local workshops and reviewed the impact on the youngsters. We divided the tasks and made all the necessary preparations to gather and develop the intellectual products of the project: the videos, the website and, of course, this book. All these resources aim to promote the use of mindfulness and nature-based methods in youthwork and in your everyday life.

Finally, in Autumn 2018, we presented the project and its products in local public events in Spain, Greece and Italy.

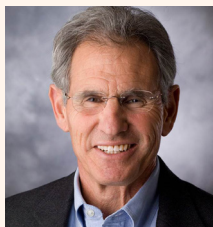
## 1.3 What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness, as understood in this book, is a set of methods (meditation among them) focused on learning how to more effectively manage attention. Through different techniques like breathing, self-awareness, sensory perception or body awareness we are trained to achieve a more effective management of attention, allowing us to stay in the present moment, with complete attention and acceptance. This state when one pays attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally is also referred to as mindfulness. We can track the origins of Mindfulness

in the Buddhist, Hindu and other traditions. In fact, mindfulness is the translation of the Pali word “sati”. There are two figures that have popularized mindfulness in the West: Thich Nhat Hanh, zen master born in Vietnam in 1926 and Jon Kabat-Zinn from the USA who began to popularize mindfulness in the 70's, fundamentally in the hospital field, after being introduced to meditation by Zen missionary when he was still a student. Today, mindfulness is increasingly popular, with a growing number of practitioners around the world. More and more scientific studies strongly suggest that mindfulness practices influence brain activity, decreasing stress, increasing concentration capacity and increasing self-control.



**Thích Nhật Hạnh** has been an activist for peace for more than four decades and was nominated for the Nobel Prize. He currently lives in France, in a Buddhist teaching community called Plum Village founded in 1982, near Bordeaux. He is a promoter of engaged buddhism, which seeks ways to apply the insights from meditation practice to situations of social and environmental injustice. He travels constantly around the world teaching and lecturing in addition to having written more than one hundred books.



**Jon Kabat-Zinn** is an former teacher of Medicine of US origin. His Zen and Yoga practices as well as his studies with different Buddhist masters led him to integrate parts of those teachings with the Western science, creating the technique of Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR).

These studies point to the positive effects on physical and psychological disorders (anxiety, attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity), as well as improve performance in professional, sporting or educational environments.

The activities that you will find in this book hold a “mindfulness” dimension, that is, they require participants to exercise self-awareness, observation, meditation, body awareness or sensory perception.

## 1.4 Is mindfulness relevant for youngsters?

Mindfulness is increasingly popular, with a growing number of people worldwide who are using them in their personal lives to produce a variety of beneficial outcomes. A multi study report<sup>1</sup> concludes that “Mindfulness [...] is especially effective for reducing anxiety, depression, and stress”. Regarding youngsters in particular, another study concludes

1. Khoury, B., Lecomte, T., Fortin, G., Masse, M., Therien, P., Bouchard, V., ... Hofmann, S. G. (2013, August). Mindfulness-based therapy: A comprehensive meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2013.05.005>

that “mindfulness may be beneficial for enhancing responses to stress among youngsters”.

As Sam Himelstein, mindfulness expert, from the Center for Adolescent Studies puts it:

*“the ability to respond rather than react is a critical skill for youth to learn. Responding rather than reacting is also an especially important skill for teens given that their brains are still developing—some research<sup>3</sup> suggests that the frontal lobe (that guides function and our ability to self-regulate) isn't fully developed in people until their late 20! This is why mindfulness is so important to teens; it can help them self-regulate their emotions and respond instead of impulsively reacting. Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”*

This suggests its usefulness in controlling the impulses associated to screen-devices, that often are so difficult to manage, particularly among teens and young adults.

Moreover, we believe this approach

2. Mendelson, T., Greenberg, M. T., Dariotis, J. K., Gould, L. F., Rhoades, B. L., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a school-based mindfulness intervention for urban youth. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 38(7), 985–994. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-010-9418-x>

3. Giedd, J. N., Blumenthal, J., Jeffries, N. O., Castellanos, F. X., Liu, H., Zijdenbos, A., ... Rapoport, J. L. (1999). Brain development during childhood and adolescence: a longitudinal MRI study. *Nature Neuroscience*, 2(10), 861–863. <https://doi.org/10.1038/13158>



has a strong inclusive dimension, proving effective in working with youngsters with disabilities, such as those experiencing psychological issues as stress, emotional pain, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and anxiety. Mindfulness can be particularly convenient when dealing with young people from a refugee or disadvantaged background as it doesn't require the command of local language or any previous skill or knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.5 Nature-Based Methods

By nature-based methods we don't mean conventional environmental education, although these can hold an educative value in terms of raising awareness regarding our the state of our planet. By nature-based methods we mean a type of outdoor activities that happen in a natural environment and that make active use of nature as a central element of the activity, not just a pleasant frame.

The benefits of using nature as an essential element for non-formal education with youngsters is supported by science.

4. Himelstein, S. (2013). *A mindfulness-based approach to working with high-risk adolescents. A Mindfulness-Based Approach to Working with High-Risk Adolescents* (pp. 1–195). Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203080856>

There is wide research confirming that contact with nature improves mental health<sup>5</sup> and enhances a sense of belonging. Positive impact includes stress reduction, a sense of coherence, improved self-confidence and self-discipline, creativity, stress alleviation and a broader sense of community<sup>67</sup>.

Playing and learning together in nature, free from the distractions of today's stimulation-intensive world allows benefits to occur in relatively short periods of time. Nature is believed to allow a sense of connectedness, meaning and purpose<sup>8</sup>. In a world full of social pressures, standards of conduct, and the demands of others; we argue that nature provides the youth with a great opportunity to appreciate that the world is alive, fascinating and meaningful.

5. Twohig-Bennett, C., Jones, A., (2018). *The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and metaanalysis of greenspace exposure and healthy outcomes*. *Environmental Research*, 166, 628–637. Accessible at <http://sci-hub.mu/http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2018.06.030>

6. Bratman, G. N., Daily, G. C., Levy, B. J., & Gross, J. J. (2015). *The benefits of nature experience: Improved affect and cognition*. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 138, 41–50. accessible at <https://innerlijkefocus.nl/wp-content/uploads/Benefits-of-nature-experience-improved-affect-and-cognition.pdf>

7. Wells, N. M. (2000). *At home with nature: Effects of "greenness" on children's cognitive functioning*. *Environment and Behavior*, 32(6), 775–795. accessible at [https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/jrnl/2000/nc\\_2000\\_wells\\_001.pdf](https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/jrnl/2000/nc_2000_wells_001.pdf)

8. Mayer, F. S., & Frantz, C. M. P. (2004). *The connectedness to nature scale: A measure of individuals' feeling in community with nature*. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 24(4), 503–515. accessible at <https://sci-hub.mu/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2004.10.001>

## 1.6 Anthropocentrism vs Ecocentrism

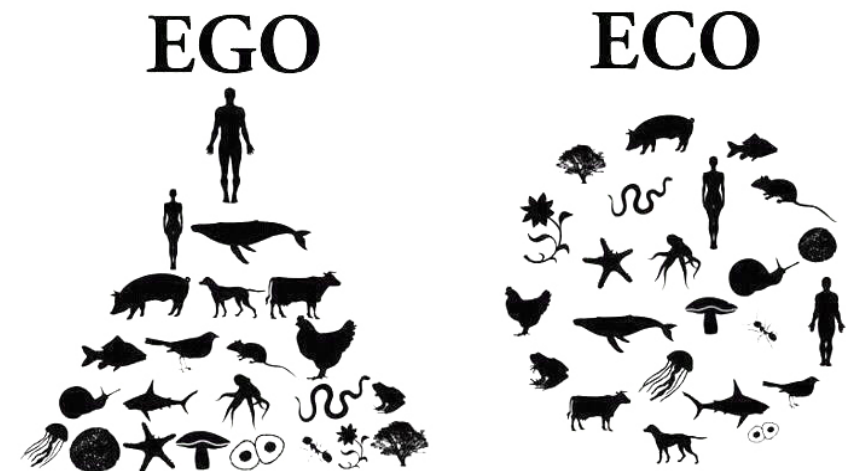
There is a very good argument to back the need to live in nature: we as human beings have evolved to be what we are today of years by living very close to nature during thousands of years. Our bodies, our senses and our mind is perfectly designed to feel at home in nature.

Returning to nature provides the opportunity of questioning the parameters we have learned in our lives. The prevailing paradigm in Western society assumes that human needs are more important than those of any other species. This conception correlates with the anthropocentric model that is causing irreparable damage to the Earth and consequently

to ourselves. Significantly, the influential ecologist Aldo Leopold already wrote in 1949: **'We abuse our planet because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see the planet as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.'**

In contrast, nature-based learning proposes an experiential understanding of the natural world as a whole. Nature-based methods proposed in these book work with an ecocentric model in which human beings are part of a complex and wonderful network of life in which everything is connected. The harm to any part of it inevitably affects the entire network.

Nature-based methods are nourished by different interrelated sources: native cultures, deep ecology, systems theory, ecofeminism, etc. They all provide both a



Anthropocentrism vs. Ecocentrism

theoretical basis and practical activities. Undoubtedly, one of the most important source of the knowledge is preserved and transmitted by the indigenous peoples, especially those from the American continent. Native peoples tend to consider that everything is alive. Each living being has a specific role to play and is deeply interrelated with all other beings. Everything on Earth forms part of the same family: the stones, the trees, the clouds, the animals that swim, fly, crawl or walk, the sun and the moon. Each of the beings encapsulates unique wisdom as a result of its adaptations and relationship with the other beings.

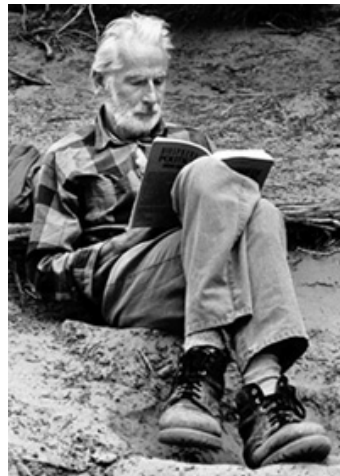
### On Deep Ecology

The “Deep Ecology” is a term coined in 1973 by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, which assumes a philosophical approach and a social movement that recognizes the right to life of all beings, not only that of humans. Joana Macy later developed it to offer a methodology to “experience “ deep ecology called “The work that Reconnects”.

Deep Ecology addresses both the causes of the destruction of our planet Earth and the management of emotions arising from it.

The practices of connection with Nature are based on the knowledge of ancestral peoples that have maintained the link with the Earth in a balanced and sustainable way. For indigenous peoples, the Earth does not belong to the people, it is the people who belong to the Earth.

Mother Earth, Pachamama, is a living organism. If we re-learn to use our senses, we will remember how to walk through this world connected to the web of life, becoming guardians and not unconscious destroyers.



Arne Naess

## 1.7

### Interview with Richard Louv



*Richard Louv is a journalist and author of nine books, including Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder, The Nature Principle: Reconnecting with Life in a Virtual Age. His books have been translated into 13 languages. He is co-founder and Chairman Emeritus of the Children & Nature Network, an organization helping build*

*the international movement to connect people and communities to the natural world. As a journalist and commentator, he has written for The New York Times, The Washington Post, and other newspapers and magazines.<sup>9</sup>*

1

***Do you think the awareness of the lack of contact with nature by the Western youth is growing among parents and the educational community? Which countries are ahead? Is there any case you know of where youth work specifically has incorporated the emphasis on nature?***

We appear to be much more knowledgeable than a decade ago about the connection between nature experience and health; but we are somewhat less aware of the connection to cognitive functioning and education – and that the barriers to nature experience are still substantial.

We now need to move more quickly into a mode of greater action, which goes beyond awareness, both at the family and the community level. In the U.S., much of the education establishment no longer sees independent, imaginary play, especially in natural settings, as “enrichment.” We’re hopeful that the culture is beginning to move in a different direction, though. We’re seeing new appreciation for these issues among parents, educators, pediatricians, mayors, and others. And we’re seeing some strong countertrends – such as the growth of nature-oriented schools.

**“We need to incorporate nature education, and knowledge of the positive benefits, into the training that every educator receives.”**

<sup>9</sup>. Find out more about the author at his personal website at [Richardlouv.com](http://Richardlouv.com)

We need to credit the many teachers who have insisted on exposing their students directly to nature, despite trends in the opposite direction – toward increasing immersion in technology and the devaluing of natural play. Teachers and schools can't do it alone – parents, policy-makers and whole communities must pitch in. And this topic needs to be addressed in education schools. And frankly, young people will need to take the lead. My sense, from speaking at colleges around the country, and of course to other groups, is that younger people are prepared to do just that.

2

*In our case, e.g in Athens, it is not easy to find time and resources to take youngsters out of the city to enjoy nature. During some of our project activities we have used parks. How to overcome the limitations of green areas in big cities? Can parks do the trick?*

**“Traditional connections to nature are vanishing quickly, along with biodiversity, but we don't have to travel far to find or nurture the rest of nature.”**

Any green space will provide some benefit to mental and physical wellbeing. In urban areas, more natural landscape can be found in a park, a quiet corner with a tree, or several pots with vegetables growing outside the door, even a peaceful place with a view of the sky and clouds. Connection to nature should be an everyday occurrence, and if we design our cities – including our homes, apartments, workplaces and schools – to work in harmony with nature and biodiversity this could become a commonplace pattern. We do know that the greater the biodiversity in an urban park, the greater the psychological benefits to people.

3

*What is the best way to convince the parents and educational community of the need for more contact with nature? How should we build the case for it?*

The only true convincing occurs through personal experience, but one way to augment our case is to show them the growing body of supportive research.

**“The research indicates that experiences in the natural world appear to offer great benefits to psychological and physical health, and the ability to learn, for children and adults.”**

The studies strongly suggest that time in nature can help many children learn to build confidence in themselves; reduce the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, calm them and help them focus. Schools with natural play spaces and nature learning areas appear to help children do better academically. There are some indications that natural play spaces can reduce bullying. Nature experience can also be a buffer to child obesity and overweight, and offers other psychological and physical health benefits. And nature experience helps grow conservation values, now and in the future. It's hard to truly value nature unless you learn to love it in person.

called the Greatest Generation (people 72 and older) are the least lonely. Next, Baby Boomers, Millennials, and Generation Z (born in the mid-1990s and early 2000s) – each generation, from the oldest to the youngest, is lonelier than the one that came before. Increased and particular ways of using social media may be one cause, but there are others. One reason is, I believe, species loneliness. Each of those generations, from the oldest to the youngest, has had ever-decreasing contact with the natural world.

There are many other benefits, and more supportive research comes out almost weekly. The Children & Nature Network Web site has compiled a large body of studies, reports and publications that are available for viewing or downloading.<sup>10</sup>

4

**How is nature connected to the social dimension?**

One of the greatest health issues of our time is loneliness.

**“Nature, as it turns out, can be an antidote to loneliness.”**

Several recent studies have shown that, contrary to the popular view that older people are the loneliest generation, the opposite appears to be true. A nationwide survey by the health insurer Cigna, released this year, found that loneliness is not only widespread in the USA – 50 percent of people surveyed reported some level of loneliness – but that older people who belong to what is sometimes

<sup>10</sup>. <http://www.childrenandnature.org/documents/C118/>



Interview with Heike Freire<sup>11</sup>

*Heike Freire is an expert in pedagogical innovation and a writer. Her research on the relationship between health, well-being and learning in nature has made her a reference point for Green Pedagogy, an educational approach she has been developing since the 1990s. She is the author of several books address these issues, translated to several languages.*

### **What is green pedagogy?**

Green Pedagogy includes a set of concepts, ideas and strategies, whose effectiveness has been widely demonstrated, to accompany the development and learning of children and young people, in harmony with natural processes. For me, pedagogy is not exclusively a set of methods and techniques to get children and young people to learn and integrate better in society, but rather a way of understanding the human being that materializes in a project with some principles and values. That has a meaning, a reason. Viktor Frankl said that whoever has a “why” can withstand any “how”.

### **Why is contact with nature so important?**

Nature is essential for our species, especially in childhood but also in other stages of life, because it is the medium from which we have emerged and in which we have developed over hundreds of thousands of years. Our bodies are perfectly prepared to grow optimally in that environment. Since the 90s, Environmental Psychology has not failed to verify, in numerous experiments, the benefits of the natural world for the health, welfare, development and learning of children and young people. At a time when most people suffer from a deficit of nature, it is even more important and necessary, if possible.

### **To benefit from these advantages, is it enough just go out to the countryside?**

Obviously not. Contact with nature is a way of being, of living and relating to other living beings. With the urbanization of the minds and the periphery of the cities, we can perfectly be in an idyllic place, completely closed. It is also not enough to go into nature once in a while. A more daily relationship is necessary.

<sup>11</sup>. Part of this interview is based on the one that Almudena García made for Ludus.org.es

### **What do you think about the use and abuse of screens?**

Personally, I have come to the conclusion that exposure to screens should be minimized, especially for 12 to 14-year-olds. But fulfilling this goal is very difficult for most families and often the insistence of parents is counterproductive. Therefore, the healthiest option is to achieve a more rational use.

### **Do you think that experiencing nature can itself promote an ecological conscience or should it be deliberately promoted?**

Research shows that the childhood of people with greater ecological awareness is characterized by intense and frequent experiences of contact with the natural world in the company of an adult (usually a family member) a lover of nature, who has conveyed to them the love of life and those values not through discourses but through example.

Therefore, I would say that experiencing nature is a necessary condition, but not enough.

In addition, we have to understand the ecological conscience as a way of being and existing in the world, not just as content, certain behaviors or attitudes. If we can talk about ecological awareness, it is because there is an anti-ecological form of consciousness, cut off from the environment and egotistical, which is promoted by today's society. To expand ecological awareness it is necessary to educate others and ourselves; to create a new culture.

## **HEIKE'S TIPS FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG ADULTS**

*Carry out group meetings in the natural environment that allow them to get to know themselves and each other better, while developing conversation and relationship skills, team building and teamwork, and survival skills.*

*Take on challenges and build projects based on your own desires and experiences. Some of these challenges can work as nucleus experiences and rites of passage into adulthood.*

*Work the imagination as it is the main tool to start creating your own life in the real world.*

*Get involved in environmental care tasks (reforestation, cleaning of the environment, work in farms, in orchards, programs to promote recycling, reuse, repair, etc.).*

*Take part as activists in campaigns for the defense of the environment.*

## Interview with Dr. Javier García Campayo



*Licensed in Medicine. Psychiatrist at the Miguel Servet University Hospital. Accredited Professor of the Department of Medicine, Psychiatry and Dermatology of the University of Zaragoza. Director of the Master Course in Mindfulness. Director of the Research Group "Mental Health in Primary Care".*

**At what point is research today (September 2018) on the benefits of practicing mindfulness? And more particularly, how can teenagers and young people benefit from it?**

The benefits of mindfulness practice have been confirmed by multiple research studies. In fact, mindfulness is one of the areas of neuroscience which is being researched a lot, not only because of its usefulness in different environments, but because it will allow us to better understand how the brain works. Mindfulness is useful both in dealing with psychological illnesses such as depression, anxiety, addictions or bulimia; as well as with medical diseases such as hypertension, cancer, chronic pain and all stress-related disorders. In the case of adolescents and young people, what the studies confirm is that mindfulness increases attention and concentration, facilitates a better regulation of emotions, increases prosocial behavior and the relationship with parents as well as improving academic performance.

**How can mindfulness be incorporated into the educational environment, either in the school context or outside it? There are different ways to incorporate mindfulness in schools and institutes:**

The way in which youth workers and educators who are not teachers can incorporate it is the following:

These professionals must follow a general training program in mindfulness FOR THEMSELVES. If a teacher does not practice, he/she cannot teach, and will not be able to transmit it. A minimum period of 6-12 months of personal practice is recommended before you start using it with children.

Once you have incorporated the practice of mindfulness into your personal life, the way you apply it depends on the age of the child. The younger the children, the shorter the exercises are and the more directed and playful the components. The older they are, the more they resemble the exercises used with adults, so they can be longer, less directed and without so much of a ludic aspect. The time dedicated to younger school children (6-10 years) can be 5 minutes per day, which can be extended to 7-8 minutes per day from 10 to 14 years, and up to 10 minutes per day for the oldest.

**What possibilities do you think nature offers for the practice of mindfulness?**

Nature is the ideal place to practice mindfulness because the mind has fewer external stimuli, which results in fewer negative thoughts and emotions. In fact, retreats of both mindfulness and meditative traditions are usually performed in nature for this reason. Studies confirm that the same hours of practice in a retreat are more effective than those hours done at home or in a practice center in a city. The reason for this is thought to be, as we have said, that the mind has fewer external stimuli and its ability to learn and retain what is learned is greater.

**Do you have any specific information about the penetration of mindfulness into the educational field in European countries, especially the Mediterranean ones? What future do you predict for the practice of mindfulness in educational and youth contexts?**

According to data from the middle of this year (2018), around 1,000 schools and institutes throughout Spain have been using mindfulness in some way as have 10-15% of public and private universities. In other Mediterranean countries such as Portugal, Italy or Greece penetration of mindfulness is lower. Spain is at the forefront of practice, teaching and research in mindfulness in southern Europe. In the whole of Europe, Great Britain is the absolute leader. The British government has committed to invest millions of pounds in the next 10 years to include mindfulness in health but, above all, in education. The British consider, with reason, that if the whole next generation receives mindfulness training at school from the age of 6 to 16, society will change for the better.

The future of mindfulness in the educational and university environment in these countries is assured by the scientific evidence on its properties and because there is increasing sensitivity towards this topic among professors, students, parents of students and educational authorities.

## 2.

## ACTIVITIES

### **Note to Reader:**

*All the activities are primarily designed to be implemented in the natural environment. They can also be adapted inside a room paying special attention to create a “natural” feeling in the space by adding leaves, rocks, flowers, spices, fruits, etc. Some background music with sounds of nature or relaxing instruments can also add value to each activity if conducted indoors.*

*All the activities can be found on YouTube in the playlist “Mind your Mind” with instructions and detailed guidance from our team.*

**Watch videos at <http://bit.ly/mymvideos> or Scan the QR code**



# Tips

*for the implementation  
of the activities:*

1

*Prepare the participants for outdoor activities and the material/equipment they may need.*

2

*Check the weather conditions.*

3

*Inquire about their status (mental, physical) and offer adequate support.*

4

*Create an environment which invites participants to leave their comfort zone but allows them to return to it if they wish.*



Scan me

# 1.

## CONNECTING WITH NATURE - AWAKENING THE SENSES

*Designed by Nuane Tejedor inspired by a long lineage of nature-based practices from indigenous people*

**Overview:** This activity introduces a reflection about our connection with nature. In practical terms, it questions the sensorial parameters that we have learned and teaches us, through practice, a new way of feeling and relating to the web of life.

**Objectives:** Awaken senses  
Connect with the earth  
Form part to the web of life

**Materials:** None

**Duration:** 90'

## Activity Description

🕒 90'

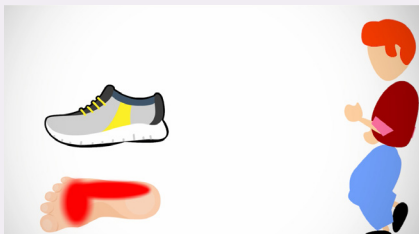
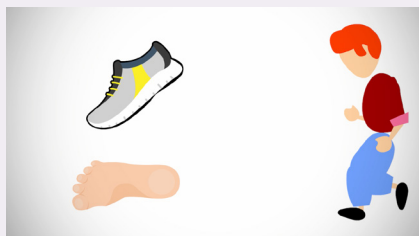
- 1 The activity begins by **walking in nature**, everyone walks freely for about 10 minutes.
- 2 After a short walk, we **make a circle** to talk about how we usually walk in nature. **The facilitator asks the group:** "Are you aware of how you usually walk in nature? Were you noisy? Did you pay attention to what was happening around you? Did you notice your surroundings? How do the creatures living around see us?" Some of the consequences of our behaviour in nature is that the beings who live in nature perceive humans as predators and they flee or hide. This lack of awareness, in combination with the deep individualistic behaviour of the Western society, may generate a perception of being disconnected from nature that may make us feel alone and lost.  
**How can we change this?** By recovering the senses of being in nature, remembering that we are part of the web of life, loving and caring about everything that is around us as we love and take care of ourselves. We cannot disconnect from what we are. To feel again that we are connected to nature we are going to increase our "awareness zone". Instead of bothering wildlife by sending out our own noises, we're going to expand our circle of awareness. Swapping impact for attention, we shrink our zone of interference and awaken our natural senses.
- 3 The facilitator invites the group to enter the forest again but in a different way, by increasing the area of awareness instead of the area of discomfort. Let's re-educate our senses!

Find the video of the activity here: [🔗 https://youtu.be/xvFk99M7FZ4](https://youtu.be/xvFk99M7FZ4)



## FOX WALK

Our first activity is the fox walk. Here, we try to move in a silent and conscious way through the woods. We step slowly, aware of each movement, planning where we will place each step. By rolling our foot onto the ground, starting from the outer edge of the sole until all the foot is in contact, we can feel our way and avoid broken branches and other noises. We can listen to the sounds of the forest around us, as the forest listens to us. Take the opportunity to practise fox walking on the way to form a circle for the next step.



## SNIFF OF THE DOG



Choose a partner. One becomes the leader and the other is blindfolded, or with his/her eyes closed. Please, bear in mind that leading a sightless person in nature needs to be done with respect.

Carefully, guide your blindfolded partner away from the circle, and choose an element from nature (rock, leaf, flower, etc) and let the other person smell it while having his or her eyes closed. It might help to crush it between your fingers, just under their nose. Your partner cannot touch it, only smell it.

Then, lead your partner back to the circle. Once they are back at their starting point, it's time to take the blindfold off and search for the thing you gave them to smell, finding the spot where it originated. They can use their body's memory of the walk, terrain, and sounds, as well as smells, to search out the thing you chose for them to find. Now, let them go back to the circle and swap roles.

## EAGLE'S EYES

The group will all walk along a path, looking ahead but concentrating on the wider picture, training the peripheral vision by looking for objects that should not be in the forest. We walk in single file, at intervals of several metres. There will be some hidden objects on the path, that the facilitator has placed before starting. The objective is to see those objects but with a broader vision of the whole, without focusing on details.

What can we see with our eagle's eye, that should not be in the forest? Maybe a plastic toy? A book? Or a cup... How many objects did the participants spot?

We are used to looking at details, but in nature, the animals are more attentive to the whole.

Walk the path again, but this time, look around you. Count how many items were hidden on the way as you return to the circle to talk about how many things you have seen and reflect on your "everyday vision".



## DEER'S EARS

The next activity is called the Deer's ears. Divide the group into pairs, making sure that each pair has a few metres of space around them. One person closes their eyes, the other tries to fox walk up to him or her without being heard and touch them.

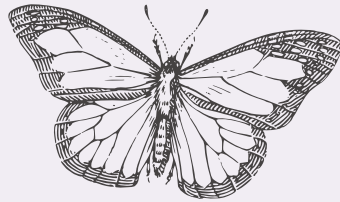


The rule is that if they hear their partner creeping up on them, they should point at him/her. If the direction is correct, the partner has to go back to the starting point.



They should take it in turns to close their eyes and listen like a deer, or walk like a fox. The aim is to try and see if they can creep right up and touch their partner.

## CARESS OF THE BUTTERFLY



The last activity is all about training the sense of touch, it's called the Caress of the Butterfly.

In pairs again, one person with their eyes shut, will play the butterfly. Their partner chooses a stick or branch and hands it to "the butterfly". The partner who is "blind" then takes time to explore and feel the stick, using only his/her hands.

After a minute, the butterflies give back the sticks and their partners gather all the sticks into a pile.

The butterflies now open their eyes and have to recognise their stick from within the pile. The partners then swap roles, and repeat the activity.

4

After this awakening of the senses everyone returns alone - and in their own pace - through the forest, trying to sharpen the new senses and feel the changes as a result of a new vision of the environment.

## Questions for reflection:

Did you observe any changes in your environment by relating to it in a new way?

Have you been able to see and hear more animals?

Has your perception changed something?

Can you feel that you are part of a life's web in which everything is interconnected?

*Designed by Sara Marzo*

Duration: **40'**

*This activity can be a getting-to-know-each-other and also a team-building activity. The participants can also work in small groups or in couples, sharing their stories in more detail. Modifying it, it can also be used as evaluation to express how participants feel through mirroring with nature.*

 40'

- Credit: <http://mamapapabubba.com>

# 3.

## MEDITATION WITH TREES

*Designed by Nuane Tejedor*

**Overview:** This activity is inspired by our Celtic ancestors and attempts to connect us with nature and value trees as living beings.

**Objectives:** Connect with the elements of nature  
Develop communication with a non-human being  
Calm down the mind and train intuition

**Materials:** None

**Duration:** 60'

Find the video of the activity here: [https://youtu.be/69\\_cSMnhqRc](https://youtu.be/69_cSMnhqRc)

## Activity Description

🕒 60'

### Background information for the trainer

#### Note

The following text is offered to the trainer, who can mention it to the group if felt appropriate in order to provide some context and background to the activity.

Trees have been worshiped throughout history by different cultures. A tree is a universal symbol and its archetype is a testimony of the existence of a primordial bond that crosses cultures and times.



In the West, the Celts have left the deepest traces because of their close relationship with nature and the knowledge they drew from it.

Trees became the central axis of their mythology. The Celts based their beliefs on nature as it provided them with shelter, warmth and food. The trees were seen as the pure essence of nature.

The druids, Celtic priests, analyzed the signals they received from nature in order to be able to converse with it. They used to summon their gods and goddess through the trees, trying to obtain the favour or “words of wind and earth”.



The trees were believed to be a source of energy for the Celtic people, the physical and divine bond with the three points which were represented by:

- The trunk of the tree - that signified the material world where they extracted wood and food
- The world of dreams, represented by the roots of the tree that entered the subsoil, where the secret of the wisdom of the Earth is.
- The crown of the tree and its branches - that were directed towards the sky and were moved by the wind; for the Celts, it was the part of the tree that signified the divine plane of consciousness, the elevated suprahuman plane.

The trees were so important to the Celtic peoples that even the druids and the druidesses lived among them and rarely approached the village and mixed with the people.

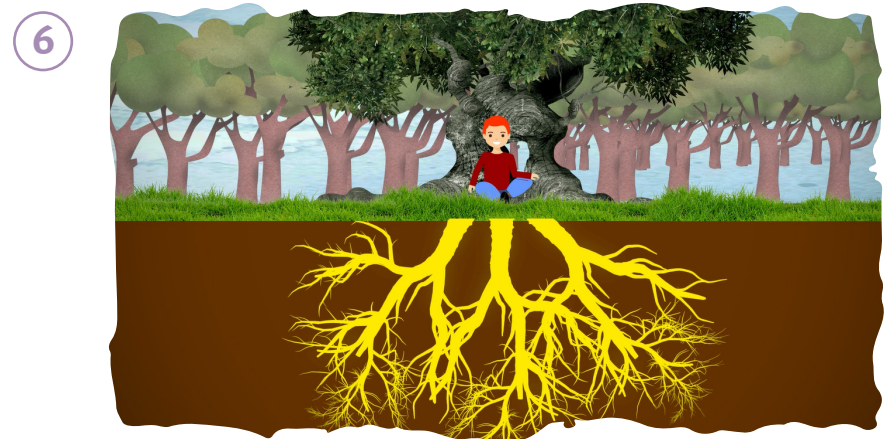
### Step-by-step instructions:

- 1 The facilitator gives the guidelines in **advance** and also **supports** the team during the process. The team is invited to walk around in **silence**, allowing themselves to be guided by intuition.
- 2 Participants begin to walk towards nature. They walk feeling the earth under their feet for a few moments trying compassionately to silence out their minds. The participants start moving away from the group and begin to **connect with the trees**, the majestic and pure beings, which kindly give us oxygen and which teach us great lessons about the roots, the growth and the connection between the sky and the earth.
- 3 Each person **in their own time** walks until one of the trees calls them, in some way. Maybe it sheds a leaf or moves its branches as you walk nearby. There may be a bird that sings, or the tenderness of a tree which inspires a person because it is a thin tree or they can even feel that it sends out a signal.

- 4 When the participants find a tree-friend, they introduce themselves (it does not need to be out loud, they are very advanced and wise beings) and ask permission to approach it. If the tree gives its permission, the participants may get closer and “make contact”. They can caress or hug it, place their forehead on its trunk, bring their body closer and observe what happens.



- 5 Then, the participants sit on the ground, observe the details, every inch of the earth is full of life, visible or not, and they are invited to observe it.



They should bring their conscience to the **roots** of that majestic being, which are usually as large as its visible part. They feel the

trees' roots sinking into the fertile soil, holding the tree tightly so it can touch the sky. Then they observe without judgment their own roots... How they are? Do they allow them to grow tall?

- 7 Now it is time to reflect on the **trunk** of that being that is next to them. They can observe the signs of its growth, its strength, what sustains it and observe in their lives what it is that sustains them, gives them strength. They can think about the tree trunk of their life here and now.
- 8 Now they raise their eyes to the **crown** of the tree. What is there? Are there fruits, or seeds, in this season? Observe the different branches of your own life. What expresses your connection to the sky? What are the flowers, fruits and seeds of your life?
- 9 After the reflection still beneath the tree, let your mind calm down. Remain quiet for a while, in silence, without doing anything just being there...
- 10 Before leaving, they can ask if the tree has something to tell them. Ask and listen. Staying quiet and accepting what comes, without trying to rationalise whether it is the tree or their own state of mind that answers. It doesn't matter really!
- 11 Before leaving it is important to **thank** the tree, in whichever way feels right.
- 12 To close the activity, the facilitator invites the team to come back together to form a circle. They are encouraged to share and reflect what they have lived and to listen openly.

### Questions for reflection:

What has this activity meant to you?

What did you learn?

What is the meaning of the roots, trunk and crown in your life?

Would you like to share something of your relationship with the trees?

### Notes

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# 4.

## THE RIVER OF LIFE

Designed by Sara Marzo

**Overview:** This activity guides participants to reflect on their lives via the metaphor of a river.

**Objectives:** Connect with oneself and planet Earth  
Stimulate sharing among participants  
Trace the origins of personal motivation

**Materials:** Sheets of paper, crayons, colours, tapes, scissors, etc

**Duration:** 40'

### Tip

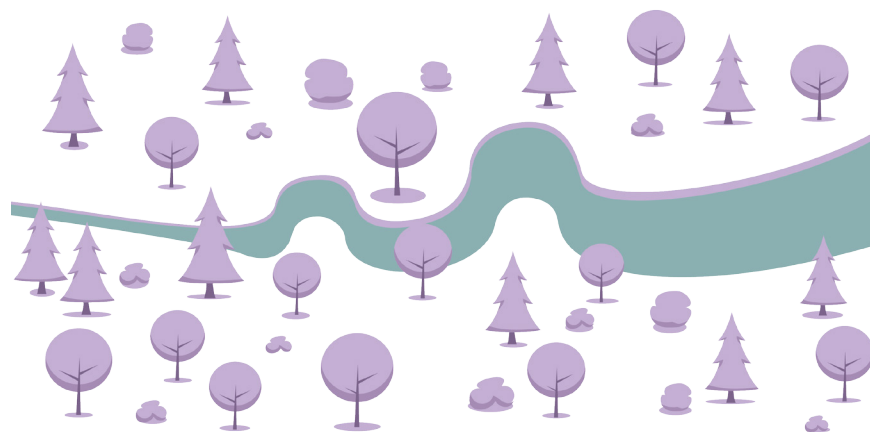
*This activity can be a getting-to-know-each-other and also a team-building activity. The participants can also share their drawings in small groups or in couples.*

Find the video of the activity here: <https://youtu.be/q4RPaNrzKRo>

## Activity Description

40'

- 1 The facilitator invites the group to sit in a circle and close their eyes. The facilitator leads the team to a guided meditation introducing life conceptualised as a **river**, with plains, waterfalls, fields of flowers, obstacles and amazing views.
- 2 The facilitator then provides a sheet of paper for each participant and asks them to take a trip into nature alone. On this trip, the group should reflect on what events brought them to this moment and this project. It may be related to mindfulness, nature or any other input that the participant feels is relevant.



- 3 The facilitator provides a station with colours, crayons, tape etc, and suggests the participants collect objects from nature to include in the drawing/collage which will illustrate this river of life up to the current moment. The participants are encouraged to respectfully collect natural materials, which can be used for drawing directly, or stick them onto the sheet, being mindful about the natural resources.

4

Once they finish their river, they go back to the group and share their stories.

### *Questions for reflection:*

What story does each river tell?

How was the experience of comparing your life with a river?

What did you discover about the events that have brought you here today?

Notes 

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# 5.

## 5 SENSES

Designed by Eleni Kardamitsi

**Overview:** This activity attempts to bring moment to moment awareness through our senses

**Objectives:** Connect with the present moment  
Raise awareness of our senses

**Materials:** None

**Duration:** 10'

**Tip** This activity can be used as an energizer or a short activity to bring focus to the group before a challenging activity. Encourage the participants to use this short activity in any kind of setting.

Find the video of the activity here: <https://youtu.be/jEMMYJkfgo>

## Activity Description

10'

- 1 The facilitator invites everyone to sit calm with a straight back and try to explore their senses in the **here** and **now**.
- 2 Without moving or speaking, the facilitator asks the group to identify:
  - a. 5 things that they can **see** (for example, their shoes, the wall, the table, etc),
  - b. 4 things that they can **hear**
  - c. 3 things that they can **feel** in their skin
  - d. 2 things that they can **smell**,
  - e. 1 thing that they can **taste** (our mouth always has a flavour).



- 3 The facilitator reminds to the group that they can use this quick check-in any time they want to bring themselves to the present moment, in the queue, on the street, at work etc.

### Questions for reflection:

How do you feel now in comparison with when you started the exercise?  
Was it easy to focus on each sense?  
Which was the most difficult sense for you?

# 6.

## YOUR PLACE ON EARTH

*Designed by Nuane Tejedor and Carlos Buj inspired by the native American wisdom*

- Overview:** This activity is inspired by Native American wisdom about the sacred places in nature. The wisdom of the Earth that comes from indigenous peoples speaks of sacred places in which for some specific reason we feel a special bond with nature. They are places where we experience feelings of well-being and calm, so it is easy to enter into meditative states.
- Objectives:** Connect with nature  
Explore the depths of our own being  
Learn how to find calm and energizing places, to gain a better perspective of the problems of everyday life
- Materials:** Notebook (nature-journal), pen, somewhere to sit (if it's wet), natural environment
- Duration:** 90'

Find the video of the activity here: <https://youtu.be/il27lszJtkU>

## Activity Description

🕒 90'

- 1 The facilitator provides the group with an envelope and invites them to walk out into nature. After a few metres from the starting point, they open the envelope and read the first message. Each envelope contains six papers with instructions and the exact time they should dedicate to each message. The messages have the following contents:

### Paper 1 - 🕒 15 minutes

1. Look around you and within yourself and find a place in nature that seems right for some reason.
2. Let yourself be guided by your intuitions... follow a butterfly or a ray of sunshine among the leaves of the trees.
3. Stop where you feel comfortable. Remember you must be able to return in a few minutes.
4. Choose your place in a non-rational way, it means trying to follow your feelings, do not judge yourself if it's right or not... Just be where you want to be.
5. When you find a place where you feel comfortable, show respect and ask permission to all the beings that inhabit it. Be aware that in that place everything is going to be watching you.
6. Once you have found your magical place, sit down and read the next message...

### Paper 2 - 🕒 10 minutes

*"Welcome to your place on Earth! This is what we will call it. It is your own space in nature at this time. Everyone has the right to a home where the sun, the stars, the open fields, the big trees and the smiling flowers show the way to a life without interruptions" - Jens Jensen.*

Reflect on this quote for a moment ... now ask yourself: *Why have you felt that this is your space, why did you choose it? Why do you feel good here?*

**ACTION: Automatic writing:** 1. take your nature journal and a pen. 2. Concentrate on the impression and the feeling you have in your space. 3. Start writing and do not stop! Write for 5 minutes anything that comes to mind. You do not have to share it with anyone, nobody has to read it. It can even be illegible, just follow your instincts and try to express yourself. Maybe some interesting things will arise.

### Paper 3 - ⌚ 25 minutes

*"Modern life narrows our senses until our focus of attention is mainly visual, tailored to the screens, on the contrary, nature accentuates all the senses" - Richard Louv.*

**1.** Imagine that you are a child who has never been in nature and you are in this place for the first time. **2.** Try to absorb as much information as possible and make sense of what you have around you. **3.** Observe the trees around you, their trunk, their leaves ... be careful, because it is possible that some leaf may fall and dance in the air near you. **4.** Sense the temperature of the air, if there is wind, where does it come from? Is there humidity? What kind of living beings can you see or hear? Can you guess what they are saying? **5.** Touch the earth with your hands, what kind of soil is there? Is it sandy, dark, hard, loose, is there fresh grass, or is thirsty for rain? **6.** Perceive the light in that place, what are the different tonalities of colours that change subtly with light? Look at the sky, are there clouds? Which shape can you see? What does it smell like? Try to look at the small details and also the whole set.

- Have you discovered something new about your space in the last minutes?
- Do you feel different in relation to your space now? How? Why?

### Paper 4 - ⌚ 15 minutes

*"Not long ago, the soundtrack of a young man's days and nights was mostly composed of nature notes, most people were raised on earth, worked the land and were often buried in the same land. The relationship was direct." - Richard Louv.*

**ACTION:** Reflect on the following questions:

- How did your ancestors (grandparents, great grandparents ...) relate to nature?
- How is your relationship with nature compared to theirs?
- Now ask yourself: Why am I here at this moment? Let the response surface on its own, without any effort. If you feel like it, write in your nature journal what you want to remember or express...

### Paper 5 - ⌚ 5 minutes.

**ACTION:** Touch the ground and the grass, with the palm of the left hand while slowly reading these words (that is, speaking aloud):

*"This is what connects us, this is what connects humanity, all beings on this planet and also the earth itself, this is what we have in common."*

Repeat this as many times as you want. You can express it in any way you feel appropriate.

### Paper 6 - ⌚ 10 minutes

It's time to say goodbye to your place on Earth. You can say thank you to the place and its beings and SMILE! Now is the time to return quietly to the starting point. Please respect your own silence and also the silence of the other participants during the time you consider appropriate.

**Tip**

Find a printable version of these instructions at <http://viajealasostenibilidad.org/your-place-on-earth/>

**2**

Form a circle to share the experience and reflect on what we have lived.

### Questions for reflection:

How did you feel in your chosen place?

Do you think that in difficult times nature can help you?

How was your mind in that place?

Have you reflected on the relationship between our ancestors and nature?

## 7.

## NATURE MANDALA

Designed by Ioanna Skaltsa

**Overview:** This activity connects the natural elements with the art of Mandala.

**Objectives:** Explore the oneness with nature  
Be creative  
Express and discover new perspectives

**Materials:** Elements found in nature (leaves, branches, flowers, shells, etc).

**Duration:** 30'

## Tip

*You can ask the participants to bring natural objects from home, which they can also add to the mandala. It is an opportunity to appreciate them in a new way, perhaps from a new perspective.*

Find the video of the activity here: <https://youtu.be/b7V9wZ8JXJI>

## Activity Description

30'

## Background information for the trainer

The Sanskrit word “Mandala” translates to “circle”. Mandala is also a ritual symbol of the universe, the cosmos, the wholeness. This simple shape, with all points equal around its centre has given humans a metaphor of the infinite. The cosmic circle, the snake biting its tail and the sphere whose centre is everywhere are all mandalas, as well as the brightly coloured guides for meditation we recognise from the East.

## Step-by-step instructions:

- 1 The group meets in a circle and the facilitator explains the meaning and the symbolism of mandala. He or she explains that they will work together to create a mandala out of natural elements, symbolising and enacting our connection with nature. They will work together in silence.
- 2 The group is divided in 4 smaller groups and scatters around the area gathering natural elements in order to create a mandala related to the topic (connect with nature). The intention is to collect things only by moving them from one place to the other, without cutting or destroying anything.
- 3 The participants start moving slowly with consciousness and they observe their connection or their invasion to the natural world. They start looking for elements exploring the energy in them, their story and their strength.
- 4 The facilitator reminds the teams to respect the elements they find and when they collect them from their original place, they are encouraged to thank them.



- 5 Once they have collected everything they need, they meet and without speaking they start creating a mandala with the elements of the Earth, trying to add another perspective other than what they had in mind when they first chose them.
- 6 When they finish they spend some time talking about their mandala and reflecting. In the end, the groups offer the mandala to the place that hosted them as a gift.

### *Questions for reflection:*

What happened during the making of the mandala between you and the group, and between you and nature?

What would you do differently if you could do it again?

What did you learn from this activity?

How are you going to use it in your everyday life?

### *Notes*

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## 8.

# SENSORIAL MINDFULNESS

*Designed by Eleni Kardamitsi*

**Overview:** This activity connects our senses to mindfulness and creativity.

**Objectives:** Explore senses  
Be creative  
Express oneself

**Materials:** Dishes where each one has different items (cocoa, cinnamon, rice, flour, lentils, soap).

**Duration:** 30'

Find the video of the activity here: <https://youtu.be/7dh-vYodeWY>

## Activity Description

30'



Credit: <https://www.vecteezy.com>

- 1 The facilitator gives a dish to each of the members of the team and asks them to feel its content, smell it, see it, hear it.
- 2 Then, the facilitator asks to create an image that represents how the participants are feeling at that moment. This image can be stable or changing according to the texture of the material which may bring the attention of the group to the present moment.
- 3 In the end, each member presents his or her image to the group and they all reflect on the experience.

### Questions for reflection:

How was the experience for you?

What did you discover from the exploration of the senses?

Did you connect to your material?

## 2.2

# MINDFULNESS MEDITATION GUIDELINES

By Michalis Chatzis

*“Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment” Buddha.*

As it is presented in previous pages, mindfulness can be very useful when dealing with young people.

The following pages will familiarize the reader with the specific aspects that should be taken into account regarding mindfulness techniques.

### ***Different forms of mindfulness practice: formal and informal***

A mindfulness program includes the introduction and cultivation of both formal and informal perspectives of mindfulness meditation practice.

#### **Formal mindfulness practices**

*The Body Scan Meditation  
Sitting Meditation  
Walking Meditation*

#### **Informal mindfulness practices**

*Awareness of pleasant and unpleasant events  
Routine events*

### ***Things to take into account before leading a mindfulness practice***

The experience of mindfulness meditation is an intense practice to focus on our inner dimensions of being. However, it may cause sensations of physical or mental discomfort. These are considered physical reactions, which should be treated with kindness and compassion. Nevertheless, when we practice mindfulness meditation, a cautious eye should be kept on each participant both during and after the session in case sensations of discomfort or general distress arise.

#### **PRECAUTIONS**

It is usually assumed that participants taking part in the sessions are healthy individuals, not having been diagnosed with any specific mental illness. For this reason it is important to receive a **verbal** or a **written consent** from **each** participant concerning any mental health issues they may have or any form of treatment (eg. medication) they may be undergoing. This should be conducted privately, before the enrolment of any participant.

In the event that there is a highly motivated individual, who is undergoing any mental treatment, advice by his/her mental health provider on the appropriateness of the practice is highly recommended.

#### **SETTING THE SCENE**

The activity should be conducted in an area sufficient to ensure space for each participant. They could be seated in a circle or even randomly. During this time, it is suggested that the facilitator remains silent while the participants find their place and settle down. It is also advisable for the facilitator to promote a **silent attitude** and maintain it until the end of the practice.

## Before the mindfulness practice

### BODY POSITION

Propose that the participants find a comfortable and alert position, keeping their back and head in a straight line. This position should be maintained throughout the duration of the practice and -as far as possible- should not be modified.

It is good to promote a **non-judgmental, accepting** attitude to all sensations of discomfort or any other kind of disturbance that could lead to a desire to change position. It is important always to keep track of the position of the body and the intention of its movements.

### SETTING THE INTENTION

The **intention**, which each individual brings to the practice, is an important aspect of how a participant will navigate through the duration of the practice. It is advisable to remind the participants of this element, which may help them to be present and alert during the activity.

### AWARENESS OF POSSIBLE DISTRACTIONS

Propose to the participants to reach out to what is **attracting** their attention at the present moment such as their anticipations, beliefs and pre-fixed opinions about the practice of mindfulness meditation or whatever may arise at the moment. Make this a starting point to observe what their intention is, rather than finding the words to describe it.

Remind the participants to focus their attention solely on being present here and now. They may want to reflect and express an opinion about the practice but this should be done after it, not while it is happening.

## Example of a mindfulness practice: Focusing on the Breathing

The breath is the only bodily process that can function both automatically and directed by the mind and plays a central role in mindfulness meditation.

The goal of this example practice is to train the participants to focus their attention on the breathing sensations and develop their ability to be mindful, better manage their attention and not get carried away by distractions.

Duration: 20-30'

### Main points:

- Become aware of the sensations and movement of the breath in the body (nostrils, throat, belly, etc.).
- Draw your attention to the fact that you are breathing and notice the flow of air moving in and out through the nostrils.
- Notice the rhythmic movement of the belly. Follow the rhythm of the breath as it is at the moment.
- Observe the movement of air through the nostrils to the throat, the chest, follow the breath to the belly.
- Simply ride the waves of the breath as it is at the present moment.

#### Step 1

##### 3-5' minutes

It is of major importance to provide the participants with the appropriate time to **explore** and **become aware** of their sensations as well as **bring their focus** to each part of the body that their breath affects.

#### Step 2

##### 2-3' minutes

Let the participants focus on the sensations of the breath.

During this time, the attention of the participants may wander, follow thinking patterns or worry about the future or the past.

After the 2-3 minutes remind the participants to keep re-focusing their attention on their breath.

#### Step 3

##### 3-5' minutes

Going deeper: Peripheral Sensations. At this stage, the participants are invited to observe the sensations which may arise all over their body.

Take the time to integrate the experienced sensations like itchiness, numbness or even the experience of no sensations. Attention should also be paid to looking closely at the duration and the intensity of the sensations. At this point, attention should be focused on the sensation of how the whole body feels.

#### 10-20' minutes

Breathing should be the anchor of this practice. This stage is about taking the first steps in establishing breathing sensations as the major focus of their attention.

*Be present here and now  
just breathe  
listen to the sensations  
of each breath in and out  
moment by moment  
without judgement*

In this way, breathing could be set as an anchor, a safe place in case agitation or rigidity arises during the practice.

#### 3-5' minutes

Coming back to the present. As the practice comes to an end, a smooth comeback to the “normal mode” is recommended. Participants can slowly go back to their preferred natural position. The facilitator should make sure that everybody feels well and at that point they may open a space for reflection and sharing.

## Meditation Postures



Full Lotus

Half Lotus

Burmese



On a stool

Seiza

On a Chair

Credit: <https://www.thewayofmeditation.com.au/meditation-posture/>



### 3.

## TESTIMONIALS

Here we have gathered some impressions hoping that they will reflect the impact this project and its activities have had on our organisations and on the participants who had the chance to experience them.

### PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

*"This project has allowed us to dive deep into very interesting topics which we normally don't have the chance to address. By developing the local workshops, where the activities were tested, we have learnt a great deal and have seen with our own eyes the real impact of the activities on the participants. Moreover, managing a truly international project with our partners has proved a challenging but enriching experience. I believe that this project has changed our organisation and myself for the better."*

**Carlos Buj**, Viaje a la Sostenibilidad 

*"Mind your Mind has been a green door to my city and myself. Since the beginning of this project, I felt my roots growing in every step that I took and my net becoming stronger. My senses got sharper and my awareness developed. I got the opportunity to see my everyday life through nature reminding myself that I am a part of nature not something that I need to connect to. It provided me with tools that I use for myself and our youth projects."*

*Every phase, the kick-off event, the training course, the skype meetings, the evaluation meeting and the final event allowed us to work in a true synergy mode where every idea was valid and every aspect was considered. It gave me the opportunity to expand my knowledge and collaborate with wonderful individuals in Athens and in Europe who I hope will stay active within our youth world. I feel deeply grateful for being part of this wonderful project"*

**Eleni Kardamitsi**, Hellenic Youth Participation 

*"When you meet the right people in the right moment and in the right place, you feel that everything is perfect. This was what I felt when I talked for the first time with Carlos and Eleni about the idea of "Mind your mind". We were on the training course "Dis-connect", in Spain when we "disconnected" from all electronic devices but connected with the stunning nature and interesting people, practising daily mindfulness. Then, you understand that things are perfect because you learn to be present in the here and now; nature itself embodies this sense of peace and presence. Mind your Mind taught me a lot. It was a journey, in all senses, around Europe and inside myself. I travelled without taking planes to join the meetings, I was nourished by nature, people and every little teaching I could get. I shared what I learned with my local community and I grew personally and professionally."*

**Sara Marzo**, VulcanicaMente 

## YOUTHWORKERS

*"This project has been an excellent opportunity to share deep transformation practices with young people. It has been a wonderful experience to observe and accompany their personal growth through the practice of mindfulness. The connection with nature and the approach of the deep ecology has been the key to activate their environmental awareness and their love for everything that surrounds us. I can affirm, without any doubt, that these practices are really transformative, not only at an individual level, but at a global level of consciousness."* - Nuane, Spain 🇪🇸

*"The experience has been unique. The chance to gather experts and practitioners from various fields and the bridging provided by anthropological views of nature-based methods were the most attractive elements. The wide spectrum of topics, teachings, conversations and experiences have stayed in our memory and everyday routine. This is one the most important gifts as the learnings received stayed vivid in memory and subjective experience even seven months after the program."* - Michalis, Greece 🇬🇷

*"Participating in this project was a great experience in various ways. The opportunity to meet with youth workers in order to share methods, good practices, thoughts and ideas, gave me a new perspective on alternatives in how to organize activities, based on both existing or new ideas and topics. The roles between facilitator/participant were changing constantly, everybody was open to explore, to give and to digest new ideas. Additionally, collaborations and networking were established!"* - Ioanna, Greece 🇬🇷

*"The idea behind Mind Your Mind was splendid. It was fun to join with a group of intelligent people working together to try and come to terms with the awful complexities of mindfulness and nature. Converting the experiment of the training course into local activities was an engaging process with plenty of opportunities to collaborate and learn."*

- Matthew, Italy 🇮🇹

*"The experience was great, that period was very important for my life. Sometimes I think about those days and I feel very grateful for the teachings, the beautiful people I met and the magical place in the nature. For example I remember some exercises we did about mindfulness and I use this in my daily life. Is very important to live here and now, without expectations. Every moment is full of blessings. I've limited the use of my mobile, I prefer to go in the nature and to listen to her voice. To speak with people directly, not through whatsapp or facebook. I miss that with the wonderful tribu.*

*That kind of experience was very important for me. I feel that it would be nice to replay the situation with other people. We live in a special historical period and people need to be together in the nature, connecting heart to heart, eyes to eyes."* - Sara, Italy 🇮🇹

*"The training was good for strengthening my connection with nature and for learning new methods that I can now use not only on myself in my personal life and relationships, but also to teach other people."*

- Michele, Italy 🇮🇹

*"I'm grateful for the opportunity to have taken the Mind your Mind training as a first step to incorporate mindfulness into my daily life. As much as possible, I try to incorporate learned practices into my routine: to be more concentrated on the present moment, more attentive to my actions and connected with myself. Besides, there was an intensive exchange of new educational techniques, based on nature, between the participants. I'm an educator and a youth worker and now I'm trying to implement these innovative mindfulness and nature-based practices in my educational programs, including the language courses."* - Hanna, Italy 🇮🇹

## PARTICIPANTS

*"Being 'in contact' with nature - whatever that means for anyone - and live the moment (not in the past nor the future) is something valuable. It is an everyday lesson."* - Alik, Greece 🇬🇷

*"I am very grateful for all I learnt: the detailed preparation of activities and to getting to know you. You raise awareness and help us want to become better people."* - María, Spain 🇪🇸

*"The most enlightening part was how I was able to use mindfulness practices ever since in order to bring myself to the 'here and now' after the meetings, especially in hectic city life."* - Vasileia, Greece 🇬🇷

*"I have been offered very valuable tools to connect with my own being, with nature, with other beings and people."* - Linda, Spain 🇪🇸

*"The experience was really pleasant. I will apply it for reaching relax and focus on everyday life. It was an unexpected activity. It should be taught in schools!"* - Carlo, Italy 🇮🇹

*"For me the activities meant a deep and beautiful experience, being able to experience a very powerful connection with nature"* - Esther, Spain 🇪🇸

*"I now understand how important mindfulness is and what you can achieve by this. I also reconsider the value of nature and how it reflects upon ourselves."* - Marietta, Greece 🇬🇷

*"It was a fantastic experience! Thanks to VulcanicaMente's team supervision we explored our senses and related to others in a much more careful and present way, developing a deep sense of trust, sharing and gratitude."* - Valentina, Italy 🇮🇹

*"All the project was an amazing journey; a way to focus and reflect in the being and to watch and feel the interactions and the inputs of the environment with my senses."* - Giorgos, Greece 🇬🇷

*"The workshop was a seed to continue deepening in these issues and building a better world."* - Pablo, Spain 🇪🇸

*"It was not something I expected but turned out to be what I needed. I realized that self-empathy needs practice to improve and open the door to self-healing."* - Katerina, Greece 🇬🇷

*"I had the opportunity to become more conscious of my relationship with technology and how it was affecting me, to realise how distracted we are when we are using technology and how is it different in nature, where I felt a re-connection with my senses. It helped me a lot to realise how to appreciate little things as the sound when you walk around the forest and to pay attention to colours, smells and to really feel peaceful by a proper surrounding."* - Jesus, Italy 🇮🇹

*"The experience in overall was quite interesting, since it gave me a different approach of life, meditation. One of the reasons that I liked it so much, I think it is because it happened in nature."* - Chrysanthi, Greece 🇬🇷

*"I feel that I am more able to develop positive thinking and enjoy the happy moments of my everyday life. I mainly feel happy for exploring and learning more about myself."* - Nefeli, Greece 🇬🇷

*"I loved every minute. Above all, the opportunity for a deep connection with nature. Even today, after almost three months since the workshop, I still feel the peace and joy in my life."* - Pilar, Spain 🇪🇸

*"It helped me live more mindfully, be focused in what I do like eating or listening, being present in a conversation."* - Tzeni, Greece 🇬🇷

## Contributors to this book



**CARLOS BUÑ** has been coordinating environmental education courses for four years. He has coordinated the international training course “Dis-connect!” about Mindfulness as a tool to overcome the dependence on screens and is currently coordinating the European project Mind your Mind: Synergies between mindfulness and nature-based methods. He is currently taking the Fritjof Capra course “The Systems View Life” to acquire the conceptual tools necessary to understand the nature of our systemic problems. He has taken a vipassana course, an intensive 10 days meditation course.

**ELENI KARDAMITSI** specialises in the empowerment of young people towards active citizenship, discovering their potential and creating networks. Her area of expertise is the application of non-formal education, personal development through arts and female empowerment. She uses mindfulness as a tool to assist young people connect to themselves.



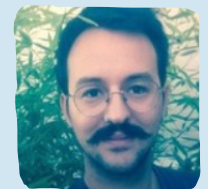
**SARA MARZO** has experience in mindfulness and meditation, collaborating with different organisations in the field, such as World Peace Initiative Foundation and Sangha of Salento. She practises zen meditation and has introduced meditation techniques into her organisation and youth work activities at both local and international level.

**NUANE TEJEDOR** focuses on the personal growth in connection with the Earth. She has learned Meditation and Yoga with great masters in Asia. She has dived into Nature based learnings and Deep Ecology by the hand of the indigenous wisdom from America and Oceania. She combines her Anthropologist, Social Educator and International Cooperation studies with deep transformational practices learned all around the world. Lately she has been designing and guiding the spanish retreats of the European project Mind your Mind: Synergies between mindfulness and nature-based methods.



**IOANNA SKALTSÁ** combines her environmental and pedagogical studies, in order to organize activities & workshops indoors and outdoors. Under her motto: “GOAL: Go Observe And Learn from Nature”, she works on soft skills and personal development topics, using mindfulness as a way for exploration and connection with ourselves, with others and with nature.

**MICHALIS CHATZIS** focuses on the study of neuroscience, embodied cognition, mind body interaction with a qualitative perspective. Through mindfulness practices and their dynamic relationship to evidence based practice, he proposes the path of the open window of probability and present moment awareness to be a useful companion to the turbulent and vivid life of youth.



# Thanks to...

*We are very grateful to all the people that contributed to Mind your Mind and especially to this book.*

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Michele Nuzzolese

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Ioanna Skaltsa  
Michalis Chatzis  
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Marieta Xera, Matina Mathiou, Nayia  
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Esther Toran, Eva Torres, Pablo Aparicio,  
Luis Arenas, Gonzalo Fanlo, Kerry  
Walker, Victoria Aran, Mar Barba

## Information about the organisations



### Viaje a la Sostenibilidad

is a non-profit organization founded in 2012 and based in Zaragoza. Our philosophy is in tune with sustainable tourism, bioconstruction, permaculture, mindfulness, rural entrepreneurship and the social economy. It offers educational and cultural activities to young people and adults both locally and internationally. These include youth meetings, courses, film cycles, weekend workshops, work camps, online trainings ([formacionsostenible.org](http://formacionsostenible.org)) and more.

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### Vulcanicamente

is a non-profit association founded by four young women in Lecce (Italy), conceived as an open platform offering opportunities for European youth mobility, information, intercultural and intergenerational learning. The organisation works at local and international level to implement educational initiatives and European projects. Thanks to collaboration with World Peace Initiative Foundation, VulcanicaMente started to introduce meditation and mindfulness practises to staff and the local community with the “Relax and meditation club” and in Erasmus+ projects.

w: [vulcanicamente.it](http://vulcanicamente.it) | m: [vulcanicamente.info@gmail.com](mailto:vulcanicamente.info@gmail.com)



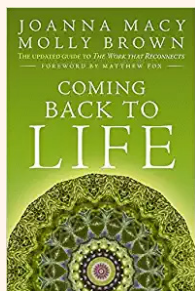
### Hellenic Youth Participation

is a youth organisation in Athens that promotes empowerment and life-long learning through non-formal education projects. HYP is active in local, national, European and global projects in order to provide the opportunity for youngsters, youthworkers and experts to get trained, exchange good practices and apply them in our local community. Nature and mindfulness are important parts of our local youthwork in our attempt to bring people closer to nature and themselves in big cities.

w: [hellenicyouthparticipation.com](http://hellenicyouthparticipation.com) | m: [info@hellenicyouthparticipation.com](mailto:info@hellenicyouthparticipation.com)



## Extra Resources

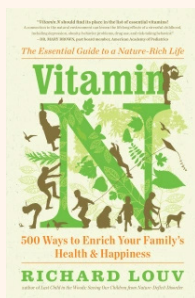


### Coming Back to Life

by Joanna Macy and Molly Brown. 2014

Deepening global crises surround us. We are troubled by climate change, raise of the extreme right, uncertainty about the future... This makes many of us fall prey to despair even as we feel called to respond to these threats to life on our planet.

This book offers easy-to-use methods for group work that profoundly affect peoples' outlook and ability to act in the world and get rid of the insensitivity to pain (and joy) that many have fall into to get through our difficult times.



### Vitamin N

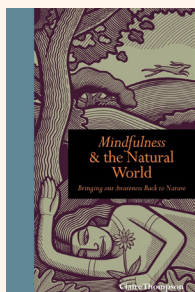
by Richard Louv. 2016.

This (for "nature") is a complete prescription for connecting with the power and joy of the natural world right now, with:

five hundred activities, scores of informational websites, an abundance of down-to-earth advice, and dozens of thought-provoking essays.

This book is a comprehensive, and practical guidebook for the whole family and the wider community.

It is a dose of pure inspiration, reminding us that looking up at the stars or taking a walk in the woods is as exhilarating as it is essential, at any age.

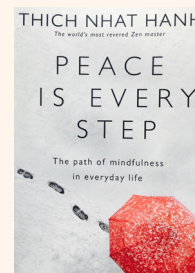


### Mindfulness & the Natural World, Bringing Our Awareness Back to Nature

by Claire Thompson. 2014

Mindfulness & the Natural World explores what it means to connect with nature and how we can learn from nature to be more mindful in everyday life with little and very simple exercises that can be done individually.

Through personal anecdotes and proven insights, she reveals how a deeper awareness of the natural world is key to inspiring us to care about and protect nature.



### Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life

by Thich Nhat Hanh

Written in a simple and straightforward way, this book contains commentaries and meditations, personal anecdotes and stories from Nhat Hanh's experiences as a peace activist, teacher, and community leader.

It begins where the reader already is - in the kitchen, office, driving a car, walking in a park - and shows how deep meditative presence is available now.

Nhat Hanh provides exercises to increase our awareness of our own body and mind through conscious breathing, which can bring immediate joy and peace. Nhat Hanh also shows how to be aware of relationships with others and of the world around us, its beauty and also its pollution and injustices. The deceptively simple practices encourage us to work for peace in the world and continues to work on sustaining inner peace by turning the 'mindness' into the mindful.



### MindandNature.site

the visitor will find all the contents of the project that supported this book, including:

- Videos explaining the activities appearing in this book
- A PDF file of this book in English, Greek, Italian and Spanish
- Photos and Extra resources



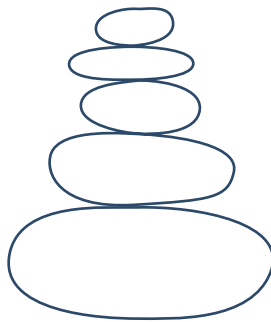
### Salto-youth.net

is great resource website for youth workers and organisations where one can find the following resources:

**European Training Calendar** is where you can find trainings and seminars run by SALTO, Erasmus+ NAs and NGOs in the youth field

**Toolbox for Training** contains thousands of tools and activity ideas for youth work

**Otlas Partner Finding** puts you in touch with thousands of youth projects, so you can build strong partnerships and apply for Erasmus+



*Visit the website of the project  
**MindandNature.site**  
to watch the videos of the activities  
and find additional content.*