

Thank You to Our Education Session Sponsor:



Making Ecotherapy Accessible to All, From Public Parks to College Campuses

*Blair McKissock, PhD CRTS &
Marissa Byers*



Objectives

- DISCOVER: *How does our environment impact us?*
- EXPLORE: *Ecotherapy experience pilot projects*
 - Self-guided trails
 - Volunteer mindful hiking guides
- EXAMINE: *Implementation steps of the project*
- REFLECT: *What did we learn from the pilot?*



Introductions

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Our Past

- As a species, we were dependant upon the seasons for game, agriculture, and foraging
- We had to pay attention to our surroundings for survival
- Basic needs (food, medicine, shelter, and clothing) were met through nature connection
- Significance in cultural traditions
- Thousands of years of co-evolution
- Biophilia and attachment theories
- Being outside was a part of development

From Blair McKissock, PhD, CRTS



Our Current State

- Indoors, disconnected from nature
- Resist cycles -
 - Food
 - Circadian rhythm
 - Toil and effort for sustainment
- Constant state of stress:
 - sensory overload
 - life threatening- poorer resilience
 - Can't connected in a stress state
- Evolutionary traits no longer apply and work to our detriment
- Lack of sunlight
- Lack of connection to others and environment
- Disconnected from intuition

From Blair McKissock. PhD. CRTS



What happens when we are disconnected?

SENSORY OVERLOAD

- Our brains never have time to shift from a stress response to a relaxation response
- Attention Restoration
- Phones, media, etc.
- Inability to pay attention



LACK OF BALANCE



- Physiological and psychological
- ACE's
- Cut off from others, our bodies
- Higher instances of violence and mental health

TRAUMA RESPONSE

- Internal and external demands
- Balance of power, race, wealth and gender roles
- Indoor and outdoor time- Has COVID changed any of that?
- Consumption of resources faster than they replenish

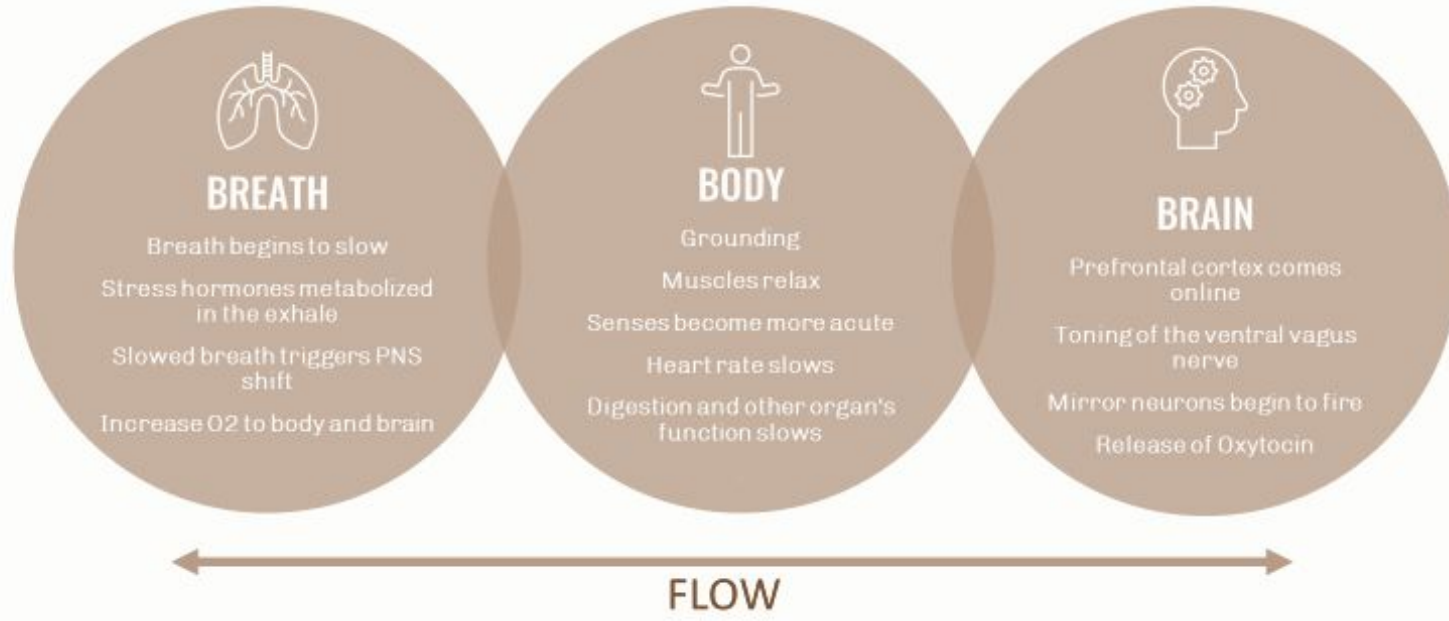


What happens in the body when we reconnect with nature?

- Attention Restoration Theory
- Neural cascade starting with vision
 - Leads to a PNS shift
 - Feel connected to something greater than the self
 - Sense of calm and peace
- Benefits of that experience
 - Resilience and recovery from stress
 - Arousal without anxiety
 - Memory recall
 - Exposure to phytochemicals
 - Exposure to higher levels of O₂
 - We are open to learning

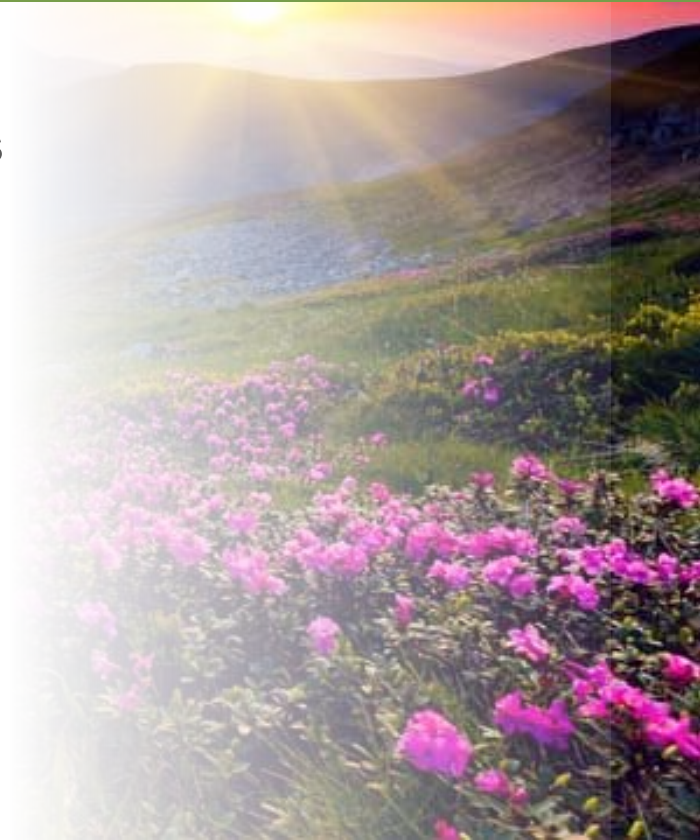


WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE CONNECT



What is ecotherapy, nature based therapy, etc.

- Intentional time spent in nature for it's restorative and neuro-biopsychosocial benefits
- Facilitated or self-guided practices in connection
- This project incorporates mindfulness practices in nature that induce a relaxed state that can be recalled and practiced during the stresses of everyday life



Why ecotherapy?

- Availability of park spaces
- Accessibility of community programming vs. healthcare system
- Growing interest in/need for mental health resources - [parks have a role in this aspect of community health!](#)
- Existing examples on the [NRPA blog](#)
- During COVID, Eagle Creek saw 30% increase in attendance

NRPA PARK PULSE Reduce Stress With Parks and Recreation

86% of U.S. adults believe it is helpful to have access to the outdoors and nature during stressful times.



A majority of U.S. adults across all generations — including baby boomers (89%), Gen Xers (87%), millennials (85%) and Gen Zers (79%) — agree that dealing with stress by accessing the outdoors is helpful.

Each month, through a poll of 1,000 U.S. residents focused on park and recreation issues, NRPA Park Pulse helps tell the park and recreation story. Questions span from the serious to the more lighthearted. The survey was conducted by Wakefield Research (www.wakefieldresearch.com).

Visit nrpa.org/ParkPulse for more information.



NATIONAL RECREATION
AND PARK ASSOCIATION

Pilot Projects - Campus Life

- Coalition to create an experience where students connect to nature
- BU Community Sustainability Literacy & Cultural Assessment:
 - 76% of students and 79% of faculty and staff surveyed stated when they think about climate change change they feel negatively, including depressed, anxious, and angry
 - 73% of students surveyed feel climate change will significantly impact their future
- Project on college campus - two trails, website, and campus guide
- Self-guided and self-paced
- Led to part 2 at Eagle Creek



Pilot Projects - Eagle Creek Park Foundation

- Project is a partnership between Park & Foundation
- In-person mindfulness hikes twice per month (June - September 2022)
 - Led by trained volunteers
 - Two guides per hike (20 trained, 10 became leaders)
 - Took place on two accessible trails
 - 50 participants in first season



Pilot Projects - Eagle Creek Park Foundation

- Guides were trained using Park volunteer process (Background check & orientation) plus one-day group facilitator training
- Designated routes were provided for volunteers, including one loop outside paid area
- Logistics for the Program
 - Volunteer Application (Form distributed to volunteers and connections)
 - Training (Background check, video orientation, and one day in-person)
 - Foundation handled registration for volunteers and participants with Sign-Up Genius
 - Limited promotion via e-newsletters and social media during first season



Risk Management & Liability

- Meet with park manager to review relevant policies
- Background check and training for volunteer guides
- Volunteers worked in pairs
- Covering emergency procedures with volunteers
- Requires training in facilitation- it can put people into a vulnerable state



Future Plans

- Collect data (*University partners are helpful!*)
- Promote hikes more visibly, use collaborative marketing
- Clarify the role of volunteers (*Who sends follow-up emails?*)
- Programs for veterans, funded through the Governor's Challenge
- Requests for specific programs & making similar resources and programs replicable at other parks



Benefits for Parks

- Provide a new community service & reach new community members
- Potential grant funding
- Variety of options (*signs, app, QR codes, volunteer program*)
- Doesn't have to be all on staff, can use existing resources (*or us!*)

**EASY
FREE
FAST**

**NEEDS PEOPLE,
FUNDING
& PLANNING**



Post Oak Trail (Illinois)



to me ▼

Hi Marissa!

Thank you for your email! I wish I could cite some amazing scientific study that we referenced for the therapy trail but I literally just got online to see what others are doing. I'm also embarrassed to say that since we put the signage up, I've had two signs stolen (post and all)!

My strategies consisted of walking the trail and picking stopping points that I thought would be good stopping points. Ha!

5 Senses Grounding Exercise

