



Contribution to Urban Nature Project, invited by Samantha Bowen and Carl Newbould

Connectedness to nature represents our personal relationship with the natural world and the extent to which we include nature in our perception of our own identity. Nature connectedness influences our mental and physical health and our tendency toward engaging in pro-environmental behaviours (see Richardson et al., 2017).

Being well connected to nature has many benefits for children and adolescents: increased self-esteem, concentration, cognitive function, wellbeing (see Barton et al., 2016), better health, and greater life satisfaction among others (see Richardson et al., 2015, RSPB report). A strong nature connectedness enables children to establish beneficial behaviours that will contribute to not only their lifelong health and wellbeing but also to protecting and enhancing the environment (see Barton et al., 2016).

It is known that for children, simply being outside in nature increases their nature connectedness (Richardson et al., 2015, RSPB report), indicating that sensory contact with the natural environment is important. For adults, it is known that sensory contact with nature is a key driver for enhancing nature connectedness (Lumber et al., 2017). As such, maximising children's sensory interactions with natural spaces may be important for increasing nature connectedness.

Spending time in nature activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is associated with restoration and affiliation – of 'being' rather than 'doing' (Richardson et al., 2016). Other pathways that have been linked to greater nature connectedness include appreciation of beauty and emotional sensations arising when in nature (Lumber et al., 2017). Additionally, mindfulness has been linked to nature connectedness (Howell et al., 2011, Van Gordon et al., 2018), that is, being fully present and aware in the moment. This can involve taking time to be calm and quiet, noticing the external environment and internal processes and sensations. Considering these factors together, it seems likely that allowing adequate time to be calm, relaxed, reflective and mindful when in nature is important for aiding nature connectedness.

