



# Peer Education Project



## A Guide for School Staff



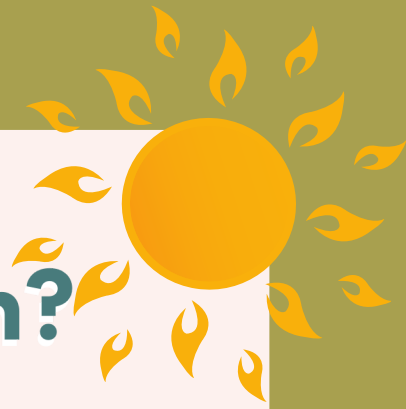
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*Over the past year, I have realised just how vital it is for me to spend time away from screens and work. It allows me to clear my head and breathe freely, without worries of pending assignments, even if it is just for a short while.*

**Peer Educator**  
**Peer Education Project**

# Why is nature good for our mental health?



Connecting with nature is not just about the amount of time we spend outdoors; it is also about building a relationship with nature by noticing and becoming sensitive to what is around us. We use our senses to do this – such as noticing the different cloud shapes in the sky, smelling the scents of flowers and listening to the birds chirping in the trees.

**Encouraging your pupils to build in opportunities to connect with nature in everyday life can improve both the health of their bodies and their minds.**

Research tells us that there are many mental health benefits to connecting with nature, such as:

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

# Why is nature good for our mental health?

It can take time, and practice, to engage with nature in a meaningful way and develop our own connection with the natural environment.

It is important to provide opportunities for pupils and staff to engage with nature within the school environment, exploring different ways to connect with nature and support their mental health and wellbeing.

**Schools have an opportunity to create a mentally healthy school environment, which will always be a task for the whole school community rather than one individual.**

No matter how much or little your school currently does to promote good mental health, it's never too late to try new ways to inspire both staff and pupils to look after their mental health and wellbeing.





# Top tips for connecting with nature in school

## Individual Action

*Create opportunities and encourage pupils to:*

### Nurture nature

Nurture nature through activities that protect our environment. For example, picking up one piece of litter a day, recycling as much as possible both at school and at home, walking to school if possible, watering the classroom pot plants or using a reusable bottle.

### Get inspired

Get inspired by watching nature documentaries, listening to podcasts on nature and its challenges or reading stories from people across the world about their access to nature.

### Take independent learning outside

Sit in the park and read a book, collect natural objects to use for artwork, or write a poem about what's outside the window or a favourite nature place.

### Disconnect from technology

Unplug headphones when walking home from school, put phones on silent when sitting in a park or choose to go for walk rather than watch TV.



# Top tips for connecting with nature in school

## Individual Action

*Create opportunities and encourage pupils to:*

### Write a nature journal

A nature journal can be filled with expressive writing, sketches and scribbles of any observations and/or thoughts and feelings whilst out in nature.

### Get creative

Design a nature card for a loved one, make a bird feeder for the windowsill or create posters with ideas on how to connect with nature for school. Organise some outdoor time where the pupils can collect natural items to use on such projects.

### Make a map

Make a map of key nature spots in their local area. This is something you could also do as a class or school, which can then be displayed in school.

**These activities could be built into a lesson, like Art, English or Geography. As staff, think about how you could run a Nature-themed lesson for your pupils.**



# Top tips for connecting with nature in school



## In the classroom

### Take lessons outside

Where possible, leave the classroom behind and get outdoors. Use your playground either as a space for learning or as a source of learning itself. This can deepen pupils' understanding of relevant topics and provide a change of pace and place for staff and pupils. You could organise a bug hunt, outdoor chalk art or even den building!

### Bring nature in

Introduce flowers and plants to your classroom and involve pupils in caring for them, add bird feeders to your classroom windows or play nature sounds during break and form times. Pupils could also gather loose items from nature - like sticks, acorns, flower petals - to use in artwork, sensory activities or to replace counters for younger year groups.

### Practice mindfulness

Whether inside or outside, find time and space for pupils and staff to practice being in the present moment.

### Create space

Create space for pupils to share their thoughts and ideas on how they would like to bring nature into school. It is important for pupils to feel empowered to speak up and take action about changes they want to see.

# Top tips for connecting with nature in school

## Across the school

### Cultivate environmental awareness

Use assemblies to raise awareness, set up pupil environmental councils to take action and ensure more environmental processes and policies are in place across your school.

### Organise nature events for pupils to get involved in

Such as pupil planting days, scavenger hunts, big litter clean-ups of the school or mindfulness walks in the local area.

### Create access

Ensure all pupils have the access and opportunities they need to connect with nature in school.



# Find out more...



#LearnToLoveNature

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

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



**WWF  
School  
Resources**

WWF have created a range of free resources to help you and pupils learn about our planet, the environmental challenges it faces and how we can all take action.

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/get-involved/schools/resources>

Register your class for a free live learning opportunities, whether it is to learn more about how penguins and polar bears are adapted to their polar environments or to explore the themes within the David Attenborough's A Life on Our Planet film.

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/get-involved/schools/calendar>



**Wildlife Photography  
Competition**

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

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



**Thriving  
with  
Nature  
guidebook**

The Mental Health Foundation and WWF produced a guide on making the most of our natural spaces for our mental health and wellbeing. Take a look at the ideas to connect with nature during each season.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/Thriving-With-Nature-compressed.pdf>



**Learning  
Through  
Landscapes**

As the UK's leading school grounds educational charity, access free outdoor learning ideas and lesson plans.

<https://www.ltl.org.uk/free-resources/>

# Find out more...



Access free online resources to support outdoor learning in schools.

<https://www.naturefriendlyschools.co.uk/free-resources>



## The Learning Pod

The Outward Bound Trust have pulled together 'The Learning Pod' which offers support and advice on how families and schools can approach home learning alongside a range of resources that encourage experiential learning, developing skills, supporting wellbeing and going outside.

<https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/the-learning-pod>



## The Eco-Schools

A global programme engaging 19.5 million children across 67 countries. The Eco-Schools Programme is pupil-led, involving hands-on learning that gets the whole school and the wider community involved in driving change and improving environmental awareness within school.

<https://www.eco-schools.org.uk>



## Green Tree Schools Award

Through the Green Tree Schools Award, your school can take part in fun, practical projects while helping the environment and improving your grounds. It's completely free and you will be provided with resources and support to help you get the most out of it. Your pupils can also earn certificates in recognition of their achievements and a special plaque to display in your school.

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/support-us/act/your-school/green-tree-schools-award/>



## Rhaglen WildED

The WildED Programme consists of a series of tailored workshops and student-led activities for students in Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 in England that take place during one school term.

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



Use nature journals to give pupils a chance to connect with the nature around them.

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/deepening-students-connection-nature>

# Mental Health Awareness Week 2021

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


There are many ways your school can get involved.



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



# Nature-themed fundraising ideas



## Wear it green day

Green is the colour for mental health awareness, so why not have a 'Wear it Green' day in your school?

Pupils and staff can all wear something green to school and each donate £1 to the Mental Health Foundation.



## Sponsored Walk

You could organise a sponsored nature walk somewhere local to the school and ask pupils and staff to collect sponsorship from their friends and family.




## Take Action, Get Active

Take Action, Get Active is our fundraising challenge for Mental Health Awareness Week, taking place throughout the month of May.

Schools could run a shorter version during Mental Health Awareness Week itself, by asking pupils and staff to do 30-minutes of exercise a day outside. This could be in during break or lunchtimes. From skipping to dancing to jogging laps of the playground – any activities count!

Pupils and staff to collect sponsorship from their friends and family.



## Organise a litter picking event

Why not organise a big school clean-up of somewhere in your local area? People will be happy to sponsor an event that will be supporting the local community!

**Any donations you raise will help us at the Mental Health Foundation to continue to raise awareness of mental health inequalities and the need for preventative action, and advocate for change so that individuals and communities can thrive.**



# Nature-themed fundraising ideas



## Competition time

Hold a sunflower competition in return for donations! The pupil who grows the tallest sunflower wins a prize. It can also work with avocado plants.


You could also organise a nature photography or drawing competition.



## Get creative

Encourage and support your pupils to use their green fingers to help people with their gardens; make them a bird or bee box, give them a cutting from their favourite plant, create posters or leaflets on how to grow vegetables or how to prune a tree in return for donations.

[WWF\\_Bee\\_Hotel\\_Activity\\_Sheet.pdf](#)



## Create a coin trail around school

Ask pupils and staff to bring in spare change, lay the coins out in a trail and see how far around the school you can get.

You could mark different distances relating to nature e.g. length of a dolphin. This will encourage pupils and staff to get to the next marker!



## Host a nature quiz

Host a nature-themed quiz and ask for £1 entry donations. You can source prizes from local businesses/individuals.

[Wild Wisdom Quiz for Secondary Schools | WWF](#)

### How to send the donations to us:

- by [making a donation via our website](#) – please give full details of your fundraising,
- e-mailing [events@mentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:events@mentalhealth.org.uk) and we can provide you with our bank details, or
- you can [set up a fundraising page](#) for the school and ask pupils, parents and teachers to make any donations via this page.

**Thank you so much for your support!**



## Mental Health Awareness Week 2021



[mentalhealth.org.uk](http://mentalhealth.org.uk)



mentalhealthfoundation



@mentalhealth



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Mental Health Foundation  
*London. Cardiff. Glasgow.*

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

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