



# Nature Connection & Wellbeing

FOR HEALTHCARE AND  
COMMUNITY PROFESSIONALS



We all have an intuitive relationship with nature in our early years which is easy to lose in the modern world. Connecting with the natural world and other people can have a transformative effect on our health and wellbeing. As practitioners, we can encourage people to boost their own wellbeing through nature connection activities.



**Sheffield & Rotherham**  
Wildlife Trust



# What is meant by 'wellbeing'?

**Wellbeing refers to a state of being comfortable, healthy, and happy, both physically and mentally. It also includes less tangible things such as how satisfied people are with their life as a whole, their sense of meaning and purpose, and how 'in control' they feel. In other words, wellbeing means feeling good and functioning well.**

Improving and maintaining your overall state of wellness isn't always easy, and sometimes requires a little extra help.

Though social prescribing cannot substitute for adequate clinical services, social work or counselling, it can support patients to overcome socio-economic barriers and can play a key role in linking people with meaningful community activities.

**Green (or blue) social prescribing enables health professionals to support patients' health and wellbeing through nature-connection.**

**Nature connection can be measured by the extent to which individuals include nature as part of their identity.**



# What is nature connection?

**Nature connection is about experiences and relationships, not only knowledge and learning**

Nature Connection is a personal relationship with nature which has many great health benefits. After all, we are a part of the natural world, and reconnecting with nature can boost our mood and bring meaning to our lives.

Nature connection can be as simple as watching the clouds go by, and feeling a sense of calm, or perhaps awe as they change shape and form patterns. If we're unable to leave our home, our nature connection may be watching a TV wildlife programme, and feeling we've got to know the animals a little better. Or it might be as intensive as growing our own food or climbing mountains, and the deep satisfaction that brings.

Whatever way we relate to nature, we can feel some benefit from the experience of connection. And we don't need to learn nature-facts in order to connect; put simply, you don't need to know the name of a singing bird to enjoy its song.

# Five Ways to Wild Wellbeing

These five actions, proposed by the New Economics Foundation (2011), are now a mainstay of NHS health and wellbeing advice, and have been adopted by schools, universities, county councils, the Scouts, MIND and so on. Building them into your everyday life can improve your mental and physical health. We have adapted them here for nature.



## Five pathways to nature connection

The results of studies by the **Nature Connectedness Research Group** at Derby University (2017), have shown that finding **simple everyday ways to connect more deeply with the nature around us** can really help us to feel good. They have identified the following five pathways to nature connection. So, don't think about knowing the names of things, just spend a little bit of time following these pathways and exploring what you love!



### Senses

Use all of your senses to explore the natural world around you.



### Emotions

How does nature make you feel?



### Beauty

Find what beauty there is in the nature around you, wherever it might be.



### Meaning

Celebrating nature can bring meaning into our lives.



### Compassion

for nature on our doorstep can help connect us to our local environment and take care of what we can.

## Nature connection in practice

Once a person's basic health and social care needs are addressed (Housing, benefits advice etc) Conversations can be had about their existing social networks and interests. People are often referred to join in with community groups and services to help the person boost their confidence and self-esteem.

**These can all be seen as opportunities for nature connection with a social element.**

Care Farms  
Health Walks  
Men's Sheds  
Community Gardens



# Wild at Heart

**Dedicated nature connection groups will provide a full programme of activities, all inspired by and linked to nature, that facilitate nature connection in a social context. Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust's 'Wild at Heart' project is a highly successful example of a nature connection group for health and wellbeing, and our simple model can be replicated without difficulty.**

The group meets regularly in an accessible building within or close to green space. A session begins with a welcome, refreshments, introduction and nature-news sharing, usually followed by a gentle walk, noticing the seasonal changes, and then an inclusive nature-related activity, outdoors if the weather permits, or indoors if needs be.

Participants are referred from local Social Prescribing scheme and Link workers based in GP practices.

The program is co-produced with participants.

Activities have ranged from summer and winter wreath-making, wild-fruit foraging, natural dye-making, wildlife gardening, seasonal soups, summer puddings, spinning and weaving, mobile phone macro-photography to garden archery and so on. Participants can access the activities at whatever level they wish, or are able.

You can follow Wild at Heart on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/WildatHeartproject](https://www.facebook.com/WildatHeartproject)

## Wild at Heart

Be wild, whatever your age

An example of a friendly nature activity group for adults

## Key to success

**A decade of experience with Wild at Heart has shown that when designing a green social prescribing project, the following considerations are key:**

- Provide a broad range of activities over the weeks, which are low cost, accessible and importantly, 'no fail'
- These should be place-based, person-centred, simple, seasonal, Nature-based activities
- Adopt a position of 'unconditional positive regard' for clients
- Join in with existing local community activities
- Your project can be a 'Third Place' (neutral ground, non-triggering) for your clients
- Make sure there are convenient toilets, shelter and benches if you take your clients out walking
- Always have refreshments available (suitable for clients' dietary requirements)



# Bringing nature into your workplace and role

Though we might not be running a nature-connection group ourselves, each of us can bring nature into our role, whatever our profession. Here are some suggestions for 'nature' you can bring into your workspace, and simple things you can do on a regular basis:

## BRING IN...

- jam jar posies
- plants or spring bulbs in your office
- interesting nature items - shells, pretty pebbles, an empty bird's nest
- nature pictures

## DO...

- notice three good things in nature, even when things aren't going as they should
- have lunch outside
- take walking meetings
- hang bird feeders in view
- seasonal eating
- take and share nature photos
- a daily walk, visiting a place through the seasons



## Taking it further

What are you going to do to bring more 'green' into your social prescribing?

For more activities, wild recipes, videos and small ways to stay connected to nature, check out: **Facebook.com/WildatHeartproject**



## References:

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Mental Health Foundation, (2021), 'Nature. How connecting with nature benefits our mental health,' MHF: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHAW21-Nature-research-report.pdf> (Accessed 04.10.2023)

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The Wildlife Trusts, (2023), Natural Health Services, TWT: [https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/23JUN\\_Health\\_Report\\_FINAL%20%281%29.pdf](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/23JUN_Health_Report_FINAL%20%281%29.pdf) (Accessed 04.10.2023)

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Lumber, R., Richardson, M., & Sheffield, D. (2017). Beyond knowing nature: Contact, emotion, compassion, meaning, and beauty are pathways to nature connection. PLoS One, 12(5): <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177186> (Accessed 10.10.2023)

Knepple Carney, A., (2018), "How Connectedness to Nature Relates to Well-Being over Time." Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Problem Reports. 5992. West Virginia University. <https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/etd/5992> (Accessed 11.10.2023)

# Find out more about Nature Connectedness

**Derby University offers a free self-guided online CPD accredited learning course providing a fantastic opportunity for you to learn about Nature Connectedness and the value of having a strong relationship with nature.**

- **For more information please visit:**  
[derby.ac.uk/short-courses-cpd/online/free-courses/nature-connectedness-relationship-with-nature/](http://derby.ac.uk/short-courses-cpd/online/free-courses/nature-connectedness-relationship-with-nature/)
- **Network with community colleagues, join the South Yorkshire Green Network:**  
[wildsheffield.com/getinvolved/the-green-network/the-green-network/](http://wildsheffield.com/getinvolved/the-green-network/the-green-network/)

## USEFUL LINKS

**Wild at Heart:** [wildsheffield.com/wild-at-heart](http://wildsheffield.com/wild-at-heart)

**Green Social Prescribing on Padlet:**  
[padlet.com/jking278/green-and-blue-social-prescribing-dj8elmne4isjpmi](http://padlet.com/jking278/green-and-blue-social-prescribing-dj8elmne4isjpmi)

**5 Pathways to Nature Connection:**  
[www.derby.ac.uk/research/centres-groups/nature-connectedness-research-group](http://www.derby.ac.uk/research/centres-groups/nature-connectedness-research-group)

**Institute of Outdoor Learning Mental Health Statement of Good Practice:**  
[outdoor-learning.org/standards/collective-knowledge/outdoor-mental-health-outdoor-therapy.html](http://outdoor-learning.org/standards/collective-knowledge/outdoor-mental-health-outdoor-therapy.html)

**Merlin Free Bird sound recognition app**  
[merlin.allaboutbirds.org](http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org)

**Sensory Trust**  
[sensorytrust.org.uk](http://sensorytrust.org.uk)

**The Wildlife Trusts nature spotter sheets**  
[wildlifewatch.org.uk/activities](http://wildlifewatch.org.uk/activities)

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