

Basking in Nature's Splendor

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People are naturally drawn to the great outdoors. A trip to the beach, the park or the mountains relaxes us, makes us feel good. Experts now tell us that this attraction isn't a chance one. We need to be close to nature, and on a regular basis.

Birth of a New Science

Ecopsychology or deep ecology is a new science that looks at this link between people and nature. Deep ecologist, Chris Johnstone feels this is timely. "Deep Ecology is a holistic approach to facing world problems that brings together thinking, feeling, spirituality and action. It involves moving beyond the individualism of Western culture towards also seeing ourselves as part of the earth. This leads to a deeper connection with life, where Ecology is not just seen as something 'out there', but something we are part of and have a role to play in." (1).

Deep ecology is becoming a popular way to provide psychological therapy. Dr. Jackie Giuliano teaches people how to use deep ecology to boost their own mental well-being, and dispel anxiety and apathy that stems from feeling hopeless about the state of the planet. (2) Ecopsychologist, John Scull helps clients feel a deep psychological, emotional and spiritual connection to nature. He uses wilderness experiences, group workshops, ritual, habitat restoration work and individual counseling in his work. Scull points out, "There may be agreement among ecopsychologists that direct, non-mediated, non-verbal experiences with nature are both therapeutic for the individual having the experience and essential if the person is to become committed to living in harmony with the earth." (3)



Dr. Peter Cock includes nature-oriented rituals and projective methods in his therapy and workshops. Art, dance, creating songs, writing poems or in journals, drumming, story telling and silent walks are all used. He explains, "My major intervention is the direct exploration of each person's left field/right brain dialogue with nature. This is in order to explore how that can enrich the power and fullness of who they are and deepen their appreciation of their beingness in nature and the beingness of nature."(4)

The Deep Ecology Process

Howard Clinebell outlines five steps used in deep ecology therapy. He first invites people to tell their ecological story, whether positive or negative to start to make a diagnosis. He then helps people become aware of and express both their painful and good feelings about nature. The third step is to encourage people to strengthen their sense of connectedness with the natural world by being nurtured by nature often. This leads to the fourth step, ecobonding, where people feel a deep bond with nature and begin to want to reciprocate the bond by caring for the earth and nature in some way. The last step is to guide people to develop a "self-care fitness plan" or "self-earth care plan", where time spent in nature is a key component of their personal wellness regime. (5)

Good for What Ails You

The experience of natural serene settings is healing and restorative for people. Even pictures of nature, or images of natural settings in the mind's eye help us relax and heal from stress, tension and pain. John Swanson uses wilderness experiences to help people get in touch with themselves. Grief work, depression, and anxiety can all be boosted with nature work. "Most people find the profusions of nature to be nurturing, aesthetically pleasing, physically invigorating, stimulating of the imagination, even spiritually profound. There is plenty of evidence that human nature and mother nature resonate to a common order that is physically, psychologically, and spiritually whole-some. Reconnecting with nature reawakens us to pleasure and beauty that feed us in body, mind, and soul." (6)



Giving yourself a dose of nature on a regular basis can help you feel renewed. Listening to the rippling water of a brook, the song of morning birds, the wind in the trees helps us to breath more deeply and restores tired nerves and senses. Try it! Spend time with nature for a few minutes every day. Even if it means looking at a single flower. This act in itself can refresh and help reconnect you to the natural environment.



References

1. Johnstone, C. *What is Deep Ecology?* The Institute for Deep Ecology. London, UK. <http://forests.org/ric/deep-eco/johnston.htm>
2. Guiliano, J. (1999). *Chart of the Deep Teaching Process*.
3. Scull, J. (1999). *Ecopsychology: Where does it fit in psychology?* <http://www.island.net/~jscull/ecointro.htm#top>
4. Cock, P. (2000). *Ecopsychology in Practice. Gatherings: Seeking Ecopsychology*. Spring Issue: May. <http://www.ecopsychology.org/gatherings2/pcock.htm>
5. Clinebell, Howard. (1996). *Ecotherapy: Healing ourselves, healing the Earth*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p. 179 - 185.
6. Swanson, J. L. (1997). *Prescribing Nature: Exploring the Subjective Frontiers of Nature*. Ecopsychology Online. No. 4. <http://www.isis.csuhayward.edu/ALSS/ECO/1097/intro.htm>

Resources

Biophilia & Emotional Well-Being, an article written by Drs. Patrick and Gael Flanagan explores how our connection with nature affects our health on different levels. Available at: <http://www.feel.org/articles/biophilia.html>

EarthDance: Living Systems in Evolution is a free to download book written by Dr. Elisabet Sahtouris on the links between humans, other species and the Earth. Available at: <http://www.ratical.com/LifeWeb/Erthdnce/erthdnce.html>

The Deep Ecology Self-Discovery Trail offers interactive exercises to help you get in touch with your inner senses, the ones that help you feel your connection to nature. Available at: <http://www.rockisland.com/~process/deepecologyk/intk.html>