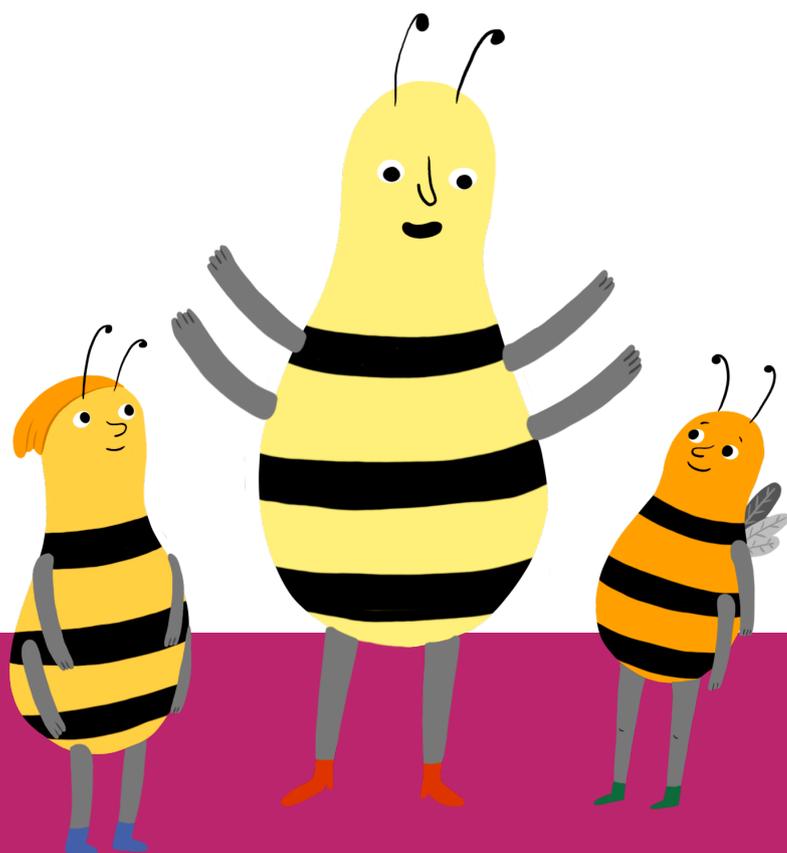


Learning to Thrive

in a climate of uncertainty

learning and support materials



Pathway 3

Learners

Ideas and activities inspired by the animation 'Learning to Thrive' to provide structured support for learners in educational settings.

BOLD

POSITIVE
NEGATIVES



Lifeworlds
Learning



Noticing

The importance of noticing

Noticing can help us to feel connected to other humans and our wider environments. When it comes to our relationship with nature, how we relate to nature is more important than simply spending time in nature - it is about quality, not quantity, moments, not minutes.

Noticing is a big part of this. In this element we have gathered **five ways to notice** that have been designed to support children and young people to better notice and connect with nature in their own environments.

Noticing through time

Creating opportunities to notice nature as part of a regular routine can enhance the benefits further. Repeated engagements strengthen the connections we make and noticing over time can help us to observe change. The following could help you to do this:

- Identify and designate some 'pause points' in the school grounds or local area.
- Repeat activities using your pause points at different times of the day / week / month / year.
- Give children a nature notebook to record key data (date, time, location etc.) and what they notice.

Learning to Thrive

Noticing things in nature can...

- ...improve mental wellbeing
- ...make us happier and more content
- ...make us feel part of nature
- ...make us more caring and responsible
- ...help develop a positive outlook on life

Noticing fully

Noticing is not just about what we see or hear. Support your learners to try and notice the feelings that they experience when noticing things in nature. This wider sort of noticing supports social and emotional wellbeing and connecting observations with emotions can build stronger memories and meaning.

Noticing through curriculum

Field notebooks, used by naturalists, contain key data that can be used in research - date, time, location, grid reference as well as sketches and observations. Maps might be created for plotting data and observations. If used in this way, then noticing could be linked back to wider curriculum work in subject areas such as science, mathematics and geography.





5 ways to notice: listening

Pathway 3: Learners



It is common to associate noticing with things that you see, but sight is only one of the senses that we notice with. Noticing through sound, through listening, can help us to discover new things. This idea uses 'sit spots' to encourage children and young people to listen attentively to the world around them.

1. Find a suitable place for children to safely pause and listen - you might use one or more of your pause points if you have designated these around your grounds. Where possible this is best done away from regular and dominant background noise such as traffic on roads.
2. Ask children to stand or sit in silence and count how many different sounds they can hear. Encourage them to go deeper with their listening - beyond the immediate sounds; to reach for the more distant or quieter sounds.
3. The following prompts could be used to help children share in what they noticed:
 - How many sounds were made by nature?
 - How many were made by human activity?
 - Did they like some sounds more than others?
 - Were there sounds that they recognised? What about ones they didn't know?
 - Were there any surprising sounds? What was surprising about them?

As you develop this activity, or repeat it, you could use these prompts to help notice more:

- Does closing your eyes make it easier or harder to count the sounds? Why might this be?
 - Does it make a difference if you stand up, sit down or lie down?
 - How easy is it to stay silent for 30 seconds / 1 minute / 2 minutes? (you could challenge children by extending the silence by 15 seconds each time)
 - Do you hear more if you stay silent for longer?
 - Do the seasons and the weather change the sounds that you can hear?
 - If you stay really still can you hear inner sounds (e.g. breathing, heartbeat)?
4. Children could make notes about the sounds they heard: they could sketch a sound map to show where the sounds were coming from; they could write a description or poem about their sounds. Children could record these in their nature notebooks if using them.

Linking back to the animation

You can link back to the animation by connecting to the soundscape of the animation and the way that sound is used alongside the images to create a story and influence feelings and emotions:

- When watching [Learning to Thrive](#) what sounds do you notice? How are these sounds similar or different to those in your locality? How do the sounds in the animation connect with your emotions and feelings?
- Watch the version of the [animation without any soundscape](#) included. How does this change your experience?
- Try sketching a scene of your own locality in the style of the animation and record sounds from your environment to bring your scene to life.

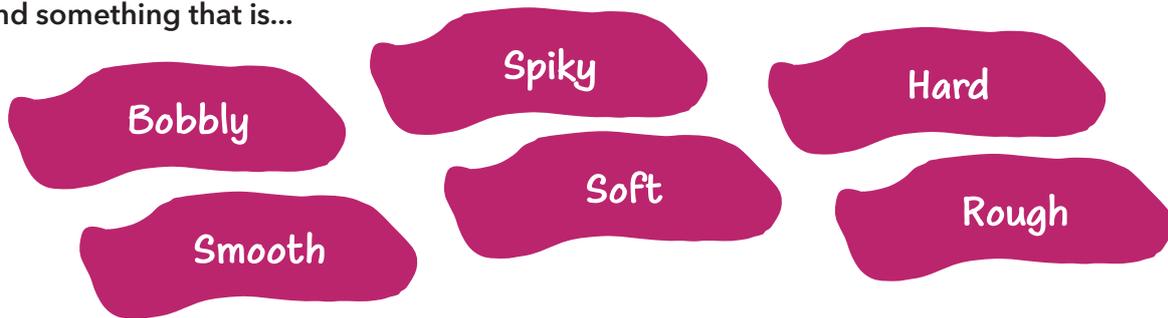


There is much to see in the nature that surrounds us, even if you don't live in a particularly nature-rich place. When nature is very familiar, we may barely notice it unless we make an active effort to do so. If nature is less familiar it can sometimes be overwhelming, however. These ideas suggest a number of ways to encourage children to actively connect with nature by noticing through textures, colours, shapes, numbers and words.

Textures

This activity could be done individually, but might be better suited to pairs or trios as this may encourage even more noticing and lead to informal learning conversations as children complete the activity.

Find something that is...



Note: When you are collecting, make sure that you stay safe, and only collect natural things that can be found on the ground.

You could extend this by making rubbings of some of the textures to put in nature notebooks if using them. You could do a short language activity to explore the textures further (e.g. "my stone is as smooth as...")



Colours

Give children a rainbow template and ask them to explore their surroundings to try and connect to each of the colours. An alternative is to create natural rainbows using a board with a piece of sticky tape (sticky side up) and children stick tiny pieces of leaves or flowers onto the board to make their own rainbow (be sure to only use things they find on the ground or check what can be picked).

Shapes

Explore the local environment to try and find something that is round, oval, triangular, square, rectangular, diamond, heart-shaped etc. Encourage them to take in their whole surroundings so they include man-made as well as natural objects.

Numbers

Write the numbers 1-10 (or to 20 for more challenge) on a piece of paper or in nature notebooks if using them and ask children find something in nature to represent each number. 1 might be a tree trunk, 6 might be the petals on a flower etc. You could include "too many to count" or "I estimate there to be..." categories for larger numbers, such as the number of leaves on a tree.

Words

Similarly write the letters A-Z down the side of the page and collect words from nature that begin with those letters or are shaped like those letters. The book [Lost Words](#) has poems inspired by nature which are organised alphabetically. This could be an inspiration for some creative writing.



Zooming in on nature can be a great way to notice new things or to connect to local environments in a different way.

This activity helps you to encourage children to become tiny explorers and to zoom in on nature in order to discover new connections.

The naked eye is all you need for this activity, but if you are able to locate and use magnifying glasses then you might be able to zoom in further and notice even more!

1. Help children to prepare for their exploration by imagining they are the bees in the animation, leaving the hive to discover a new world... Younger children might like to create a small bee character to take with them by painting a pebble for example.
2. Do some research about bee's eyes first. Did you know bees have 5 eyes? Learning more about bee eyesight could inspire children to notice more and see the world around them differently.
3. Ask children to notice something they are interested in zooming in more closely with. What do they notice that they might not have seen before? What is the benefit of zooming in to connect with nature?
4. Look at these zoomed in images from nature. Ask children to guess what they are. The images are available as a [Power Point slide here](#) for displaying. You can find the answers and zoomed out full-size images [here](#).



5. If you have access to digital cameras, children could make their own versions of the zoomed in images from your local environment.



5 ways to notice: framing

Pathway 3: Learners



Frames can be a useful device to help us notice things more with greater purpose. A window provides a frame on the outside world and can connect us with nature even when inside and the weather is wild! What can children see from your windows? How might what can be seen change over time?

When actively encountering nature, frames can help us to notice things and to focus on greater detail. A frame can be made really simply from scrap cardboard or you may have quadrats that you use for science learning.



Cardboard frames are good because they have the added benefit that children can annotate them with their observations, feelings, thoughts or questions as they use them. An alternative is to use sticky notes to annotate the frame.

1. Allow children to make their own frame. They might like to think about how big the frame is - smaller ones can be good for close-up observation. Larger ones allow a wider scale and view. It doesn't have to be square either! What if it was a wide rectangle or even a circle?
2. Let children choose what they would like to frame and perhaps to share why they chose that view. What can they see in their frame? What is beyond the frame? Why did they decide to include or exclude certain things?
3. Relate the framing activity back to thinking about photographs. When we use, take and share photographs these are another type of frame. Next time you look at a photograph ask yourself what has the photographer chosen to include and what might be outside of the frame?
4. If you have access to digital cameras/devices you could try taking some photographs of your local environment using different frames to create a different impression or feeling. The example below uses the still from the animation *Learning to Thrive* to show how you might create different frames from the same scene.





This activity takes a slightly different angle on connecting with nature and encourages us to look up at the skies and clouds that are the natural ceiling to our lives.

The founder of the Cloud Appreciation Society, Gavin Pretor-Pinney, reminds us in his [TED Talk](#) that clouds often have negative associations. When we are feeling a little low we might say we are 'under a cloud'. When looking ahead we can sometimes talk about obstacles or doubts as 'clouds on the horizon'. And yet, clouds are an incredibly important part of nature and of our survival on Earth. Clouds bring us the essential rains that are needed for all life, and they offer protection from the rays of the sun at the hottest times of year.



If we find time to actively notice them then we can find great beauty in clouds, just as many people do when looking up to enjoy the stars of a clear night sky. Taking time to stop, notice, observe, record and learn from the rhythms of our skies inspires curiosity, dreaming, deep thinking and enquiry, whether it's the stars or the clouds.

1. Try taking children outside at the same time every day for a week, or on the same day once a week and just spend 10 minutes looking at the clouds. Sit or lie down if you can. Ask children:

"What shapes can you see?"

"What colours do you notice?"

"How do the clouds change minute by minute / day by day / week by week?"

"What weather do you notice with each type of cloud you have spotted?"

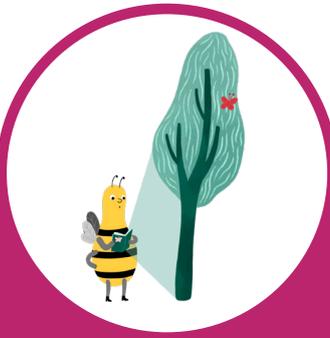
"Notice your breathing. Does it change, the longer you are there?"

2. Clouds change all the time, just as our feelings change. Pick out a cloud and imagine what it is feeling. If it is on its own, perhaps it is feeling lonely or lost. As it moves and changes, perhaps joining up with other clouds or drifting away into the distance, how might its feelings change?

Children could use ideas from this to write a poem or short description of their chosen cloud. They could put these in their nature notebooks if they are using them.

3. Use a [cloud spotting sheet](#) to identify the scientific name of the different clouds you can see. Children could try sketching them and labelling them to create their own cloud guide.
4. Some parts of the world will mainly have just a few types of clouds that depend on the normal weather patterns in that region. Other parts of the world will experience many types of cloud, even in a single day.

On 16th September 2022 the first Cloud Appreciation Day took place and people from around the world took more than 3000 photos of the clouds they could see that day. You can explore the clouds from that day using [interactive map](#) that was created to record them all.



Connecting

The importance of connecting

Feeling connected is important. It is part of how we develop our sense of identity and belonging. Our connections can take many different forms. They might be to people, to localities (places), to nature, to beliefs, to our histories, and to feelings. Connections are important for personal and cognitive development and can help us to thrive, enjoy and achieve more from the relations and opportunities that are available to us.

Finding connections

Some connections may be obvious such as our social connection to immediate family and friends or our place connection to a favourite park, walk or café. Other connections might be less obvious though and require a little more thinking to identify. How are we connected to nature, even when we are not in nature for example? What about the connections we may have with people we may never meet and places we may never visit?

These less obvious connections matter because they can help us to better understand the nature of challenges and concerns in our complex and uncertain world. Understanding these connections can help young people to develop greater empathy, deeper understanding, and perhaps a greater sense of empowerment and agency.

The seven activities in this element help to develop a sense of connection at a variety of scales and with a focus on planet, people and place.

Learning to Thrive

Positive connections can...

- ...improve critical thinking
- ...encourage creativity and curiosity
- ...make us happier and more content
- ...give us a sense of belonging
- ...make us more caring and responsible





These two activities focus on **connections with our planet - with nature and the environment**. It starts with the connections that young people identify themselves but encourages a deeper awareness of connections through critical thinking.

ACTIVITY: Finding connections

1. Begin by asking children to have a quick chatter in learning groups of around 4-6 about the connections that they can identify with nature*. After a few minutes, invite groups to share their ideas (one at a time), going around the groups until all the ideas have been shared.

* Define 'nature' together first - it should include a broad understanding of our environment at a local and global scale and not just plants and animals.
2. Provoke a deeper understanding of connection by showcasing an object in the classroom (almost anything will do, but a book is a good choice) and ask learners: "What about this? How is this connected to nature?" [Connections for a book: paper from trees, water to make the paper, energy in the manufacturing process, minerals in the ink, glue for binding etc.]
3. Use the downloadable [connections images](#) and give a different image to each learning group. Ask them to identify as many connections with nature as they can in the image. If the image is placed on a larger sheet of paper, learners can list their ideas around the image. They could even draw lines connecting to the object in the image.



4. Once they have finished invite each group to share their image, or carousel the images around the groups in a clockwise rotation giving each group a minute or two to identify the connections that their peers identified in their image.

NOTES:

- We offer some of the connections that we have identified in each image at the end of the [connections images](#).
- You could use the images to create a classroom display about how we are connected to nature or in a corridor to raise awareness in the wider school community.
- An alternative to using the images is to use the classroom itself, or to take a walking assessment in another part of the school.
- This activity could be extended to a home-learning challenge with learners taking a photo in their home and identifying the connections with nature that they (and their family) can find.



GAME: Do we need a tree for that?

1. Provide learners with a copy of the [‘Do we need a tree for that?’ cards](#) that have been cut up into individual cards (or ask learners to cut them up if given out as a sheet).



Cooking with wood



Listening to music



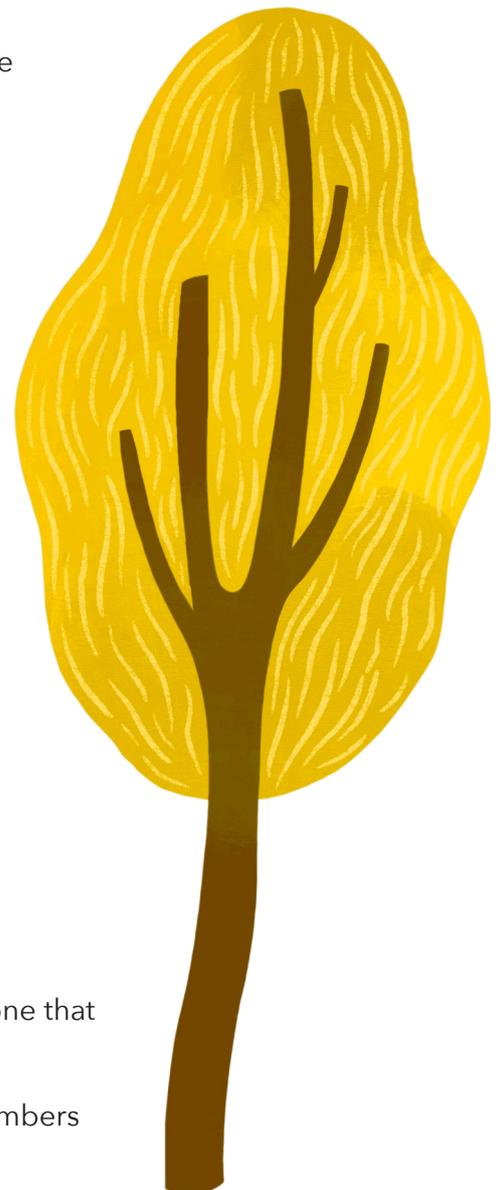
Sleeping

2. In their learning groups invite learners to sort the cards into two separate sections - one for YES, we do need a tree for that, and the other for NO, we don't need a tree for that.
3. Encourage learners to think as critically as they can and explain that they can move things in and out of the YES / NO sections as their conversation and ideas develop.
4. After around 10-15 minutes take each image in turn and ask each group where they placed it. If there are differences across the groups, then invite them to explain to one another why they came to a different decision.
5. Reveal to learners that the activity was a little bit of a trick and that all of the images can in some way be connected back to a tree (i.e. we need a tree for all of them!). Invite learners to see if they can use this new knowledge (unless they already put them all as needing a tree) to work out what the connections might be.
6. There is a [PDF answer sheet](#) that shows the connections between the object and a tree. You might like to use this to help build connections with nature (a tree) where they are less obvious.
7. Close the game with a takeaway challenge for learners:

“Can you think of an object or activity that does not need a tree in some way?”

[NOTE: in several years of running this game we have yet to find one that cannot be connected back to a tree in some way].

This could be a fun home-learning challenge to involve family members too.





These ideas focus on **connecting with people**. In the animation *Learning to Thrive* the narrator reminds us “We are social beings who thrive through connection, communication and co-operation”.

ACTIVITY: Network map

This is a practical activity that encourages learners to create a personal network map of the people they have direct connections with. Direct connections are those that are visible or known to you. They normally include people you know by name or by association and group (e.g. running club).

1. You might like to begin by sharing the model [network map](#) with learners to give them an example of what they are going to create. Discuss the key features such as the symbols for different groups of people, the key, and the distance to show how close* the connection is.

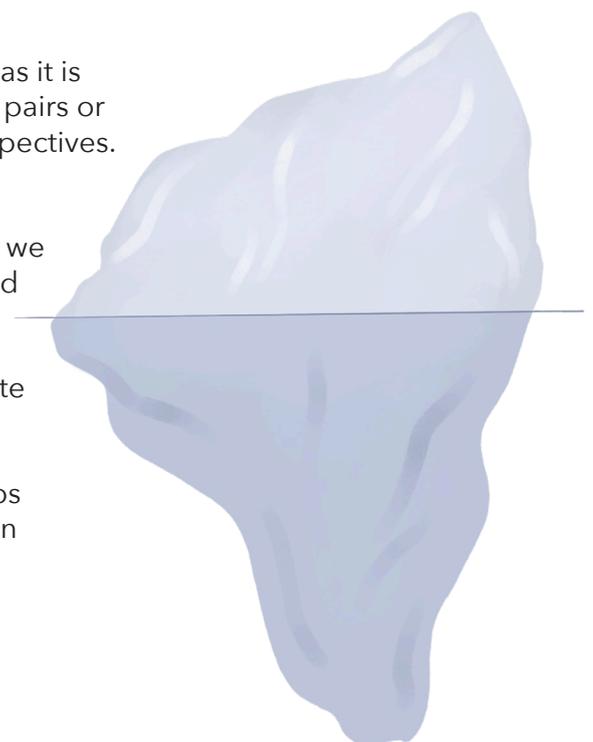
* Close in this sense is not about distance (though that may be a factor). It is more about how close the connection feels to you; how important that connection is.

2. Provide learners with a sheet of paper (A3 is ideal) and ask them to draw themselves in the centre of the page (not too big – see model).
3. Ask them to think about the connections they have in their life and to start building up their own map. If a connection involves several people (e.g. school friends, faith group, sports team etc.) they can put the group name rather than listing individual people.
4. They could create a key using symbols or colours that might help others to read their map by grouping connections into different categories (e.g. family, community groups, friends, leisure, learning etc.).

ACTIVITY: Connection Berg

This activity can be done on its own or can follow on from the network map activity. It uses the idea of an iceberg and the common understanding that we only see the smallest part of the iceberg. The biggest part remains hidden from view. We apply this idea to think more deeply about our connections with people.

1. Organise learners: this could be done individually, but as it is aimed at promoting critical thinking it is better done in pairs or small groups to encourage dialogue and multiple perspectives.
2. Using a large sheet of paper ask learners to draw an iceberg shape and then a water line to separate the bit we can see, from the bit that is more hidden. You may need to model an example like that on the right.
3. Start with the visible section and ask learners to annotate the connection berg with connections that are more obvious and visible (e.g. family, friends, school-friends, clubs, faith groups etc.). If working in pairs/small groups they do not all have to be a member of each connection for it to be added. If a connection is identified by any member of the group it can be included.





4. Next ask learners to think about the less visible connections that they have with people in their daily lives. You might need to give them some examples to begin with or support the first few ideas by inviting them at a class level. If further prompting or support is needed the following sorts of questions might help:

- Where does your food come from?
- Where do your clothes come from?
- What happens to your waste and recycling?
- How do we get fresh water?
- How does the energy get into our homes and schools?
- Who cares for the places we enjoy spending leisure time in?
- Who creates the laws and rules that ensure we can all live together?
- What happens if our homes need repairs?
- Who motivates you in your life?
- Do you have any role models that give you a sense of connection?

NOTE: Learners don't need to know the names of the people that might connect them through these aspects of daily life. It is sufficient to know the roles such as farmer, factory workers, refuse collectors, plumber, gardener etc. The purpose of the activity is to broaden and deepen our understanding of being connected to people locally, nationally and globally.

ACTIVITY: Sense of belonging

This activity builds on the previous two by thinking about why connection might be important. As it focusses on a 'sense of belonging' you might like to take a moment to think about whether this could be sensitive for some learners and how you will support them if that is the case. The same is true during the course of the activity.

1. Begin by asking learners the open question: "Why might connections be important to us?" Then invite them to talk in pairs, trios or other small learning groups for a few moments, before gathering ideas from the room.
2. Extend the conversation by asking "How does having a connection with other people make us feel?" Invite them to continue with their dialogue by reflecting on their feelings.
3. Next ask learners to use their conversations to make a few personal notes using the two sentence starters "I feel connected when..." or "Being connected makes me feel..."
4. Introduce the idea of a "sense of belonging" as way to think about connections to others. This can change throughout our lives. If we move schools or homes we may feel less of a sense of a belonging until we have made new connections, for example (if comfortable to, you could invite any stories from learners). Expand "sense of belonging" to make clear that it can be about more than people. It can also be about things like place (e.g. environment, weather) and culture (e.g. language, food and customs).
5. Invite learners to use the word 'belonging' as an inspiration for a short piece of creative writing that shares their ideas. They could use the beginning letters to produce an acrostic poem. An alternative to writing (or in combination with writing) would be to create a piece of art that expresses their ideas about belonging.



These ideas aim to help learners explore their **connection with place**. Place can be considered at a variety of scales from the local, through regional, national, and to the global. Exploring place at different scales can help us to better face complex issues with interconnections and interdependencies that tie together different locals.

An issue such as climate change for example could be daunting when considered at the global scale (*"what can I do about this?"*) but identifying actions that could be taken locally may give a greater sense of empowerment and agency (*"It's a big challenge but I can do this!"*). The same can be true the other way too. Climate change globally might seem to be out there and not really affecting you (disconnected), but looking at local weather patterns over time, or talking to those who have lived in a place for longer can help you to see how it might be impacting your own locality too (connected).

ACTIVITY: Imagine my place

This is an activity that begins with what learners know and understand about their own place. It can provide an insight into their sense of place and to how they currently connect to their locality.

1. Give learners a sheet of paper (A3 ideal) and ask them to create a map of their place. Do not give specific limits as to what it should or should not include. The key is to be able to say *"this is my place"* by the end.
2. When learners have finished their own maps ask them to find a partner (perhaps someone they know less well) and to share their maps with one another. How are they similar? How are they different? What have they chosen to represent and why?
3. Invite learners to look at their maps again and this time to consider how many of the features on their map are natural and how many are human-made? Is it the same for everyone? Why might the way we see nature in our place vary? If there was not much nature featured, then why might that be?

ACTIVITY: Scales of place

Place can look very different when you consider it from different scales. This activity encourages a deeper engagement and connection with place using scale to stimulate thinking. This activity can be a standalone but would also work well to follow on from the previous activity above.

1. First check learners' understanding of scale. The short (3 min) film, [Eye to Universe](#) is a fun way of exploring one idea of scale.
2. Introduce the idea of thinking about connections to place using scale. Ask learners to close their eyes and to focus on what comes into the mind when you read out the following prompts:
 - Your town/village/city
 - Your home
 - Your bedroom
 - Your bed
 - Your pillow

Like the film [Eye to Universe](#) that zoomed both ways, you could also consider:

- Your region



- Your country
 - Your continent
 - The world...
3. Reflect with learners on the idea that these are all places that we can connect to but that we do so at different scales. At the scale of town, the pillow as a place is probably not so important to us, for example.

The same is true for the world around us. We might see an oak tree simply as a tree, or perhaps even just see it as woods or forest but at a different scale an oak tree could be an entire world! A study in the UK by the Woodland Trust found that oak trees support an incredible 2,300 species of which 326 depend on oak for their survival and 229 are rarely found anywhere else.

4. Having introduced scales of place, organize learners into small learning groups and ask them to consider what the following would need in terms of place to survive and thrive:

An ant

A bird

A human

Humanity

NOTES: This is critical thinking and imaginative task for which there are some clear correct responses (e.g. water), but also considerable room for learner interpretation. This could be run as a class, sequencing through each, or by giving groups one scale to focus on and then sharing ideas together.

5. To close the activity, ask learners to come back to their scale of their own place and having thought about what is needed to survive and thrive ask them to identify any threats or challenges to their place, and to think about what could be done to reduce or remove those. Who might they need to connect with in order to achieve this?





This last idea is based on **connecting connections**. It can help to develop an appreciation of the complexity of connections that are around us every day. Becoming more aware of our connections can make it easier to think about and understand the choices and actions available to us as citizens of our shared planet.

1. Choose a familiar object (there is a list of suggested objects in the box to the right) and first check that everyone can identify with the object in question. [NOTE: you could divide the class up into groups of 4-6 and give them each a different object for this activity.]

2. Invite children to identify as many connections as they can with the object that you have given them. Prompts could include:

- How do you connect with this object?
- Where does the object come from?
- Who made or produced this object?
- If things make up your object, then where might they have come from?
- How did the object get all the way to you?
- What will happen to the object when you have finished with it?

3. Learners might find it useful to organize the connections by type such as:

- How does your object connect to nature/ environment? - planet connections
- Who is connected to your object and why (roles etc.)? - people connections
- Where is your object connected to? - place connections

Encourage learners to use whatever knowledge they have about their chosen item and not to worry if their ideas and thoughts are a little uncertain - they could always be checked with a bit of internet research but having the ideas is the first step.

4. Learners could present their thoughts/findings about their object back to each other if they are working in groups. What do they notice? How are the connections with their objects similar or different?

5. Close the activity by asking children to reflect:

"Does thinking about these connections provoke any thoughts or feelings?"

"Does it make you think about the object any differently?"

Suggested familiar objects:

- Banana
- T-shirt
- Mobile phone
- Tennis ball
- Chocolate bar





Playing

The importance of being playful

Play, or having a playful outlook, is increasingly recognized as important for human wellbeing and thriving. A playful outlook is also thought to be beneficial when we are faced with situations that are complex or uncertain. Playfulness can lead to more imaginative ideas and to more generative (positive) perspectives. Playfulness can also help to build greater emotional resilience and when done alongside others, strengthen a sense of belonging.

A report from the University of Cambridge on 'The Importance of Play' emphasises these positive attributes of play, stating:

'The value of play is increasingly recognised, by researchers and within the policy arena, for adults as well as children, as the evidence mounts of its relationship with intellectual achievement and emotional well-being.'

Learning to Thrive

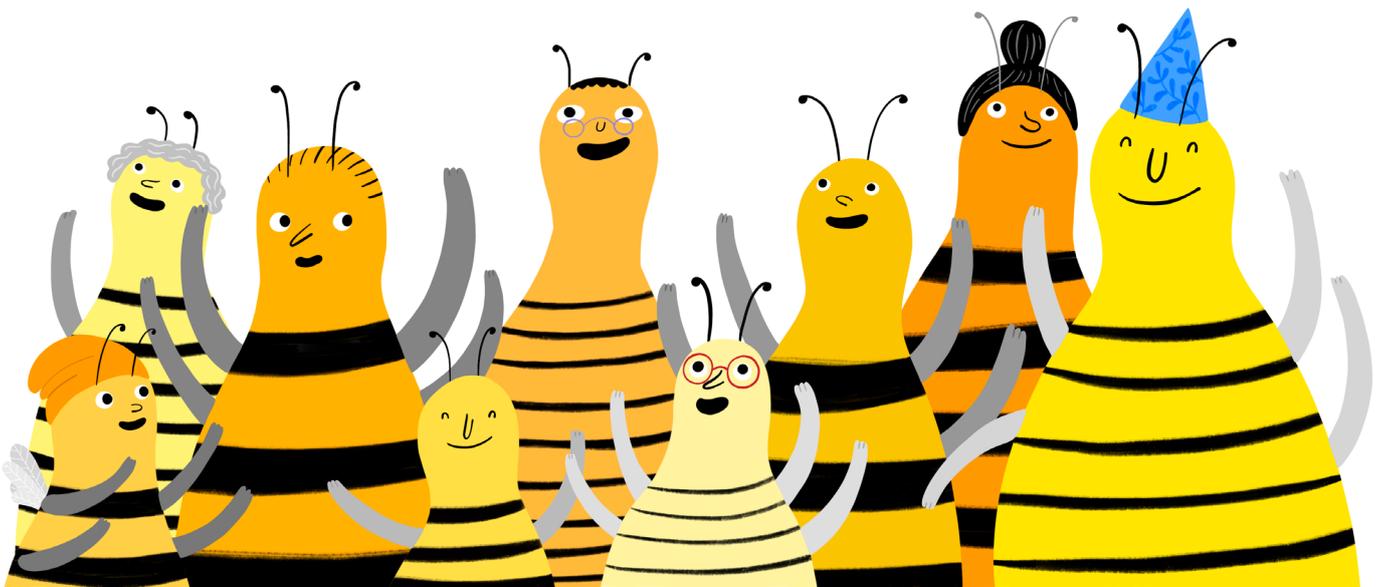
A playful outlook can...

- ...improve critical thinking
- ...encourage creativity and curiosity
- ...strengthen social skills
- ...build emotional resilience
- ...benefit mental and physical health

The ideas and short activities we share in this element focus on play and how we can support children and young people, as well as ourselves, to develop a deeper appreciation of play.

Nature and play

For many children, their first encounters with nature come through play. Think splashing in puddles, making mud pies, kicking fallen leaves, playing with sticks or any one of many other activities. As we age these activities might migrate to making dens, creating natural art, flying a kite, climbing trees, wild swimming, outdoor pursuits (climbing, canoeing). Nature is a great partner for play, providing us with surprises to overcome (weather, obstacles etc.) or opportunities to make the most of (resources, observations etc.).

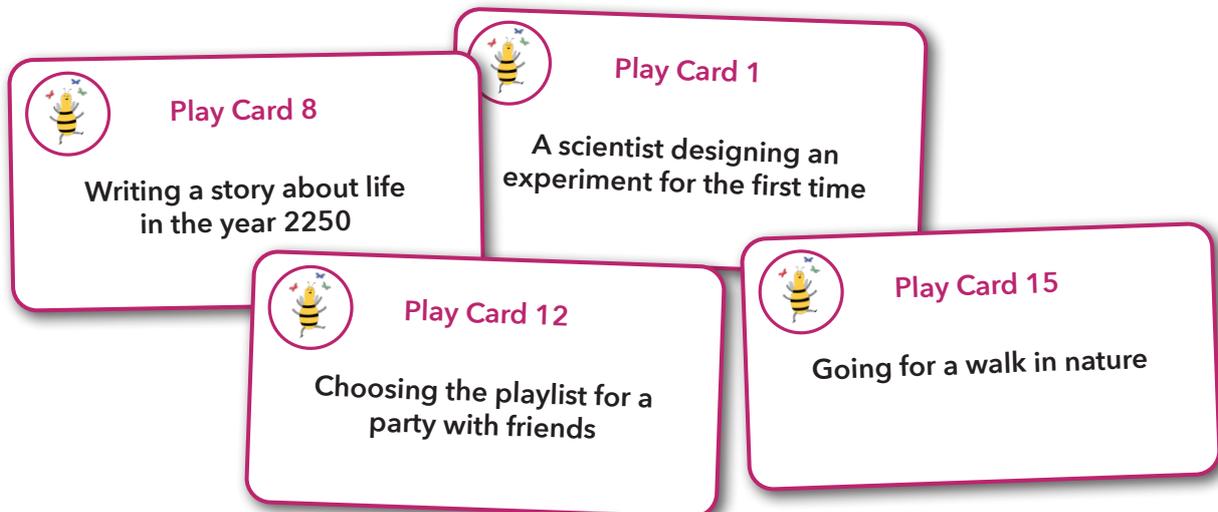




This activity aims to help learners reframe play and remove any risk of it being seen as childish or not serious.

1. Begin by asking learners what they think of when they hear the word 'play' and record the ideas that they come up with on a flip chart, whiteboard or similar. To make even this interaction more playful you could add icons, cartoons and pictures to the mind map as it develops.
2. Expand the dialogue by asking where they think play features in a typical school day.
3. Invite learners to think more critically about play using some of the following prompts or using your own ideas:
 - Can you think of something you have learned through play?
 - Have you ever become better at something through play?
 - How does play engage with your imagination?
 - What are some of your best memories of play? What makes those memories special?
4. Organise learners into learning groups of 4-6 and give each group a set of pre-cut [downloadable Play Cards](#). Building on their conversations ask learners to look at the cards and arrange them in a continuum from 'most playful' at one end to 'least playful' at the other.

NOTE: There is no right and wrong to this and it is very much based on their ideas individually and as a group. They should be encouraged to play with the position of the cards as their discussion evolves.



5. Close the activity by returning to the list of ideas that were recorded about 'play' in step 1 above. Ask learners: *"Having thought about play a bit more, what might you add to your understanding of play?"*
6. A follow up question could be *"Are there words / ideas that you might now relate more closely with play?"* To explore this, you could give the sentence starter *"Play is about ..."* and invite learners to complete it with their ideas. Examples might include: experimenting, discovering, imagining, dreaming, testing, inventing, creating, enjoying, fantasy.

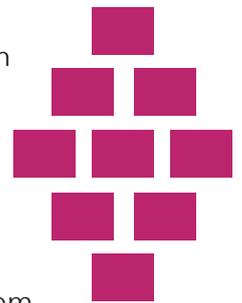


ANIMATION LINK: The importance of play is a central message in the animation *'Learning to Thrive'*. In the narration play is related to in the following ways:

Essential	Experience	Sense
Outlook	Possibilities	Imagine
Alternative Futures	Dream	Different point of view
Thrive	Let go	Beneficial
Permission	No limits	New Ways

You could use these words as an optional reflection activity:

1. Give copies of this grid to learners in their groups of 4-6 and ask them to cut them up into individual words.
2. Using a diamond-9 framework ask each group to place 9 words in the diamond from the 'most important' at the top to the 'least important' at the bottom.



Note that as there are 15 words, six of the least important will automatically be excluded from the diamond-9. An alternative using all the words is to arrange them along a continuum as in step 4 above from 'most important' to 'least important' aspect of play.

3. Give groups the opportunity to share their top 3 ideas about the most important aspects of play and perhaps a short explanation of why they selected those. How are their ideas similar/different?
4. At the end of the learning session invite learners to take away the idea of play by thinking about one thing in the rest of their day that they could do more playfully.





Here are some games that can be used to encourage playfulness with groups of learners and link to other skills development such as cooperation, responsibility, and communication.

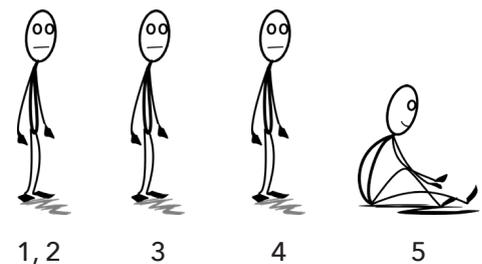
GAME 1 - Name game: a memory-based team game for the whole class

- Round 1 - establishing the sequence:** Everyone stands in a circle. Use a beanbag or a soft ball to play the game. Gently throw the ball to someone in the circle and say their name. That person then throws it onto another person and says their name. This process is repeated until everyone has received it. When a person has had the ball, they put their arms behind their backs to indicate they have had a turn. At the end, the ball goes back to the person who started the game.
- Round 2 - memory:** Now the ball is passed around again, in exactly the same order as Round 1, but without saying the person's name and without putting their hands behind their back once they have been. Everyone needs to remember who they received the ball from and who they threw it to.
- Round 3 - introduce a second ball:** Repeat round 2 but this time introduce a second beanbag or ball, a few seconds after the first one has been introduced. If this is successful and the beanbags are not being constantly dropped, then you could try introducing a third!
- Reflection:** When the game finishes invite learners to share how it felt playing the game. Ask them what skills they think they had to use to play the game well.



GAME 2 - Fives: a circle game exploring competitive and co-operative play

- Round 1 - Competitive Fives:** Everyone in the circle stands up. One person is chosen at random. Ask this person which way around the circle they would like the game to go. This person starts by saying 'one'. The next person continues with 'two', the next 'three' and so on up to five. Whoever is 'five' has to sit down and is out of the game. People can say one number or two numbers but not more, so it could go:



In competitive fives there is one winner.

- Round 2 - Co-operative Fives:** The next time around give two people a beanbag or other visible token placed in front of them. The game proceeds in the same way as before but this time the circle works together to keep the two people with the tokens standing at the end of the game. They cannot be 'five'. In this version people will need to think ahead, work together and perhaps sacrifice themselves for the game to succeed.
- Reflection:** Explore the difference between the two versions of the game. How did learners feel in each version of the game? Did they enjoy one more than the other and why? What skills can they identify that were used in playing this game? (e.g. concentrating, speaking, thinking, cooperation, looking).



GAME 3 - The sun shines: a team energising game around connections (that can be themed or not) and movement.

1. Arrange learners to be in a large circle. If playing this indoors you can use chairs to form a circle. If playing outdoors (or if you prefer not to use chairs) then the game can be played with learners sitting or standing in a circle.
2. One learner volunteers to begin the game by standing in the middle and they do not form part of the starting circle (e.g. there is one less space in the circle than there are players). The learner in the middle starts the game by saying, "*the sun shines on you if you...*" and completes the sentence with something that is true for them such as "*...like camping*", "*...have been to a cinema*", "*...play football*".
3. Those listening in the circle stand up (or step forward if already standing) if the statement is also true for them and move to where someone else is also standing (or standing forwards) to take their space. When the moving is completed, one person will be left standing in the middle. They are the next person to make the next statement. "*The sun shines on you if you...*"
4. Keep the game going until most people have found a connection and had the opportunity to move at least once. If you wanted to you could theme the game, by for example, making only connections about nature (jumped in a puddle, climbed a tree, kicked fallen leaves, picked fruit etc.) or another theme like food or experiences.
5. **Reflection:** How did it feel playing this game? What kinds of play were involved (e.g. imaginative, social, mobility)? What skills and values were needed to play the game (e.g. listening, honesty, care, cooperation, communication, participation, humility etc.)?





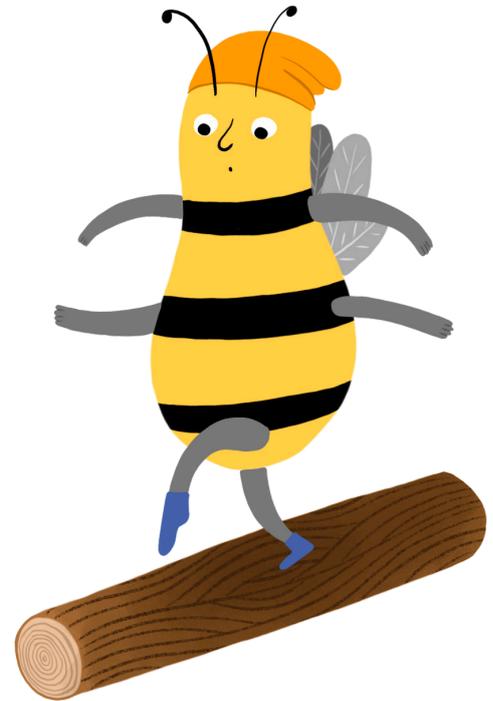
The ideas shared here are designed to get children and young people to engage playfully with nature. The opportunities for this type of play will vary according to the local environment that is available, but even an urban environment can provide many opportunities to play in nature with a little imagination. Select from these ideas to suit your learners and environment or use them as inspiration to come up with your own ideas. Some are really simple and can be used as warm-up activities for other learning (e.g. before an outdoor PE session). Others are more freestanding and could be linked to curriculum areas to bring nature indoors.

ACTIVITY: Obstacle course

Create an obstacle course using nature and natural materials. You might weave in and out of trees, rocks or other natural obstacles (e.g. sticks pushed into the ground). You might hop along a narrow path or create one by lining sticks along the ground. You could leap across a gap - natural (e.g. small ditch or dip in the ground) or created (marked out in some form) - or over something (e.g. pile of leaves, log, etc.). You might balance along a boundary or a natural feature. If you live in a more urban environment then incorporate urban features into your obstacle course such as gates, paving stones, bollards etc.

Imagination, creativity, and teamwork are most important for this activity, but so too is safety. Be sure to check your site for dangers and create a playing safe agreement with learners at the start of the session.

You could follow this up by getting learners to create a plan of their obstacle course on paper, indicating the different tasks and features and labelling it, or perhaps make a 3D model of their course.



ACTIVITY: Micro-obstacle course

An alternative to the above is to create a micro-obstacle course. This links to the part in the animation where the two bees notice the smaller elements of nature like the caterpillar on the leaf. What would an obstacle course for a caterpillar look like? Or what about a spider, or an ant? What about a bigger animal? You could watch these two short videos (both around 3 minutes) for inspiration...

Squirrel challenge: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkmeZwsi3HA>

Crow challenge: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVaITA7eBZE>

ACTIVITY: Tic tac toe (Noughts and Crosses)

Create a nature tic tac toe (noughts and crosses) using sticks or long grass to construct the grid and natural counters (leaves, seeds, nuts, pebbles). What other versions of games could you make using natural materials?

Next time you need to use counters in for example a maths lesson, why not use natural counters such as pebbles, seeds etc. Connecting/playing with nature in any way is thought to be beneficial to our wellbeing and to encouraging a greater connection with and responsibility for nature.



ACTIVITY: Nature art

Try collecting materials from nature to produce a piece of art using nature's resources. You could use earth/clay to create ranges of light brown to black, different leaves might give greens or reds, flowers could give you a range of colours. Berries (make sure they are safe ones to handle) can also create some vibrant colours.

Another way to use natural materials for art is to use the shapes, colours and textures to create a picture or sculpture in nature. Look up the Scottish artist Andy Goldsworthy as an example or look at [this article](#) for ideas and guidance.

If you want a little more inspiration these short videos share some tips and ideas:

Making natural paint: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoM9yukjMGU>

Nature Birds: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NFvwN01NxU>

Nature sculptures/pictures: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zzdFwUc9Zl>

ACTIVITY: Imagine you're a ...

This activity was inspired by a book called *'What it's Like to be a Bird'* by Tim Birkhead and Catherine Rayner (2021) that encourages you to imagine what it would be like to be a bird. Using this idea, you could encourage learners to be playful by imagining what it would be like to be a bird or another animal.

Stretch out your arms like wings and run around looking around as you scour for food or somewhere to rest or nest. What if you were a mouse keeping safe from a bird? How would that be? What about an ant? What about a fish?

Use your local environment for inspiration and fire up the imagination about what it might be like to be a creature living there.

You could extend the idea to the environment itself - imagine you're a tree, a pond, a cloud, a flower...

What would that be like? Who would visit you and why?

If you wanted to you could encourage learners to use their ideas for some creative writing such as a short description of a day or moment, or perhaps a poem.





ACTIVITY: Qi (energy/spirit) sticks

This is an activity to do in pairs. It uses meditation techniques and two straight(ish) sticks. It is about co-ordination and movement and non-verbal communication. It is also about letting your mind rest into the action and opening yourself up to a moment of peaceful reflection. These instructions have been adapted from those produced by Westonbirt Arboretum in England.

1. Arrange learners into pairs. Provide or ask them to find, two straight(ish) sticks of around 30 cm in length (this is flexible).
2. Standing opposite one another ask learners to horizontally balance one of their sticks between them using the end of their index fingers (so one is using their left hand and the other their right).
3. Choose one person to start as the 'leader'. They begin to make small slow movements (they can just move the hand, arm, or their whole body) and the partner has to follow in order to prevent the stick from dropping.
4. When it feels right (and without communicating) the 'follower' takes over and becomes the leader.
5. Once you've had a go, make it more challenging by adding a second stick between the fingers on your other hand.
6. If you want to increase the challenge, try it with your eyes closed using your other senses to keep the sticks from falling.





Wellbeing

The importance of wellbeing

The social and emotional aspects of learning (those related to wellbeing) are as important as more cognitive aspects in helping learners to thrive. It can be difficult to take on board new concepts and ideas associated with cognitive learning when feeling unsettled or deregulated.

Positive wellbeing can help us to deal with situations or issues that might be challenging or create concerns and a growing number of reports suggest that young people are frequently exposed to such circumstances. Nature-related concerns such as climate change and biodiversity loss are high on the list of learners' concerns about the future.

Engaging with nature can improve wellbeing and has the added benefit of encouraging more pro-environmental attitudes. Such attitudes might help to reduce the challenges that threaten a sense of wellbeing in the first place. This connection is emphasised in research from the University of Derby Nature Connectedness project that states:

Learning to Thrive

Nature-based wellbeing can...

- ...benefit mental and physical health
- ...build emotional resilience
- ...encourage creativity and curiosity
- ...build healthy relationships with nature

'The need to transform the human-nature relationship has never been more important. People who feel closer to nature are happier and more satisfied with life and are more likely to take actions that help wildlife and the environment.'

The ideas and activities in this element aim to support learners to improve their wellbeing through a closer connection with nature. Wellbeing is a very personal thing, and what works for one person, may not work for another. The ideas we share are not prescriptive but suggestions that you could adapt, or be inspired by, to suit you and your learners. As many of the ideas are reflective you may choose to combine them with the activities in the Noticing, Connecting and Playing elements.

Wellbeing pathways

[The Nature Connection Handbook](#) suggests that nature can contribute to our wellbeing in the following ways:

- Improved mental health
- Greater vitality and happiness
- More satisfaction with life
- Greater meaning and purpose in life

They go on to suggest five pathways to nature that focus on ways of being in, engaging with, and relating to nature. These five pathways provide the framework for sharing our wellbeing ideas.





Senses

Support learners to use their senses to connect and be at one with nature in your local environment. Here are some ideas to use or get inspired by:

Use **touch** to make direct contact with nature. Sense different textures, temperatures (e.g. tree, grass, moss, soil, rocks, water, air, leaves). Do the feelings change if you use different parts of your body-hands, cheek, forehead, feet?

Find a spot away from immediate noise and distractions and **listen** to the natural world around you. What do you hear (birds, plants moving, wind, rain, animals)? Stay longer and listen more deeply. Do new sounds appear? Where from?

Look around you and choose something in nature to focus on. What do you see? Zoom out (you may need to move further away) to take in the wider surroundings. What do you see now and how does it relate to what you first noticed? Now zoom in (you may need to move closer) to look in greater detail. What do you see now and how does what you see relate to what you have seen before?

Smell your local environment. What does it smell of? What is the dominant smell (e.g. soil, grass, leaves, flowers). Visit different parts of the nature around you and smell them more closely. What does moss smell like? What about a stick or a dry leaf? Does the smell change depending whether it is wet or dry, warm or cool?

NOTE: We have not given guidance or ideas for tasting as this will depend on your local environment and the season. There are also safety implications to be aware of so please check carefully if you choose to taste anything in nature, and if in doubt then don't.



Beauty

Noticing and appreciating the beauty and wonder that exists in our natural environments can make a positive contribution to our wellbeing and sense of purpose in life. Here are a few ideas:

Nature notes (or talk): Give learners something to make notes with and ask them to explore the local environment making notes on what they appreciate and notice. You might like to use some sentence starters to support them such as *"I love the way..."*, *"I'm amazed by..."*, *"I notice that..."*. If doing this as a pair then take turns to share what you appreciate/notice.

Nature "I spy...": A nature-based variation of the well known I spy game where the focus for each clue is on something natural.

Capturing nature: If you have access to a tablet, smartphone or digital cameras, then invite learners to use these to capture the beauty of nature within your setting by taking photos. You could share these when you return indoors. You could even print them out to make a display that keeps you connected to nature when inside.

Sketching nature: An alternative form of the above idea if you do not have access to camera devices is to make a simple frame by cutting out a frame from scrap card. Learners can use this to frame a scene in nature and sketch what they see.



Emotion

Being in nature can create a range of emotions for your learners and not all of these may be positive. We should be aware of these (see box).

Their emotional responses to nature will largely depend on previous experiences of connecting with nature and on the socializing influence this has had on them. If they have encountered warnings of nature as 'dirty', 'dangerous' or 'disgusting' for example, they are likely to have a different emotional response to those whose engagement has been framed more around 'awe', 'wonder' and 'discovery'. These ideas encourage an engagement with our emotions:

Step outside: Take the simple action of stepping outside into nature. Relax your body (maybe close your eyes) and sense what you feel and how this makes you feel. What words would you use to describe your emotion/s?

Take a breather: If you can, find somewhere to lie down in nature. Spread your limbs out so that you make good contact with the ground and stare upwards towards the sky above you. What emotions does this connect with? Stay there for a little longer, relax your body even more, concentrate on slow and steady breathing through your nose, maybe close your eyes. Do your emotions change?

Picture this: This is an image-based activity that uses photos to depict nature and invites learners to respond to them in terms of their emotions. This uses images in a [Powerpoint presentation](#) and the space in the room for them to respond. This is best done in an open space (with furniture pushed to sides or in a hall for example).

Set up the room with five feelings stations (each in a different part of your space and perhaps indicated with a sign). Suggested feelings are happy, excited, disgusted, scared, amazed but you and your learners could create your own. You might like to leave one space as 'other' emotion so that participants can move there if they have a different emotional response.

Once the room is ready, show the images (one at a time) using the presentation and invite learners to think about how it makes them feel, and to move to the feeling station that best fits.

Once they have moved, you can interview the room and if learners are willing, ask one or two of them to share why they moved to that place - their reasons for feeling like that. Remember to include the 'other' feelings if relevant.

Be clear with learners that there are no answers to this activity - it is about how THEY feel.

Biophilia and biophobia

When thinking about emotions it is useful to be aware of the concepts **biophilia** and **biophobia**. Nature connectedness is about our relationship with our natural environment. It is often approached with the assumption that we all share a positive attitude towards the natural world - this is the idea of biophilia.

Biophobia—a negative or fearful attitude towards the natural world—is also a real feeling for some people. A study by Spanish academics with young children suggests that from an early age children will use both positive and negative emotions in relation to nature with 'happiness' being the main emotion, but 'fear' being the next most common.



Meaning

Sharing what nature means to learners or how they have engaged with nature in their lives (e.g. the meaning it has given them to date), can contribute to their wellbeing. Here are some ideas:

Story walk: Take learners outside and in learning pairs ask them to take a stroll in the local environment. Whilst walking they should take it in turns to share a personal story about their best experience in nature and their worst experience in nature.

Once stories have been exchanged you could gather in a circle and invite learners to introduce their partner and the highlights of the story they were told. Learners should not be forced to do this if they feel uncomfortable. If you had a story walk partner, you could model the process.

At the end you could reflect with learners on how nature can make life meaningful by trying to identify common themes that emerge from the stories. This might be about the location, the activity, the company, or the weather for example.

Imagining nature: This is an art-based imaginative activity that encourages learners to combine their knowledge of engaging with nature with their ideals of what that could mean. Ask learners to close their eyes for a moment and to imagine their 'ideal connection with nature'.

Once they have their image in mind, encourage them to explore their ideal engagement with nature by silently reflecting on prompts such as:

"Where are you?"

"What can you see/hear/smell?"

"What is the weather like?"

"What is happening around you and what are you doing?"

"Are you with anyone?"

"How do you feel?"

After a moment or two, ask them to open their eyes and then use the ideas that came into their heads to recreate their imagination through art - a collage (maybe using natural materials), a painting (perhaps using natural paints) or sketch. If you want to expand the idea of art you might include drama, music, or creative writing as other ways for learners to express their imagination.

Mark the moment: Use days in the natural cycle of life to celebrate nature. This might be the change of the seasons or the longest or shortest days if these are relevant where you are. Look at festivals, rituals, myths and folk stories that are connected to nature and bring meaning to your life. Which ones do learners know of and how have you come across them? You could adapt 'I spy...' into a short game to do this too, by going outside to spy signs of Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter (dependent on the time of year) or choose other themes such as growth, birth, death, decay (looking at life cycles for example).

National nature: Many nations have links with nature through plants or animals. This can be true for regions too. What are the national emblems associated with countries/regions that are meaningful to your learners? You could look these up together if you don't know them. What about other countries that learners have a connection with, are studying, or are interested in?



Compassion

Demonstrating compassion for/with nature can be beneficial for our own wellbeing. Here are some ideas to think about compassion with nature:

Nature friendly: Support learners to make their local environment more nature friendly. This might mean removing some things such as litter but may include making and adding things too such as sweeping leaves into a pile, hanging up bird feeders, putting out a dish to collect rainwater for animals to drink. It might include creating areas to enjoy nature such as a viewing area for birdwatching, a growing area to produce food or herbs, a resting area to unwind and simply be in nature. If you are in a school, explore funding that might be available to support with your ideas - there is often money or resources available for planting trees, creating wildlife gardens etc.

Action with nature: Find out about what others are doing to support nature by researching local wildlife/nature organisations and groups. You could invite some of them to talk to learners about their role/work and their own nature stories of how they came to be involved.

Consuming nature: We depend on nature for many of the things we use and consume in our daily lives. Support learners to explore these links and to think about how different choices might be more compassionate towards nature (e.g. choosing eco-friendly products, organic food or clothing, local rather than global suppliers, vegetarian or vegan diet etc.).





References and Credits

Noticing

[The Nature Connection Handbook](#) from the University of Derby

Connecting

Oak tree diversity

The Woodland Trust [Oak Trees and Wildlife](#)

Playing

The importance of play

Dr David Whitebread with Marisol Basilio, Martina Kuvalja and Mohini Verma (2012) [The importance of play](#). University of Cambridge

Qi sticks

Westonbirt Arboretum [Creativitree No.42 Resource](#)

Wellbeing

Five pathways to wellbeing

[The Nature Connection Handbook](#) from the University of Derby

Biophilia and Biophobia

Olivos-Jara P, Segura-Fernández R, Rubio-Pérez C and Felipe-García B (2020) [Biophilia and Biophobia as Emotional Attribution to Nature in Children of 5 Years Old](#). Front. Psychol. 11:511. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00511

Credits

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