



Time in, Outdoors

What: A Spring Break course “TIME IN,” outdoors.

- When: Week of Spring Break: April 3rd, 2017-April 7th, 2017.
- Time: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. with transportation provided within ten miles of City limits.
- Who: Youth ages 10-16.
- Where: Charlottesville and surrounding nature areas.
- Why: <http://www.crchealth.com/find-a-treatment-center/struggling-youth-programs/help/nature-is-therapeutic/>
- Cost: \$275.00 for week. Includes: Lunch and snack.
- How: Fill out application that is attached, limited space available! Each child will be chosen based on match of needs with the therapeutic benefits of program.

Date & Time:	Skill practiced:	Location:
Monday April 3rd, 9 to 1 p.m.	Introductions, understanding “Leave No Trace” Ethics, Safety on the trail, Elk Hill Garden	Elk Hill-Charlottesville, Meadow Creek Gardens: (Behind Bodo’s) (Small hike: 1 mile, lunch @ park)
Tuesday April 4th, 9 to 1 p.m.	Health benefits of nature, fitness	Ivy Creek Natural Area: Charlottesville, VA (total hike 2 to 3 miles, lunch @ Elk Hill)
Wednesday April 5th, 9 to 1 p.m.	Continuation of fitness, nature and scavenger hunt	Van Clief Nature Area: Scottsville, Virginia (3 miles exploring, lunch in park)
Thursday April 6th, 9 to 1 p.m.	Mindfulness, fitness and continued building of social skills.	Ragged mountain: Ragged Mountain Reservoir 3 mile trail.
Friday April 7th, 9 to 1 p.m.	Continued fitness, review of week and health benefits of nature. Lunch a reservoir	Sugar Hollow: White Hall, VA (3 to 4 miles hiking)

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Why Nature Is Therapeutic

Humans crave a connection with nature. From gardening and horticulture to taking a stroll through the park or hiking through the mountains, man has found solace in nature for centuries. But with a rapidly deteriorating environment, shortage of open spaces, fear of “stranger-danger” during outdoor playtime, and an emerging culture of technology-obsessed youth, American life is punctuated by nature deprivation and a disconnect with the world around us.

Although quality time in nature is hard to come by, here are a few reasons to make the great outdoors a part of daily life.

A Natural High

Generations of brilliant minds, naturalists and authors have documented the many benefits of spending time in nature. Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), an American author, naturalist, and philosopher best known for his book *Walden*, celebrated the therapeutic effects of nature by saying, “I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright.” Nature has played an integral role in the quest for happiness and personal fulfillment of many other historical figures as well, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Muir and Charles Darwin. Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), acclaimed architect and philosopher, advised, “Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you.”

There is a strong body of research confirming that direct contact with nature increases mental health and psychological and spiritual development. Benefits include stress reduction, a sense of coherence and belonging, improved self-confidence and self-discipline, and a broader sense of community.

I. Stress Reduction

More than 100 research studies have shown that outdoor recreation reduces stress. In a study of individuals exposed to stressful videos of accidents, those who watched a subsequent nature video experienced faster recovery than those who watched a video with other content.¹ Another study established that a view of nature, even through a window, speeds recovery from surgery, improves work performance, and increases job satisfaction.² By observing the ever-changing environments in nature, individuals cultivate a positive attitude, renewed attention, mindfulness, and sensory awareness. In the words of renowned naturalist and essayist John Burroughs (1837-1921), “I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order.”

II. Meaning and Purpose

Being in nature also bestows a sense of connectedness, meaning, and purpose. There is a sense of chaotic order in the way nature works; the plants and animals are interconnected in a series of complex relationships. Everything coexists in nature without the necessity of outside intervention. It is a system that has existed successfully since the beginning of time, which provides a sense of structure, coherence, and reliability for those wise enough to use nature

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as a model for life. Realizing that human beings are an essential component of this larger structure can supply a sense of purpose and belonging.

For many, respect and enjoyment of nature also leads to a sense of spirituality and an appreciation for powers larger than oneself. The wilderness teaches that each individual is unique but also part of the larger whole. In a world bogged down by social pressures, standards of conduct, and the demands of others, nature gives people a chance to appreciate a grander sense that the world is alive, fascinating and meaningful. This universal appeal crosses all cultures and time periods. "Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better," advised legendary physicist Albert Einstein (1879-1955) .

III. Heightened Awareness and Physical Activity

Outdoor settings beg for activity rather than passivity as the world is best explored on foot. Hiking through the wilderness merges a heightened sense of awareness of one's surroundings with the need to take action to move through and be part of nature. People understand and process environmental information through mapping, exploring, and interpreting the landscapes, obstacles, and surroundings. This type of physical activity reduces depression and anxiety, reduces the risk of disease, and improves psychological well-being. In fact, research suggests outdoor exercise has even more beneficial effect than indoor exercise.

A strenuous trek through mountains or desert can represent both a physical journey and a journey of self. Spending time in nature's silence better acquaints people with their own thoughts and feelings, leading to a sense of calm and inner peace. As expressed by early preservationist and Sierra Club founder John Muir (1838-1914), "Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you... while cares will drop off like autumn leaves."

Up to the Challenge

In nature, people learn that challenge is actually the opportunity to improve oneself, develop an internal locus of control, and build confidence. Wilderness experiences give people an optimistic confidence in the predictability of nature and the pace of life, combined with a healthy ability to surrender control. Nature-goers learn to trust their innate ability to overcome both expected and unexpected obstacles and to appreciate that things work out even if they aren't in complete control. In short, they learn they can cope with whatever comes their way, which in turn builds confidence and a sense of self-efficacy and achievement.

While rising to a challenge is important for developing self-esteem, shared challenge offers the added benefits of affiliation, social support, intimacy, and the ability to help others. This sense of community and intimacy that develops by facing challenges in the company of others translates into other group settings as well, such as the family unit.

A Nature-Deprived Youth Culture

For many American children, quality playtime outdoors has been replaced by televisions and computers indoors. In a survey from Hofstra University, 70 percent of mothers reported playing outdoors every day when they were young, compared with only 31 percent of their children. Fifty-six percent of mothers reported that, when they were children, they stayed outside for three hours at a time or longer, compared with only 22 percent of their children. A study by

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Sandra Hofferth at the University of Maryland reported that, from 1997 to 2003, there was a decline of 50 percent in the number of children ages 9 to 12 who spent time doing outside activities like hiking, walking, and playing at the beach.

Natural spaces stimulate children's imaginations and creativity, and playing outdoors enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving ability, and self-discipline. Unfortunately, most children between 6 months and 6 years of age spend an average of 1.5 hours a day with electronic media, and youth between 8 and 18 years of age spend an average of 6.5 hours a day with electronic media, totaling more than 45 hours a week.³

In recent years, health care providers have begun to recognize the therapeutic attributes of nature for treating conditions like attention disorders and depression. Researchers at the University of Illinois have shown that the greener a child's everyday environment, the more manageable their symptoms of attention-deficit disorder. ⁴ In a UK study released in April 2007, a majority of people with mental health disorders reported that taking a "green walk" decreased their depression (71%), reduced their tension (50%), and increased their self-esteem (90%).⁵ Studies also show that nature in forms as simple as a plant at work or trees in front of an apartment complex help reduce stress, improve coping skills, and develop self-discipline. ⁶

Children and Teens in the Wilderness

Children and teenagers benefit from experiences in nature more than any other population, particularly in the area of academic performance. A 2005 study by the American Institutes for Research demonstrated that students in outdoor science programs improved their science testing scores by 27 percent. ⁷ Moreover, participation in outdoor education was directly associated with improved conflict resolution skills and cooperation.

Many parents are choosing wilderness camps and programs to help their troubled teens. Adolescence, an angst-ridden period of self-discovery, is the ideal time to discover the lessons nature can teach. When a teen is immersed into a wilderness experience, they leave their family, their familiar community and environment and the roles they have adopted, to try out new social roles. This "fresh start" presents the opportunity to develop a new self-image, a new way of relating to other people and the environment, and new ways to respond to the challenges of daily life. Ideal candidates for therapeutic wilderness programs are students exhibiting at-risk behaviors, including defiance, rebellion, experimentation with drugs and/or alcohol, sexual promiscuity, poor performance in school, and other behavioral difficulties.

Anne Frank, author of *The Diary of a Young Girl*, written during the German occupation in World War II, summed up the therapeutic benefits of being nature:

"The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God.

Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles."

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Ulrich, et al. (1991). "Stress recovery during exposure to natural and urban environments." *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 11 (3), 201-230.

2Ulrich, R.S. (1984). "View Through a Window May Influence Recovery From Surgery." *Science*, 22, 42-421. See also www.americanforests.org/productsandpubs/magazine/archives/2002fall/perspectives.php.

3E. Vandewater, et al. "Digital Childhood: Electronic Media and Technology Use Among Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers." *Pediatrics*, May 2007. Available at: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/119/5/e1006>.

4F. Kuo and A. Taylor. "A Potential Natural Treatment for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Evidence From a National Study." *American Journal of Public Health*, Sept. 2004. Available at: www.ajph.org/cgi/content/abstract/94/9/1580.

5"Now a Green Agenda for Mental Health." Available at: www.bio-medicine.org/medicine-news/Now-a-Green-Agenda-for-Mental-Health-21784-1.

6See www.floridagardening.org/download/BenefitofPlants.pdf, http://parksandpeople.org/publications/special_reports/TreeBenefits.pdf and www.projectevergreen.com/pdf/Technical%20Bulletin.pdf.

7 "Effects of Outdoor Education Programs for Children in California." American Institutes for Research, 2005. Available at: <http://www.air.org/news/documents/Outdoorschoolreport.pdf>.

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