

# Connecting to Nature



## Indigenous Wisdom

*"The old Lakotas were wise. They knew that a person's heart away from Nature becomes hard; that a lack of respect for growing, living things soon leads to a lack of respect for humans too."*

-Luther Standing Bear, Lakota



## Background

Youth today are spending significantly less time in nature than our grandparents or even our parents did. For most of human history, people have spent most of their time outdoors. The breaking of this bond is hurting us and the natural world around us.



- From 1997-2003, the number of 9 to 12-year-olds that regularly spent time outdoors declined by half.
- Over 90% of our time is spent indoors. One study found that 64% of Canadians spend 2 hours or fewer outside each week, and 29% spent 30 minutes or less – that's just 5 minutes a day!
- Access to nature is inequitable. Youth from lower-income families may face more barriers to getting outdoors, including living in areas with fewer parks and trees, and having parents with less time or resources to travel to natural areas further afield.

## Some Benefits of Spending Time in Nature



- **Less stress.** Spending time in nature makes us feel calmer. Studies have shown it reduces heart rate and stress hormones (such as cortisol), and generally improves mental health.
- **Better physical health.** Time in nature reduces the risk of a range of health conditions including sickness, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and premature death. Interestingly, these benefits occur even if you are not exercising!
- **More energy.** Studies have shown that spending even 20 minutes a day in nature significantly boosts "vitality levels", making you more energetic and resilient to illness.

## The Problem

Our ancestors did not need to be given studies to understand why they needed to spend time outdoors, because their entire worldview and way of life was connected to the land. The decline of time we spend in nature is representative of our disconnect with the natural world. The environmental crises we face are the result of a worldview that sees people as separate from nature, instead of dependent on it.

- **Shallow ecology or anthropocentrism** suggests that human beings are the central species in the Earth's ecosystems, and that other beings and parts of the systems are of less importance or value. This is the dominant worldview in modern-day North American society.



## Biocentrism

However, there are many people rediscovering a different relationship with the earth, a perspective that is still remembered and held by Indigenous Peoples.

- **Deep ecology or biocentrism** suggests that all life forms have inherent, intrinsic value, apart from their usefulness or interest to humans. This is the dominant worldview in many Indigenous societies.
- **hishuk'ish tsawalk** meaning “everything is connected”, is part of the philosophy of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people, who live on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It articulates a worldview of having a respectful and responsible relationship with the environment, in which all life forms are necessary and deserving of respect.



## Learn More and Take Action

As young people, our access to the outdoors is often limited by our lack of independence. Here is a list of camping trips you can access without a car:

- <https://bit.ly/2CA3oV>

Volunteer in Metro Vancouver parks, by helping out with ecological restoration or being a host:

- **Metro Vancouver**, (<http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/parks/get-involved/volunteer/Pages/default.aspx>)



Follow, donate, or participate in urban nature programs in Vancouver:

- **Environmental Youth Alliance**, (<https://eya.ca/>)
- **Catching the Spirit**, (<https://catchingthespirit.com/>)



Follow, donate, or volunteer with a nature conservation organization:

- **BC Nature**, (<https://www.bcnature.ca/links/>)

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