

# Mental health awareness

In touch with nature





## In touch with nature

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As we gather this week to reflect on Mental Health month, please show your respect and attention to the following clip as we give thanks for all the joy and wonder nature gives us.

- <https://youtu.be/we-n-ZmglT0>

Song- 3.15 mins





# In touch with nature

Nature is truly amazing. It can inspire us, soothe us and enchant us. It can connect us with others and help us feel part of something bigger.

Nature also seems to be like medicine for everyone's mental health. A sort of balm for our souls, a warm duvet, a natural cuddle, and there is so much for us to engage in season to season.

From forests, oceans and rivers, to parks and gardens, to window boxes or even house plants, we can find nature wherever we are.

Interacting with nature can be not just enjoyable, but also beneficial to our mental health and wellbeing, aspects of our health that are particularly important to look after.

# In touch with nature

We all have mental health, and it is as important as our physical health. When our mental health is good, we feel emotionally well, able to look after ourselves and able to engage with the things that we care about.

When we struggle with our mental health, we can feel overwhelmed and unable to cope, which can make it difficult to manage in our daily lives.

In our recent Wellbeing survey (204 pupil replies), we found that 61% have at some point felt stressed and anxious and 40% described their mental health during COVID as poor or of concern.

For some of us these difficulties may come and go, and for others they may be more long-lasting.



# In touch with nature

Looking after our mental health and wellbeing is important for everyone, and there are things that each of us can do in our day-to-day lives that can help to support good mental health, including connecting to nature.

Many of us live a fast-paced urban life, with long working days and long, crowded commutes. In these environments there are many pressures that affect our mental health.

Therefore, it is worth making the time for nature, in whatever way works for you, even when things get busy and other priorities feel more important.





# In touch with nature

## Find nature

Nature is all around us. It might be a garden, a local park, a nearby beach or open countryside. Even in cities where nature can be harder to find, there's things like community gardens or courtyards to discover and explore.

Look out for the unexpected – an urban fox early in the morning, changes in the weather or birdsong outside your window.

Try to notice nature wherever you are, in whatever way is meaningful for you.

- <https://youtu.be/50amvQo7-ek>
- Starlings murmuration's –45 secs



## In touch with nature


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There are lots of ways in which spending time in nature can be positive for our mental health and wellbeing. From gaining a sense of peace and a boost to our self-esteem, to improved concentration.

New and exciting research is happening all the time that adds to our understanding of how our natural environment affects the health of our bodies and minds.

The benefits are often related to how our senses connect us to the environment around us. The shapes and colours in nature we see, the scents of flowers and trees we smell, the soft, spikey, hot, cold, or unusual feel or fascination of the weird and wonderful that inspire or stimulate our minds.



A close-up photograph of a child's feet lying on a green lawn. The soles of the feet are decorated with colorful paint: yellow and green dots on the toes, and a green smile on the left foot and a yellow smile on the right foot. The child is wearing pink shorts. The background is a blurred park scene with green trees and a yellow fence.

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## Time in green spaces

Researchers have found a fascinating link between access to green space, such as fields, forests, parks and gardens, and a reduced risk of mental health problems, improved mood, and increased life satisfaction. Other benefits include reduced stress, increased physical activity, and better physical health.

- <https://youtu.be/y9Gr2rUugMA>

1.44 mins Michael's Story





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## Finding nature in the city

Green spaces are a little more difficult to find in big cities. At first glance nature can appear to be lost in the urban jungle, but if you pause, and take in your surroundings, you might notice that nature can pop up in even the most unlikely places. Signs of nature are threaded throughout the city.

It is worthwhile seeking out these natural spaces, such as parks, canals or courtyards. Research suggests that taking advantage of urban green spaces is also positive for your mood and life satisfaction.

- <https://youtu.be/jUQOT9H5IRY>

1.35 mins Daniel's Story

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## Staying active

An important link has been found between spending time outdoors and how physically active we are.

Besides the benefits for our physical health, exercising and staying active is also good for our mental health. We know that physical activity may reduce the risk of mental health problems, like anxiety or depression, and exercising in green spaces can have an extra added benefit.

Walking or running seems to give us an extra boost when done in natural environments rather than indoors, reducing feelings of anger, fatigue and sadness.

We don't even need to do it for long! Exercising in green spaces for as little as five minutes was found to improve mood and feelings of self-esteem.

- <https://youtu.be/2OJyLHZnYQw>

2.01 mins Caroline's story





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## Use your senses

Taking some quiet time to reflect in natural surroundings using all your senses can be a real boost to your mental health. Whether you're relaxing in the garden or on your way to work, try listening out for birdsong, look for bees and butterflies, or notice the movement of the clouds. All of these good things in nature can help you to find a sense of calm and joy.



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If you want to take things further, you could also take your bike out or hire one to try a safe route in a woodland or other green space nearby. And for the adventurous you could hire a kayak or canoe and paddle your way downriver or learn to sail.

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## Relaxation and mindfulness

Taking quiet time to reflect on our natural surroundings can be positive for mental health and wellbeing. There is evidence that 'forest therapy' or 'forest bathing' (famously known as Shinrin Yoku in Japan) may lead to improved mental health. This involves spending active time in a forest or wood and observing our surroundings, using all of our senses.

The practice of 'mindfulness' (a way of directing awareness towards our thoughts, feelings, environment and body) has been found to reduce feelings of stress, and increase feelings of self-compassion and empathy, and who doesn't want to be a little kinder to themselves?



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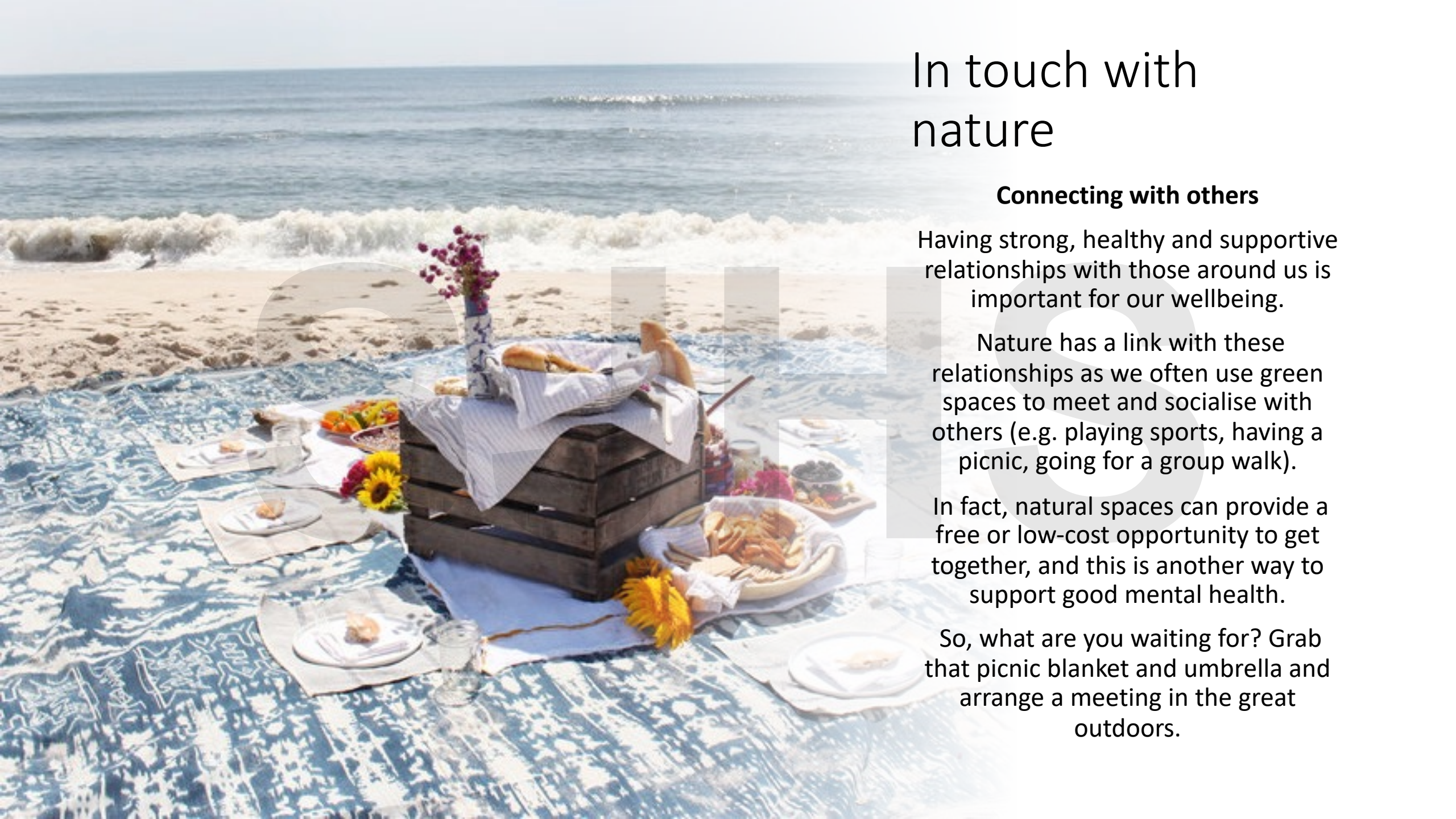
## Connecting with others

Having strong, healthy and supportive relationships with those around us is important for our wellbeing.

Nature has a link with these relationships as we often use green spaces to meet and socialise with others (e.g. playing sports, having a picnic, going for a group walk).

In fact, natural spaces can provide a free or low-cost opportunity to get together, and this is another way to support good mental health.

So, what are you waiting for? Grab that picnic blanket and umbrella and arrange a meeting in the great outdoors.



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## Interacting with wildlife

Some studies suggest that being around animals and wildlife may be beneficial for overall wellbeing. They have found that activities involving observing and interacting with wildlife in their natural habitat, such as watching birds in a garden, can improve people's feelings of wellbeing, relaxation, and connection to nature.

There is so much out there to observe – from watching the garden robin fluff up for winter to the squirrel searching for nuts in the park, ducks and swans gracefully swimming, bats using their radar or hedgehogs on a forage.

Take a couple of minutes to pause, look out of your window or step outside and notice what is going on in nature around you.





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## Creativity

Many people find nature inspires them to create, be it through painting, drawing, photography or writing. There is so much out there just waiting to be our source of creativity – from vibrant and fiery autumnal leaves to the crunch of frost underfoot on a cold winter morning.

There is also evidence that suggests taking part in creative activities like dance, music, art or expressive writing can help reduce stress and improve mood and wellbeing. This gives us even more reason to combine creativity with our natural environment.

Why don't you go outside and capture your surroundings, trying your hand at a few creative sentences, a quick sketch, the opening verse to a song or capture an inspiring photo? Share it with friends to help their wellbeing and inspire them to do the same.



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## **Gardening**

There is good evidence that people who spend time gardening experience a wide range of positive results including improvements in mood, quality of life and feelings of community.



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## Grow or pick your own food

It can be very satisfying to grow your own food and enjoy the fruits of your work directly!

It's also a great way to experience and learn more about nature.

Small gardens and even balconies can be enough space to grow food, such as tomatoes or strawberries. If you don't have access to a garden, you could plant salad leaves or herbs in a window box or plant pot. If you have enough space, on the other hand, why not go big on a vegetable plot and save on your shopping bill at the same time?



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## Connect with animals

Animals are all around us all the time. From blackbirds to red foxes, and from terriers to tabby cats.

At home you might be able to attract some garden birds with a feeder and bird bath. You can watch the different species popping up and see how they each behave.

If you enjoy that, then you could visit a nature reserve with bird hides to take a look at more birds in the wild.

Or take a walk around your local park and try to notice more of the birds you can see and hear around you. Find a seat and close your eyes for a minute or two; how many different bird calls can you hear?

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## Bring nature inside

Despite all your best intentions, sometimes you just won't want to go outside.

So why not make sure there is some nature inside with you for those bitter cold and rainy days? You can surround yourself with sights, sounds and smells of nature.

You could start by potting up some house plants to bring some greenery and flowers into your room or grow some herbs that you can use for cooking.

You could print and frame some photos of the beautiful natural places you have visited and enjoyed in the past. Put them up somewhere you will regularly see and notice them.

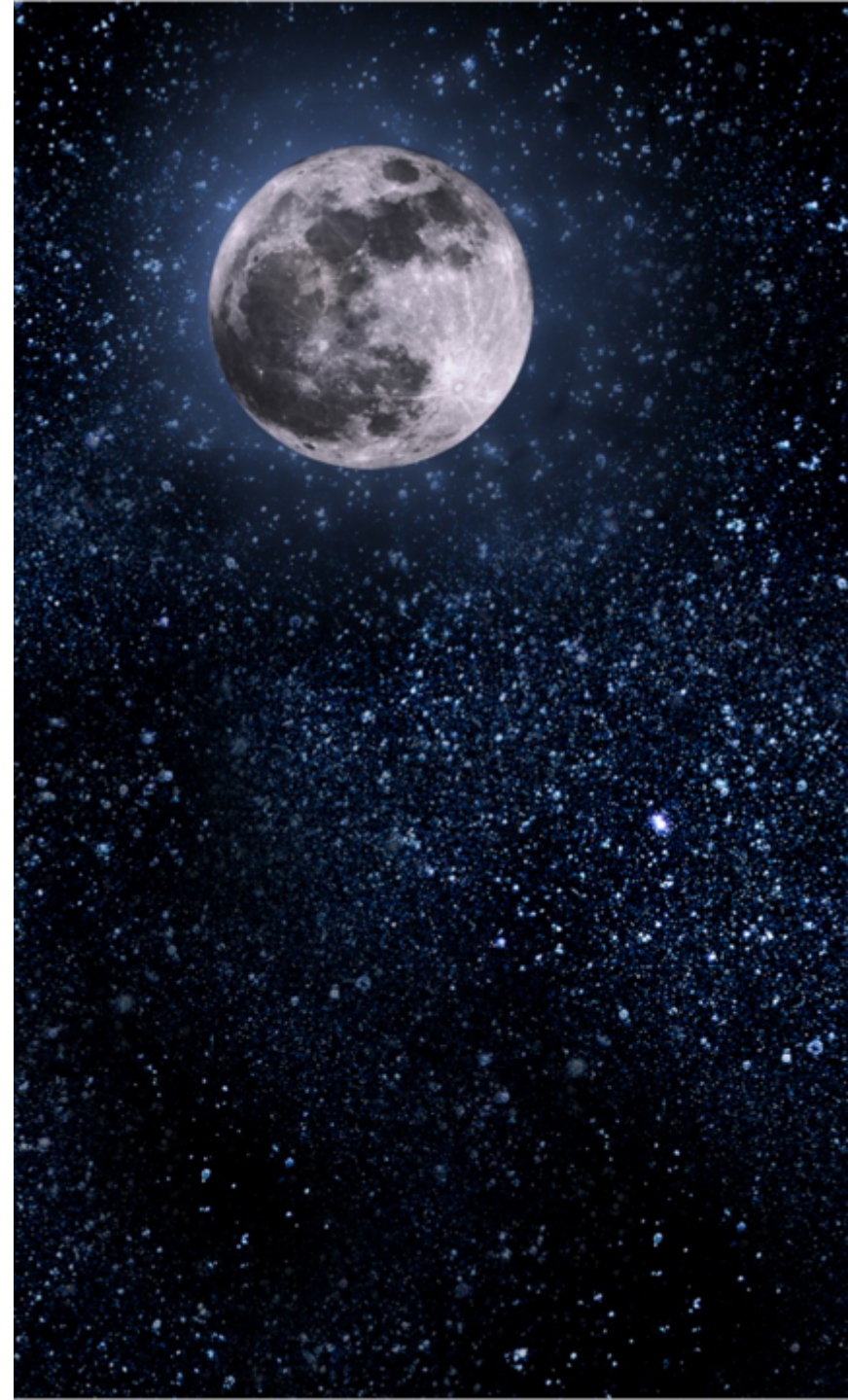
Bring the scent of the outdoors in, including scented candles or diffusing essential oils from trees like pine and cypress. You could even complete the atmosphere by playing some soothing natural sounds.

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nature

## Gaze at the moon and stars

You don't need any equipment to enjoy a starry sky (except perhaps some warm clothes). If you have a pair of binoculars this can help you see the moon in surprising detail (especially if it is not full) and look deeper into areas with lots of stars to find many more that the naked eye cannot see.

Search in the app store on your phone for some amazing sky at night features and information.



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## Being part of something bigger

Do you care about the footprint you leave behind? Want to benefit your local natural environment or community? Or be a part of a global environmental movement?

Well, research suggests that taking part in social action and making an impact in our local area not only benefits the community at large but also ourselves. Studies have found a link between taking part in social action or community engagement activities and increased empathy, self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as an increased sense of community.



# In touch with nature

## Protect nature

Taking care of something can be a really great way to feel good, and what better way than to take care of nature?

Nature is truly amazing – do what you can to look after nature - in your actions and choices. This can be as simple as recycling, to walking instead of driving, or even joining community conservation or clean-up groups.

Taking care of nature can help you feel that you're doing your part, and that can make you feel more positive all round.

- <https://youtu.be/pBCLy4nIHpg>

0.52 secs Plastic

- <https://youtu.be/zXlc-IEQsD8>

0.30 secs WWF



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Please find below a small variety of links that will give you equal measures of support, information and inspiration.

- <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>
- <https://www.wwt.org.uk/>
- <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/>
- <http://www.wildernessfoundation.org.uk/>
- <https://theoutdoorguide.co.uk/>
- <https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/>
- <https://www.rspb.org.uk/>
- <https://www.parkrun.org.uk/>
- <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/>
- <https://www.field-studies-council.org/>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission>
- <https://www.tcv.org.uk/greengym>
- <https://www.wwf.org.uk/who-we-are>

