

Forest School – Autumn 2023

One of the six forest school principles is:

Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.



Our natural world amazes me. For me, this is one of the most important principles of forest school – it is an absolute pleasure to witness the relationship between the children and the natural world develop and flourish over the months. This relationship helps mould them into well-rounded, respectful and caring adults who I'm sure will help care for and nurture the natural world around us that is not only crucial to our physical and mental wellbeing but also fundamental to our existence as a species on this planet.

Relationships require hard work, effort and most importantly involve a connection of some kind. It's not just a question of being out in nature and witnessing it - in order to have a relationship with the natural world we have to connect with it. Louise Ambrose (a fellow Forest school practitioner and trainer) wrote an article recently in *The Outdoor Practitioner* online magazine produced by Muddy Faces – see link below. She writes eloquently about this connectedness and its link with eudaemonic wellbeing (a sense that one's life has meaning and is worthwhile). Nature connection helps people to feel self-worth and find their purpose - aims also shared by the Forest School philosophy. I see that in the children around me and feel it myself. So how can we develop this connection with nature? Louise refers to the work of Jon Young who highlights these practices in his book *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature*:

1) Visit a 'Sit Spot'

Find a place in nature which you can visit regularly, ideally every day. It could even be in your garden. Try to spend at least 20 minutes there (but even 5 minutes is better than nothing!). With regular visits, the unseen world of nature will slowly reveal itself to you.

2) Share your 'Stories'

Find at least one person to recount your adventures in nature to (and perhaps hear theirs in return). Be selective, it can be disheartening to share a story with someone who isn't interested or who doesn't believe you. Tell your stories recalling as much detail as possible.

3) Activate your senses

Whilst in your sit spot or whilst wandering bring your awareness to the current moment. Become present by focusing on your senses. Consciously notice all of life around you; the sights, sounds, smells, textures and tastes. Try to accept the sensory information you are receiving without judgement and without naming things. Appreciate the moment

4) Practise Gratitude

Being in a state of gratitude changes our energy so we are perceived as less of a threat. It is also great for our mental health. It doesn't matter what you are grateful for, just that you are grateful!

5) Be in a 'beginner's mind'

Try to encounter things as if you are experiencing them for the first time. Take time to explore and discover. Be curious, ask questions, see where things lead. When you return indoors, use books or online resources to investigate things more deeply.

6) Try a 'timeless wander'

If you have some free time, go on a walk in nature with no set destination or duration. Wander whichever path feels right to you to explore. Tune in to your body by activating your senses and see what direction it wants to take you in. Initially this is best done in a place which you know well so you don't get lost!

7) Notice bird language

Birds are the messengers of nature. Just like us, they have different tones to their voices to communicate different things. With practice, listening to the birds will tell you what is going on all around you.



So if you haven't yet come up with a New Year's resolution, then here's one to try – **I will connect more with nature.** Let me know how you get on! I hope that you enjoy looking at what your children have been up to this term, there's lots of evidence of connecting with nature...

All the best for 2024!

Mrs McInnes

References:

Issue 3 of The Outdoor Practitioner: <https://muddyfaces.co.uk/outdoor-hub/forest-school/news-blogs>

Jon Young – Coyote's Guide to Connecting in Nature



