

CONNECTING WITH NATURE

"The land is the mother and we are of the land; we do not own the land rather the land owns us. The land is our food, our culture, our spirit and our identity"

– Dennis Foley, a Gai-mariagal and Wiradjuri man, and Fulbright scholar.

Dennis speaks for all of us, whether we realise it or not.

Being in nature, living near nature, or even viewing nature in paintings and videos can have positive impacts on our brains, bodies, feelings, thought processes, and social interactions.

HOW CONNECTED TO NATURE AM I?

Do this quiz to see how connected to nature you are.

Rate yourself from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) on each of the questions below and calculate your average score by adding the scores and dividing the total by 5.

- » **If your average score is 4–5** then you are highly connected to nature. Enjoy this connection and challenge yourself to find even more ways to connect with nature. Share the love and show others the beauty, joy and peace that comes with connecting with nature.
- » **If your average score is 3** then you have experienced the benefits of nature but probably need to set some routine or habits to ensure you make the most of your connection with nature.
- » **If your average score is 1–2** then you are quite disconnected from nature. The good news is that there is so much simple, accessible joy and wellbeing awaiting you. And best of all, doing so will improve your wellbeing, health and happiness, costs nothing, has no side effects, and can be easily achieved, and shared with those you love.

THE QUIZ

My score
(1–5)

My ideal vacation spot would be a remote, wilderness area	Strongly disagree (1)	Strongly agree (5)	
I always think about how my actions affect the environment	Strongly disagree (1)	Strongly agree (5)	
My connection to nature and the environment is a part of my spirituality	Strongly disagree (1)	Strongly agree (5)	
I take notice of wildlife wherever I am	Strongly disagree (1)	Strongly agree (5)	
My relationship to nature is an important part of who I am	Strongly disagree (1)	Strongly agree (5)	
I feel very connected to all living things and the earth	Strongly disagree (1)	Strongly agree (5)	
My average score (1-5)			

WHY WOULD I BOTHER TO GET MORE CONNECTED?

There is much recent scientific research to demonstrate the positive impacts of nature on our social, psychological, and emotional life.

Emotional & mental health benefits

- » Improves mood and motivation and sense of meaning in life
- » Improves attention & cognition
- » Enhances memory
- » Improves life satisfaction & wellbeing
- » Reduces anxiety, stress, ADHD and depression symptoms

Social health benefits

- » Increases co-operative, generosity, kindness and helping behaviour
- » Decreases selfishness and entitlement
- » Increases social and community cohesion including feeling more connected to neighbours

- » Enhances environmentally responsible behaviours
- » Improves relationships
- » Increases calmness and civility and reduces neighbourhood violence and crime

Physical health benefits

- » Improves cardiovascular health
- » Decreases fatigue and increases sleep quality
- » Reduces risk of high blood pressure
- » Reduces risk of obesity
- » Lowers risk of diabetes
- » Reduces recovery time from surgery

Work related health benefits

- » Increases attention and focus as well as problem solving and creativity
- » Improves job satisfaction
- » Reduces sick leave
- » Increases productivity
- » Improves recovery from work related stress
- » Improves overall mental health

Would you or any family members benefit from any of the above?

'NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER'

We have we have been slowly disconnecting from nature since the 1950s. This is because of a combination of urbanisation which cuts people off from natural surroundings, and technological change such as the rise of television, video games and the internet dominating recreation instead of outdoor activities. Additionally, in the past 30 years, people's levels of stress and sense of 'busyness' have risen dramatically.

Personal reflection...

- » When was the last time you just sat still with nature (plants, wilderness, animals, greenness) close by?
- » What emotions did you feel when you did this?
- » Did time seem to go fast or slow?
- » How did you feel afterwards?

NATURE CONNECTION

Nature connection is "a realisation of our shared place in nature, which affects our being – how we experience the world

here and now; our emotional response, beliefs and attitudes towards nature"
– Dr Miles Richardson.

Humans have long known that being in nature is good for the mind and body. From adolescents completing rites of passage in the wilderness, to silent nature retreats, many have looked to nature as a place for healing and personal growth. The experience of being immersed in nature can even be deeply spiritual and life altering.

Here are some ways to connect with nature at work, around the home and with family/children.

Work

- » Take outdoor breaks
- » Set up a recycling system at your workplace for food, waste and rubbish
- » Buy your morning coffee from a café with plants
- » Put a pot plant on your desk (or even better, several)
- » Have a nature/animal/wilderness picture for your computer screen saver
- » Have meetings outside
- » Petition for a 'bring your pet to work' day
- » Do some outdoor team building exercises

Continued overleaf...

Around the home

- » Look into a sunrise or sunset – looking into a horizon can increase a sense of hope
- » Mow the lawn – easy way to connect to nature with your senses
- » Go for a walk at the start or end of the day, go on the weekend, walk the dog/cat/kids!
- » Get some pot plants
- » Spend quality time with the animals in your domestic space – pets, birds, worms, insects, bats etc
- » Do some gardening start a small garden bed with some flowers, herbs or easy to maintain plants
- » If meditation or yoga is something that you already do, try doing it outside or in view of nature
- » Read the paper or a book, listen to music or the radio outside (or in view of nature)
- » Have lunch or a cuppa outside

Family & children

- » Go for a family walk via a park or waterway where there are trees, plants and birds
- » Learn how to recycle your food, rubbish and waste
- » Grow vegetables and herbs on your deck or back yard
- » Grow vegetables from scraps (e.g. celery, shallots) or micro-herbs on the kitchen benchtop
- » Camp in the backyard
- » Get a pot plant
- » Make a mud kitchen with kids
- » Make a treehouse, fort or hut
- » Take the dog for a walk each day to the greenest place you can find
- » Have a 'Green hour' where you spend time in nature or with animals
- » Each day take a minute to notice 3 good things in nature
- » Write these down or deliberately ponder on them at the time (or later with the family at dinner)






MY PERSONAL PLAN TO INTEGRATE NATURE INTO THE 5 WAYS TO WELLBEING



The 5 Ways to Wellbeing are Connect, Be Active, Keep Learning, Be Aware and Help Others. They are described in more detail in the table below and each of these five ways are significantly enhanced if done in conjunction with nature. Use the table to identify ways to integrate nature into the 5 Ways to Wellbeing. Make it simple, fun and consider the domains of home, work and family.

5 ways to Wellbeing

Something I will do this week to incorporate nature (plants, wilderness, animals, greenery)

 <p>Connect – Develop and nurture close relationships and socialising with friends, family and others. Broaden social networks and range of relationships with others in the wider community.</p>	
 <p>Be Active – Do more activity or exercise. Walk, stretch, yoga, jog, gym session, cardio, hide and seek, chasings, bike ride, obstacle course, stairs... whatever works for you!</p>	
 <p>Keep Learning – Learning can take many forms. A new hobby, a podcast, new music, an online course, practical skills, something mechanical, a new sport skill, origami, drawing, an instrument, a language, reading books with kids, YouTube videos, new food and recipes, or just listening to someone's point of view that is really different to yours.</p>	
 <p>Be Aware – Make time to stop and be aware of your surroundings and the moment you are in, paying attention to your thoughts and feelings.</p>	
 <p>Help Others – When we give to others, it activates the areas of the brain associated with pleasure, social connection and trust. Altruistic behaviour releases endorphins in the brain and boosts happiness for us as well as the people we help. Often, it's the little or unexpected acts of kindness that go the furthest.</p>	

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