



WEEK ELEVEN: Using the Natural World in Recovery

Take a moment to breathe deeply through your nostrils, into your belly, and exhale gently through the nostrils, allowing your spine belly to fall back towards your spine. Allow your eyelids to fall heavy over your eyes. Begin to envision yourself awakening to the gentle, distant songs of forest creatures, birds, frogs, the hum of bees as they glide sleepily through the air, heavy with pollen. As you watch the trees sway in harmony, you can hear the wind dance through the leaves, feeling a cool breeze caress your warm skin. The sun is rising above the horizon, softly peaking out behind a crimson sky. You take steps into the earth, feeling soil and moss and life between your toes, until you reach a calm, quiet, peaceful lake. The sun is now above the mountains, casting shadows on the landscape as it rises higher and higher in the morning sky. You sit at the edge of a long dock, dropping your toes, feet and legs into the depths of the water, watching the light of the sun sparkle on the lake's surface.

Gently, come back to an awareness, noticing the sounds around you, the passage of air in your nostrils. Find small movements in your toe and fingertips.

How do you feel?

What's so fascinating and promising about this guided meditation is that humans have the capacity to induce real stress relief, with only their imaginations. By surrounding ourselves in a space that creates peace and supports restoration, we can more easily revitalize our mind, body and spirit. Society has created a world that tangles and un-tethers our connection to the natural world - this disconnect is at the core of how addictive behaviours and patterns arise in humans.

The external world built of concrete, advertising, high-rise buildings, internet signals, car fumes and media excesses, moving at a pace that forces us to compete instead of connect - shouting at us every day that we need this, that or the other to be this, that or the other, gnawing at a deep, dark space in our souls, over days, weeks, months, years: the natural world provides us with the antidote to the destructive patterns of "society". Nature encourages us to slow down, become aware of each of our senses; it asks us to be curious, to ask questions of ourselves and others; it gives our stress-filled mind time to rest and rejuvenate and create new neural pathways to freedom, while showing us the magic, spectacular beauty and inherent brilliance of the Earth we inhabit. Nature reminds us that we are connected with the Earth and each other, at a much deeper level than we may even be able to comprehend, but that we know arises in us a peace and harmony that we can seldom find elsewhere, despite searching for it in all sorts of strange and dangerous places.

While much of this knowledge may seem obvious, it is still an important aspect of recovery that we can address within ourselves and our clients. Beyond the intuitive knowledge that exists within our bodies about the benefits of regular interaction and immersion in nature, there are plenty of scientific studies that prove that humans can live a more fulfilling, relaxing, calm and long life by frolicking in the natural world.

It's important to note that you don't have to suggest to your clients that they move out of their city dwelling and into the woods; this is obviously not going to be possible/feasible or even desired by many people - so how can we connect our clients to the natural world by working with where their at? It's been proven that people living in cities can improve their well-being simply by immersing themselves in "green" spaces: this includes city parks, lakes and ponds. It is also proven that even looking at images of nature has a calming effect on the nervous system! It's totally possible to make nature accessible for everyone.

National Geographic article: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/01/call-to-wild/>

The Atlantic article: <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/03/how-nature-resets-our-minds-and-bodies/274455/>

University of Minnesota article: <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/environment/nature-and-us/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing>

Mental Floss article: <http://mentalfloss.com/article/60632/11-scientific-reasons-why-being-nature-relaxing>