

RESILIENCE IN NATURE

A TOOLKIT FOR EMPOWERING YOUTH
WITH OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES



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Colophon

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Oba Utopia Education and Art Organisation, Türkiye

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FOREWORD

Why this toolkit? Young people today are under great pressure from both global and local challenges such as climate change, war, financial insecurity, achievement pressures and social exclusion. At the same time, many young people struggle with mental health problems, while there is little focus in education on well-being and connection with nature. Research shows that nature can be a powerful source of resilience, but many young people have lost connection with it. They grow up in urban environments, get out in nature less often and have few opportunities to experience the value of peace, nature and connection.

Professionals and volunteers working with young people want to involve nature more often in their guidance but often do not know where to start or which activities are appropriate and feasible. There is a need for accessible, hands-on, non-formal (experiential) and sustainable forms of work that can be directly applied in everyday work with young people.

This toolkit has been developed to meet that need. It offers inspiration, practical

tools and a clear vision of how nature can contribute to strengthening resilience and well-being in young people. This vision is based on the latest scientific insights from ecopsychology and ecopedagogy, in which the relationship between people and nature is central.

With this toolkit, we approach resilience not only as an individual trait, but as something that lives in relationships and contexts. Young people thrive in environments that support, challenge and connect them. That is why we want to contribute to the development of resilient systems around young people - systems that focus on movement, rest, nutrition, social contact, meaning and nature. An ecosystem in which young people, supervisors, families, schools and communities build well-being and future strength together.

This toolkit aligns with the EU Youth Strategy and contributes to achieving European Youth Goals 5 and 10, which aim to improve youth well-being and promote a sustainable, green society. By connecting young people to nature as a source of recovery and strength, we strengthen their

‘When guiding outdoor activities in nature, one of the most important learnings is to follow the group’s natural rhythm’

ability to deal with change and find their way with confidence in a complex world. At the same time, this toolkit invites facilitators to learn from young people. Their flexibility, creativity in the face of adversity, sensitivity to injustice and often intuitive connection to nature can inspire us to think, feel and act in new ways. Resilience is not just something young people need to build - it is also something they can share, teach us and rediscover with others, precisely in and with nature.

We would like to thank Erasmus+ Youth, the National Agency in the Netherlands of the Netherlands Youth Institute, for their support in this project.

This project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. Many thanks to the young people, youth workers and experts we interviewed during the Research of Good practices and helped us with piloting the outdoor activities.

Our thanks go to the team:

- Sybren Bouwsma - Project Coordinator, Nature Trainer, Outdoor Life Coach
- Lia van Loo - Nature Coach and Volunteer of Scouting in the Netherlands
- Gaia Theil - Youth Worker, Trainer for Youth Workers, and Storytelling Coach
- Oda Salomons - Project Leader, Eco-Psychologist, and trainer/coach
- Dennis Fieret - Psychologist, piloted activities with young people at Youz
- Annette Bol - Walking coach and initiator of Green Mental Health Parnassia Group, supported the team during the piloting phase
- Ahmet Öncel - Project Coordinator and Ecopedagogue, Early Childhood and Outdoor Educator
- Bengü Ergin Balta - Project Coordinator, Arts, Early Childhood and Outdoor Educator, Actress
- Cansu Üzümcü Ünüvar - Special Needs Teacher, Early Childhood and Outdoor Educator, Youth Worker
- Ezgi Bilgin - Artist, Art Therapist and Educator, Academic, and Youth Worker
- Selen İzgi - Early Childhood and Outdoor Educator, and BBM Facilitator, Youth Worker
- Hüseyin Çağlar İnce - Nature Observer, Outdoor Educator, and Documentarian
- Birsen Civelek - Ecopsychologist, Outdoor Educator, Youth Worker
- Ahmet Asil Dugan - Creative Drama Leader, Outdoor Educator, Youth Worker
- Ayşen Şahin - Early Childhood and Outdoor Educator, Youth Worker
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With natural greetings,

Oda Salomons

Project leader & CEO, Flourish in Nature Foundation

ABOUT THE PROJECT

We, Flourish in Nature Association (Netherlands) and Utopia Education and Art Organization (Türkiye) are two organizations working in the fields of nature-based learning and ecopsychology. Together, we have launched the Resilience in Nature project. Our partnership began in 2022 at the GREEN INCLUSION seminar in Amersfoort, the Netherlands, organized by SALTO Inclusion & Diversity RC and Erasmus+ Jeugd Netherlands. During this seminar, our organizations met and established a collaborative vision to work with youth on resilience-building. The project was later approved by the Dutch National Agency.

The Resilience in Nature project aims to support resilience in 14 to 18-year-old youth through nature-based activities and educational resources. Additionally, it combines the expertise of both organizations -eco pedagogy and ecopsychology- to develop innovative tools and initiate new projects in this field.

WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

- Research & Good Practices: Conducted a literature review, interviewed young people, youth workers, and experts to gather insights on effective practices.
- Pilot Activities: Tested and identified good practices through pilot activities with young people to evaluate their impact.
- Exchange of Best Practices: Facilitated an exchange of nature-based learning and resilience practices among youth workers and experts.
- Toolkit & Check-List Design: Created a practical toolkit and checklist for implementing nature-based learning on resilience in youth work.

WHAT IS ERASMUS+?

The Erasmus+ Programme is the European Union's initiative for education, training, youth, and sport. It will run from 2021 to 2027 and have a budget of €28.4 billion. Through mobility and cross-border cooperation, it aims to enhance skills, personal development, and employment opportunities for individuals regardless of age or educational background.

The programme supports youth workers and organizations by offering professional development (training courses, seminars, study visits), networking, and system-building projects under Key Action 1. For youth workers, it provides non-formal and informal learning opportunities, fostering intercultural exchange and improving the quality of youth work across local, national, and international levels.

Erasmus+ offers youth exchanges, volunteering projects, and capacity-building initiatives for young people and youth organizations. These activities promote inclusivity, digital transformation, and sustainability, aligning with the EU Youth Strategy 2019 – 2027. Eligible

organizations (e.g., NGOs, public bodies, social enterprises) can apply for funding to host or participate in mobility projects, with grants covering travel, accommodation, and operational costs. Notably, the programme emphasizes Youthpass certification to validate learning outcomes and enhance employability.

For more information please check the official website of the Erasmus+ Programme: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>



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ABOUT THE COOPERATING PARTNERS



FLOURISH IN NATURE FOUNDATION

The Flourish in Nature Foundation promotes people's psychological, social, and physical well-being by connecting them with nature and each other. We develop innovative, intercultural projects in which nature-inclusive learning is central, focusing on resilience, compassion, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups. This is how we contribute to the well-being of people and planet, and to a world where reciprocity with the living environment is self-evident.

The Team Flourish in Nature

Oda Salomons - Project Leader, Ecopsychologist and Trainer/Coach, CEO of Flourish in Nature Foundation
Sybren Bouwsma - Project Coordinator, Nature Trainer/Outdoor Life Coach
Lia van Loo - Nature Coach and Volunteer of Scouting in the Netherlands
Gaia Theil - Youth Worker, trainer for youth workers, storytellingcoach



OBA UTOPIA EDUCATION AND ART ORGANISATION

Oba Utopia envisions a future where learning occurs under the sky, children, youth, and adults reconnect with the natural world, and communities are strengthened by eco-conscious values, inclusive opportunities, and innovative educational models rooted in nature, local culture and global responsibility.

The Team Oba Utopia

Ahmet Öncel - Project Coordinator and Ecopedagogue, Early Childhood and Outdoor Educator
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HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT



WHY USE THIS TOOLKIT?

Young people tell us that they need a stronger connection with themselves, others, and the natural world.

This toolkit offers practical ways for youth workers to explore and strengthen resilience through outdoor activities. These shared natural experiences can help young people build trust, emotional safety, and a more profound sense of belonging.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT?

In this toolkit, you'll find 22 *evidence-based activities* that support youth workers in guiding young people towards resilience through nature. Each activity includes clear icons and key information: estimated time, keywords, group size, needed materials, and instructions. Activities are grouped in three sections. You can see an overview in the *Ecosystem Model of Resilience* as a foundation for the approach of this toolkit:

- **Plant (7 activities):** prepare fertile ground, warming up and creating the right conditions for learning.
- **Flourish (11 activities):** experience connection with nature, act and reflect, step into the learning zone.

- **Harvest (4 activities):** wrap up, collect growth and enjoy the satisfaction of learning and growing.

Each activity also includes information on how to adapt it for different needs and target groups (variations), along with additional background details.

Alongside the activities, this toolkit offers inspiration to support your practice. You'll find among others:

- The results of interviews with young people, youth workers, and experts,
- A "*Nature Bucket List*" with small ideas to get started outdoors,
- Insights on *youth, nature, and resilience*, drawing from ecopedagogy, ecopsychology, and scientific research,
- A transparent *methodology for nature-based learning*,
- Reflections on your role as a facilitator and how to *guide young people into nature*,
- A *practical checklist* to prepare your group for going outside,
- A *template* to co-create your own activities to strengthen resilience.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You might use this toolkit to build a three-month program, going outdoors weekly for 1.5 to 2 hours and doing one activity every week. You can also select one activity that fits your group's needs and context.

Use the **Plant** activities to begin exploring, the **Flourish** section to go deeper, and the **Harvest** activities to close or reflect on a journey.

Whether you follow the activities step by step or use them as inspiration, stay curious, create space for reflection, and encourage connection with nature and each other. In doing the activities, you can follow the rhythm of your group and co-create the activities with young people.

NATURE BUCKET LIST

SIMPLE WAYS TO ENJOY NATURE

HOW TO USE THIS NATURE BUCKET LIST

This bucket list is designed as a playful and flexible guide to inspire meaningful outdoor experiences with young people. Youth workers can use it as a ready-to-go toolkit where young participants choose what excites them most, or as a co-creation tool to dream up new nature-based adventures together.

Whether you're exploring quietly or adventuring boldly, take time afterwards to reflect through drawing, journaling, or group sharing to deepen the connection with nature and each other.

CONNECT WITH NATURE

- ☐ Set a weekly meeting time with nature.
- ☐ Sit still in nature for 15 minutes.
- ☐ Do a 'sit spot' ritual, return to the same outdoor place for quiet observation.
- ☐ Try forest bathing (Shinrin-yoku): slow, mindful walking in the woods.
- ☐ Practice yoga in a natural setting.
- ☐ Sleep under the stars (even in your backyard).
- ☐ Keep a nature journal.
- ☐ Meet and interview a tree, plant, or animal. Use your imagination to connect with them and 'ask' questions about their lives and experiences.
- ☐ Choose a local tree and help care for it.
- ☐ Take a nap in a hammock.
- ☐ Read a book outdoors.
- ☐ Watch the clouds.
- ☐ Walk barefoot.
- ☐ Go to school/work by bike or on foot.
- ☐ Walk or cycle without a destination.

EXPLORE AND GET CREATIVE WITH NATURE

- ☐ Write a poem inspired by natural sounds.
- ☐ Draw a landscape view.
- ☐ Make leaf rubbings using crayons or pencils.
- ☐ Create a nature mandala on the ground.
- ☐ Make art with sticks, stones, and natural materials.
- ☐ Build a fairy house or small shelter from natural objects.
- ☐ Make natural dye from flowers, berries, or vegetables.
- ☐ Make a nature treasure box.
- ☐ Pick up the fallen flowers, press them into your journal.
- ☐ Roll down a grassy hill.
- ☐ Fly a kite.
- ☐ Run through the sprinkler.
- ☐ Go swimming in a lake or the sea.
- ☐ Throw, skip, collect rocks.
- ☐ Collect shells and get creative with them.



OBSERVE AND LEARN WITH NATURE

- ☐ Smell, observe, and draw flowers.
- ☐ Learn how to identify local plants or trees by their leaves (with a guidebook or app).
- ☐ Watch and document the same tree or plant throughout a season.
- ☐ Identify different types of clouds and what they mean for the weather.
- ☐ Use binoculars to watch birds.
- ☐ Observe rainwater with a magnifying glass.
- ☐ Sketch animal tracks.
- ☐ Learn to read animal scat or tracks (with a guidebook or app).
- ☐ Make a sound map: mark where birds, water, wind, or insects are heard.
- ☐ Make a sound recording of what you hear in nature.
- ☐ Use an app to identify bird sounds, trees, and plants.
- ☐ Pick a nature topic & learn about it.
- ☐ Read a book on nature.
- ☐ Watch a nature documentary.
- ☐ Do a '100 species challenge' (plants, insects, birds – log each one).
- ☐ Join a citizen science project like bird or insect counting.
- ☐ Try wildlife tracking with a camera trap or time-lapse.

HANDS-ON NATURE SKILLS

- ☐ Learn how to filter and purify water to make it drinkable.
- ☐ Learn how to do compost.
- ☐ Learn the basic knots used in outdoor survival.
- ☐ Make a sundial and tell the time with it.
- ☐ Use natural materials to learn basic weaving or basketry.
- ☐ Carve something small out of wood (with supervision, if needed).
- ☐ Build a bug hotel using twigs, bark, and leaves.
- ☐ Learn how to build a shelter from natural materials.
- ☐ Grow a garden.
- ☐ Take care of an indoor plant.
- ☐ Grow your food: plant a vegetable or a herb at home.
- ☐ Volunteer on a farm.

ADVENTURE & DISCOVERY IN NATURE

- ☐ Navigate a trail using a paper map instead of GPS.
- ☐ Hike a local trail.
- ☐ Explore a creek or river.
- ☐ Float down a river.
- ☐ Climb a tree.
- ☐ Balance on a fallen tree.
- ☐ Forage for wild herbs (with expert guidance).
- ☐ Find a nature buddy.
- ☐ Go on a nature scavenger hunt.
- ☐ Try geocaching.
- ☐ Try orienteering.
- ☐ Try rock climbing in nature.
- ☐ Go on a camping trip.
- ☐ Take a canoe or kayak trip on a lake or river.
- ☐ Take a wilderness survival course.
- ☐ Participate in a nature walk with a local guide.
- ☐ Visit a national park and explore its trails.
- ☐ Explore a cave or cavern (safely).
- ☐ Try cross-country skiing or snowshoeing.
- ☐ Go on a night hike to explore nature after dark.



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

ABOUT NATURE & RESILIENCE?



For our Erasmus+ project across the Netherlands and Türkiye, we spoke with 24 young people aged 14 – 22. They shared their lives and nature's role in dealing with their challenges. Young people experience nature as a helpful companion in their journey through stress, emotions, and growth. From silent forests to lively beaches, mountain trails to neighbourhood benches – nature offers them a space to reflect, reconnect, and recharge.

NATURE HELPS TO QUIET THE MIND

Many young people find in nature a rare stillness, a moment of peace in a fast, noisy world.

'Being in nature makes my thoughts go away.'

– Charlie, 14, Netherlands (NL)

Nature helps young people calm down and sort through their emotions in the woods, the park, or by the sea. Juliette (18, NL) describes her and her friends' ritual after exams: **'We go to the park, sit on a bench, and just look around. We don't even need to talk.'**

Ömer (15, TR) added:

'Walking in nature clears my mind.'

Doing things outdoors feels more peaceful than indoors.'

Nature helps to focus because there are fewer distractions.

'In nature, I feel more free. There's less pressure, fewer distractions. It helps me focus on what matters.'

– Roan (18, NL)

NATURE SUPPORTS CONNECTION WITHIN AND WITH OTHERS

Young people emphasised how connection to themselves, to others, and to something bigger emerges more naturally outside. Whether it's walking silently in a group, building a raft together, or sharing difficult feelings under a tree, nature seems to soften barriers and help people connect with others.

Maud (18, NL) shared: **'When I walk in the forest – even with others around – I feel more connected to people who also go there.'**

Myrddin (18, BE) says, **'When we go hiking in a small group, suddenly everyone opens up. That doesn't happen in a classroom.'**

A. (17, Syria/NL) enjoys being outdoors with friends:

'When I play football outside, I feel good. I relax, I talk, I chill. It's much better than staying indoors all the time.'

Being in nature also helps young people to reflect and connect with themselves.

M. Ali (17, TR) shared:

'Even when we live in a community, we are still individuals. That's why I sometimes go to nature to talk with my inner voice.'

Some also find a connection through animals. The presence of nonjudgmental beings at the petting zoo or with their own pets helps them feel seen and more grounded.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN NATURE BOOSTS RESILIENCE

For many, nature becomes more powerful through movement. Hiking, cycling, playing games, or doing outdoor sports helps them feel better and stronger. Recep (22, TR), who recently finished university and is preparing to become a teacher, shared:

'In nature, we can spend time together without distractions. That's when we really listen to each other.'

Levi (15, NL) deals with trauma by biking 60 – 80 km through nature:

'Nature gives me energy... it helps me relax and unwind.'

Y. (17, Syria/NL) finds the sea calming:

'We Syrians love the sea. The sand feels soothing, and the sun gives me comfort. When the weather is sweet, I feel like going outside.'

Young people don't want long nature lectures. They want to do things – ideally together. They value activities that are simple, meaningful, and connected to their own lives. Several suggested nature-based activities.



WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE TO DO?

Ideas from the interviews:

- A forest game where you find natural objects to tell a story about resilience
- Silent walks to help calm a busy mind
- Build something together (like a campfire or a hut) and then reflect on how it relates to your challenges
- Cooking outdoors or sharing tea after a hike creates moments of trust.
- Dancing, running, rope games, or mountain biking to release tension
- Writing a rap or journaling after a walk to process emotions

NATURE HELPS, BUT ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

Young people show us that nature is not a magical fix, but a powerful setting for growth, strength, and healing. They teach us that resilience is not only about bouncing back – it's also about finding rest, connection, perspective, and joy. Not every young person feels directly at home in nature. Some need a gentle introduction. Some feel uncomfortable unless they are with friends. Some want music, others wish for silence. Some need movement, others need silence. Some go

out with friends, others go alone. Some want to explore their role in a group, others need space to talk with a tree. But almost all agreed: nature has something to offer if the space makes them feel safe and the activity fits them.

'Resilience means not giving up. Even if you fall, getting up and continuing is the best way.'

– Efe (16, TR)

'Spending time outdoors reminds me to appreciate the little things.'

– Hansa (19, TR)

'Nature helps me to think more clearly. And just be with myself.'

– Juliette (18, NL)

HOW YOUTH WORKERS CAN SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT WITH NATURE

- **Ask first** – What does the group or person you work with want or need?
- **Keep it flexible** – Mix quiet and active moments.
- **Use simple tools** – Music, objects from nature, short walks, and group games.
- **Create routines** – A weekly bench meeting, a walk before class, a forest ritual.
- **Normalise emotion** – Invite reflection, but don't force it. Let nature speak.

Let young people lead the way. Ask them what helps. Give them the tools to express it. And remember: sometimes, *just being together outside is enough.*



YOUTH, NATURE & RESILIENCE

INTEGRATING ECOPEDAGOGY AND ECOPSYCHOLOGY



This project explores how connecting young people with nature can foster emotional resilience, environmental awareness, and a deep sense of belonging. By integrating the principles of ecopedagogy and ecopsychology, we aim to create meaningful learning experiences that support personal and ecological growth.

We take you through our exploration in developing a shared vision that brings together the strengths of two organisations: Oba Utopia Education and Art Organisation (Türkiye) and Flourish in Nature Foundation (The Netherlands). This vision is closely aligned with the core values of Erasmus+ projects, including inclusion, diversity, innovation, active citizenship, and care for nature. We investigate how combining ecopedagogical and ecopsychological approaches can contribute to human and planetary resilience.

Planetary resilience refers to the Earth's ability to absorb shocks, like climate change, biodiversity loss, or pollution, while continuing to support life. It includes how natural systems and human societies adapt,

recover, and work together to sustain a healthy, livable planet for future generations.

As part of this journey, we asked ourselves: How can this toolkit catalyse social change and ecological awakening? How can we guide young people in discovering their place within Earth's community and inspire them to contribute to the care of our planet?

From the beginning, we were driven by a core challenge: How can we bring nature back into young people's everyday lives – not only as a setting, but as a source of well-being, connection, and purpose?"

To better understand the needs of young people and those who support them, we interviewed young people, youth workers, and experts in resilience and nature. We explored the challenges youth face daily, their connection with the natural world, and what kind of support youth workers need to guide them effectively in outdoor settings. Additionally, we drew insights from leading experts and recent scientific findings to enrich our understanding of how nature contributes to resilience.

We discovered that young people's resilience is deeply connected to the nurturing environments in which they are rooted – environments that offer safety, belonging, and meaningful connection to the natural world.

Roan (18, NL): 'Nature takes care of me, but only if I also take care of nature.'

We were impressed by how wisely young people talk about a reciprocal relationship with nature and by the fact that supervisors' support of them in outdoor activities requires a different role. If we translate the needs of young people into the role of the facilitator, we see that the facilitator plays a key role in guiding the learning process rather than delivering fixed outcomes. This means:

- Co-creation: Facilitators create space for young people to learn from each other, encouraging shared discovery.
- Connecting with nature: Facilitators support young people in observing and learning from nature's patterns and wisdom.
- Follow the process: The aim is not to complete an activity step by step, but to observe what emerges and adapt the

method to the group's needs. This requires sensitivity and creativity.

- Reflection: Facilitators help young people reflect on their experiences through conversation, journaling, or creative expression.

In this approach, nature is seen as a co-facilitator: a living, dynamic presence that offers metaphors, challenges, comfort, and inspiration throughout the learning process. Facilitators help young people tune into this relationship and recognise nature as an active partner in their development. Facilitators become guides and companions in the learning journey, attuned to what unfolds in the moment.

MAKING SPACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES

To truly make space for young people's voices, we must let go of the traditional mindset that 'We adults know what is good for young people' and shift toward a more inclusive approach that asks, 'What can we learn from young people?'





**THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN IN
RELATION TO THE ENVIRONMENT**

The complex challenges of our time demand fresh, creative thinking, and adolescents are uniquely equipped to meet this need. Experts point out that young people are natural innovators, often thinking outside the box. This is partly due to the developmental stage of the adolescent brain. The prefrontal cortex, also called the brain’s ‘final editor’ or ‘conductor,’ is still maturing during adolescence, but is highly flexible. This region governs self-regulation, planning, and decision-making.

Neuroscientist Dr. Kayla Green explains that brain regions do not all develop at the same rate. Adolescents experience heightened activity in areas linked to emotion, motivation, and reward around the ages of 15-17. However, neural pathways to and with the prefrontal cortex are still being formed. This neurological state fosters openness, exploration, and flexible thinking, making young people especially receptive to new ideas and creative expression. It’s no coincidence that social trends, cultural movements,

and innovative thinking often emerge first among youth.

Yet society often emphasises the risks associated with adolescence, such as impulsivity or substance use, while overlooking the developmental strengths of this phase. In reality, this same neuro-plasticity allows adolescents to discover themselves, form identity, and imagine new possibilities.

Moreover, the brain develops in relation to the environment. An adverse environment, such as poverty, exclusion, discrimination, bullying, abuse, or neglect, can hinder brain development and lead to potential mental problems later. Therefore, according to recent scientific research, the social environment plays a crucial role.

Resilience is often seen as something that must come from within oneself. However, it is not only the individual who should be resilient; systems also need to be resilient. As such, resilience can also be embedded in the social environment: family, school, nature, neighbourhood - all systems that help young people cope with adversity.

ECOPEDAGOGY

Guiding young people in connection with themselves, others and the earth. Ecopedagogy focuses on education in, about and with nature. It combines ecological knowledge with an awareness of our interdependence and the need for sustainable, equitable relationships with the natural world. Working with young people means letting them experience nature and inviting them to reflect, connect and take responsibility.

This approach draws its strength from three guiding principles.

Ecological Activism

Paulo Freire is considered the founder of ecopedagogy. He saw education as a liberating process in which people learn to think critically about their relationship with the world. He advocated dialogue, experiential learning and developing awareness of social and ecological systems. In youth work, young people are active participants, not passive recipients.

Ecological Connection

Richard Louv, known for ‘Last Child in the

Woods’, introduced the concept of nature-deficit disorder and showed how young people become alienated from nature, with negative consequences for their physical and mental health. In his work, he advocates restoring this connection by making nature experiences integral to upbringing and education.

Place-Based Learning

David Sobel emphasises that young people must develop a positive, emotional connection with nature before confronting complex environmental issues. His concept of ecophobia shows that talking about climate issues too early and too abstractly can be paralyzing. He advocates giving young people place-based learning activities, and playful and meaningful nature experiences as a basis for resilience and engaged citizenship.





ECOPSYCHOLOGY

Support young people with direct nature experiences to strengthen their resilience through a deeper connection with nature.

Ecopsychology explores how the relationship between humans and nature affects our mental and physical well-being. It argues that problems such as stress, anxiety, alienation, and loss of meaning stem in part from our alienation from the natural world. Not only is the Earth sick, but so are we, and the two are deeply connected.

Ecological Crisis

Theodor Roszak, founder of the field, introduced the term ecopsychology in the 1990s. In ‘The Voice of the Earth’, he argues for a psychology that puts the Earth at the centre. He sees the ecological crisis as a reflection of humans’ inner crises. By providing space for nature experiences within youth work, young people can connect with something bigger than themselves, promoting wellbeing and more engagement with their environment.

Ecological Awakening

Joanna Macy, a pioneer in ecopsychology and ecophilosophy, adds a spiritual and experiential dimension. Through ‘The Work That Reconnects’ and experiential activities in and with nature, Macy supports young people in recognising and transforming feelings of grief, fear, and powerlessness around ecological crises into engagement, hope, and action. She emphasises the need for deep connection and ecological awakening in response to environmental alienation.

For young people, nature experiences increase their resilience and help them find meaning and direction in a time of ecological and societal challenges.

Ecological Identity

Bill Plotkin, wilderness guide and ecopsychologist, argues in ‘Wild Mind’ that our deepest identity lies not in our social role, but in our place within the Earth Community - our ecological identity. He stresses that modern cultures do not help young people in this quest. We sit indoors a lot, while our wild, free side gets the most space in landscapes that suit us, our emotional, playful, sensual, and

instinctive side emerges, the part associated with rivers, mountains, deserts, plains, and forests. This side knows no shame or fear and causes young people to flourish in natural environments.

However, according to Plotkin, young people hardly learn how to handle emotions, shape social relationships, or care for wounded parts. In healthy cultures, however, rites of passage and mythical-poetic language (metaphors, stories, symbolism) help young people discover their place in the world.

For example, after a Vision Quest (spending time alone in nature), as Plotkin describes, there can be a sense that the barrier between yourself and the world falls away - a deep understanding of coming home to the world. Such experiences transform consciousness and personally fulfilling living and service to the earth.

This offers valuable inspiration for youth work: giving young people space for nature experiences, rituals, and silence creates a bed for personal development. This makes young people feel stronger and more

resilient, and start recognising and shaping their unique contribution to the world.

Ecosystem Approach

Roger Duncan, author of ‘Nature in Mind’, relates ecopsychology to systems thinking, imagination, and adolescent well-being. He shows how Western culture, emphasising control, individualism, and distance from the body and the earth, contributes to a loss of resilience.

In contrast, many ‘we-oriented’ cultures, like Türkiye, prioritise the relationship over the individual. Values such as connection, interdependence, and harmony with the natural world form the basis of resilience. Within these cultures, well-being is seen as something that emerges through strong bonds with others, with the land, and with the community as a whole.

Duncan argues for a nature-based language for resilience and well-being. He offers insights on how to live more in line with our natural rhythms in an increasingly technological society and urbanisation. His work substantiates why nature-based learning and thinking are essential for well-being.





In the context of Duncan’s work, his approach to mentoring young people means that he offers practical guidelines for reconnecting with nature and helps us understand and process knowledge about nature and our relationship with it. In youth work, ecopsychology offers a powerful lens: young people experience that they are not separate from nature, but part of it. Outdoor activities thus become more than relaxation or adventure; they are pathways to connection, ecological awareness, and resilience.

THE ECOSYSTEM MODEL OF RESILIENCE & NATURE
Ecopedagogy and ecopsychology teach us the importance of connection: with ourselves, others, and the environment. This approach can help young people feel stronger, more connected, and more resilient in a complex world.

Psychologist and researcher Laura Weiss (NL) clarifies that ‘resilience can be seen as an outcome or a process. Resources, such as a supportive social network, are crucial in managing adversity. Nature is another resource.’ She further emphasises: ‘Nature doesn’t just restore - it inspires. It’s a resource for growth, creativity, and connection that’s available to everyone.’

The coexistence of the ecopedagogical and ecopsychological approaches gives rise to a more holistic approach: the ecosystem model of Resilience. Resilience arises in a dynamic interaction between people and nature. Young people develop their inner strength through direct natural experiences, where they learn to better understand themselves and their environment. In the methodology of

Nature-Based Learning, we distinguish three steps on the learning journey.

Plant
Prepare fertile ground, Warming-Up
Create the right conditions for learning. A first step is to connect with nature and open up.

Type of Activities: check-in, group bonding, name games, icebreakers, energisers, nature walks.
These activities create a safe base for growth.

Flourish
Experience, Act, Reflect
Step into the Learning Zone.
Engage in outdoor challenges that push boundaries, grow resilience, and expand the comfort zone.
Type of Activities: Mapping your environment, storytelling, eco art, nature rituals, adventurous outdoor activities, dance.

Harvest
Wrap Up, Collect Grow
Enjoy
Satisfaction of learning and growing

Transfer to practice.
Harvesting what has been learned, anchoring it, translating it into everyday life, setting learning intentions, and making it applicable to other areas of life. Type of Activities: Nature journaling, Wrap up of learnings, Rites de Passage.

Resilience thrives through biodiversity, exchange, and a cyclical learning process, as in nature. This three-step model helps young people become stronger and develop a deeper connection with themselves and the natural world.

The outdoor activities in this toolkit focus on how we can engage in natural experiences to boost ecological activism by creating a learning environment for young people where they can gain a better understanding of their future, their qualities, strengths, and the support available in their environment, all while connecting with natural resources. At the same time, the activities empower young people to make a *meaningful contribution to nature*, responding to their desire to care for the planet and be part of positive ecological change.

DEFINING THE TERMS

YOUTH

Our target group is young people aged between 14 and 18.

RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to cope with adversity through individual coping strategies (such as risk-taking, recognising and naming emotions, acceptance), and support from the social and natural environment. The family, neighbourhood, school, groups of friends, and other systems that young people belong to play a crucial role in strengthening resilience for individuals and systems. We see it as a dynamic process in which the individual and the systems around them contribute to recovery and growth.

ECOPEDAGOGY

Ecopedagogy aims to develop a deeper connection with nature and promote behavioural change to protect the planet by raising awareness of ecological and environmental issues. It combines education with environmental consciousness and sustainability, emphasising ecological responsibility at both personal and systemic levels. Central to ecopedagogy is

learning with and for nature – engaging with the natural world not merely as a subject of study but as an active partner in shaping more sustainable ways of living.

ECOPSYCHOLOGY

Ecopsychology focuses on the interaction between humans and nature and how this relationship affects our well-being. Central to this is the connection between humans and nature. Ecopsychology assumes that many of the psychological problems people experience, such as anxiety, depression and alienation, stem from a broken relationship with the natural world. It emphasises the importance of ecological connection and restoring a healthy relationship with nature as part of psychological well-being.

NATURE

By nature, we mean in this toolkit not only wild forests or distant mountain landscapes, but any environment in which we can experience connection with the living whole around us. This can be a park, a tree in the street, a vegetable garden, an urban fringe, a piece of wilderness or even a plant inside a building.

Nature is a space where young people can step out of their heads, slow down, feel, play, and breathe. It is a space where resilience can grow, emotions are welcome, and meaning can unfold. By not limiting nature to ‘big and far away’, we make it accessible and meaningful within the context of youth work. Nature provides a foundation for many young people as a source of recovery and growth.

Going out into nature means leaving our comfort zone and entering the learning zone.

NATURE-BASED LEARNING

Nature-based learning is a form of experiential learning, referred to as non-formal learning in Erasmus+, in which nature is approached as a learning environment, a source of inspiration and a co-facilitator. Young people learn by doing, exploring, moving, reflecting and connecting with the natural world. It is not only about being in nature, but also about learning from and collaborating with nature.

Nature-based learning combines different methodologies:

- Experiential learning** - Active learning through observation, movement, and natural experiments.
- Connection with nature** - Sensory experiences deepen awareness and strengthen the relationship with the natural environment
- Skill development** - Encourages collaboration, creativity, resilience, and problem-solving.
- Holistic growth** - Integrates cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects into a unified learning process.



NATURE-BASED LEARNING

METHODOLOGY

Nature-based learning (NBL) is an educational approach that draws on natural environments, elements, and experiences as a context for learning across subjects, developmental stages, and personal growth. It involves learning in, with, and about nature, encouraging learners to explore, observe, reflect, and interact with the natural world, whether in forests, gardens, parks, or even schoolyards.

NBL is not only about understanding nature, it's about learning with nature, for nature. Adopting this approach means embracing nature's abundant and spontaneous learning opportunities each moment offers. A bird's song can inspire a new learning journey; a fallen tree can spark reflective storytelling; an anthill can provide insights into social structures and cooperation. These are not just passing observations but profound, meaningful experiences that foster authentic learning (Sobel, 2004).

When we spend time in nature, unexpected learning opportunities arise naturally. To recognise and make use of

these opportunities, one must develop natural literacy, the skill of noticing and understanding the signs, patterns, and rhythms of the natural world. Strengthening one's connection with nature is essential, and this is cultivated through spending extensive time outdoors, engaging in reflective practice, and embracing nature with curiosity and humility (Louv, 2008; Green, 2012).

Developing a deep familiarity with the natural environment is essential for outdoor educators and facilitators. Repeated exposure allows outdoor facilitators to recognise subtle natural cues, engage in experiential learning, and guide learners through meaningful encounters. Additionally, technological tools developed in recent years can significantly enhance the quality of nature-based education. For instance, educators can use apps to identify birds by song or mushrooms by their features, increasing accuracy and engagement (Dickinson & Bonney, 2012).

To better engage youth, especially digital natives, educators can integrate tools like

QR codes placed around outdoor learning sites to create digital treasure hunts or challenge-based activities. These approaches blend digital and environmental literacy, fostering stronger emotional, sensorial, and cognitive connections with nature (Kuo et al., 2019).

Ultimately, blending traditional nature observation with modern digital tools enriches the learning experience and empowers young people to build a resilient, reciprocal, and meaningful relationship with the natural world.



WHO AM I AS A FACILITATOR OF NATURE-BASED LEARNING?

INTRODUCTION

Guiding young people in outdoor activities requires a different approach. In this module, you'll explore the facilitator's role and mindset and the practical and intuitive skills needed to support learning in nature. You'll also learn how to create a safe, inclusive, and engaging atmosphere for outdoor education.

Some of the activities in this toolkit may feel unfamiliar or challenging, especially if you're new to guiding with the help of nature. That's fine. What matters most is that you begin from where you are. Take the time to connect with nature yourself first. The more comfortable and grounded you feel outdoors, the more effectively you can support young people on their journey of discovery.

Mindset of the Facilitator

Nature-based learning requires a different role for the facilitator. Psychologist Alison Gopnik clearly describes this difference with her metaphor of the carpenter and gardener.

The carpenter tries to shape young people by modelling them, just as he crafts a piece of wood to become a table or chair. This top-down approach shapes the young person according to specific, predetermined expectations.

On the other hand, the gardener creates the right conditions for young people to grow, but allows each one to develop in their way. This is a more organic and bottom-up approach to learning.

Are you a Carpenter or a Gardener?

Read the description of the carpenter and the gardener. Reflect on the following questions:

- Where are you now? Which of the two do you identify with most?
- What do you realise? What does this say about your way of guiding young people?
- Where would you like to be? What would you like to change in your approach?
- What is your first step? How will you put this step into practice?



Carpenter

Belief: 'I can turn a wood block into a chair.'

Mindset: Young people need to be moulded into functioning adults.
Learning space: Top-down - 'I know what is good for them.'



Gardener

Belief: 'I create growing conditions so the seed can develop into what it wants to become.'

Mindset: We thrive when we experience freedom and space and can explore the world around us.

Learning space: Bottom-up - 'I create a safe space where young people can grow at their own pace and in their own way, like plants in a garden.'



PRACTICAL & NATURAL SKILLS FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING

Developing Sensory Awareness of the Outer and Inner Landscape

Sharpening our senses teaches us to notice subtle details in nature and within ourselves. This awareness deepens presence, focus, and emotional regulation.

A Different Role: Taking the Lead

In our pilots and work training social workers and young people, we noticed that going outdoors requires youth workers to take on a different role. It means taking the lead, actively guiding and inviting young people outside. Left to themselves, many tend to stay indoors. However, inspiring others starts with our enthusiasm and example. We invite young people to explore and connect by showing initiative and curiosity.

Navigating Risk in Play

Experiencing risk in a natural setting builds confidence, decision-making, problem-solving, creativity, and resilience. It's about learning to assess boundaries rather than avoiding challenges.

Nature as a Co-coach

Nature mirrors our emotions and offers lessons in patience, growth, and letting go. It becomes a silent partner in guiding self-discovery and reflection.

Make underlying (Dis)connections Visible Between Young People and their Ecological Home.

Many young people feel disconnected from nature without realising it. Through guided experiences, we can help them rediscover belonging and responsibility toward the earth.

CREATE A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

At the beginning of the activity, the facilitator ensures a safe learning environment by making clear arrangements with the group, such as creating a group agreement. Share your learning and development vision, and explain what you expect from the participants.

Why? Research shows that when we take time at the start of an activity to talk about how we want to treat each other, it helps create a safe and supportive space where everyone feels free to learn, share, and be themselves.

Non-judgmental-based Learning

Explain how you see your learning environment. We explain that we view the learning environment as a playground for exploration, curiosity, and growth. Imagine you were seven years old, building a treehouse, and it collapsed. You wouldn't think, 'I failed,' but rather, 'This was a good spot. Next time, I'll tie it stronger with rope.' There is no right or wrong here – only learning moments. That's how we invite you to step into this activity:

What went well?
What can I do differently next time?

Shared Values

We discuss values in a safe learning environment because shared values help create clarity and trust within the group. They are the foundation for treating each other so everyone feels free to learn, share, and be themselves. Examples we work with:

- Presence. I'm here and now, present in body and mind.
- Humbleness. I stay open and commit to lifelong learning. I acknowledge that there's always something I don't know.
- Courage. I dare to step into the learning zone, even when things are unfamiliar.
- Learning by Doing. I learn through practice and feedback. The more I give, the more I receive.
- Empowerment. I speak for myself. I don't fix other people's problems, but trust them to find solutions.

Holding Space

To create a holding space for young people in nature, we follow expert Heather Plett's core principles: We offer a safe, non-judgmental environment where young people feel seen, heard, and supported. We do not direct but gently guide their process with openness, trust, and presence,



not by fixing but by offering space for their wisdom and development to emerge. Nature asks a different role from facilitators, to give space to what happens in the moment, and to adapt to what happens. This is challenging because we tend to solve or fix things.

We are used to acting goal-oriented, following every step of the activity, for example, and getting frustrated when something completely different happens. The pilot showed that even for experienced outdoor facilitators, this is one of the most challenging skills: following what is happening in the group and tailoring the activity accordingly. The pilots also showed that the learning experience for individuals and groups is the greatest if you go with the flow.

Ownership & Inclusion

To encourage ownership of the learning process, we ask young people: ‘What is important to you? What would you like to add to this agreement?’
Tip: Write these agreements on a flipchart and hang it in the space. You can return to it at the start or end of any activity.

STEP INTO NATURE AND START WHERE YOU ARE

Our research and interviews made it clear that working in nature can be too big a step for some. Some saw nature-based activities as too vague or linked them to the stereotype of ‘tree-huggers’ or shamans. Others doubted the value of the activities, thinking that just sitting in the sun for a bit or walking through the dunes with young people wouldn’t achieve much. And for facilitators with a deep connection to nature, doing activities such as experiencing different parts of a tree (roots, trunk, crown) and experiencing their impact felt very natural.

This variety of responses also applies to the young people we work with. For example, the pilot showed that some young people with autism had difficulty visualising or imagining, such as imagining they are a tree, because they take things literally. This highlights the importance of ‘starting where you are’. As a facilitator, the young people will notice if you are uncomfortable with nature-based activities. Nevertheless, we encourage you to step out of your comfort zone and

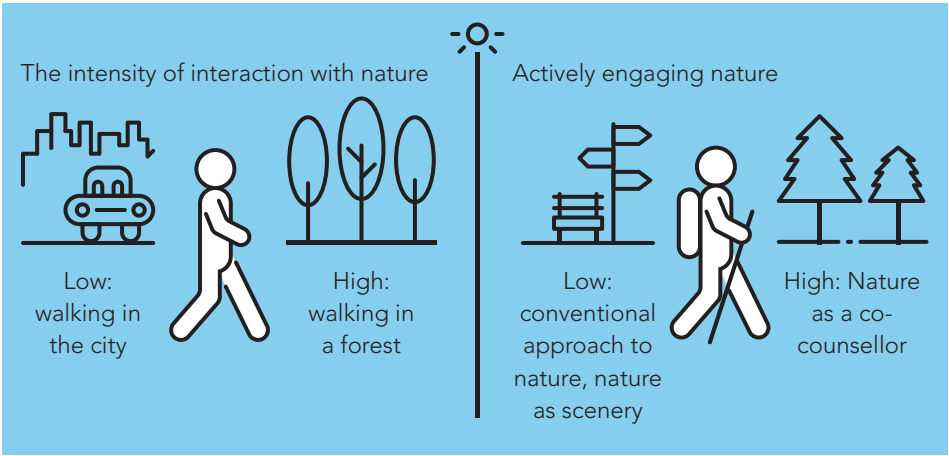
make nature-based learning your own, step by step. To this end, we distinguish three phases that can help you develop as a facilitator.

Cooley’s Model and the Three Phases of Nature-Based Learning

Researcher Sam Cooley (2020) conducted

a meta-analysis on the effects of guidance. He collected and analysed results from several studies, leading to clear insights. His model provides essential guidance for adding nature to the youth worker’s toolkit.

Cooley highlights two key aspects when working with nature:



THREE PHASES OF GUIDING AS A FACILITATOR IN NATURE



Phase 1: Looking at Nature

Simply observing nature can positively impact health and well-being. It enhances self-esteem, cognitive function, and mood, while also calming the body.

Methods:

- Greening the space with plants or nature posters
- Playing nature sounds
- Looking out of the window
- Asking young people about their safe space in nature
- Exploring which outdoor activities they enjoy
- Opening windows to let in fresh air

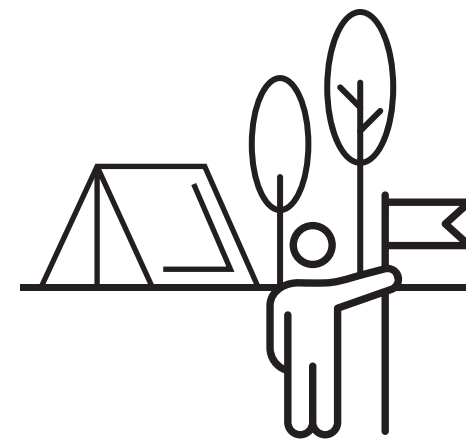
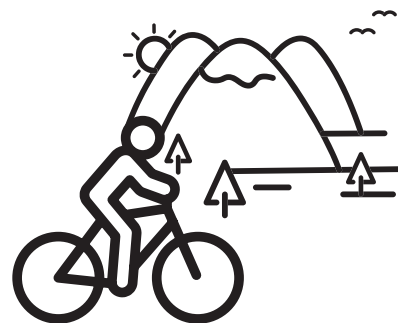
Phase 2: Being in Nature

Spending time in nature significantly benefits overall health, especially for socio-economically disadvantaged groups with limited access to natural environments.

Methodology:

Take your existing indoor methods and apply them outdoors. In this phase, nature serves primarily as a setting for activities such as:

- Walking
- Cycling
- Playing
- Picnicking



Phase 3: Intentionally Interacting with Nature

Here, the focus shifts to actively and consciously engaging with nature to support resilience and personal growth.

Methodology:

Nature-based learning, nature rituals, and drawing on nature's wisdom.

Activities:

- Outdoor exercises, games, gardening, and interacting with animals
- Mindfulness and meditation practices that connect the body and mind
- Using nature metaphors and nature as a mirror for self-reflection
- Encouraging young people to find something in nature that resonates with them
- Integrating natural elements into specific activities – for example, imagining a fallen tree as a symbol of a personal challenge: how do they approach it, walk around it, or face it?

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON NATURE AND RESILIENCE

Including cultural differences in Erasmus+ projects is essential because it helps young people learn to deal with diversity and be open to other perspectives. This promotes mutual understanding, respect, and inclusion within international groups.

In 24 interviews with young people, we spoke with people from different cultural, religious, and geographic backgrounds, including Turkish, Dutch, Belgian, Finnish, Syrian, and West African youth. We have learned that nature and resilience are not just individual experiences. They were also shaped by their culture, community, and worldview. Here are some insights about what we learned.

How Young People Interpret Resilience Across Cultures

The word 'resilience' wasn't always familiar to young people. In some interviews, translation or explanation is needed. It is a word not usually used in their daily language. However, young people from different cultural backgrounds linked it with their background and described it vividly and practically.

Examples:

- In Arabic, the word *Samoed* came up for a young refugee from Syria: the inner strength to endure hardship.
- In Türkiye, young people describe resilience as 'not giving up, staying calm, and believing in yourself – even when things go wrong.' In Turkish, it is often explained as '*duygusal dayanıklılık*,' which can be translated as 'emotional endurance.'
- In the Netherlands, resilience was often framed as "accepting what you can't change" or "learning from disappointment."

Community and connection are key in different cultures, but how we connect differs

Some cultures strongly value doing things *together*, such as walking, cooking, dancing, and praying, while others highlight the importance of alone time in nature to reflect.

Examples:

- Turkish youth often mentioned the importance of activities with friends, like group picnics or forest games.
- Young refugees preferred outdoor

group activities with peers over solo walks.

- Dutch and Belgian youth varied: some preferred solitary forest walks, others wanted playful outdoor games with friends.

Not Everybody Feels Safe & Connected in Nature

Not all young people feel at home in nature. For some, nature is unfamiliar or even uncomfortable.

Example:

- Y. (17, Syria/NL) shared his fear of dogs: *'In my country, people don't keep dogs as pets. In the Netherlands, I'm afraid, when I see them walking loose.'*

Barriers and Access to Nature

- In Western Europe, access to nature is generally assumed – many young people can reach forests, parks, or even scouting groups. Still, not everyone feels equally connected. For some Dutch youth, nature feels 'boring' unless structured by activities or shared with friends. *Nature is nice, but not something I would choose. If my friends go, I'll go.'* – Zara (14, NL)

- For refugee youth or those from more urbanised Turkish settings, nature is more precious and sometimes more challenging to access; weather, language barriers, or lack of time play a bigger role in whether they can enjoy it. Warm, sunny weather was significant for their well-being.

'Sweet weather helps me feel better.

Cold and rain make me stay inside, and then I feel worse. – Y., (17, Syria/NL)

Role of Faith and Ritual in Nature

- Dutch or Belgian youth mentioned faith and spirituality in connection to nature in the form of a ritual. *'When my friend blocked me, I did a ritual in nature to leave it behind. That helped me move on.'* – Lara (16, NL)
- In contrast, many Turkish and Syrian youth referred to prayer and reflection as part of their emotional coping, often practised in or connected to nature. *'I go for a walk, then I pray, then I feel calm again.'* – A., (17, Syria/NL)



What can facilitators in outdoor learning do concerning different cultural perspectives?

- Be aware that resilience can mean different things, from 'opening up' and 'accepting' to 'enduring' and 'remaining hopeful.' This requires actively exploring what resilience and nature mean for the young people you work with.
- Make space for cultural expression in activities such as music, language, food, rituals, and storytelling. Let young people bring their cultural habits, traditions, or stories into the activity.
- Access and safety also differ in a cultural context: physical, emotional, and cultural accessibility. Create safe and inclusive outdoor spaces.
- Be aware of comfort and safety needs, especially for those unfamiliar with nature.



HOW TO GUIDE YOUTH TOWARD NATURE

UNPLUG, STEP OUT, TUNE IN

What Youth Workers Can Learn About Nature and Resilience – Insights from the Field

How do you encourage teenagers to step outside, breathe in fresh air, and truly connect with the world around them? We asked 16 youth workers in the Netherlands, Türkiye, and a few other European countries this question. Their experiences reveal the promise and complexity of engaging nature to support young people's resilience. There is no step-by-step method for taking young people outdoors, but a shared wisdom is gathered from their practice and experiences. Below are the major insights based on the interviews with the youth workers, followed by twelve tips.

Start with Their World, Not with 'Nature'

Several youth workers, including Violette Brand, a youth and nature coach from the Netherlands (NL), emphasised the importance of starting where young people are. Rather than saying, 'Let's go into nature,' she begins with a more personal invitation: 'Where do you feel safe?' That might be a childhood park, a football field, or a street corner bench. When a young person feels ownership of

the place, the outdoors becomes familiar rather than foreign.

In Türkiye (TR), Cansu Üzümcü Ünüvar, an outdoor instructor working with young people with special needs, creates stories and challenges linked to real-life situations. She doesn't just plan an activity; she tells a story: 'What if you were lost in a forest – what skills would help you?' The narrative draws young people in and transforms the activity into an adventure.

Friends First, Nature Later

Whether in Türkiye or the Netherlands, one message is clear: social connection makes all the difference. Muhsin from Türkiye, a youth worker working with disadvantaged young people, sees how group activities draw young people in, even if nature isn't the original motivation. Leon Piksen, a youth worker from a rural area in the eastern part of the Netherlands, notices that while some teens may say nature is 'boring,' they still gather at sunset spots or forest benches with friends, quietly drawn to places where they can just be. And Erika Sall, a youth worker from Estonia, uses games, quizzes, and photo hunts to make outdoor learning playful and social.

Make it Playful and Simple

The most successful activities related to nature often start small and fun: baking a pumpkin, finding mushrooms, taking care of a plant. Annette Bol, a nature coach and specialist in Green mental care from the Netherlands, created a challenge where youth raised 'baby pumpkins' and presented them with pride – dead or alive, each pumpkin became a story of learning, care, and creativity. For Dennis Fieret, a psychologist working with young people in Youz, a residential setting in the Netherlands, even a clean-up walk becomes a moment of insight when young people reflect on nature's cycles or the role of mushrooms as 'cleaners of the forest.' As several youth workers said, start short, stay flexible, and let curiosity lead. Keep it playful, fun, simple, and manageable.

Create a Safe Place in Nature

For some young people, nature isn't immediately calming. Gaia Theil, who worked with unaccompanied young refugees in the Netherlands, points out that forests can trigger trauma for refugees who fled through them. Her solution: start with positive associations like city parks,

petting zoos, or picnics. This helps young people feel safe and comfortable, instead of telling them that nature must always feel peaceful or look a certain way.

Deal with Barriers to Going Outdoors

Many youth workers mentioned practical barriers: no raincoats, the wrong shoes, or a fear of the dark. Lia van Loo, a nature coach and volunteer for Scouting in the Netherlands, stressed the importance of being prepared and letting young people take responsibility for their choices. If someone eats all their snacks before noon, they learn. Youth workers need to hold space for discomfort, but not always solve it. Digital distraction is another major hurdle. Social media often pulls young people indoors, but can also be used to spark interest. Kemal Erdim, a youth worker from Türkiye, suggested that youth workers embrace art and storytelling on social media platforms that young people already use to go outdoors.

Nature as a Mirror

The most powerful learning often comes from subtle metaphors. Violette Brand invites young people to observe the forest's



diversity – how different trees grow together – and uses this to reflect on social comparison and self-worth. Lia speaks of anti-fragility: how muscles grow after strain or trees don’t worry after storms – they just root and begin again. In Estonia, Erika links seasonal changes to life’s cycles: letting go, resting, flourishing, regrowing. Nature teaches resilience not through instruction, but through presence. It models balance, chaos, recovery, and change. Hüseyin Çağlar İnce (TR), who is also the author of books on nature observation, puts it well: a burned forest regrows. A tree bends but doesn’t break. These are not lessons to be taught – they are to be experienced.

A Systemic Challenge

Many youth workers face the same structural problem: their colleagues or managers don’t always see the value of outdoor activities. Annette Bol (NL, walking coach and initiator of Green Mental Health Parnassia Group) described how overworked social workers often feel unsupported and untrained when working with nature. They may not even recognise their morning walk as an act of experiential

learning. The result? Good ideas get stuck before they start. Several interviewees called for simple tools: clear templates, seasonal cards, reflection questions, and goal-based exercises. This can help youth workers who need confidence and a framework to connect nature with personal development and well-being. We took this need as our starting point for developing activities for young people.

Final Thoughts: Resilience Grows in Relationship

What young people need, the youth workers say again and again, is not more pressure to succeed, but spaces to be themselves. Nature can offer that space. So can a caring adult who listens without judgment. Resilience isn’t just about bouncing back – it’s about having someone who holds space for you while you figure out how. As Dennis Fieret (NL) puts it: ‘Being outdoors with a group gives space for conversations to happen. You don’t direct, you follow.’ Let this be an invitation not to do more but to go slower, be present, and trust that small moments of care, laughter, and stillness can plant deep roots.

12 TIPS TO TAKE YOUNG PEOPLE OUTDOORS

Here are 12 tips based on our interviews that can help connect young people to nature and encourage them to go outdoors:

1. Start from the world of young people

Don’t begin with ‘let’s go into nature,’ but start with what they enjoy or already do. Build from what’s already meaningful to them.

2. Make it a group activity

Outdoor activities work best when social: group walks, games, biking, chilling around a fire. The social aspect makes nature more appealing and less intimidating for young people.

3. Make it active and fun

Young people are more likely to engage in exciting activities like mountain biking or cooking over a fire. Ask what they like to do.

4. Use food, music, and variety as hooks

Snacks, music, and chill moments matter. They make nature-based activities more enjoyable and less ‘forced.’

5. Keep the activities short at first

Not every young person has the patience (yet) for long hikes or reflection sessions.

6. Connect nature to real life

Nature can be a mirror that helps you reflect on your life. This becomes more powerful when young people experience it directly – sitting under a tree, watching water flow, or touching soil.

7. Provide structure but allow freedom and flexibility

Have a basic plan when going outdoors, but allow space for free play or spontaneous reflection.

8. Use role models and peers

Youth are more likely to join when they see peers enjoying it. Social media or storytelling can help – post photos, share short videos, or let young people create their narratives about what they experienced.

9. Be aware of barriers

Practical things matter: warm clothes, good shoes, dry spots to sit, short distances, and safe areas.

10. Create safety

Respect fears (e.g., dogs, darkness) and address them gently. Make sure no one feels left out or embarrassed.

11. Be a role model

Show your curiosity, calmness, or joy in nature. When you enjoy it authentically, it invites young people to explore that experience for themselves. Have or gain some knowledge about the nature around you.

12. Hold space for discomfort – don’t always fix it

Let young people learn through experience and devise their own solutions as they explore the outdoors.

EXPERTS' PERSPECTIVES

ON RESILIENCE, NATURE, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Resilience in Young People: What Nature and Science Teach Us

Resilience is often described as the ability to bounce back from hardship, but the ten experts from across Europe that we spoke with suggest it's much more than that. For young people especially, resilience is not only about recovery - it's about connection, regulation, and growth. In the face of today's challenges - from mental health struggles to climate anxiety - nature is emerging as both teacher and resource.

Resilience is a Process, not something you are born with

According to psychologist and researcher Laura Weiss (NL), resilience is not something you either have or don't. It's a dynamic process, shaped by relationships, environments, and meaningful experiences. 'Resilience is not about bouncing back,' she says. 'It's about using your resources to regain balance after experiencing adversity.'

F. Senem Şahlar, a psychotherapist from Türkiye, agrees: 'Resilience is the capacity to develop in the face of a negative experience or a difficult event. This is not just about enduring – it's about creating

and using resources to continue your life meaningfully.'

The Body as a Compass

Psychotherapist Hilde Bolt (NL) urges us to help young people reconnect with their bodies. 'We have the same nervous system as animals but don't listen to our natural responses,' she says. She tells the story of a young woman who entered her room and said she didn't want to be there. 'I asked her: What does your body want? She said she wanted to lie under the table with a blanket. So I let her. And that was exactly what she needed to feel safe.'

(Source: Lecture 'The Body as a Basis for Feeling Safe,' 28 November 2025)

Hilde Bolt believes learning to self-regulate should be a basic competency:

'Safety means: I can carry myself – or reach out to another person.'

– Hilde Bolt, psychotherapist

'Focus is the gateway to our authentic selves'

– Elke Geeraerts, neurologist

'Otherwise it's like driving a car without knowing where the brakes or the accelerator are.'

The Attention Crisis

Neurologist Elke Geeraerts (BE) warns in her lecture for experts in stress and burn-out (18 November 2024) of the overstimulated lives many young people are living. 'We are addicted to distraction,' she says. 'Smartphones have created 'Smombies' – zombies walking around glued to screens.' She references the work of Daniel Kahneman: 'System 1 is fast, emotional, and impulsive – it's always on. But System 2 is where our authenticity lives: curiosity, courage, deep attention. We must teach young people to activate this system.'

She uses a natural metaphor: 'There's always an elephant – something deeply important – but we get distracted by rabbits: every message, every notification. Focus helps you stay with the elephant.'

Young People Want Meaning – and to Be Heard

Kayla Green (NL), a postdoctoral researcher at Erasmus University Rotterdam, emphasises the importance of listening to young people. 'One in three young people in the Netherlands suffers from performance pressure. Instead of

'Resilience is dynamic – young people, their environment, and the world they engage with.'

– Kayla Green, neuroscientist and postdoctoral researcher at Erasmus University Rotterdam.





asking what's wrong with them, we should ask: What gives you energy? What makes your life meaningful?'

She found that small acts of contribution matter deeply: 'Doing something nice for someone else - like walking a neighbor's dog - gave young people a sense of purpose. We must stop treating youth as passive receivers and instead invite them to be changemakers.'

Nature as a Mirror and a Mentor

'Nature shows us that dying is not just physical,' says Şahlar. 'Failing an exam or not getting a job can feel like death. But

'Nature helps young people understand they are part of something larger. It connects them to life itself'

– Fatma Senem Şahlar, psychotherapist.

nature teaches us that death is part of the cycle. After every winter, spring comes.' Thomas Albers, an ecopsychologist from the Netherlands living in Italy, sees nature as a powerful resilience resource: 'It's not just about peace and quiet. It's about seeing yourself as part of something bigger. Nature helps put problems into perspective.'

Physical geographer and expert in coastal flood risk management, Quirijn Lodder from the Netherlands, explains resilience through landscape: 'If a dune erodes, it grows back. That's resilience. Natural systems recover - and people can too. But we must allow time and space for that recovery.'

Healing and Growing Through Outdoor Activities

In Türkiye, ecopsychologist Birsen Civelek's nature camps are a model for combining challenge and care. 'Young people walk, climb, sleep under the stars - without their phones. They struggle and cooperate, and in the end, they say: I did this. I can handle more than I thought.' Laura Weiss echoes this: 'Nature positively impacts hedonic well-being (happiness)

'Even when struggling, being in nature reminds us we're part of something bigger.'

– Thomas Abers, ecopsychologist

and eudaimonic well-being (meaning). It's not just for people who love nature. It works for everyone.'

Ecological Awareness as Inner Strength

Nature, says Laura Weiss, shifts our value orientation: 'People who spend more time in nature tend to focus less on external

validation - like money or status - and more on relationships, meaning, and compassion.'

F. Senem Şahlar adds: 'Nature is not always peaceful. There's also struggle and aggression. But it reflects life honestly. Learning to live with that complexity is part of building resilience.'

Resilience in Nature: A Youth Worker's Perspective

What does this mean for youth work? It means helping young people recognise their resources – whether a supportive friend, a quiet forest, or their breath. It means building programs that don't just talk about resilience, but allow it to be practised through movement, challenge, rest, reflection, and connection.

'Resilience is not just about bouncing back. It is using your resources to regain balance after experiencing adversity, with others by your side'

– Laura Weiss, psychologist and researcher.

OUTDOOR CHECKLIST

FOR FACILITATORS WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN NATURE

Create a safety plan tailored to your group, the organisation, and the natural environment. Here are some tips to get you started (Harper, 2019).

Clothing

- Waterproof coat (plus a spare if needed).
- Rain pants or warm shell pants.
- Spare warm layers (fleece, thermal).
- Hat and gloves (plus extras).
- Protective, terrain-appropriate footwear.
- Long sleeves and closed shoes to protect against bites, stings, or scratches.

Equipment

- Waterproof tarp and ropes (for shelter).
- Sit pads, blankets, or insulation for damp ground.
- Sun protection (hats, sunscreen).
- First aid kit (in backpack).
- Tick Remover. In the evening, check your body for ticks – especially behind your knees, around your waist, armpits, neck, and hairline. If you find one, ask an adult or facilitator for help removing it safely.
- Collect allergy information before.
- Communication tools (phone, whistle).

Orientation & Safety Outdoors

- Bring a good map of the surroundings. Clearly define the boundaries of the activity area, so participants know where they can and cannot go.

Food & Drinks

- Water bottle.
- Nuts, fruit, or snacks.
- Thermos of hot tea (or bring a camp stove to make tea together).
- Cups or mugs.

Materials

- Writing tools and a waterproof notebook.
- Tape, ropes, and other basic materials for activities.



HOW TO CREATE AN OUTDOOR ACTIVITY ON RESILIENCE?

MANUAL FOR NATURE-BASED LEARNERS

We have designed a template to serve as a basis for developing the activities in this toolkit. We invite facilitators to use it to create new activities or to co-create with young people. Moreover, the template can transform existing indoor activities into outdoor ones.

Flow Learning for Young People

When you develop an activity for young people, please use the tips from nature expert Joseph Cornell.

- Flow learning has four phases:
1. Encourage enthusiasm. This involves playfulness, alertness
 2. Concentrate attention. receptivity
 3. Experience directly, become absorbed in the experience
 4. Share inspiration, clarifying and deepening the experience. Because the game forms are part of nature, we have fun and experience inner calm.

In this way, we become entirely absorbed in the present moment, not worrying about the past or the future, over which we have no influence. Our creativity is unleashed, and we become joyfully, wholly alive (Cornell, 2015).



Name of the Activity

Instructions: Find a surprising name that excites young people about the activity. It should not be a game of resilience, but ‘Find natural objects’.

Group or Individual

Indicate: Is it a whole-group, individual, pair, or small-group activity?

Keyword Learning Outcomes

Think of one or two keywords that capture the core of your activity and reflect what young people can discover about resilience through it. For the toolkit, we used, for example, these kinds of keywords: Creativity, Empathy, Exploring challenges, Flexibility, Fun, Adventure.

Type of Activity

Think about the kind of activity you are designing. Is it playful, reflective, creative, or physical? Choose the type of activity that best describes the core form and purpose. This will help others understand how it supports young people’s learning and resilience.

- Examples of activity types:
- Name Game – playful icebreaker to build group connection
 - Eco Art – creative expression using natural materials
 - Nature Ritual – a symbolic moment to mark transitions or intentions
 - Mindfulness – quiet reflection and presence in nature
 - Adventure – a physical challenge to step into the learning zone

Time (in minutes)

Indicate the duration of the activity in minutes or hours

4

NAME YOUR NATURE

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Group

TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Icebreaker, Name Games

KEYWORDS

Connection, Creativity

TIME

15-25 minutes
(depending on group size)

PURPOSE

- Encourage participants to learn each other's names in a memorable and fun way
- Promote self-expression and creative thinking through natural elements
- Develop awareness of body, voice, and group presence

MATERIALS

No materials needed

PREPARATION

A quiet, open space where everyone can stand in a circle

PLANT

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction

- Invite participants to stand in a circle.
- Explain the goal: Each person will introduce themselves by saying their name along with a nature-related sound and movement that represents them. These can come from animals, trees, weather, water, etc.
- Ask each person to choose a nature-related quality that starts with the same letter as their name and say it before their name (e.g., "Buzzing Bengü").
- Then, they make the chosen sound and movement.
- Go around the circle so everyone gets a turn.

Step 2. Demonstration

- Start by modelling the activity. For example:
"Buzzing Bengü" – makes a buzzing bee sound and mimics a flying bee with fingers.
"Orange Oda" – forms a big round orange shape with arms and says "ooo" like in "orange."
"Stormy Sybren" – makes wave motions with hands and blows out a stormy wind sound.

Step 3. Group Repeat

- After each person takes their turn, the entire group repeats that person's name, sound, and movement.
- This repetition helps reinforce memory and builds a shared sense of group energy.

REFLECTION

You can discuss the following questions with the group:

- How did it feel to express yourself through sound and movement?
- Was it easy or hard to find your name's "natural" version?
- Did anything surprise you about what others shared?
- What did you notice about group energy before and after this activity?

COMMENTS

- This activity is excellent for mixed-language groups, as names and nonverbal expressions go beyond language barriers.

You can adjust the activity for different energy levels. It can be kept calm or made silly and loud, depending on the group.

- It encourages laughter, bonding, and engagement early on.

VARIATION

Make an optional challenge round:

At the end, invite some or all participants to try to repeat everyone's name, nature quality, sound, and movement.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Embodied learning and nature-based play are core components of social-emotional learning. This activity taps into creative drama, sound therapy, and kinaesthetic memory, which have improved group trust, self-confidence, and retention in non-formal education settings.

Purpose (learning goals)

Describe how the activity connects to resilience and nature.
List up to a maximum of three clear learning goals.

Materials

List the materials needed for the activity, such as paper, pens, natural objects, and a blanket.

Preparation

Describe what preparation is needed for the activity. For example, finding a suitable spot in nature in advance, gathering materials, or checking the weather conditions.

Steps

Here you describe step-by-step how to guide the activity.
This is the so-called 'handout of the activity.' It provides clear instructions for carrying out the core part of the activity. Since we use non-formal and experiential learning, detailed introductions with much information are not always necessary. Instead, this information can be shared during the debriefing and evaluation moments. It is often more effective if young people simply begin their experience journey, and later reflect and make sense of their learning with the support of the facilitator.

Reflection

An activity becomes a learning experience only when we reflect on it.
Here, you can create reflection questions such as:
'What went well?' and
'What can I do differently next time?'

Comments

Here, you can include specific requirements, such as prior experience with mindfulness or familiarity with the target group, knowing the group well is essential, for example.

Variation

Here you can add variations or extensions of the activity to adapt it to different groups or goals.

Background information.

You can add the activity's theoretical, eco-psychological, or eco-pedagogical background here. You can also include tips for further reading, such as books, films, podcasts, or articles.

SHARE YOUR ACTIVITY WITH US!

On our websites, we share our activities. Please send us your activity so that we can add it to the toolkit:

- <https://flourishinnature.org/projects/resilience-in-nature/>
- [Mailto: oda@flourishinnature.org](mailto:oda@flourishinnature.org)
- <https://www.obader.org/resilienceinnature>
- [Mailto: info@utopiaeduart.org](mailto:info@utopiaeduart.org)

**ECOSYSTEM
MODEL OF
RESILIENCE**

**PREPARE
FERTILE GROUND
WARMING UP**

PLANT

**CREATE THE RIGHT
CONDITIONS
FOR LEARNING**

**EXPERIENCE
ACT
REFLECT**

FLOURISH

**STEP INTO THE
LEARNING
ZONE**

**WRAP-UP
COLLECT
GROWTH**

HARVEST

**ENJOY
SATISFACTION OF
LEARNING AND
GROWING**



LEARN

PREPARE FERTILE GROUND

WARMING UP

CREATE THE RIGHT CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING.

Name

Mood of the Herd
Name Your Nature
Resilience Bingo
Ecological Awakening
Walk your Natural Rhythm
Balloon Up
Step into the Learning Zone

Type of Activity

Sheep-In
Name Game
Icebreaker
Day Start Activity
Nature Walk
Energiser
Recognising your Learning Zone

MOOD OF THE HERD

SHEEP-IN

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL
Both

TYPE OF ACTIVITY
Check-in

KEYWORDS
Awareness of mood

TIME
5-10 minutes

PURPOSE
Raise awareness of individual and group moods.
Encourage emotional expression and openness; this can help develop emotional resilience.

MATERIALS
A visual of sheep displaying different moods

PREPARATION
Print out the visual

STEPS

Step 1. Explain the purpose of a check-in

A check-in is a simple yet powerful method to create space for everyone to share something about themselves or the topic before starting the session.

Step 2. Create a safe space and explain the check-in guidelines

- Start as a facilitator by choosing your sheep first - this serves as an example and guideline for the group.
- No one reacts to what others say. We listen without judgment.
- Let everyone take their turn in 'popcorn style,' meaning participants speak spontaneously, without a fixed order. Whoever feels ready speaks next. In short: When you 'pop,' you speak.
- The freedom to share means that participants can choose not to share.

Step 3. Ask a guiding question

The simplest option is to ask:
'On this sheep scale, how do you feel today?'



(Optional)

- How did choosing a sheep help you express your feelings?
- Which sheep would you like to be? And is there a difference with the sheep that you feel now?
- How does your 'sheep mood' affect your engagement in today's session?

Facilitator Check-In: Interpreting Group Dynamics

Did any of the sheep choices surprise you? Why? What patterns do you notice in the group's mood? What adjustments could you make to better attune to the group's needs?

- Let young people create emotion cards and drawings, or select or take photos.
- Ask participants what question they are curious about for the day.
- What are your expectations of this activity?
- Look for other fun animal pictures online
- Let young people share how they're feeling using a weather report.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Connection with nature. Animals constantly adapt to their natural environment, as we adapt to our internal emotional landscapes and challenges. Participants naturally share more about their feelings and state of mind by choosing a sheep and explaining why.

Building resilience through self-awareness is a key aspect of emotional resilience. By identifying how young people feel in the moment, they can better understand their emotions and cope with challenges, a crucial component of resilience.

This check-in is inspired by Deep Democracy, a method designed to listen to the wisdom of the minority. Deep Democracy encourages dialogue and discussion by actively including alternative voices in decision-making. Including diverse voices in the decision-making process ensures that decisions are widely supported and that the group's full potential is utilised.

NAME YOUR NATURE

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL
Group 

 **TYPE OF ACTIVITY**
Icebreaker, Name Games

KEYWORDS
Connection, Creativity 

 **TIME**
15–25 minutes
(depending on group size)

- PURPOSE**
- Encourage participants to learn each other’s names in a memorable and fun way
 - Promote self-expression and creative thinking through natural elements
 - Develop awareness of body, voice, and group presence

MATERIALS
No materials needed

PREPARATION
A quiet, open space where everyone can stand in a circle

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction

- Invite participants to stand in a circle.
- Explain the goal: Each person will introduce themselves by saying their name along with a nature-related *sound* and *movement* that represents them. These can come from animals, trees, weather, water, etc.
- Ask each person to choose a *nature-related quality* that starts with the same letter as their name and say it before their name (e.g., “Buzzing Bengü”).
- Then, they make the chosen sound and movement.
- Go around the circle so everyone gets a turn.

Step 2. Demonstration

- Start by modelling the activity. For example:
“Buzzing Bengü” – makes a buzzing bee sound and mimics a flying bee with fingers.
“Orange Oda” – forms a big round orange shape with arms and says “ooo” like in “orange.”
“Stormy Sybren” – makes wave motions with hands and blows out a stormy wind sound.

Step 3. Group Repeat

- After each person takes their turn, the entire group repeats that person’s name, sound, and movement.
- This repetition helps reinforce memory and builds a shared sense of group energy.

REFLECTION

You can discuss the following questions with the group:

- How did it feel to express yourself through sound and movement?
- Was it easy or hard to find your name’s “natural” version?
- Did anything surprise you about what others shared?
- What did you notice about group energy before and after this activity?

COMMENTS

- This activity is excellent for mixed-language groups, as names and nonverbal expressions go beyond language barriers.
- You can adjust the activity for different energy levels. It can be kept calm or made silly and loud, depending on the group.
- It encourages laughter, bonding, and engagement early on.

VARIATION

Make an optional challenge round:

At the end, invite some or all participants to try to repeat *everyone’s* name, nature quality, sound, and movement.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Embodied learning and nature-based play are core components of social-emotional learning. This activity taps into creative drama, sound therapy, and kinaesthetic memory, which have improved group trust, self-confidence, and retention in non-formal education settings.

RESILIENCE BINGO

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Group



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Icebreaker, Team Building

KEYWORDS

Getting To Know
Each Other



TIME

15-20 minutes

PURPOSE

- Encourage social interaction and group bonding
- Facilitate personal discovery and shared experiences
- Create a safe and open environment for participants

MATERIALS

Bingo paper sheet specially prepared for the group, pens or pencils.

PREPARATION

Here are some questions for the Resilience Bingo Game. You can choose from these, use them as inspiration to create your own Bingo list, or simply use the template we've provided below. You can also invite young people to come up with their questions.

Resilience Bingo Questions

- Planted a tree?
- Watched a sunrise or sunset outdoors?

- Name three different trees.
- Camped under the stars?
- Walking barefoot on grass or sand?
- Taken care of a plant?
- Picked fruit directly from a tree or bush?
- Climbed a tree?
- Like the smell of rain or the earth after rain?
- Made art with natural materials?
- Walked in the forest alone?
- Recycle in your daily life?
- Like to be in the mountains?
- Like to be in the forest?
- Like to be by the sea?
- Have a secret place in nature?

PLANT

STEPS

Step 1. Distribute the Bingo Cards

Hand out one Bingo sheet to each participant.

Step 2. Instructions for the Group

- Tell the participants: "Complete your Bingo Card by finding someone who fits each description and write their name in the corresponding spaces on the bingo card."
- The goal is to complete the Bingo card by talking to *everyone* in the room.
- For each box on the card, find *someone who fits the description* (e.g., "Has planted a tree," "Enjoys being in the forest").
- Ask them questions like:
"Have you ever planted a tree?"
"Do you like to be in the forest?"
"Have you ever gone camping?"

If they say "Yes," write *their name* in that box.

- You can only write a person's name once per card.
- Everyone should speak to everyone at least once!

Guidelines for Filling Your Bingo Card

- *One Name per Box, One Time per Card:* Each person's name should appear only once on your Bingo card.
- *Multiple Names in One Box (If Needed):* If your group has more people than questions (e.g., 20 people and only 16 questions), you can include more than one name in a single box — just make sure each person appears only once on your card.

Step 3. How to Complete

The goal is to talk to everyone in the group and find a proper place for them on the Bingo card. The activity finishes when everyone has completed filling in the cards.

Participation is optional. You can join the game or simply observe. The facilitator usually stays as an observer, which is an excellent opportunity to get to know the group and observe how they interact.



RESILIENCE BINGO

Complete your Bingo Card by finding someone who fits each description and write their name in the corresponding spaces on the bingo card.

Planted a tree?	Watched a sunrise or sunset outdoors?		Name three different trees.
Camped under the stars?		Walking barefoot on grass or sand?	Taken care of a plant?
Picked fruit directly from a tree or bush?	Climbed a tree?	Like the smell of rain or the earth after rain?	Made art with natural materials?
	Walked in the forest alone?	Recycle in your daily life?	Like to be in the mountains?
Like to be in the forest?	Like to be by the sea?		Have a secret place in nature?

RESILIENCE BINGO

Complete your Bingo Card by finding someone who fits each description and write their name in the corresponding spaces on the bingo card.



You can discuss the following questions with the group:

- What surprised you the most?
- Are there any questions that you couldn't answer?

It is possible to ask the participants almost anything in the questions. We can also ask questions that reflect their relation to nature or about how they feel at that moment.

Participants can create their own questions and create an entirely new Bingo game.

Psychological and educational research supports playful activities such as *Resilience Bingo* in promoting positive emotional and social outcomes. According to Lev Vygotsky's social development theory, learning occurs most effectively through social interaction and shared experiences. Icebreakers and games reduce social barriers, promote laughter, and lower cortisol levels (the stress hormone), creating a psychologically safe space for participants to open up and connect.



ECOLOGICAL AWAKENING

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Both



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Nature Walk
Day start activity

KEYWORDS

Awareness of body, self,
people, and nature



TIME

30-60 minutes

PURPOSE

Feel that you are part of
an ecosystem
Awareness of your senses

MATERIALS

Participant Handouts:
printed handout with the
reflection questions from
Step 3. Nature Awakening
Tingsha Bells: Bring a
tingsha to signal
participants when to
return, especially if they
are spread out in the
forest.
Sit Maps: Provide simple
sit mats for participants to
sit on during their solo
time in nature.

PREPARATION

Find a natural place with
diverse fauna.

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction

- Ask participants to turn off their phones.
- Briefly introduce the Wood Wide Web:
Beneath our feet, trees and fungi form a hidden network. They share water, nutrients, even warnings - like an underground internet of the forest. It's nature's way of staying connected.
- Invite a short group reflection:
'Have you ever felt like nature was communicating or connected somehow?'

Step 2. Silent Walk (a few minutes)

Begin walking in silence.'As you walk, imagine the network under your feet. Roots and fungi connect everything. How does this change how you walk, how you feel, or what do you notice?'

Step 3. Walk and talk

Pair up with someone. During the walk, discuss:

Ask: What attracts you in nature?

1. What catches your attention in nature?
2. What could it mean or remind you of?
3. How does it make you feel?

After a while, switch partners and repeat the same questions.

After this, more steps follow. See if they fit the group or if just a few steps are enough.

Step 4. Embodied walking

As you continue walking, bring your attention to your body. How do your feet meet the ground?
Can you feel rooted, like a tree connecting down into the earth?

Step 5. Find your place in nature

Pause and find a place to sit alone for 5 - 10 minutes.

- Reflect on this question: 'If nature could see, hear, taste, smell, and touch; how would it experience you right now?'
- Come together in a circle and share what came up (if comfortable).

- 'What if everything you saw, every tree, every bird, didn't judge you? Nature accepts you completely. What if you could see yourself this way, too?'
- In pairs, share: *What did you realise about judgment, toward yourself or others?*

- This connects your mind and heart. Feel your breath. Ask yourself: What do I truly need?
- Close your eyes and travel back to a nature memory from when you were 7 or 8 years old.
- Where were you? What were you doing? How did you feel in your body?
- Thank that memory.
- Share your memory with a partner while walking.

If you like, pick up a natural object representing this reflection, like a pebble or leaf.

In pairs, take a final walk and answer: 'What was your favorite moment in this walk?'



- Let participants share freely.
- Close by thanking the group and inviting a deep breath together.

Ask: What do you realise? Or: What have you noticed?



You can start with silent mindfulness exercises, but from piloting, we learned that young people find the mindfulness exercises in silence boring. So you need to level up according to your group. Try to alternate between a silent walk and sharing, or give fun activity questions like:

- Find three leaves with different colours. Here is how we include the educational part: it allows the facilitator to educate the participants on recognising surrounding plants. Moreover, if you don't have this knowledge, please consider using an app like PlantSnap, iNaturalist, or Google Lens.
- Find something in nature to make a sound with. When participants return to the circle, they can try to make music all together.
- Find a tree to climb in.

Get creative: use your imagination and intention to create more short activities adapted to your group and surroundings. Ask young people to create fun activity questions.



Wood Wide Web – As a facilitator, you can read more background information to prepare, linked to Step 1. When you walk in a forest, you only see the upper part of the forest. You see trees, plants, moss, but you often don't see what is under the ground.

There is a lot more underground than you think. Did you know that trees in a healthy forest are interconnected? Beneath the forest floor lies an extensive, complex network of hair-like fungal filaments called mycelium that connects trees. The millions of pathways and connections in this fungal network between trees work in much the same way as the internet, which is why it is often called the 'Wood Wide Web'. (Wohlleben, 2018).

If a tree is attacked by insects or a disease, it sends distress signals to other trees, giving them time to strengthen their defenses. And when old trees die, they dump all their resources into the network.

The network is connected to the root tips of trees. This relationship between trees and fungi is symbiotic. The fungi receive sugars and carbon from the trees; in return, the fungi release nutrients and water to the trees and provide the trees with a communication network. Ultimately, this interconnected network ensures the overall health of the forest.

WALK YOUR NATURAL RHYTHM

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Group



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Mindful walking

KEYWORDS

Find your natural rhythm



TIME

30 - 45 minutes

PURPOSE

This mindful nature walk helps participants to reflect and re-align with their inner rhythm and reduce stress. They discover how nature can guide them to a more balanced and resilient daily life, even in challenging times.

MATERIALS

None needed

PREPARATION

Find a safe natural place with a path or route where you can safely walk at several rhythms. Along the path, you can scout the route or mark certain spots where you want to change the pace beforehand. You can also make flashcards with some reflective questions.

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction (10 minutes)

Explain to the group:
'Everyone has their natural rhythm. This exercise will explore how our pace affects how we experience nature. We'll walk in silence several paces and observe—without speaking. I will guide the direction and the time for each part.

Start with a short body meditation, body scan, or breathing exercise to become more open to feeling your body's sensations and being aware of nature.

Ask participants to sit or stand in a cosy natural place and close their eyes if they want. Then, give the following instructions in a calm, relaxing way.

- Breathe in through your nose in four counts slowly
- Breathe out through your mouth slowly in seven or eight counts
- Do this three more times
- Feel your feet touching the ground like the roots of a tree.
- Imagine the roots grow in the earth and stand firm
- Notice your legs and body as the tree trunk
- Notice: your hands.... your arms and shoulders... your fingers....
- Do you feel the sun or wind on your face, your body?
- What sounds do you hear?
- Take three more breaths, and when you are ready, slowly open your eyes.
- Shake your hands and feet to get started with the walk.

Step 2. Walk at Your Normal Pace (5 minutes)

Explain: We will walk silently for a hundred meters, max. one minute, at your *normal* pace, and observe your experiences silently. Ask them to be open to what they see, smell, hear, and feel in nature. They keep their observations to themselves.

Step 3. Slow Walk (5 minutes)

Continue the route and walk the same distance (hundred meters or one minute) as slowly as possible without stopping. Halfway, ask participants to slow down even more.

Again, observe:

- What do you see, hear, smell, or feel now?
- Stay silent.



- What changes in how you notice nature?

What do you see, hear, or smell now that you're not moving?

During the walk, continue observing: What do you become aware of in nature or your body?

- What rhythm did you like most? Is this also what you apply in daily life?
- When did you experience most of nature?
- What did you become aware of in your body?
- How did you feel when you were leading?
- How did you feel when you were following?
- How does this relate to your own daily life?
- When do you need to speed up or slow down in your life?
- What small step could you make tomorrow to follow your rhythm more?



You may want a second facilitator to keep an eye on the back of the group.
Maximum ten people to keep it safe.



- Instead of walking just slow and fast, you can assign a number to the speeds, for example, ten is very fast, and one is very slow, and ask participants to walk at these different speeds.
- You can do this exercise again after three to six months to see if your rhythm or awareness has changed.
- Let people bring a notebook and draw or write their experiences afterwards (journaling)



Living in tune with your natural rhythm means listening to your inner clock, your energy highs and lows, and the seasons of life. Everyone has a unique pace for thinking, feeling, and moving. But in today's fast-paced world, we often lose sight of that (natural) rhythm. We start to follow the clocks of others, push ourselves to always be 'on,' and lose touch with our flow.

Staying connected to one's natural rhythm helps reduce chronic stress. When people learn to recognise and balance their energy levels, they make more effective decisions about when to be active and rest. The concept of 'recovery' plays a vital role in mental health. According to research, recovering after stress is essential for resilience.

When you learn to listen to your body and mind again, space opens up for recovery, clarity, and direction. You begin to recognise when you need rest, when you have energy to create, and when it's time to reflect or take action.

Being in contact with nature makes this even clearer – nature doesn't rush, but lives in (natural) harmony.

BALLOON UP

KEEP YOUR GOAL IN THE AIR

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL



group



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Energizer, Teamwork

KEYWORDS

Setting goals as a group
Exploring challenges



TIME

5-15 minutes

PURPOSE

- This energising activity helps participants embody resilience – learning to bounce back, support each other, and stay light in the face of challenges.
- The activity is fun and helps in group bonding.

MATERIALS

2-3 Balloons per group

PREPARATION

Ensure there is enough open/ safe space for free movement.
Inflate balloons before starting and have some spares in case they snap.

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction

The activity uses a playful, low-pressure game that’s accessible and enjoyable for young people. Balloons bring energy and movement—perfect for breaking the ice or lightening the mood after intense discussions or moments.

Step 2. Make a circle

Gather four to ten people. Ask everyone to hold hands and stand in a circle. Explain that the balloon stands for a goal, and we’re working on it together to keep it in the air.

Step 3. Action

The facilitator throws the balloon into the circle and stays outside.

The group’s task is to keep the balloon in the air:

- Use hands, feet, heads, knees—whatever works.
- Do not let go of each other’s hands.
- Do not let the balloon touch the ground.

Count out loud how many successful bounces they make before it falls or the circle is broken.

Step 4. Pause and reflect

Pause and reflect on the exercise by asking questions like:

- What made it work?
- What made it harder?
- What helped the group stay focused?
- What did you notice about how others stepped in?

Let them retry with their new insights.

Step 5. Extra rule

Now add a rule:

‘Each person may only touch the balloon *once in a row* – then someone else must take over the next bounce.’

Repeat the game several times and see how the group adapts.

Step 6. Cool-down and Closing (Optional)

After the last round, invite everyone to take a moment to pause.

- Ask the group to take one deep breath together—inhale, hold for a moment, and exhale slowly.
- Then, offer a simple closing sentence they can say together, like:
‘We keep our goals in the air, together.’
or
‘Bouncing back, we move forward.’

Encourage the group to choose a short sentence that fits the mood, something meaningful or playful to mark the end of the activity.





- A. To make this game more inclusive, you could play an alternative version where participants link elbows or stand with fist bumps to form a 'circle of connection.'
- B. If you have more than 10 people, you can make two or more smaller groups
- C. You can name the balloon any theme you're working on in your group, e.g, Inner strength, Balance, Letting go, Connection, Vitality
- D. Depending on the ability of the group, you can make it more challenging, for example:
 - You can add more balloons, or add more challenges, like not speaking
 - Give a task to bounce at least 10 times without letting the balloon touch the floor.
- E. If you want to work more on teambuilding, let the group set their own goal (amount of bounces) and challenge them to set a realistic goal together.
- F. Let the group name the balloon after a shared value or goal (e.g., Trust or Teamwork). After the game, briefly discuss whether giving the balloon meaning affected the group's focus and motivation.

The facilitator can ask the participants:

- How did it feel to work together to keep the balloon in the air?
- Did you notice moments of frustration?
- Did you notice moments of working together as a team?
- How did the group resolve the challenges?

Be aware that not all people like to hold hands. It requires some safety in a group, so do not force people to hold hands.

Have fun!

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

By playfully setting goals, participants experience how collaboration leads to creative solutions. The activity draws on the group's collective wisdom. Participants build resilience and learn from each attempt by analysing what works and what doesn't and trying again.

STEP INTO THE LEARNING ZONE

FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU TRY SOMETHING NEW

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL



Both



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Creating a safe learning environment
Recognising your learning zone

KEYWORDS

Exploring challenges



TIME

25-40

PURPOSE

Awareness of learning
Own your learning
Setting learning intentions

MATERIALS

Floor anchors

PREPARATION

Make floor anchors with the comfort zone, learning zone and panic zone.
How to make a floor anchor? Put the text by the zones in step 1 on flip charts or a sheet of A4 paper and print it out.

STEPS

Step 1. Instruction in the three zones of learning

Zones of Learning

We use the three learning zones as a tool for self-awareness:

COMFORT ZONE

It feels safe, calm, and familiar. You feel confident and in control, but you may also be a bit bored or understimulated.
Notice what this zone feels like in your body.

LEARNING ZONE

It is the space for growth and challenge. You try new things, take risks, and learn from experience. You may experience tension or arousal. How does this zone feel in your body?

PANIC ZONE

Overwhelming, stressful, unsafe. Performance and focus go down, and anxiety increases. Listen to your body in this zone. What signals do you notice?

Ask yourself:

- What is my next step?
- Is the step too big? If yes, how can I make it smaller?

Step 2. Step into Your Zone

Create three circles on the ground to represent zones.

With your group, lay down natural materials to mark the three circles on the ground, such as sticks, stones, leaves, or anything else you find nearby. Place a floor anchor in each circle with the label *Comfort Zone*, *Learning Zone*, or *Panic Zone*. After the activity, all natural materials will be returned to their original place.

Instruction:

I will read out a series of sentences. For each one, listen carefully and notice how your body feels.

Ask yourself:

- What does this situation do to me?
- In which zone does it place me?
- What do I become aware of in my body?

Please step into the circle that feels right for you. Everybody's answer may be different. For some, it can be a comfort zone, and others can become panicked.

Ask the first question: When I see a spider, I am in my...

Pair Reflection. Ask everyone to turn to the person closest to them (in the same circle or a different one) and reflect together:

- Why are you in this zone right now?
- What do you feel in your body?
- Have you ever moved from one zone to another in a similar situation?

Examples of questions:

When I am alone in the forest, I am in my...

When I do something for the first time, I am in my...

When I feel challenged, I am in my...

When I am exhausted, I tend to go to my...

If I present in front of the group, I am in my...

When I am bored, I am too much in my....

When I talk to strangers, I am in my...

When I eat together with other people, I am in my...

When I don't know the way, I am in my...

When I am angry, I am in my...

When I fall asleep, I am in my...

When I am at school, I am in my...

With friends, I am in my...

At home, I am in my...

On a roller coaster in a play park, I am in my...

At the top of the mountain, I am in my...



'Today, I want to talk to someone about my needs.'

The trick is to explore together how a young person can take a first step outside their comfort zone, without immediately panicking. This keeps them in the learning zone, where curiosity, growth, and self-confidence are given space. Accepting challenges and daring to ask for support when needed are key elements of resilience.



Ask young people what questions they are curious about.

These methods help young people build self-awareness, listen to others' experiences, and develop group trust simply by starting with their physical, felt experience of where they are.

Form groups of 3 or 4 in each zone and invite them to share:

- What are everyday situations where you feel this way?
- What helps you stay in the learning zone?
- What can others do to support you when you're in the panic zone?

Invite one person from each zone to share their experience with the larger group:

- Can someone from the learning zone share what helps them stay curious and engaged?
- Is there someone in the comfort zone who wants to challenge themselves?
- Would someone from the panic zone like to share what support they might need?

Ask everyone to close their eyes and reflect quietly: In which zone do you spend most of your time daily?

Let participants leave the circle formation and go for a short 5-minute walk in pairs:

- What's one thing you learned about yourself today?
- What zone surprises you most, and why?

Invite each zone to express their experience through:

A freeze-frame or body sculpture of how it feels

A short phrase, sound, or word that captures their zone

A quick drawing (if you're outdoors, using sticks, leaves, etc.)

Come back together in one large circle and ask:

How can we use these zones as a tool in our daily lives together?



What Happens When People Own Their Learning?

When young people take ownership of their learning process, amazing things happen:

- They develop self-determination
- They become problem solvers
- They think more creatively
- They learn to think outside the box
- They become systems thinkers who see the bigger picture
- They become curious explorers
- They take initiative and grow into self-directed learners
- They develop iterative thinking — learning through reflection and continuous improvement (Deci & Ryan, 1985)



FLOURISH

EXPERIENCE

ACT

REFLECT

STEP INTO THE LEARNING ZONE

Name	Type of Activity
Find Your Place in Nature	Nature Ecogram
Find Your Tree	Trust and Team Building
Nature’s Hidden Story	Storytelling with Natural Objects
Like a Tree	Embodied Learning
Clean-Up Walk	Ecological Awakening
Trekking with Challenging Parts	An Adventurous Outdoor Activity
Treasure Hunt & Land Art	Adventure & Eco Art
Dance with the Four Seasons	Eco Art
Mask Making	Eco Art
New Eyes in Nature	Perspective Flexibility
Medicine Wheel Ritual	Nature Ritual

FIND YOUR PLACE IN NATURE

WITH THE NATURE ECOGRAM

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL



Both



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Nature Ecogram
Embed nature in daily life
Ecosystem approach

KEYWORDS

Exploring challenges
Well-being



TIME

60-90 minutes

PURPOSE

Ecological awakening

- Find your place in nature

Ecosystem Connection

- Connect with resources in the environment (nature, people, organisations)

Active engagement

- What activities do you do in nature, and what do you want to do more?

MATERIALS

Paper (preferably A3 format) and markers/colour pencils.

PREPARATION

Prepare an example with the circles in advance, or let the participants draw their versions during the activity.

Preferably, go to a natural place where the group can work on picnic tables.

FLOURISH

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction

What is your favourite place in nature? In some cultures, like the Netherlands, young people seek quiet spots more often to connect with nature and themselves: watching water, sitting silently with friends, calmly gazing at the water, and away from distractions. This aligns with broader Dutch values such as individualism, autonomy, and seeking peace in outdoor spaces. Other cultures, like in Türkiye, gather more in nature to share food, music, and games, like making tea over an open fire or preparing a picnic under the trees, finding connection in togetherness. This fits within the values of a more collectivist culture, such as Türkiye's, where hospitality, community, and togetherness are central, also when spending time in nature.

In this activity, young people map their natural environment and explore where they feel most connected.

Step 2. Draw the nature ecogram

Instruction:

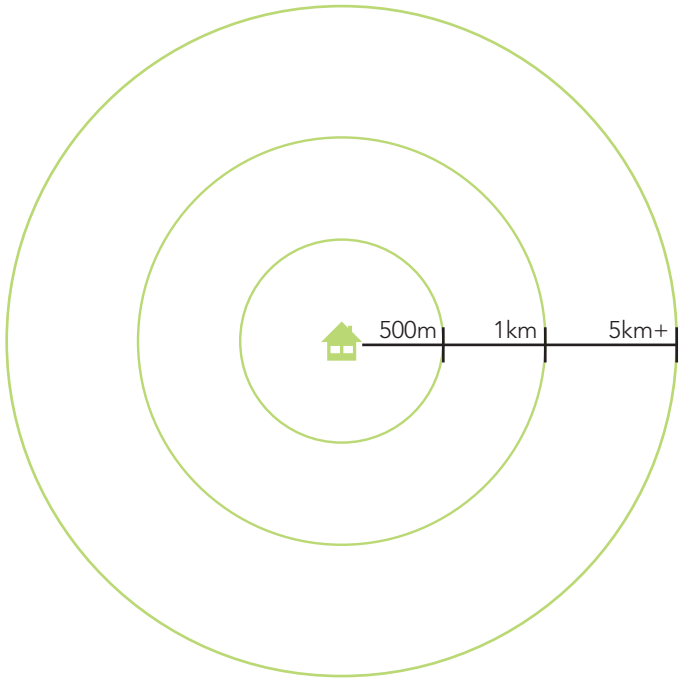
Place your house in the centre.

Add three circles around it:

1st circle (500m): Nearby places (e.g., a park where you walk your dog).

2nd circle (1km): Slightly farther (e.g., school, basketball court).

3rd circle (5 km+): Distant locations (e.g., a forest, lake, a meaningful place from your background, or where you were born).



Ask: Is there a forest, park, maybe a river?
What places do you already know?
What is your favourite place in nature?
Where do you go with friends or family?

Draw your activities.
Where in the area do you do your activities?
What activities do you enjoy doing?

Draw your social network. To draw your social network in an ecogram, start with yourself in the centre of the page. Around you, draw circles or small figures for the people, animals, or places in nature that are important to you.

What social places do you like to go to in the neighbourhood? (Such as the cinema, swimming pool, a place in the park where young people can congregate, or parks near the school.

Where do your friends/friends like to go in the neighbourhood?

What places in the neighbourhood that other young people come to are you curious about?

What social places are there in the neighbourhood?

What activity in nature do you like to do more?

Debriefing in the group

How does your environment support you?

What is your first little step to connect more with the environment?

From activity to habit: How to make change sustainable?

When young people want to take up a new activity, they must know how to sustain it. A habit starts with a clear intention, a first achievable step, and the proper support. By using three essential elements: goal, behaviour, and support, you help young people turn their intention into lasting change.

Goal - What do you want to achieve? (The desired result)



Behaviour - What do you need to do to achieve it? (The concrete behaviour required to achieve the goal)

Support - What will help you keep this up? (Tools, environment, and support to keep up the new behaviour) (source: Clear, 2018).

Goal: When young people choose an activity to do more, make it very concrete.

Is the goal clear?

Concrete behaviour: What will you do – the first small step? Making something a habit starts with a successful little step.

When are you going to do this?

Support: Who can you ask for help?

Who can be your buddy (social support)?

- Adapt to the group's needs – you can do steps 1 to 3 first and steps 4 and 5 later.
- Sense of place. This is the feeling or perception of the environment. It also identifies characteristics that make a place special and unique to the person. It includes positive, neutral, and non-positive feelings about a place, such as fear.
- Use colours to indicate how you feel in different places.

Green is my comfort zone, neutral, calm, and connected. This is where I like to come. It is a nice and familiar place to be.

Yellow is my learning zone. Exploring challenges. Maybe a little uncomfortable.

A new experience. Daring to take risks.

Growth. A first step to explore the environment further.

Red is my panic zone. Feeling unsafe and disconnected. I want to leave here. It feels uncomfortable; I get into fight/flight or freeze mode.

See for more information the activity: Step into the learning zone.

Please indicate: Where or with whom do you feel unsafe? With whom and where do you feel safe and comfortable? Which places in your neighbourhood could you explore?

Reflection: What do you realise? How can you enlarge your comfort zone by exploring challenges in the learning zone? What will be your first step?

Explanation: Understanding where you feel comfortable, challenged, or unsafe in your neighbourhood is essential to exploring your surroundings. Awareness of your feelings and body sensations in these different zones helps you recognise your boundaries and where you can grow. Support young people in making this connection to better understand their emotions and experiences. Give them time to reflect and honestly notice how they feel in each zone.

Nature ecogram. A nature ecogram is a personal map that shows how a person views and interprets the environment based on previous experiences. It is not a geographical map, but a representation of the reality in which a person lives, revealing the young person's perspective (Salomons, Pijpker, Atmani, 2021).

Resilient environment. Neuroscientist Kayla Green (2024), a Dutch postdoctoral researcher at Erasmus University Rotterdam on youth, resilience, and wellbeing, emphasises that resilience is not only about personal coping but is also shaped by our natural and social surroundings. Environmental psychology invites us to explore which natural places offer young people a sense of calm and connection.

Sense of place is a concept from the geographical and social sciences that investigates how people become emotionally and culturally connected to certain areas. It refers to the perception and experience of an environment by its inhabitants. This includes positive and negative feelings about a place, such as connectedness or fear. A strong sense of place happens when people feel a deep connection to a location that has a clear and meaningful identity for them.

FIND YOUR TREE

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Group (Work in Pairs)



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Trust and Team Building

KEYWORDS

Sensorial Experiment,
Ecological Awareness



TIME

30 Minutes

PURPOSE

Connecting with nature through the senses,
Experiencing the connection with nature,
Trust building among the partners,
Improving sensorial development and nonverbal communication

MATERIALS

If needed, a scarf per team for covering the eyes.

PREPARATION

The facilitator defines the area for the activity and shares it with the participants. Participants have 5 minutes to explore the surroundings. The facilitator explained that one blindfolded participant would be guided by their partner to visit a tree.

STEPS

Step 1.

Group participants into pairs. The facilitator gives them time to choose their partners.

Step 2.

Each pair decides who will be blindfolded. The chosen person covers their eyes with a scarf.

Step 3.

The guiding participant leads their blindfolded partner to a tree. The blindfolded participant is given 3 minutes to explore and recognise the tree using different senses (e.g., touch, smell). After 3 minutes, the guide leads them back to the starting point and removes the blindfold. The participant then tries to identify the tree they visited.

Step 4.

The participants change their roles. And follow the same structures.

REFLECTION

The group sits in a circle. The facilitator invites participants to choose one word that describes their feelings after the activity and say it aloud during the circle sharing. Here are some example questions the facilitator can ask the group and invite the ones who want to share:

- How was the trip for you?
- Did you feel safe and trust?
- How did you connect with nature and your partner?
- Did you have any difficulty, and how did you handle it?
- How good are you at finding your way in the woods without a compass?

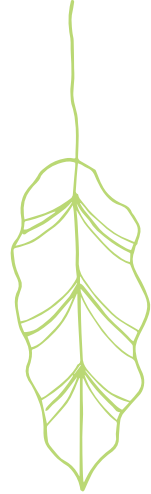
COMMENTS

The participants should be warned to be careful to lead their mates and not to make jokes that make the blindfolded participants stressed (especially for youngsters).



For individuals who fear moving with their eyes closed or staying in enclosed spaces, the activity can be adapted by tying ropes between specific trees. Participants can then follow these ropes to reach each tree, providing a safer and more guided experience.

Another variation of the same activity could involve placing natural objects with different textures, such as stones, wooden pieces, plants, or other elements from nature, along a path. With their eyes closed, participants can explore and select one object. Afterwards, once they open their eyes, they try to identify which object they are touching while blindfolded.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Eco-therapists and educators increasingly use blindfolded nature games in resilience training, particularly for those facing anxiety, trauma, or learning difficulties. These activities encourage presence, attention, trust in others, and a safe way to explore vulnerability, making them powerful tools in resilience-focused education and mental health programs (Jordan & Hinds, 2016).

Blindfolded tree recognition is a sensorial activity that enhances perception through touch, smell, and hearing, bypassing visual dominance. According to David Abram (1996) and the philosophy of embodied cognition, sensory immersion in nature enhances ecological awareness and emotional bonding with the environment. This tactile exploration helps participants form a more profound, multisensory connection to trees, increasing their nature-relatedness, which has been positively linked to psychological well-being.

NATURE'S HIDDEN STORY

STORYTELLING WITH NATURAL OBJECTS

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Individual or small groups
(5-10 persons)



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Mindfulness,
Creative Thinking

KEYWORDS

Mental Flexibility



TIME

30-45 minutes

PURPOSE

Develop creative thinking and mindfulness by discovering meaning in seemingly ordinary objects.
Individual goal: Stimulate imagination and uncover unexpected insights in everyday surroundings.
Group goal: Collaboratively create a story and explore meaningful narratives together.
Resilience competency: This activity fosters the ability to find new perspectives and create meaning from seemingly insignificant things, contributing to mental flexibility and creative problem-solving.

MATERIALS

Natural objects

PREPARATION

Choose a location where participants can find different natural objects. Encourage an open and curious mindset before starting the exercise.

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Gather the group in a circle and briefly introduce the idea of 'Nature's hidden story.' Invite participants to imagine that nature is full of untold stories: messages, memories, and mysteries waiting to be discovered. The goal isn't to find the prettiest object, but to choose something that others might overlook - something small, forgotten, or rough around the edges - and see what it might have to say.

There is no right or wrong in the object you find; you can use any object in nature.

Optionally, you can do a short grounding moment:

Take one minute to close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and listen to the sounds around you. This simple exercise can redirect your focus toward the environment.

Step 2. Finding an Object (Individual Exercise) (10 minutes)

Ask participants to find an object in nature that initially seems unimportant or useless.

Step 3. Discovering Meaning (10 minutes)

Invite participants to spend 5-10 minutes with their object, using all their senses to explore it. Encourage them to observe and interact with the object: touch it, look at it from different angles, and reflect on where it might have come from.

Ask guiding questions:

- What if this object had a story? What would it tell?
- Does this object remind you of something in your life?

Step 4. Telling the Story (15 minutes, depending on group size)

Invite participants to create a story after exploring the object with their senses. Offer the following two formats, depending on whether the activity is done individually or in groups.

Option A: Individual Storytelling

Invite participants to write, draw, or tell a short story about their object.

The story can be:

- A fictional journey (e.g., 'This stick once floated down a river and heard secrets from the fish...')
- A symbolic tale (e.g., 'This leaf reminds me of a time I had to let go...')
- A metaphor for something in their own life.

In small groups, invite participants to place their objects in the centre and collaboratively weave them into a single story. Participants can also add to the story with their objects when they feel the urge to wait for the right time.

1. Beginning – Introduce the 'characters' (the objects).

2. Challenge – Something unexpected happens.

3. Journey – The objects travel, change, or learn something.

4. Return – What did they discover?

Encourage participants to listen to each other and build on one another's ideas.

Bring the group back together. Facilitate a short reflective dialogue using open questions as mentioned in the reflection. You can ask participants to share silently in pairs, in a circle, or in a journal.



- What surprised you about your object?
- How did it feel to create a story from something 'ordinary'?

- What might this activity tell you about how you see the world?
- Can you think of a moment when something small or overlooked became meaningful?
- How can this way of seeing help you when things are challenging or uncertain?

In step 4, for participants who have difficulty creating a story, you can provide a few story starters and write these on cards. For example:

- 'This object used to belong to...'
- 'If this object could talk, it would say...'
- 'This object has a secret it never told...'



There are many different variations of the activity. Here are a few examples:

Different stages. The activity can also be done in two (or more) stages, let participants find an object and discover the meaning in one session (steps 1 – 3), and tell the story and the debriefing in the next session (steps 4-5).

Drawing the Journey. Instead of telling the story aloud, participants draw their object's 'life journey': where it came from, what it's seen, or what it might become.

Silent Story Walk. After finding their object, participants go on a short, silent walk holding it. Ask them to imagine their object whispering a story along the way; they can share it later through words or drawings.

Object Swap. After finding and exploring their object, participants give it to someone else. Each person creates a story for their received object, inviting fresh perspective and empathy.

Nature Museum. Instead of telling the stories aloud, you can create a “pop-up museum” where participants place their object on a table with a title and short story or reflection. Others can walk around and take it in quietly.

Mood Matching. You can ask participants to find an object that matches their current mood or something they're going through. The story then becomes a gentle way to express what might be hard to say directly.



This activity helps participants to find meaning in seemingly unimportant things by engaging with them through all their senses. It's about uncovering hidden meaning, strength, or value that may not be immediately visible. By shifting perspectives, participants develop a resilient mindset that enables them to see opportunities, significance, and power in unexpected places.

Creating a story around a natural object invites mindfulness, slows thinking, and encourages a shift in perspective. This mental flexibility, seeing something ordinary in a new light, is key to resilience. Storytelling also allows difficult emotions or personal experiences to be explored safely and symbolically. Shared storytelling builds empathy, connection, and a sense of belonging in group settings.

In the book 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces', Joseph Campbell describes the universal narrative pattern he calls the 'Hero's Journey'. He shows how hero stories from different cultures share the same phases and symbolism, from vocation to transformation and return. The book has influenced film, literature, and education, helping to understand how stories connect and inspire people.

LIKE A TREE

EXPLORING RESILIENCE THROUGH IMAGINATION, MOVEMENT, AND GROUP CONNECTION

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Individual and in small groups (3-4 people)



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Embodied practice
Creative visualisation
Imagination activity

KEYWORDS

Dealing with Challenges



TIME

50 minutes

PURPOSE

Individual goal: To inspire self-expression, creativity, and connection with nature in a light-hearted way.
Group goal: To encourage teamwork and creativity while building a sense of connection and fun. The activity fosters emotional awareness and adaptability by encouraging participants to embody resilience through movement and imagination. The activity helps participants embody resilience through nature's example. It shows that, like trees, we can bend without breaking, root

ourselves in what gives us strength, and deal with climate and other challenges, alone and with others.

MATERIALS

Although no materials are needed, it is advised to be surrounded by (or have images of) trees to connect with.

PREPARATION

Ensure a spacious setting (preferably with trees around) where participants can move freely (approximately 4 square meters per person)

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Gather the group in a circle. Explain to the group:
We'll do a movement exercise to help us experience resilience with our body wisdom, our ability to deal with tough times and bounce back, like trees do in nature. Trees stand firm through storms, bend with the wind, and grow repeatedly. In this exercise, you'll act like a tree, using your body and imagination.

Let them know:

- They'll do this partly in silence, and there's no 'right' way to move.
- Everyone will work individually at first, and later in small groups.
- It's okay to feel shy, joining in is enough.
- Don't force yourself to participate if something feels bad for you. You can also observe.

Step 2. Imagining the Tree (Individual Exercise) (10 minutes)

Ask participants to find their own space and close their eyes.
Guide them to imagine a tree that resonates with them. It can be real or imaginary.
You can help with questions like:

- What does your tree look and feel like?
- What kind of bark does it have? What do the leaves smell like?
- How does it move in the wind?
- What makes this tree strong?

After about 2-3 minutes, invite them to slowly open their eyes and silently stand "as their tree."

Step 3. Facing Challenges (Individual Exercise) (15 minutes)

Guide the group through imagined natural challenges. Encourage full-body movement, even if small.

Tell a short story, for example:

"A storm begins. The wind picks up... your branches sway harder. How does your tree respond?"

Then continue:

- Storm: Sway, bend, or resist the wind.
- Flood: Shift your roots, find new balance.
- Insects or disease: React to discomfort or pain, then find stability again.
- (Optional) Fire or another challenge: invite free movement and recovery.

Encourage participants to stay present and focused on how their body responds.

Step 4. Group Exercise (3-4 People Per Group) (15 minutes)

Divide the whole group into groups of 3-4 people.
Ask each group to use their bodies to create one collective tree: some will become roots, other branches, or the trunk.

LIKE A TREE

EXPLORING RESILIENCE THROUGH
IMAGINATION, MOVEMENT, AND GROUP
CONNECTION

- What are the strong parts of your tree?
- How does your tree move or react together?

Call out the natural challenges of step 3 again. In this case, the small group(s) respond together in movement, Emphasise cooperation, communication, and adaptability.

Bring the whole group back into a circle. Then lead a simple grounding, such as:

- A few moments of silence
- Two deep breaths
- A shake-out of the arms and legs
- A hand on the heart or stomach to feel the breath

Then, ask 2–3 reflective questions. Keep it short and optional:

- What part of your tree felt the strongest?
- How did your group tree stay together?
- What did you notice about yourself during the challenges?

Make space for voluntary sharing in the group, but also allow silence. Some insights may come later.



REFLECTION

Some (other) questions a facilitator can ask participants in the debriefing with the group, or where participants can think about individually:

- What does the tree's way of dealing with challenges teach you about how you handle difficulties in life?
- How did it feel to do this activity individually versus in a group?
- What insights did you gain about teamwork and shared strengths?

COMMENTS

This exercise can be out of their comfort zone for some participants, especially if unfamiliar with visualisation and body movement exercises. This will help make participants feel at ease and adapt to the possibilities of your group. The following instructions can help:

Normalise shyness: Tell them it's okay to feel awkward. Just trying is enough.

Allow small movements: Not everyone wants to act out big gestures. That's fine, you can make small or subtle movements.

Eyes closed: if it is too challenging to see the movements, you can ask participants to close their eyes.

Start by observing: Let hesitant youth watch the first round. They can join later if they want.

Model openness: If you, as a youth worker or facilitator, join in, it helps others feel safe.

Avoid forcing: Participation is encouraged, but never mandatory.

Frame it well: This isn't a performance – it's a way to reflect and explore.



LIKE A TREE

EXPLORING RESILIENCE THROUGH
IMAGINATION, MOVEMENT, AND GROUP
CONNECTION



This activity connects personal resilience with the wisdom of nature by inviting participants to embody how trees adapt and withstand challenges. Inspired by creative drama techniques like frozen images and role-play, it uses body movement and imagination to make abstract concepts like flexibility and strength more tangible. Through this embodied practice, participants explore emotional awareness, adaptability, and how to stay grounded during difficulties. The activity encourages empathy and focus, as participants physically experience responses to imagined storms, winds, and other challenges.

The group exercise fosters teamwork, highlighting how resilience can be strengthened through cooperation and shared balance. By working together to form a “collective tree,” participants practice nonverbal communication and collective problem-solving. The connection to nature, whether outdoors or visualised, also promotes environmental awareness and reflection on how natural systems mirror human experiences. This holistic approach supports emotional regulation and social learning in a playful, creative way. It’s especially effective for helping young people build resilience by engaging mind, body, and imagination.

- While body movement is central to this activity, we might consider including alternative options for participants with limited mobility (or who don't like to move), e.g., expressive gestures with hands/arms, seated movements, or just imagination.
- Add an artistic element where participants draw their trees before or after the activity.
- The exercise is preferably done outdoors for the best nature connection, but it could also be indoors.

CLEAN-UP WALK

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON WASTE

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Group



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Ecosystem approach

KEYWORDS

Ecological Activism



TIME

90 minutes

PURPOSE

Ecological awareness of the impact of waste in nature – understanding what does and doesn't belong and recognising the role of natural waste. For example, fallen leaves can provide shelter for insects or hedgehogs.
Ecological behaviour – Young people do something good for nature by picking up trash. When picking up trash, you are consciously interacting with nature.

Social awareness – Intuition, empathising with others.

Self-awareness – Participants reflect on what resonates with them in others' words, learning about their qualities.

MATERIALS

- Gloves
- Eco-friendly bags to put the trash in.
- Bring a disposal bag for rare or unexpected waste situations.
- Litter pickers: Municipalities sometimes distribute these for free.

PREPARATION

Choose a place in nature with visible litter, or ask your group to find a place to clean up. This spot will form the starting point of the Clean-Up Walk.

STEPS

Young people are invited to search for and collect litter in nature. They can use gloves and litter pickers to do this hygienically. Afterwards, they discuss the objects they found, focusing on their characteristics and qualities. Finally, the group comes together to reflect on what they have learned from the activity.

Step 1. Dialogue: What is waste? (10 min)

This is a preliminary conversation about the value of waste. Start with a check-in question like: What is waste in nature? What waste belongs there, and what waste doesn't? Is it only cans and paper, or also leaves, dead animals, and twigs? Be aware that there are no right or wrong answers; we explore it together.

Step 2. Mindful walk to open senses (5 min)

Invite participants to engage in a mindful sensory experience of nature, fostering a deeper connection with nature.

During a silent walk, you can become aware, for example, of the sound you usually make when walking in nature. You can also ask to open the senses one by one. How do you experience your body here in this environment? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel (have something touched in nature)? What do you taste (if possible)? What do you see?

Step 3. Picking up litter (30 min)

Young people pick up litter in nature during a walk or go to one place to find it and collect it, for example, in a bag.

You can make a pile of all the collected trash, or participants can make a pile of their waste.

Step 4. Trash pile (5 min)

Young people find three objects from the trash pile that catch their attention. If they want, participants may also take a picture of an object.

WALK

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON WASTE

Participants form pairs and decide who will be A and who will be B.

Modelling. The facilitator begins by modelling the activity: they choose an object and describe what they notice. For example, if A has picked up a bottle, B might describe it as robust, transparent, and solid. Or if A has a bottle cap, B might say colourful and ribbed.

Then, the activity continues as follows:

A: Shows one of the objects they collected.

B: Intuitively describes what they see in the object, sharing the first words or impressions that come to mind.

Listening

A. listens and shares what most intrigued or moved them in B's words, then responds. They may also share something from their own life related to those words. B. can then react and ask further questions.

The conversation takes place while walking.

Then, A and B switch roles to discuss all the objects.

REFLECTION

Group debriefing (20 min)

Form a circle with the group, look at the picnic tables, or choose a nice spot in the forest.

Wrap up: What can we learn from nature about resilience? This is an interactive dialogue in which the facilitator lets the young people tell their stories. You can vary the sharing by having them share in pairs or with the whole group.

Questions:

- Is there a difference between nature's trash (leaves, dead animals) and people's trash in nature: plastics, bottles, etc.?
- What was it like for you to help clean up nature?
- What did you like most about this activity?
- The facilitator can ask to write down a learning intention. Invite them to step out of the comfort zone into the learning zone: What will you do more often? What is your challenge?

Check-out question: How do you look at waste in nature now? Can you look at it in different ways?



CLEAN-UP WALK

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON WASTE

FLOURISH

From the piloting, we learned that it works well to split up this activity into different activities. First, you have a clean-up walk, and the next week, you reflect on characteristics. It also depends on the group dynamics if young people open up to share their qualities. Another option is to stop at step 4 and let young people reflect on an object they found.

Safety and hygiene tips

- Check the area in advance for hazardous waste (glass, needles, etc.)
- Safe disposal protocols after collection
- Clear instructions on what not to pick up: *never* to touch or pick up sharp, chemical, or suspicious items.



Mindful walk: A silent walk can be too challenging for young people with short attention spans. You can also alternate between silence and action and bring a question to engage in conversation in pairs.

Variation: Have participants place their chosen objects together in a natural spot. Do one person's objects match another person's objects? And make a collective story out of that. Check out the activity 'Nature's hidden story' to see how to guide this.

Art workshop - Have participants make an art object from natural waste.

Reflection: 'Now that you have used the waste differently, what do you realize about the circular economy?'

Photo Storytelling - Before collecting, participants can take photos of waste and share their reflections afterwards in the group. Furthermore, they can practice creative writing about the images.

Before-and-After Map: Participants can create a simple map showing what areas were cleaned and what was collected.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Positive Mental Health: Engage, Connect, Empower

Focus on well-being by strengthening qualities, strengths, and positive aspects.

Stimulating self-confidence, connection, and meaning grows resilience. The starting point: focus on what is possible.

Ecological Activism: making a difference

Young people desire to contribute to a healthier world. The Clean-Up Walk is a direct, visible way to take action for nature and be part of positive change.

TREKKING WITH CHALLENGING PARTS

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL



Group



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Adventurous Outdoor Activities, Team Building

KEYWORDS

Exploring Challenges, Problem Solving, Discovering Nature



TIME

90-120 minutes (routes can be extended or shortened)

PURPOSE

- Helping and asking for help at the right time and in the right way.
- Building group communication and awareness under stress, learning to ask for help and offer help appropriately.
- Developing problem-solving and reflection on one's behaviour and the group dynamic.

MATERIALS

- Trekking shoes (Vibram or equivalent),
- Comfortable, weather-appropriate clothing,
- Raincoat or windbreaker,
- Backpack with personal water bottle, snacks, and a sitting mat,
- Notebook and pen for post-trekking reflection,
- First-aid kit (carried by facilitator),
- Map and emergency contacts (carried by the leader),

PREPARATION

- The group leader scouts and selects the route in advance, ensuring it includes varying difficulty levels and safe challenges. Before the activity, the facilitator should:
- Learn about the group's experience levels with trekking.
 - Be aware of physical limitations or emotional sensitivities.
 - Adapt route and intensity accordingly.
 - Carry first-aid and have safety protocols in place.
 - Brief team members or co-facilitators on roles

(e.g., back leader, emotional support).

Before the activity:

Facilitate a short warm-up or connection game to build group cohesion.

Guide the group in creating a "Trekking Agreement" that includes:

- Stay together and support each other
- Respect personal space and boundaries
- Speak up if you feel unwell or unsafe
- No one left behind

FLOURISH

STEPS

Step 1. Meeting & Grounding

- Welcome the group and set intentions.
- Give a brief safety orientation (hydration, pace, group signals).
- Share the group agreement and invite additions or input.
- Encourage mindful observation during the trek:
- 'Notice how you react when something feels hard. What happens in your body? Do you push through, withdraw, or ask for help?'

Step 2. Trekking & Group Challenges (60–90 min)

- Lead the group on a route that includes:
- Uphill and downhill challenges,
- Narrow or slightly unstable paths,
- Natural barriers (e.g., stepping over a log, managing mud, balancing over rocks).
- Observe group behaviour: How do participants handle complex parts? Who offers or receives help?
- Introduce short silent sections in more difficult areas to help participants connect with their breath and body.

REFLECTION

Group Sharing (20–30 min)

Settle in a quiet rest spot. Invite individual reflection using the following handout:



HANDOUT

OBSERVING AND BOOSTING RESILIENCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN NATURE

	In places where the route is easy	In places where the route gets challenging
How do you feel?		
Where is your focus the most?		
How is your interaction with the group?		
How is the team leader's approach to the group? (alert, relaxed, protective, encouraging, or anxious)		
How did you feel when you completed this route?		
Did completing this route excite you for new routes?		

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

How do your teammates respond to challenges?

- ☐ They take more risks.
- ☐ They grab onto the first thing they see in panic.
- ☐ They freeze and don't move.
- ☐ They demotivate themselves
- ☐ They become focused and turn to their resources.

After completing these routes, I feel braver

Disagree

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

1 2 3 4 5

Agree



You can ask the group the following questions to encourage them to share their feelings and thoughts:

- Did helping or asking for help feel easy or difficult?
- Was the help offered at the right moment, in the right way?
- When do you tend to step in, or hold back?
- How can we better support each other during challenging moments?
- What does this tell us about how we act daily, not just trekking?

COMMENTS

- Group can observe and share behavioural patterns related to resilience, problem solving, helping, asking for help, and emotional management.
 - Watch for participants who may help too eagerly or invade others' personal space, especially on steep or narrow paths.
 - Encourage respectful boundaries and give gentle feedback if someone's help unintentionally creates risk or discomfort.
 - Encourage healthy risk-taking, which is an essential part of building resilience.
- According to *Outdoor Risky Play* (Harper, 2019), experiences involving manageable risk can support learning, confidence, and group bonding.
- Common types of healthy outdoor risks to be mindful of:
 - Heights* – climbing or jumping from natural features
 - High speed* – running, sliding, swinging
 - Use of tools* – such as ropes, knives, or fire (always under supervision)
 - Natural hazards* – water, fire, steep edges, uneven ground
 - Rough-and-tumble play* – playful wrestling or imaginative sword fights
 - Disappearing/getting lost* – solo exploring or hiding (only in safe and guided conditions)

As a facilitator, balance safety and autonomy. Know when to step in , and when to let the challenge teach.



This activity can be adapted to different environments and interests. Some options:

- Route Settings:* Forest trails, mountain paths, riversides, or local parks.
- Adventure Activities:* Incorporate rafting, hiking, cycling, or climbing, depending on the group's age, ability, and interest.
- Ask the Group:* Invite young people to suggest activities they enjoy, boosting their sense of ownership and increasing engagement.

Obstacle Course – create a path with physical or mental tasks

Vision Quest – a solo hour of silence in nature for deep reflection

Symbolic Items – place a “resilience rock” at the most challenging part of the trail or tie ribbons to trees marking milestones

Role Play During the Trek: Assign roles like observer, motivator, or timekeeper to build responsibility and group awareness.

Post-Trek Creative Reflection: Draw the trekking route together as a group, marking emotional highs and lows along the way.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The 'Trekking with Challenging Parts' activity is grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasises learning through direct experience and reflection. Participants engage in a physically and emotionally demanding trek (concrete experience), reflect on their reactions and group dynamics (reflective observation), identify personal insights around resilience and support (abstract conceptualisation), and are encouraged to apply these insights in future situations (active experimentation). This structured process turns a simple outdoor trek into a meaningful learning opportunity where participants explore how they respond to challenge, support others, and manage emotional reactions in real time.

Additionally, the activity draws on Sanford's Challenge and Support Theory, which states that personal growth occurs when individuals are pushed slightly beyond their comfort zones, but with the right level of support. The trekking route is designed with natural obstacles that create manageable difficulty, while peer support and group agreements create a safe environment. This balance helps participants strengthen emotional resilience, learn to ask for or offer help appropriately, and develop confidence through overcoming shared challenges. Together, these theories help make the trekking activity a rich, embodied experience in self-awareness, group trust, and adaptive coping.

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TREASURE HUNT & LAND ART

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Group

KEYWORDS

Teamwork, Exploring Challenges, Discovering Nature

TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Adventure, Eco Art, Team Building

TIME

30–60 minutes

PURPOSE

- To develop environmental awareness through direct interaction with natural elements.
- To foster resilience by navigating through and overcoming small natural obstacles.
- To stimulate creative thinking by transforming found objects into art.

MATERIALS

- Small baskets or bags for collecting items,
- Pieces of white fabric or cloth for display or grouping,
- Pens or markers,
- Printed visual checklists of nature items to find.

PREPARATION

- Design a nature treasure hunt checklist (items may include leaves, stones, feathers, bark, etc). You can use the printable visual that we provide.
- Select and prepare a safe and nature-rich outdoor area.
- Brief the participants on safety rules and respect for nature (e.g., no harming living creatures or plants)

FLOURISH

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction

Briefly introduce the activity and divide participants into small groups. Hand out baskets and checklists.

Step 2. Treasure Hunt

Groups explore the area to collect items from the checklist, observing textures, shapes, and scents. Find and check off each item on the list!

You can take pictures of your findings – only pick up items that have naturally fallen to the ground. Leave everything else where it is.

Step 3. Group Sharing

Participants return and share the items they’ve found, discussing why they chose them (e.g., texture, colour, scent, uniqueness).

Step 4. Land Art Creation

Participants collaborate to create a piece of land art (e.g., a mandala, animal shape, symbolic pattern) on a designated surface or cloth using the found materials.

Consider dividing the group into smaller groups if there are more than 7–8 participants.

Step 5. Presentation

- Participants present their Land Art, explaining its meaning, the materials used, and what the creative process was like for them.
- If there is more than one group, ensure all groups take time to view and appreciate each other’s work.

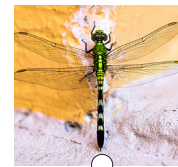


FLOURISH

Something that
smells nice



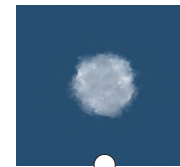
A track or footprint



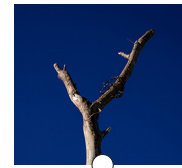
A bug or insect



A flower with more than five petals



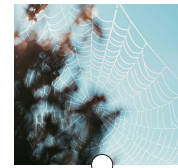
A funny-shaped
cloud



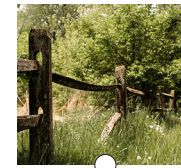
A stick shaped like
the letter Y



A feather



A spiderweb



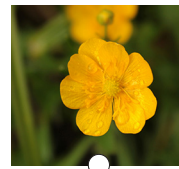
Something broken
but still functioning
or alive



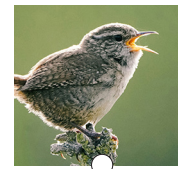
Three different
types of birds



A smooth rock



Something yellow



Something that makes a sound



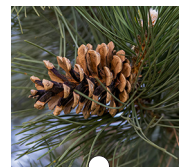
A seed or seed pod



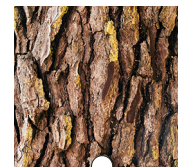
A hole



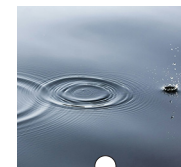
A leaf bigger than
your hand



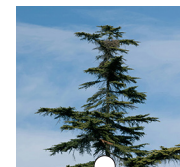
A pinecone



A tree with rough bark



Some water



An evergreen tree

This activity draws on principles from eco-pedagogy, experiential learning, and forest-based resilience education. Combining sensory exploration, problem-solving, and artistic expression supports cognitive, emotional, and social development. It is grounded in research that shows direct interaction with natural environments enhances well-being, creativity, and a sense of ecological belonging.

DANCING WITH THE SEASONS

MOVE THROUGH THE SEASONS, FEEL WHAT CHANGES IN YOU

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL
Both 

TYPE OF ACTIVITY
 Embodied learning

KEYWORDS
Find your natural rhythm 

TIME
 60-90 minutes

- PURPOSE**

 - Connect participants with the natural seasons
 - Experience that the cycle of the four seasons is a mirror for resilience.
 - Use dance to explore personal growth and transformation
- MATERIALS**

 - Music player and soundbox
 - Optional cushions for reflection
- PREPARATION**

 - Find a good spot in nature for the activity, like a park or an open field
 - Prepare a playlist with music representing the different seasons (look in the steps for suggestions) or use the Spotify list in the comments.

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction (5 minutes)
Have everyone stand in a circle. Invite them to pause momentarily, close their eyes, and take deep breaths.
Introduce the four seasons as metaphors for growth, change, and resilience:
Spring: Awakening and new energy
Summer: Blooming and abundance
Autumn: Letting go and reflection
Winter: Silence and inner peace
Music: Play a soft, neutral tone such as “Weightless” by Marconi Union or nature sounds.

Step 2. Explain the flow of the activity (5 minutes)
Tell participants that they will now begin dancing through the seasons in separate rounds, moving silently and individually with closed eyes as they explore the qualities of each season through movement. We’ll dance with closed eyes to help us connect with ourselves without distraction. If you don’t feel comfortable doing that, it is possible to face outwards.

This is a space to explore freely. There is no right or wrong way to move.
If possible, invite the participants to dance on bare feet or without shoes so they can better connect with the ground.

After every season, there is a ‘break’ without music. In that time, you can ask yourself: What did I become aware of this season? And what did I experience in my body? After that, we ‘shake off’ the season and slowly move on to the next.
Emotions can arise during the activity; it’s okay to feel them. Participants can raise their hands if they need support. They can also pause or sit and then continue if needed or wanted.

Step 3. Spring: Awakening (10 minutes)
Movement:

- Ask participants to make slow, flowing movements from stillness, as if they are waking up from hibernation.
- Make them visualise that they are a tiny seed, growing and growing, out of the earth, facing the sun, and slowly increasing.
- Use gestures symbolising growth (raising arms, standing firmly on the ground).
- Let them play with light, playful movements that express curiosity and joy.

Suggestions for music:

- Vivaldi – “Spring” from The Four Seasons (Max Richter version)
- Ólafur Arnalds – “Near Light”
- River Flows in You - Yiruma
- Yann Tiersen – Amélie Poulain soundtrack (Lavinia Meijer version)

You can ask the participants (as mentioned in step 2): What did I become aware of about this season? And what did I experience in my body? After that, we ‘shake off’ the season and slowly move on to the next.



Movement:

- Encourage larger, open movements that radiate joy and abundance.
- Let participants spin, jump, and use their entire bodies.
- Visualise that you are dancing under the shining sun, completely blooming. You feel the warmth on your skin and the energy in your body.
- This is a moment for expressive and free movement. Expressive, open, turnings, significant arm movements, joyful.
- Optionally, work in pairs or small groups for interaction.

Suggestions for Music:

- Ludovico Einaudi – “Divenire”
- Bobby McFerrin – “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” (for a playful element)
- George Gershwin – “Summertime” (from Porgy and Bess)

You can ask the participants (as mentioned in step 2): What did I become aware of this season? And what did I experience in my body?

You can also ask questions linked to the summer season: What are you grateful for at this moment? Which areas of your life are currently in full bloom? What would you like to celebrate? What would you like to show the world? What parts of you and your life want to grow, to bloom? After that, we 'shake off' the season and slowly move on to the next.



Step 5. Autumn: Letting Go (10 minutes)

Movement:

- Invite participants to make softer, slower movements, like leaves falling from a tree.
- Focus on releasing, swaying arms, downward movements, and deep breathing.
- Visualise what you want to let go of while moving.

Suggestions for music:

- Max Richter – “On the Nature of Daylight”
- Agnes Obel - “September song”
- Ludovico Einaudi – “Nuvole Bianche”
- Camille Saint-Saëns – “Le Cygne” (The Swan) from Le Carnaval des Animaux

You can ask the participants (as mentioned in step 2): What did I become aware of this season? And what did I experience in my body? Or ask questions linked to the autumn season, like: What do you want to release to make space for something new? How does it feel to let go? After that, we 'shake off' the season and slowly move on to the next.



THE SEASONS
MOVE THROUGH THE SEASONS, FEEL
WHAT CHANGES IN YOU

FLOURISH

Movement:

- Let movements slow down almost to a stop.
- Focus on minimal, meditative gestures such as gentle swaying or deep bows.
- Ask participants to close their eyes and observe a moment of complete silence.

Suggestions for music:

- George Winston – “December”
- Sigur Rós – “Untitled #3 (Samskeyti)”
- Emile Mossere & Julianna Barwick - “Snowpool”.

You can ask the participants (as mentioned in step 2): What did I become aware of about this season? And what did I experience in my body? Or ask questions linked to the winter season, like: How does silence and stillness feel in your body? What insights arise when you are still? Which small movements are still moving inside of you? What is the silence telling you? After that, we'll shake off this season.

Step 7. Closing (10-15 minutes)

- Bring participants back to the circle.
- Let them sit or lie down in silence and gradually reconnect with their breathing and surroundings.
- Invite them to briefly share (optional) in pairs what they experienced during the dance.
- End with words of gratitude and an invitation to carry this connection with nature into their daily lives.

Music: Plays soft ambient music or a gentle piano piece, such as Yiruma – “River Flows in You”.



REFLECTION

Individually guide participants through a reflection after completing the movement journey with the seasons. You can use these questions:

- How did each season feel in your body?
- Did any particular movement or a season link to a personal experience?
- How can you adapt the cycle of the seasons to your daily life?

Encourage journaling or drawing as an alternative way for participants to process their experiences. For example, they can draw their experiences in their bodies. You can also ask participants to share their experiences in pairs.



- Instead of setting a specific time for a season, you can also play one (or two) songs per season.
- If participants don't feel comfortable with their eyes closed, they can do it with their eyes open.
- This activity is adaptable to different group sizes and settings.
- This activity can be modified to suit different physical abilities or if participants don't want to dance by incorporating seated or smaller-scale movements.
- Music selection can be adjusted based on participant preferences. (Look for a playlist with different songs: "Gaia Theil, 4 seasons dance meditation" on Spotify)

- **Indoor Version:** Instead of doing the activity in a park or forest, directly interacting with nature, you can do the activity in a room
- **Seated or Gentle Adaptation:** For participants with limited mobility, focus on breath, hand gestures, and visualisation.
- **Partner or Group Work:** Introduce mirroring exercises where participants reflect each other's seasonal movements.
- **Creative Expression:** After the dance, add an art component where participants create drawings, poems, or collages representing their seasonal journey.
- **Shortened Version:** If time is limited, focus on two contrasting seasons (e.g., Spring & Autumn).
- **Different order of seasons:** instead of starting with 'Spring', start the dance with a different season.

This activity is grounded in embodied learning, which connects physical movement with emotional and cognitive processes. Movement-based practices help regulate emotions, increase self-awareness, and foster resilience.

- **Metaphor & Resilience:** The cycle of seasons mirrors life's transitions, helping participants reflect on personal growth, challenges, and renewal.
- **Somatic Experience & Well-being:** Engaging the body in expressive movement can release stress, improve mood, and enhance a sense of agency.
- **Nature Connection:** Research in eco-psychology suggests that aligning with natural rhythms supports mental well-being, fostering a sense of belonging and inner balance.

Relevant theories include:

- Gestalt: Emphasises awareness through experience.
- Polyvagal Theory (Stephen Porges): Suggests movement and breathwork regulate the nervous system.
- Expressive Arts: Uses creative movement for emotional processing.



MASK MAKING

CLAY YOUR ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Both



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Eco Art, Storytelling

KEYWORDS

Creativity, Mask,
Self-reflection

TIME

40-60 minutes

PURPOSE

- Activity: Make or modify a personal mask using playful, abstract forms.
- Mindfulness: Engage your senses, focus on breathing and movement, and try sculpting with closed eyes.
- Resilience: Express emotions creatively. Boost self-worth through unique creation. Embrace imperfection and play. Reduce stress through mindful focus. Draw inspiration from nature's cycles.

MATERIALS

- Clay or paper masks.
- Natural materials include rocks, leaves, fruits,

markers, crayons, and other painting supplies.

- It would be great if suitable clay could be used for baking in a ceramic/porcelain oven. If not, even cutting a paper well-shaped would be okay. It depends on the trainer and the possibilities.
- Young people can find natural objects themselves.

PREPARATION:

Material Prep (15–20 min before session)
Set up a calm, inspiring space outdoors or by a window.
Prepare each workstation with:

- Air-drying or natural clay
- Recycled/natural items (leaves, twigs, seeds, feathers).
- Wooden or simple sculpting tools
- A bowl of water for smoothing
- Wet wipes or a cloth for cleanup
- Base for mask (cloth or cardboard)
- Optional: mirrors for self-reflection
- Test background playlist (ambient or nature-inspired music).
- Optional: create a small nature altar in the centre (leaves, stones, feathers, candle).

FLOURISH

STEPS

Step 1. Background Music & Atmosphere

- Begin playing gentle, grounding music (preferably without lyrics).
- Let the environment support a slow transition into a creative, mindful space.
- Encourage silence or soft voices before starting.

Step 2. Opening: Breath & Mindfulness Exercise (5–7 minutes)

- Invite participants to sit comfortably and close their eyes.
- Lead a guided breathing exercise:
- 'Take a deep breath... and slowly let it go. Feel the ground beneath you... the air touching your skin... the rhythm of your breath...'
- Slowly guide participants to recognise their surroundings through sound, touch, and body presence.
- Optional: include a short visualisation (e.g., 'Imagine your breath as roots connecting you to the earth...')

Step 3. Introducing the Ecological Self & the Mask Activity (5–7 minutes)

Part 1 – What is the Ecological Self? (2–3 min)

Invite a short reflection or group thought-sharing:

- 'When we say *ecological self*, we mean the part of you deeply connected to the natural world – your feelings, instincts, and place within nature. It's not about what you look like, but how you sense, respond, and relate to the world around you.'
- Optional questions to ask the group:
'What part of nature do you feel most connected to?'
'How do you feel in your body when you're in nature?'

Part 2 – The Mask Activity (3–4 min)

Explain the purpose:

- 'You'll be creating a symbolic mask that represents your ecological self, not how you look, but how you feel, sense, and connect to nature and your inner world.'

Emphasise creative freedom:

- 'It doesn't need to be realistic or beautiful. Abstract, nonsense, playful, and shapeless expressions are all welcome.'
- Briefly show the materials and invite participants to explore and use them however they like.



- Encourage participants to touch the clay, learn its texture, and play.
- Invite them (optionally) to close their eyes while they shape the first impressions, to deepen the body-sense connection.
- Allow silence or soft music; facilitators can gently walk around to support participants if needed.
- Encourage using natural or recycled objects as extensions of the mask.

Signal that the session is coming to an end:

- ‘You have around 10 minutes left – take your time to gently complete your mask, as much as it feels complete for today.’
- Encourage people to name their mask or give it a symbolic meaning.

REFLECTION

Encourage participants to take a few quiet moments after completing their masks. You may offer them these reflective questions to discuss in pairs or small groups, or write them on paper:

- How does this process reflect your connection to the natural world?
- How did you feel while shaping something with your hands?

Circle (15–20 minutes)

- Gather participants in a circle (if possible).
- Invite each person (voluntarily) to show their mask and say a few words about:
 - How the process felt
 - What their mask might represent
 - Any sensations or thoughts that came up
- Emphasise listening with care, no interpretation, no judgment.
- Optionally: offer a closing sentence like: 'What I take from today is...' or 'Today, I discovered...'



COMMENTS

- Participants may initially feel hesitant or unsure, especially if unfamiliar with clay or creative expression. A slow, encouraging tone is essential.
- Closing their eyes during part of the activity can deepen body awareness and help reduce self-judgment.
- Most participants tend to open up emotionally by the end , be prepared to hold space for unexpected emotions.
- Symbolic language (such as 'your inner tree,' 'your emotional landscape,' etc.) supports deeper engagement.
- Sharing masks in a group setting helps foster mutual respect, empathy, and a sense of community.



- *Silent walk before session:* Begin the workshop with a short mindful nature walk to collect materials and tune in with the environment.
- *Themed masks:* Invite participants to create a 'seasonal self' (e.g., a winter or spring mask, based on their current emotional season)
- *Partner activity:* Participants can co-create a shared mask to explore relational dynamics and cooperation
- *Natural dye painting:* After the clay dries, participants can paint their masks using earth-based or vegetable dyes
- *Alternative materials:* Instead of using clay, you can create a 'mask' with natural materials.
- *Sound & mask:* Add an optional sound component. After creating the mask, each participant expresses their 'voice' using sounds or music.



Inspired by eco-art therapy practices, this activity blends expressive arts, mindfulness, and nature-based resilience-building elements. The mask is used here not as a disguise but as a symbolic tool to explore identity, emotions, and connection to the Earth.

Creating with hands directly in contact with clay (a raw, natural material) engages the sensorimotor system and has grounding effects, especially when paired with breathwork. This practice supports emotional

regulation and strengthens personal insight,
key components of resilience.

The approach is rooted in the principles of expressive arts therapy outlined in *The Expressive Arts Activity Book* by Darley & Heath. This book emphasises using creative processes, like visual art, storytelling, and movement, as tools for emotional expression, resilience, and self-awareness. In expressive arts practice, the focus is not on the product but the creation process, allowing participants to access unconscious feelings, experiment with identity, and transform inner experiences into symbolic forms.

Mask making engages the imagination, body, and senses, enabling participants to explore aspects of their ecological self. This concept, drawn from eco-therapy, highlights the emotional bond between humans and nature. As Darley and Heath suggest, creating symbolic artefacts like masks encourages clients to 'externalise their internal states' and gives form to emotions or roles that are often hard to articulate.

Using natural materials and working with hands-on mediums like clay, this activity grounds participants in the present moment, activates the sensorimotor system, and supports emotional regulation. Shaping raw material while reflecting mindfully builds resilience through self-expression, sensory integration, and a strengthened sense of identity connected to the natural world.

NEW EYES IN NATURE

EXPLORING VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Group (10-15)



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Nature Walk
Perspective Flexibility

KEYWORDS

Empathy, Flexibility,
Perspective



TIME

60 minutes

PURPOSE

Become aware of how we perceive the environment automatically.
Practice seeing from different perspectives.

MATERIALS

Pen and paper to write down observations. Sitting mats.

PREPARATION

Begin with a walk and wait for a landscape that offers enough variation before starting the instructions.

STEPS

With this activity, young people discover where their attention naturally goes when they walk in nature and what they start to see when they look entirely differently.

Step 1. Instruction (2 min or 100 meters)

We take a short walk in silence and observe the surroundings.

Step 2. Share in pairs (5 minutes)

After a few minutes, divide the group into pairs.

Person A tells Person B what they noticed, and then switches roles. You stay in the same place with the group.

Step 3. Make a circle (5 minutes)

Ask the group: What part of nature attracted you the most? Did you focus only on the ground, or did you also notice the movement around you in nature?

After sharing, explain that what we notice tells us what our brain is naturally drawn to. Some focus on movement, others on small details, or mainly look at the ground. Everyone's brain notices different things. Once we understand this, we can start seeing more things around us.

Step 4. Walk with New Eyes (5 minutes)

Now, walk back to the starting point.

Instruction: Walk as if you've never been here before and are curious about your surroundings. Maybe you'll zoom in and notice small details or zoom out like a bird flying above. You might look at the sky or the tops of the trees. Pay attention to how you look and what you notice – how does it make you feel?

Step 5. Stop at the same point (5 minutes)

Divide the group into triplets.

Share: What did you see now? What was different from the first walk?

Step 6. Debriefing (5 minutes)

Form a circle.

Ask:

What new things did you notice this time on the same route?

Did you notice anything that surprised you?

How did your body feel when you changed the way you looked around?

What do you realise now about how you usually look at things?

Step 7. Explore different views (30 minutes)

Walk on and see what's around to allow even more perspectives to be experienced.

- Can they climb on something, like a lookout tower or a tree? If you step into a bird's perspective, what do you see?
- Lie down on the ground and look up at the sky. What do you experience now?

Ask: 'What perspective would you like to use more often when looking at your surroundings: zooming out like a bird or focusing on small details?'

'Can you think of a moment in daily life where looking from another perspective could help?'

Check-out question: All share one observation or image of what has stuck with you in nature.



- Choose a shelter here in nature and sit or lie down for a few minutes. What do you experience here?
- Grab something from nature. Let them spend 5 -10 minutes looking very intently at each detail. What do you see now
- As a variation, ask participants to walk with different mindsets: a happy mindset, a fearful or sad mindset, and a curious mindset. After each walk, ask what they noticed in their body.
- Challenge young people to come up with a perspective of their own.

Why is seeing from different perspectives critical for young people?

- They can build curiosity. By looking at the natural environment with new eyes, we step out of autopilot and arouse curiosity and wonder, competencies that move us to explore and start seeing and connecting with the environment.
- They can develop empathy. By putting themselves in others' shoes, young people better understand how people think, feel, and act.
- They can think critically and creatively. They learn to approach situations from multiple perspectives, which helps with problem-solving and decision-making. When young people get stuck, looking at the problem from different perspectives is helpful.

MEDICINE WHEEL RITUAL

CONNECT WITH THE SEASONS AND THE WISDOM OF NATURE

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Individually or in groups of up to 12 people



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Nature ritual

KEYWORDS

Exploring challenges



TIME

30-60 minutes

PURPOSE

Embodied learning – Listening to body knowledge and intuition to make the next step instead of just using your head, which is usually filled with fears, anxiety, or blocking thoughts. Natural wisdom - Experiencing that your body has natural wisdom, too, and intuition can help you when facing challenges Experiencing that action brings you further.

for wisdom. For example, a flower bud can represent spring or the East, a blooming flower for summer or the South, and a crystal for the centre. Stones and sticks can also be used as symbols. You can make reflection cards for the debriefing in pairs and groups.

PREPARATION

Find a safe place in nature. Ask the young people if they like the spot, or let them find it themselves.

MATERIALS

As a facilitator, bring or search for natural objects for the seasons and the ‘holy middle’ or the centre

Lay out a large circle with four objects representing the seasons, and in the middle, a smaller circle for

the ‘center of wisdom’: Winter - rest, reflection Spring - birth, new energy Summer - full bloom, capacity Fall - harvesting, decay, and letting go Middle – The centre is a place of calm and curiosity, where you can connect with what matters to you (friendship, family, nature, religion, etc.). Traditionally, winter is put in the North, Spring in the East, etc. You begin by laying out the objects. The circle is preferably created counterclockwise and cleared away clockwise. Make the circle large enough for everyone to move around inside.

FLOURISH

STEPS

Step 1. Walk with the seasons

Go to a beautiful place in nature and discuss in pairs: What is your favourite season? What do you like about the current season?

Step 2. Introduction

This cycle aims to help young people with issues reconnect with themselves and the world around them. In a time when speed, business, and an infinite number of choices are the order of the day, it is sometimes difficult to know at any given moment what exactly is right for you. And how do you find out? Nature Wisdom provides a compass for this. You can always work with a compass to help you find your way. It helps you to deal with challenges in daily life by:

- Reflecting on life phases and personal challenges
- Letting go of what no longer serves you and making space for growth
- Feeling connected to nature and a greater whole
- Finding inner balance between action and rest, giving and receiving

Explain that this is an old ritual. Indigenous peoples use the medicine wheel to find their place in the continuous life cycle. The four seasons symbolise recurring phases of change. In doing so, they represent a kind of compass for a natural way of life: moving with the seasons. Just as indigenous peoples always knew how to find their way in the forests, mountains, or deserts. Explain in your own words: The cycle circulates water through evaporation, clouds, and rain, sustaining life. Seasons come and go: winter, spring, summer, fall, etc. In nature, nothing stays the same. So when you’re down, good days will come again. And you won’t always be happy, flowers don’t continuously bloom.

Step 3. What is your challenge or need at this moment?

Let participants feel for a while what their challenge in life is before entering the wheel. They can leave the question very open. You can also link the question to a phase you are in now: choice of education, workplace. It can be something they are stuck in and want to get movement on, but do not yet know what to do, and want to explore further with the medicine wheel.

Invite participants to find a natural object, such as a stone, leaf, branch, or feather, that symbolises their question.

‘You don’t need to explain your challenge out loud. Feel it inside and let it guide where you step into the circle.’

Step 4. Step into the Medicine Wheel

Have them place the object in the circle where they feel they are now and at which stage of the issue. Ask: ‘What are you experiencing here? What are you sensing in your body? What are you realizing right now?’



Challenge participants to move around to find the exact spot: closer to the middle, left, or right. Explain that they will feel the right place in their body.
For example, you might feel lighter or at ease at the right spot.
If someone else is in 'your spot,' work it out together, just like in real life. Trust that you will end up in the right spot.
Even if participants want to stay in the first place, invite them to explore the whole circle.

Close your eyes and let your body tell you what to do: sit, talk, scream, hop, etc.
Let everyone move and make sounds on their spot, all simultaneously.
They leave their object on the ground.
Encourage participants to do this without hesitation or shame.
Do this for a while, and look for the group's energy to end.

Nature always moves forward. You can follow the seasons clockwise or move toward the centre - just don't move backwards.

What step would their body want to take now? Invite them to take this step or make the movement. Maybe they feel lighter, warmer, and connected to the new spot.

They leave their object at the first spot.



When everyone has found their spot, ask them which one they are in.
Let them reflect on where they came from and where they have put their object.
Let them reflect on significant steps, small steps, or movements, and the feelings they experienced.

Find someone to look back at what you have discovered.
Let them question each other:

- What was your first place, and where did you come out?
- How did you get there?
- And what does this say about your challenge?
- What is the first step you want to take regarding your challenge?

Exchange



End the circle by removing the objects clockwise. Leave no trace. Participants may want to hold on to their object as a token of this exercise.

Ask participants to stand quietly, look around, and silently thank nature. E.g.
Take a moment to notice the trees, the sky, and the ground beneath your feet. Just be still and offer a quiet thank you for the wisdom nature shared today.

Debriefing with the group

- What did your mind tell you where you are in the process?
- What did your body tell you?
- If there was a difference, what would you realise?
- Which movement did you make, and what does it mean to you? (it is not about what others or the facilitator think), It is their inner wisdom.
- In which direction (middle or in the circle) did you move? What did this teach you?
- How can this relate to your current situation/project?

Reflect individually or in pairs on what this ritual brought you:
What is the first natural small step you could make tomorrow in real life with this insight?



As the facilitator, you can walk around during the process and help youngsters if they seem stuck. Try to intervene as little as possible. It is a personal and internal process.

Be aware that intentions may be very personal and don't need to be told/ shared. It is about the internal process that gives meaning to the steps they want to take.

As the facilitator, you must create a safe and supportive environment where participants feel comfortable sharing, reflecting, and expressing themselves.

Time-wise, you can clear the circle yourself afterwards.





The medicine wheel is an ancient symbol used by Indigenous peoples, especially in North America. It symbolises the cycle of life and the connection between people and nature.

Each part of the circle represents a season and a phase in life:

Winter (North) – A time to rest, reflect, and slow down.

Spring (East) – A time for new energy, beginnings, and ideas.

Summer (South) – A time to grow, take action, and enjoy what you’ve created.

Autumn (West) – A time to harvest what you've learned and let go of what you no longer need.

Centre (Middle) – A place of calm and curiosity, where you connect with what matters to you.

Just like the seasons change, our lives also go through phases. The medicine wheel helps us see where we are now and what kind of support or action we might need.

Ask young people to find natural objects that symbolise the four seasons and have them create a medicine wheel individually or in pairs.

You can ask participants to draw and write about their nature journey and insights. Play natural music and let them reflect individually before sharing with the group.

This activity is a more practical and youth-friendly version of the Medicine Wheel. If you wish to explore it more traditionally, we recommend reading more about or following training courses in Indigenous holistic practices.

It is a circle, meaning every place is equal – no better or worse place exists. You move through it in your way and at your own pace.

In medicine wheel rituals, moving clockwise follows the sun, symbolising life, growth, and connection to natural cycles. It is used to create, honour, or activate something, like setting intentions or starting a ceremony. Clearing the circle counterclockwise means release, cleansing, and closure. It helps to let go or clear space, like ending a ritual or old habits.

This activity invites a connection with nature, movement, and reflection to help participants sense what feels right for them, not just with their thoughts, but with their body and heart. It helps people feel grounded, make decisions, and find meaning.

The idea of the circle can also be seen as a spiral, each time you return to the same place, you've changed a little and see it with new eyes.



HARVEST

WRAP-UP

COLLECT GROWTH

ENJOY THE SATISFACTION OF LEARNING AND GROWING

Name

Tree of Resilience
Evaluation Path

Crossing the Threshold
Harvest Circle

Type of Activity

Wrap-up Learnings on Resilience
Visualising Learnings with
Natural Objects
Nature Closing Ritual
Check-Out

TREE OF RESILIENCE

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL
Both  

 **TYPE OF ACTIVITY**
Self Evaluation

KEYWORDS 
Self-awareness about
resilience, goal-setting

 **TIME**
30 minutes

- PURPOSE**
- Identifies and explores their strengths and values.
 - Analyse themselves and make insights on resilience-related topics.

MATERIALS
A paper and color pens

PREPARATION
The facilitator gives 10 minutes to participants to see around and find one tree that symbolises his/herself.

STEPS

Step 1.
Participants are given a sheet of paper and colored pencils and asked to draw a picture of their selected tree. The visual shows that the tree consists of three parts: ROOTS, TRUNK, and FRUITS.

Step 2.
In the *roots*, *trunk*, and *fruits* sections, the facilitator asks participants to associate these parts of the tree with themselves. The following questions can help participants find connections. The facilitator writes these questions on paper and shares them with participants.

- Roots*
What keeps you grounded in life?
Where do you belong?
What can't you live without?
What nourishes you?
- Trunk*
What values and skills make you stronger in life?
What do you do to succeed?
- Fruits*
What are your dreams?
What are your plans for the near future?

Step 3.
Participants share their tree and keywords with others, and the facilitator leads reflection as follows:

REFLECTION

The facilitator shares the following information and the tree design model with the participants and explains what each part represents.

- Analysis (Roots-Trunk-Fruits Connections)
Roots: Reveal the participant's core values, sense of belonging, and what grounds them in life.
Trunk: Reflects their strengths, skills, and coping strategies for success.
Fruits: Represent their goals and future vision.

- Reflection Questions:**
1. What did you enjoy about this activity?
 2. What nourishes you?
 3. What surprised or inspired you about someone else's tree?
 4. What do you think about the resilience of a tree?



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

HARVEST

Since this activity may trigger psychological associations or emotional responses in some participants, focusing primarily on personal development, skills, and future planning is recommended, rather than delving into deeply personal or sensitive issues during the session.

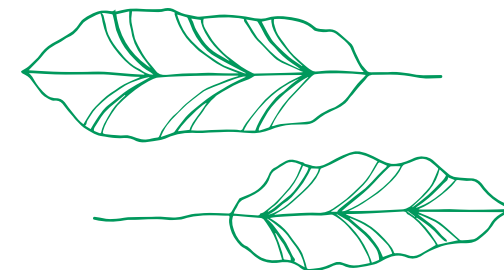
For facilitators without a background in psychology, it is essential to approach the “roots” section, which may touch on participants’ values or past experiences, with care and avoid exploring past traumas or emotional difficulties in depth. The emphasis should remain on what grounds and empowers the participant today, rather than analysing or unpacking past psychological issues.

Creating a safe and supportive environment is key, and the activity should be framed as a self-reflective, strength-based exercise that promotes resilience and future-oriented thinking.

- The participants can revisit the tree after 6 months, draw the resilience of the tree again, and check if their values/goals have changed.
- The activity can be conducted outdoors using a single, real tree chosen collectively by the group. Participants are asked to identify the most resilient tree in the area and discuss why they believe this tree stands out in terms of resilience and strength.
- Following this discussion, the activity continues with participants writing on papers and freely attaching their reflections to different parts of the chosen real tree:
Roots: representing core values, sense of belonging, and personal foundations
Trunk: representing strengths, skills, and coping strategies
Leaves or Fruits: representing hopes, goals, and future visions

After everyone has attached their keywords or reflections to the tree, the group gathers to collect and review all contributions. These papers are placed on a flat surface or whiteboard, and the group clusters similar ideas. The facilitator guides a reflective discussion to interpret and make meaning of the group's input, exploring common themes and insights related to resilience.

This process encourages collective learning, more profound connection with nature, and a shared understanding of what resilience means within the group.



The Tree of Resilience activity is a powerful tool that helps young people explore their inner strengths, build emotional awareness, and enhance their psychological resilience. Using a nature-based metaphor, this creative and reflective method provides a safe space for self-expression, particularly effective in youth work.

This activity is grounded in *positive psychology* (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), which emphasises the capacity of individuals to grow through adversity. The use of *metaphors and embodiment* supports young people in expressing complex emotions in a concrete and accessible way.

EVALUATION PATH

REFLECT ON LEARNINGS WITH
HELP FROM NATURE

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Both (Groups max. 12)



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Journaling, Nature ritual

KEYWORDS

Set a learning intention



TIME

15-30 minutes

PURPOSE

Encourage reflection, imagination, and connection with nature. Reflection strengthens resilience by helping young people understand thoughts and feelings, allowing them to learn from challenges and grow stronger.

MATERIALS

Optionally, question cards, a notebook, and drawing materials. Insulated sitting mats are available if you want to journal in nature afterwards.

PREPARATION

Choose the reflection questions and adapt them to the focus of your activity

if necessary. Print each question on a separate card. Create an evaluation path: choose a walking path or follow a natural line in the forest, such as a row of trees, where participants walk a short route individually in silence. Along the path, place reflective questions on cards. You can also use natural markers like stones and branches. These are sample questions, but feel free to develop your reflective questions. People often focus on what went wrong, so start with the first question about what went well. Tip: The final question - about

applying insights in daily life - often leads to the most action.

- Nature station 1: What went well today/this period?
- Nature station 2: What did you find challenging?
- Nature station 3: What would you like to leave behind? (Let participants pick something from nature to leave behind symbolically—throw it away, bury it, etc.)
- Nature station 4: What will you take on your learning path?
- Nature station 5: What did you learn about yourself concerning this theme?
- Nature station 6: How can you apply this in daily life?

HARVEST

STEPS

Use the following steps to guide participants on a calm and reflective nature walk. Your role is to gently set the scene, spark curiosity, and create a safe space where silence and self-discovery feel like an adventure—not a task.

Step 1. Introduction

We are going to do something different now than talk. Nature can help us see things differently, not just with our minds but by listening with our hearts, minds, and bodies. No phones, no distractions, just you, nature, and some questions to reflect on the past day or period. This is not a test, with no right or wrong answers. It is simply about your feelings and thoughts.

Step 2. Purpose

Today or this week, you discovered something new, learned something, or simply felt a certain vibe. This walk will help you think about your experiences and feelings about them, using nature as a peaceful and nonjudgmental space. During this walk, we will take a moment to reflect on that—no need to talk or share, just for yourself.

Step 3. Instructions

- You will walk a short route in silence. Along the way, you will find questions or pictures to reflect on.
- Take your time with the questions that feel right for you. You can skip the others.
- Stay silent so everyone can focus on their reflections.
- You don't have to write or share unless you want to.
- Think of this as a mini-break for your mind. You might discover something new about yourself, or maybe not, and that is perfectly fine.

Step 4. Start the Walk

- Take a moment to take a few deep breaths and look around. When you are ready, start walking at your own pace.
- At the end of the path, marked by [fill in], wait silently until everyone has finished. You have approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the walk. Make sure the endpoint is marked.



PATH

REFLECT ON LEARNINGS WITH
HELP FROM NATURE

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slightly textured appearance and is set against a dark background.

After the walk, participants can briefly share their experiences in the group or pairs or reflect quietly in nature, journaling, drawing, or simply sitting with their thoughts.

Select a peaceful and safe outdoor location with sufficient space where participants can move around without disturbing one another.



Add your creativity. At certain nature stations, you can encourage youngsters to write down a word or reflection, create a drawing, write a poem, or use other creative methods. Some participants prefer drawing or writing, while others simply want to share a word. Adjust the questions and reflection methods to fit the theme and the group. Ensure that the necessary materials are provided at the start of the activity.

Have participants create their own evaluation path in nature. Then, give each participant a stack of reflection cards to lay on the path.

Depending on the theme, you can adjust or add different reflective questions.

Research shows that spending time in natural environments enhances awareness of needs, reduces stress, and fosters deeper personal insights.

Nature provides a distraction-free environment, allowing individuals to process thoughts and emotions more effectively. Studies show that time in nature reduces stress and improves emotional regulation (Kaplan, 1989).

Natural settings stimulate cognitive function and creative thinking. Walking in nature, particularly in silence, has been linked to increased problem-solving abilities and innovative thinking (Atchley, 2012).

Being in nature encourages mindfulness and self-reflection, leading to greater self-awareness and emotional balance. It fosters a connection with yourself and the surrounding world (Louv, 2008).

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

ANCHORING LEARNINGS WITH THE HELP OF NATURE

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

Group



TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Nature Rituals
Transition and Reflection

KEYWORDS

Setting an intention
Exploring challenges



TIME

15 minutes

PURPOSE

Create a visual and physical experience of personal growth. Embed the results of previous activities. Consciously mark and complete the transition to a new phase or mindset.

MATERIALS

Participants look for natural objects that symbolise their journey

PREPARATION

Search for a challenging place in nature to cross that can be used as a threshold. It can be, for example, a narrow bridge or a muddy road.

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction

‘Can you imagine stepping beyond your comfort zone and facing new challenges? These moments aren’t just difficulties — they are thresholds. They mark the start of a new journey, a chance to grow, and an invitation to show courage.’

Step 2. Finding Nature Symbols

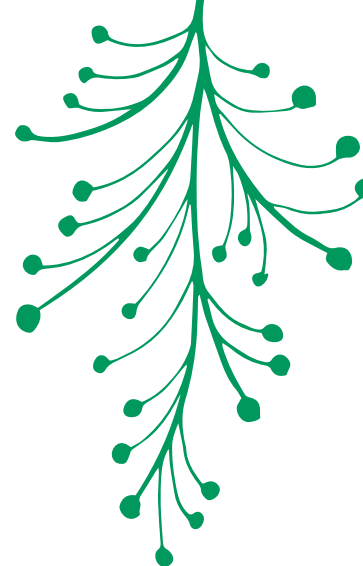
Ask participants to find two elements in nature that represent their journey: What do you leave behind? Find something in nature that symbolises what you are letting go of or don’t need anymore. Please relate this to the learning topic from the activity. What do you want to take with you? Find something in nature that represents what you want to take with you on your journey.

Step 3. Crossing the Threshold

Participants gather in two rows, creating a symbolic pathway. The facilitator stands next to the presenter to offer support if needed. The participant presents the objects to the whole group.

Each person takes turns stepping forward: They present their ‘*letting go*’ object, explain its meaning, and choose how to release it (e.g., throwing it into the water, burying it). They then present their ‘*carrying forward*’ object and share its significance. The facilitator gives a kind word to support their journey (for example: ‘Good luck on your path of [courage].’) The participant walks through the pathway while the group claps and encourages them. They then join the back of the line, and the next person takes their turn. Once everyone has passed the gate, the whole group symbolically steps over the threshold.



[illegible]

For the facilitator: What insights have you gained from the young people's reflections on what they have discovered about the topic? How can you help keep their intentions alive on their new pathway?

Afterwards, the facilitator can explain that we all go through changes in life – moving to a new school, making new friends, starting a job, or trying something new. Crossing a threshold symbolises leaving behind what you no longer need and stepping into a new chapter.

Piloting shows this activity works best when participants feel safe sharing their experiences. Some may not want to find a symbol or participate. It's essential to accept participants as they are. Don't force them – let them join in their way. They may want to say something to the group, and if not, allow them to silently express what they want for themselves before walking through the line, if they choose to. It's key to meet the participants where they are.

- Instead of a row, you can also present symbols in a circle.
- Walk under an arch as a symbolic passage.
- Labyrinth Walk:
Forward: Walk while reflecting on a challenge
Pause in the centre: set an intention
Back: walk towards a new mindset
- Crossing an obstacle (e.g., balancing on a beam, stepping over a log).
- Jump over an object to symbolise leaving something behind.
- Drawing a 'learning river'. Participants illustrate their growth journey.

Crossing the Threshold is an excellent ending for a learning journey. Participants symbolically step into a new phase, leaving behind what no longer serves them and embracing new insights. This ritual mirrors the Hero's journey, helping individuals commit to change, build resilience, and gain confidence in their next steps. The *Hero's Journey*, developed by Joseph Campbell, is a universal storytelling framework describing a hero's transformation through challenges and growth. One key stage is '*Crossing the Threshold*', where the hero leaves their familiar world to enter the unknown, facing new experiences and obstacles.

Archetypically seen, crossing the threshold is a ritual all about letting go of something or someone to create space for something or someone new to come.

HARVEST CIRCLE

FRUITS OF THE JOURNEY

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL
Both



TYPE OF ACTIVITY
Check-out



KEYWORDS
Embodying Insights



TIME
5-10 minutes



PURPOSE
Reflection: Participants can reflect on what they have learned and experienced.
Completion: It ensures that a session does not end abruptly but is deliberately concluded.
Group feeling: It gives space to express appreciation and feel connection.
Feedback moment: The Facilitator can gain valuable insights about the impact of the activity.

MATERIALS
No materials needed.

PREPARATION
Look for a safe space in nature.

STEPS

Step 1. Introduction
We conclude this activity with a Harvest Circle - a moment to reflect on what you learned or felt today. As you harvest what has grown after a long day, we collect what you take away from this experience. The point is that you can say something about what this activity has done to you. Maybe you feel like a river flowing, or like a sturdy tree. You may have discovered something about yourself, or a question you want to take on your journey. What do you take away from today?

Step 2. Explain how the turn goes
Popcorn style means anyone can speak when they feel ready. There is no set order. Just like popcorn pops one by one, people talk when they are ready. This creates a dynamic, free exchange of ideas, giving everyone space to contribute naturally.

Step 3. Harvest instruction
How would you describe your feelings as a weather forecast?

Step 4. Thank the group and nature
Ask everyone to take a deep breath, look around, and say one word to thank nature or the group.

REFLECTION

For the facilitator: Collect your participants' learnings so you know what steps they want to take, and keep tuning in to how you can support them.
You can also use a flip chart on which participants write what they learned using keywords. Or have them write on Post-its an intention with what step they want to take in the learning zone.

COMMENTS

A check-out is a decisive closing moment after an activity. In an activity around resilience and nature, a check-out helps young people discover how nature can support them through challenges and growth.
A check-out helps young people to:

- Reflect on what they have learned and experienced.
- Consciously reflect on their feelings and how the activity affected them.
- Strengthen the connection with themselves, each other, and nature.



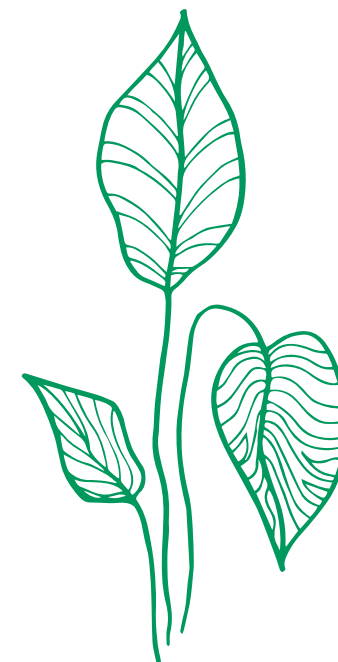
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Instead of the popcorn style, you could start by yourself and then give the turn to someone else. Each participant would then pass the turn to someone else.

You can ask various check-out questions and tailor them to the topic you've been exploring, so the reflection connects more deeply with the experience.

- **Animal image.** Choose an animal that reflects your feelings and describe it in one word.
 - **Show a collage of animals with emotional expressions** and ask participants to choose one that matches how they feel, similar to the Sheep Scale used in the check-in.
 - **Use nature as a mirror.** Have young people identify a place or thing in nature that reflects their feelings, such as a flowing river full of energy.
 - **Resilience is a stepping stone.** Have young people step on a stone and say, 'With this step, I take [.....] with me.' This helps them consciously take away a lesson or strength from the experience.
 - **Nature association.** Look for something in nature that symbolises what you want to take away from this experience.
 - **Voices of the Field.** Everyone stands in a place in nature that matches how they feel.
- Share: Why did you choose this spot?

Positive learning. What did you like about this activity in nature? Asking when young people had a good time connects them with fun, play, and a valuable source of learning and development.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Deep Democracy is a powerful tool for a check-out because it gives space to all voices in the group, including minority voices that might not otherwise be heard. By including all voices – especially those less likely to be heard – facilitators gain a fuller understanding of what resonated with participants, leading to a more meaningful and inclusive conclusion to the meeting. Applying the method creates more openness, connection, and recognition of different perspectives, contributing to a sense of ownership and inclusion. It makes the check-out not only a closure, but also a moment of reflection and shared wisdom.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES



Interested in learning more about Resilience in Nature?

Explore the Ecosystem of Knowledge on the topics of Nature-Based Resilience, Ecopedagogy, Ecopsychology, Youth Work and adolescence, and Natural Skills and outdoor Guidelines.

NATURE-BASED RESILIENCE

Atchley, R. A., Strayer, D. L., & Atchley, P. (2012), *Creativity in the Wild: Improving Creative Reasoning through Immersion in Natural Settings*. *PLoS ONE*, 7(12)

Basso, Keith H (1996), *Wisdom sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, University of New Mexico Press

 The book describes how place designation is referenced in the Western Apache language. For example, they say, 'He lives by the river upstream.' Basso explores and explains how people develop a connection with their surroundings.

Cleary, A., Fielding, K. S., Bell, S. L., Murray, Z., & Roiko, A. (2017), Exploring potential mechanisms involved in the relationship between eudaimonic well-being and nature connection. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 158, 119-128.

Cornell, Joseph (2018), *Listening to Nature: How to Deepen Your Awareness of Nature*, Crystal Clarity Publishers

Cornell, Joseph (2015), *Sharing Nature. Nature Awareness Activities for All Ages*, Crystal Clarity Publishers

 Joseph Cornell is a pioneer in nature experience and experiential learning in nature. His 'Flow Learning method' offers a structured way to connect young people with nature playfully and intuitively. This model consists of four phases-warming up, concentration, direct experience, and sharing, through which participants gradually open up more to their environment and develop a deeper connection with nature. His work is essential for youth work and nature education, as it encourages knowledge transfer, wonder, and a sense of belonging to the natural world.

Darley, Suzanne & Wende Heath (2007), *The Expressive Arts Activity Book*, A Resource for Professionals, Jessica Kingsley Publishers

 The book offers creative, arts-based methods that help young people express emotions, build self-awareness, and process experiences. The book's approaches can be easily combined with eco-activities, supporting reflection and connection through nature, movement, and imagination.

Dickinson, J. L., & Bonney, R. (Eds.) (2012), *Citizen science: Public participation in environmental research*, Cornell University Press

Flach, Frederic (2020), *Resilience: How We Find New Strength At Times of Stress*, Hatherleigh Press

Gennep, A. van (1960), *The Rites of Passage*, M. B. Vizedom & G. L. Caffee, Trans.

 This book explores how life transitions shape identity, offering valuable insight for youth workers guiding young people through growth. It highlights how nature-based experiences can serve as powerful rites that build resilience and emotional strength.

Green, C. (2012), *Well-being and the Outdoors: A Literature Review for the Outdoor*, Health Working Group. Institute of Outdoor Learning

Hartig, T., Mitchell, R., de Vries, S., 7 Frumkin, H. (2014), *Nature and Health, Annual Review of Public Health*, 35, 207-228

 This article is a leading scientific review substantiating the relationship between nature and health. It shows how exposure to natural environments contributes to physical, mental, and social well-being and highlights the need to integrate nature into public health policies.

Ingulli, K. and Lindbloom, G. (2013), Connection to Nature and Psychological Resilience, *Ecopsychology* (vol. 5), nr.1, p. 52-55

 This short scientific article focuses on whether one's perceived connection to the natural world correlates with one's subjective sense of psychological resilience, finding a moderate positive correlation between scores on the Connectedness to Nature Scale and the Resilience Scale

Kolb, D. A. (1984), *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Prentice Hall

Kuo, M., Barnes, M., & Jordan, C. (2019), Do experiences with nature promote learning? Converging evidence of a cause-and-effect relationship. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 305

Pretty, Jules, Mike Rogerson, and Jo Barton (2017), Green Mind Theory: How Brain-Body-Behaviour Links into Natural and Social Environments for Healthy Habits, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2017, 14 (7), 706

 The Green Mind Theory is crucial because it links brain, body, behaviour, and the natural and social environment. It shows how exposure to nature not only promotes our mental well-being but also stimulates physiological and behavioural changes that lead to healthier habits and resilience.

Lester, Viki (2022), *Earth Magic: Ground Yourself with Magic. Connect with the Seasons in your Life & in Nature*, Leaping Hare Press

Lupa (2016), *Nature Spirituality From the Ground Up: Connect with Totems in Your Ecosystem*, Llewellyn Worldwide, LTD.

Salomons, Oda, Roald Pijpker & Latifa Atmani (2021), *Gids Groene Zorg Toolkit Sensa Zorg, De eerste stap naar implementatie van begeleiding in de natuur in de reguliere werkprocessen*, Amsterdam

<https://www.sensazorg.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/SENSA-ZORG-GIDS-GROENE-ZORG-TOOLKIT06.2021.pdf>

Sobel, D. (2004), *Place-based education: Connecting classrooms and communities*. The Orion Society

Walker, Clare & Charles E. Roth (2000), *Keeping a Nature Journal. Discover a Whole New Way of Seeing the World Around You*, Storey Publishing

 An essential source for daily nature journaling to connect & reflect in and with nature.

White, Mathew P. et al. (2023), Nature-Based Biopsychosocial Resilience: An Integrative Theoretical Framework for Research on Nature and Health, *Environment International*, Volume 181

 This article introduces a theoretical framework about how biopsychosocial resilience resources can: i) reduce the risk of various stressors (*preventive resilience*); ii) enhance adaptive reactions to stressful circumstances (*response resilience*), and/or iii) facilitate more rapid and/or complete recovery from stress (*recovery resilience*).

Wohlleben, Peter (2019), *The Secret Wisdom of Nature: Trees, Animals, and the Extraordinary Balance of All Living Things – Stories from Science and Observation*, Greystone Books, The Mysteries of Nature Series

 Wohlleben's book offers a compelling look at how deeply interconnected natural systems are, showing that resilience in ecosystems mirrors the resilience we can nurture in young people.

For youth workers, it inspires a deeper appreciation of nature as both teacher and ally, enriching their practice with stories that blend science and wonder.

Wulf, Andrea (2015), *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group

ECOPEDAGOGY

Freire, Paulo (1970), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin Modern Classics

 This classic shows the importance of taking young people seriously and learning with them instead of just imparting knowledge. For youth workers in nature, this means no fixed lessons but activities in which young people discover, make choices, and think for themselves. The book helps you not be the boss but a facilitator who gives space for real involvement and growth.

Louv, Richard (2008), *Last Child in the Wood, Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Algonquin Books

 Louv shows how disconnection from nature – what he calls *nature-deficit disorder* – has serious consequences for children's physical and emotional development. He explains that nature helps children calm down, self-regulate, solve problems, and grow through unstructured play. This book is a must-read for anyone working with youth, resilience, or education, as it clearly shows why nature is not a luxury but a necessity.

Louv, Richard (2017), *Vitamine N, The Essential Guide to a Nature-Rich Life*, Atlantic Books

 This practical follow-up to *Last Child in the Woods* offers over 500 ideas and activities to help people of all ages reconnect with nature in their daily lives. It highlights how essential time in nature is for our health, like taking vitamins, and inspires us to make the outdoors a natural part of a healthy lifestyle.

Misiaszek, Greg William (2020), *Ecopedagogy: Critical Environmental Teaching for Planetary Justice and Global Sustainable Development*, Bloomsbury Academic

 This book challenges traditional environmental education by linking sustainability, ethics, and social justice. It emphasizes the importance of teaching students scientific knowledge and cultural, political, and ethical perspectives on global environmental issues. Ideal for educators and activists, it offers innovative ways to shape future generations into active, responsible global citizens who can tackle the environmental challenges ahead.

Oliver, Kylie G., Philippa Collin, Jane Burns, and Jonathan Nicholas (2006), Building resilience in young people through meaningful participation, *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health (AeJAMH)*, Volume 5, Issue 1, 2006

Sakellariadis, C. (2022), *Redefining Resilience Through Ecology at School*, visited 4/18/2025 on: <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/redefining-resilience-through-ecology-at-school/>

 This article highlights the need for education systems to go beyond environmental awareness by embedding resilience, ecological literacy, and lived experience into the curriculum, the core principles of eco-pedagogy. It aligns with eco-pedagogical goals by calling for youth to develop agency and adaptability through meaningful engagement with climate realities and ecological systems.

Sampson, S. D. (2015), *How to Raise a Wild Child: The Art and Science of Falling in Love with Nature*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

 At a time when technology and urbanisation are moving nature further away from children, this book offers practical strategies to reconnect young people with the natural world, contributing to a healthier and happier life. It is a must-read for anyone who wants to help youth develop a deeper appreciation and responsibility for nature.

Sobel, David (2019), *Beyond Ecophobia, Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education*, Orion Magazine

 Sobel warns that overwhelming children with environmental problems too early can create fear instead of care. Sobel argues that emotional connection with nature must come first, through wonder, play, and joy, before introducing complex issues like climate change. His work is essential for anyone who wants to build resilience by first nurturing a love for the natural world.

ECOPSYCHOLOGY

Antonov, Vladimir (2011), *Ecopsychology*, New Atlanteans

Duncan, Roger (2018), *Nature in Mind, Systemic Thinking and Imagination in Ecopsychology and Mental Health*, Routledge

Green, K. (2024), *Becoming and Thriving in a Changing World: Socioeconomic, Social, and Neural Determinants of Wellbeing Across Adolescence and Young Adulthood*. Doctoral Thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam

 Youth workers can use this research to understand how social, economic, and personal factors affect resilience, helping them create nature-based activities that better support young people's well-being and growth.

Kaplan, S., & Kaplan, R. (1989), *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*, Cambridge University Press

 Developers of the classic Attention Restoration Theory (ART), which explores how nature helps restore mental fatigue and improve concentration and well-being

Macy, Joanna (2021), *World as Lover, World as Self, Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*, Parallax Press

Macy, Joanna (2014), *Coming Back to Life, The Updated Guide to the Work That Reconnects*, New Society Publishers

 Joanna Macy's work provides an essential foundation for experiential learning in and with nature. It offers a deep ecological perspective in which people experience themselves not as separate from but as intrinsically connected to the natural world. Her approach encourages awareness, empathy, and action through direct experience, which is essential for developing a reciprocal relationship with nature and promoting sustainable change.

Passmore, H. A., & Howell, A. J. (2014),

Nature involvement increases hedonic and eudaimonic well-being: A two-week experimental study. *Ecopsychology*, 6(3), 148-154

Roszak, Theodore (1992), *Voice of the Earth, An Exploration of Ecopsychology*, Phanes Press, U.S.

Roszak, Theodore, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner (1995), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* Sierra Club Books

 This groundbreaking work shows how our mental well-being is deeply connected to the Earth. It brings together leading thinkers who argue that feeling part of nature, not separate from it, is essential for emotional balance, responsible action, and long-term sustainability. It provides a strong foundation for understanding how working with nature can support young people's resilience, emotional health, and sense of belonging in a changing world.

Williams, Florence (2017), *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative*, W.W. Norton & Company

 Williams scientifically explores how spending time in nature reduces stress, stimulates creative thinking, and promotes mental clarity. The book explains how different natural environments offer specific psychological benefits, such as forests and lakes. It provides valuable insights for youth workers and educators who want to integrate nature into everyday life to improve the well-being of children and adults.

Wilson, E. O. (1984), *Biophilia*, Harvard University Press

 In this book, Wilson introduces the biophilia hypothesis, which states that humans have an innate tendency to feel connected to nature and other living organisms. This book is fundamental to understanding the relationship between humans and the natural world from a psychological perspective.

YOUTH WORK & ADOLESCENCE

Albert, T. & Salomons, O. (2020), *Building Blocks for Promoting Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing in the European Youth Sector*. <https://positivementalhealth.eu>

 What can we learn from experts in the field of Youth Work on positive mental health and creating natural environments for young people?

American Psychological Association. (n.d.), Resilience for teens: 10 tips to build skills on bouncing back from rough times. <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/bounce-teens>

 Adapting well in hard times is a valuable skill for young adults. The good news is that resilience is something that can be learned.

Arnett, Jeffrey & Malcolm Hughes (2012), *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood, A Cultural Approach*, Pearson Education Limited

 The authors focus on the cultural basis of development from an interdisciplinary approach to what adolescence means in different contexts.

Crone, Eveline (2016), *The Adolescent Brain, Changes in Learning, Decision-Making and Social Relations*, Taylor and Francis

 The need to belong to a group of peers is one of the biggest challenges for young people in adolescence, along with coping with the physical pain of rejection. That's why they are more vulnerable to group and peer pressure. Understanding what is happening in the brain of adolescents. Why do they show increases in sensation-seeking, risk-taking, and sensitivity to opinions of friends?

Crenshaw, David A., Brooks, R., and Goldstein, S. (editors) (2015), *Play Therapy Interventions to Enhance Resilience*, The Guilford Press



This volume brings together experts to describe effective play therapy approaches for enhancing resilience in children.

DeBenedet, A.T. (2018), *Playful Intelligence: The Power of Living Lightly in a Serious World*, Santa Monica Press



This book explores how embracing playfulness can lead to a more resilient and fulfilling life.

Green, J. (2016), *I'm OK! Building Resilience through Physical Play*, Redleaf Press



Green provides tools and strategies for creating a culture of resilience through physical play, emphasizing its role in children's development.

Kernaghan, Donna (2021), *Building Resilience in Young People: Youth Work in the Voluntary Sector*, Scoping Report

Lepla, Karel (2017), *Bounce Young, Resilience Training Tool for Youngsters*, Arkto NPO

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000), Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.



This basic motivation theory boosts intrinsic motivation and well-being for young people.

Siegel, Daniel (2014), *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*. Scribe Publications



Siegel presents a simple hand model of the brain to explain how young people's brains work. This model helps us understand the connection between emotions and brain function. It also highlights four basic needs of young people: to be seen, to feel safe, to be soothed, and to feel secure. Meeting these needs is essential for their emotional well-being and development.

Van den Berg, A.E. & Albers, T. (2022), *Nature Intelligence in Youth Work: Conceptual Model, Measurement Scale and Critical Success Factors*. Aalten: Anatta Foundation

Van den Berg, A.E., Paci, A., Kosková, H., Murn, K., Salmeri, F. & Albers, T. (2022), *Nature as a Teacher in Youth Work. Manual for Promoting Nature Intelligence in Non-Formal Education Programmes to Connect Young People With Nature*. Aalten: Anatta Foundation

Van den Berg, A.E., Paci, A., Kosková, H., Murn, K., Salmeri, F. & Albers, T. (2022), *Nature as a Teacher in Youth Work. Manual for Promoting Nature Intelligence in Non-Formal Education Programmes to Connect Young People With Nature*. Aalten: Anatta Foundation

NATURAL SKILLS & OUTDOOR GUIDELINES

Bauer, Susan (2018), *The Embodied Teen. A Somatic Curriculum for Teaching Body-Mind Awareness, Kinesthetic Intelligence, and Social and Emotional Skills*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California



This book is essential for youth workers because it provides practical tools for enhancing teens' body-mind connection and emotional resilience. By teaching body awareness and kinesthetic intelligence, we can help young people navigate physical and emotional challenges, improve self-esteem, and develop healthier relationships with their bodies. This approach empowers teens with the skills to handle stress, prevent injury, and build lasting resilience.

Beames, Simon et al. (2024), *Outdoor Learning Across the Curriculum, Theory and Guidelines for Practice*, Routledge



It offers guidelines for teachers and other professionals on how to integrate outdoor learning into their daily timetable, with clear educational purposes.

Brown, Brené (2013), *The Power of Vulnerability - Teachings on Authenticity, Connection and courage*, Sounds True



This (already classic) book is a very readable introduction to the power behind vulnerability, which is closely connected to building resilience. See also her TED Talk on the same topic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzLF7o>

Campbell, J. (1949), *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, New World Library.



In *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Campbell describes the universal narrative pattern he calls the 'Hero's Journey'. He shows how hero stories from

different cultures share the same phases and symbolism, from vocation to transformation and return. The book has influenced film, literature, and education, helping to understand how stories connect and inspire people.

Clear, James (2018), *Atomic Habits, Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results*, Avery



The book is important for guiding young people in learning new habits because it shows that small, achievable steps lead to big changes in the long run. It emphasises that behaviour is not changed by willpower but by creating a supportive environment and clear routines. For young people, it offers practical tools to build positive habits in a motivating and sustainable way.

Cooley, Sam J., Jones, C.R., Kurtz, A. & Robertson, N. (2020), 'Into the Wild': A metasynthesis of talking therapy in natural outdoor spaces. *Clinical Psychology Review*, Vol 77, April 2020, 101841



Three stages of how to bring nature back into the lives of young people. Plus: What skills do facilitators need to 'walk the talk' outdoors? How does it allow the conversation to happen between a Youth Worker and a youngster?

Cooley, S. J., & Robertson, N. (2020), *The Use of Talking Therapy Outdoors*. Guidelines published by the British Psychological Society, UK.

Gopnik, A. (2017), *The Gardener and the Carpenter, What the New Science of Child Development Tells Us About the Relationship Between Parents and Children*. Vintage Publishing.

What is your educational style?

Harper, Nevind, Kathryn Rose, and David Segal (2019), *Nature-based therapy. A Practitioner's Guide to Working Outdoors with Children, Youth, and Families*, New Society Publishers

Inside Out 1 & 2 - Movies about how



young people experience emotions in their brains

Miyazaki, Y. (2018), *Shinrin Yoku - The Japanese Way of Forest Bathing for Health and Relaxation*, Aster, Octopus Publishing Group

 This book guides you to the science of forest therapy and the practice of forest bathing with different benefits: reduced stress, a boost to the immune system, and an improved mood.

Plett, Heather (2020), *The Art of Holding Space, A Practice of Love, Liberation, and Leadership*, Page Two

 It offers practical insights for facilitators who want to create a safe and supportive learning environment for young people. It emphasizes supporting young people rather than solving their problems or disciplining them, and it helps them discover themselves in a space of trust and safety. This is essential for promoting well-being and personal growth, especially in outdoor activities.

Plotkin, Bill (2024), *The Journey of Soul Initiation: A Field Guide for Visionaries, Evolutionaries, and Revolutionaries*, New World Library

 Ecological Awareness. Learn about our ecological identity and how to find your place in Earth's community.

Plotkin, Bill (2013), *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche*. New World Library

 Plotkin shows how we can see emotions like fear, anger, or sadness not as problems to solve, but as natural parts of ourselves, just like the changing weather in nature. His model helps youth workers guide young people to explore these inner parts with curiosity and connect them to their strengths, engaging in nature as a mirror for wholeness and growth.

Ramamurty, C. et al. (2024), *The Impact of*

Storytelling on Building Resilience in Children: A systematic review, Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, vol. 31 issue 4, pp. 525-542

 This systematic review of 11 studies published between 2012 and 2022 indicates that storytelling interventions enhance psychological resilience in children.

Siegel, Daniel J. (2018), *Aware. The Science and Practice of Presence*, Tarcherperigee

 Siegel introduces the tool 'Wheel of Awareness', which helps young people develop focus, emotional balance, and connection. It's a practical guide for youth workers using nature and outdoor activities to support mindfulness and personal growth.

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ERASMUS PLUS

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