

# Mental Health Awareness Week

Activity Menu



**NATURE**

# INTRODUCTION

As a part of Mental Health Awareness Week, this booklet aims to provide a selection of activities for school staff to use, focused on engaging children, young people and staff in this year's theme, nature.

## Why is nature good for us?

- Simply being in nature can act as a chance to reboot and rejuvenate your mind and body.
- Nature opens up the fantastic opportunity to become absorbed in activities which promote mindfulness.
- Sunshine supplies us with Vitamin D which helps lower blood pressure by, quite literally, relaxing your blood vessels.
- Exercise releases endorphins which boosts mood.
- Being exposed to sights/sounds/touches helps strengthen senses and memory.
- Sunlight also helps regulate melatonin, which is the hormone that controls our internal body clock, helping us get a better night's sleep!
- Participating in nature focused group activities gives a fantastic opportunity to build emotional regulation and executive function skills as pupils have fun, navigate working together, have opportunities to express themselves, practice impulse control and empathy towards others and experience getting on with their peers.

# THE FIVE SENSES

The main goal of this activity is to be more aware of the present moment, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them. Mindfulness helps to increase happiness, decrease anxiety and stay grounded.

## See

Look around you and spot things you would not normally notice.

## Feel

Maybe you can feel the wind on your cheeks or the texture of grass on your fingertips.

## Hear

Notice all the background sounds around you which you might normally filter out.

## Smell

Maybe you can smell freshly cut grass or flowers or even a smell you don't like!

## Get Outside and Stop

Focus on one of these areas for 2 mins and then discuss together what you have experienced

## Taste

Sip a drink, have a snack or even notice how your mouth tastes. "Taste" the air to see how it tastes on your tongue.



# GARDENING

Watering plants, removing weeds and planting seeds are all great activities enabling us to remain in the present moment, work collaboratively and develop positive peer relationships and experience the joy of being outside.

Children and young people will develop the ability to carry out tasks as they learn and become flexible with their thinking; they'll solve problems by adapting to new challenges presented by nature.

It also provides the benefit of delayed gratification, as children and young people can reap the rewards of their efforts at a later date as they see their plants grow and blossom.





# NATURE COLLAGE

**Bring the outdoors, indoors!**

Collect flowers, leaves, and other bits of nature and use them to make a collage. Making a collage acts as a fun way to encourage greater awareness of nature and its properties, including colour and texture.

Art can help children and young people to focus their mind and feel calm and grounded in the present moment. Engaging in art activities has also been shown to reduce anxiety, low mood and stress.





# MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

**Making music together promotes attunement**

Get children and young people to make their own musical instruments using things they can find outside. Sticks, stones, and plant pots are all good objects. You might also need to provide other resources such as string, beads and buttons.

What noises do the instruments make? What beat can they tap?  
Can they play their instruments together as an ensemble?

Actively participating in making music, making the sounds either alone or with a group, fosters communication, listening, attention, imagination – all key executive function skills.





# STORY STONES

## Materials needed:

- smooth pebbles
- permanent marker pens, chalk, paints or collage pictures
- varnish (optional)

Take children and young people outdoors to collect smooth stones. To make story stones, draw or stick pictures onto smooth pebbles. You can use pens, paint or cut out images to stick on. Using chalk let children change images and add extra elements.

You can enjoy the stones as a work of art, but they are also great for play and storytelling. Children and young people who are exposed to fictional stories show more empathy and have better developed theory of mind (the ability to understand that other people have different thoughts and feelings to us), both of which are essential for developing effective social skills.

