



Eco-Therapy Curriculum and Open Educational Resources

PR2

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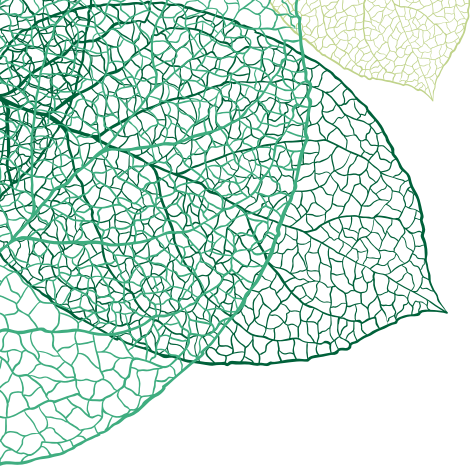
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PART ONE

WHAT IS ECOTHERAPY?





WHAT IS ECOTHERAPY?

INTRODUCTION

This unit aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the concept of ecotherapy, its benefits, and various applications. This unit delves into the idea of ecotherapy as a form of mental health therapy that connects individuals with nature to promote healing and well-being. Through this unit, learners will explore the theoretical background of ecotherapy, learn about various practices and interventions involved in ecotherapy, and develop an understanding of the therapeutic benefits of this approach. Additionally, the unit explores the diverse applications of ecotherapy, including its role in promoting environmental awareness and sustainability.

GOALS & LEARNING OUTCOMES



By the end of the training, participants will be able to:

- Define the concept of ecotherapy and explain its theoretical foundations.
- Describe the benefits of ecotherapy, including its impact on mental health and overall well-being.
- Identify related fields and disciplines, such as horticultural therapy and nature-based mindfulness, and compare and contrast their approaches to ecotherapy.
- Analyse various ecotherapy practices and interventions, including nature walks, gardening, and animal-assisted therapy.
- Evaluate the role of professionals, such as ecopsychologists, therapists, and environmental educators, in the field of ecotherapy.
- Apply the principles of ecotherapy to real-world situations, including developing nature-based interventions to promote well-being and sustainability.

WHAT IS ECOTHERAPY?

Ecotherapy, also known as nature-based therapy or green therapy, is a form of psychotherapy that utilises the natural environment as a means of promoting mental and emotional well-being. This approach is based on the idea that connecting with nature can have a positive impact on individuals suffering from mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and stress.

One of the key principles of ecotherapy is that it promotes the idea of the interconnectedness of humans and the natural environment. This connection is believed to have a therapeutic effect on individuals, as it allows them to reconnect with their sense of self and the world around them.

Ecotherapy has been found to be effective in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety in individuals with mental health conditions. It has been suggested that ecotherapy led to a significant reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as an improvement in overall well-being, and this may be due to the fact that ecotherapy allows individuals to reconnect with nature, which can have a calming effect on the mind and body (Williams et al, 2018).

A study by Van den Berg and colleagues (2020) found that ecotherapy can also be effective in reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in veterans. The research results demonstrate that ecotherapy led to a significant reduction in symptoms of PTSD, as well as an improvement in overall well-being. The authors suggest that this may be due to the fact that ecotherapy allows veterans to reconnect with nature, which can provide a sense of peace and tranquillity.



THEORIES ON ECOTHERAPY

There are several theories related to ecotherapy that have been proposed to explain the positive effects of nature on human well-being.

The Ecological Theory

The ecological theory on Ecotherapy is based on the idea that the natural environment has a positive impact on human well-being. This theory is rooted in the belief that humans have an innate connection to nature and that this connection is essential for physical and mental health. One of the key principles of the ecological theory on ecotherapy is the concept of biophilia, which is the innate human attraction to nature. According to this theory, humans have an innate need to connect with the natural world, and this connection is essential for maintaining mental and emotional well-being.

The Attention-Restoration Theory (ART)

The Attention-Restoration Theory (ART) on ecotherapy is a psychological theory that explains how exposure to nature can benefit cognitive functioning, particularly in terms of attention. According to this theory, the natural environment has a unique ability to restore attention and reduce mental fatigue, which can be beneficial for individuals suffering from attention-related disorders such as ADHD, depression, and stress. The ART theory suggests that natural environments can restore attention in several ways. For example, natural environments are typically more complex than human-made environments, which can provide a sense of novelty and interest. Additionally, natural environments tend to be less cluttered and more open, which can provide a sense of "soft fascination" and help individuals relax. Furthermore, natural environments are often associated with feelings of awe, which can provide a sense of transcendence and help individuals disconnect from their worries.

The Stress-Reduction Theory

The Stress-Reduction Theory suggests that exposure to nature can reduce stress and improve physical and mental health by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for relaxation and rest. A study by Li (2010) supports this theory by showing that nature exposure can reduce cortisol levels, which is a hormone associated with stress.

The Social-Connectedness Theory

This theory suggests that exposure to nature can improve social connectedness and sense of community by promoting social interactions and shared experiences. A study by Williams and colleagues (2010) supports this theory by showing that nature exposure can improve social cohesion and trust.

The Place Attachment Theory

The Place Attachment Theory suggests that people have an emotional bond with certain places and that this bond can have a positive impact on well-being. A study by Scannell and Gifford (2010) supports this theory by showing that people who have a strong attachment to nature have better well-being.

The Self-Determination Theory

This theory suggests that nature exposure can improve well-being by increasing feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness. A study by Ryan, Rigby and King (1993) supports this theory by showing that nature exposure can improve self-esteem and self-worth.

As listed above, there are several theories related to ecotherapy that have been proposed to explain the positive effects of nature on human well-being. Studies have supported these theories by showing that nature exposure can improve well-being, reduce stress, improve social connectedness, increase self-esteem and self-worth.

ECOTHERAPY AND RELATED FIELDS

Ecotherapy, eco-psychology, nature therapy, and environmental psychology are all related fields that study the relationship between humans and the natural environment, but they have different focuses and approaches.

Ecotherapy, also known as nature therapy or green therapy, is a form of therapy that uses the natural environment as a therapeutic tool to improve mental and physical health. Ecotherapy can include activities such as hiking, gardening, and spending time in nature, and is often used to treat conditions such as stress, depression, and anxiety.

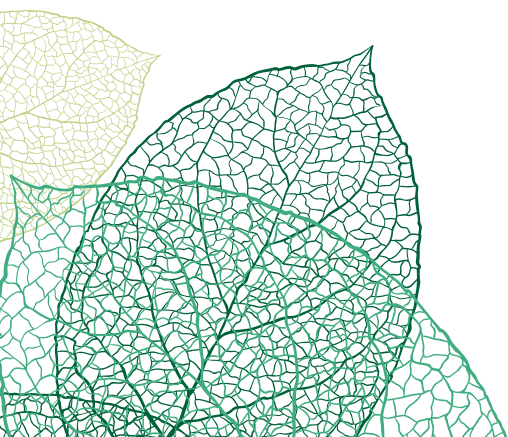
Eco-psychology is a field of psychology that explores the relationship between humans and the natural environment, and how this relationship affects human mental and physical health. Eco-psychology is based on the idea that humans have an innate connection to nature and that disconnection from nature can lead to mental health problems.

Nature therapy is an approach that uses nature-based activities, such as hiking and gardening, to improve mental and physical health. Nature therapy is based on the idea that spending time in nature can reduce stress, improve mood, and promote well-being.

Environmental psychology is a field of psychology that studies the relationship between human behavior and the natural environment. Environmental psychology is focused on understanding how the built and natural environment affects human behaviour, and how human behaviour affects the environment.

Forest therapy, also known as forest bathing, is a form of nature therapy that involves spending time in a forested environment to improve mental and physical health. It is becoming increasingly popular in Japan and is based on the idea that the natural environment, particularly the forest, has a therapeutic effect on the human body and mind. Forest therapy includes activities such as walking in the forest, breathing in the fresh air, and engaging in activities that promote relaxation and mindfulness. It is believed to have benefits such as reducing stress, improving mood, and promoting overall well-being.

Although all are related with the relationship between humans and the natural environment, they have different focuses and approaches. Ecotherapy and nature therapy are forms of therapy that use the natural environment as a therapeutic tool, eco-psychology is a field of psychology that explores the relationship between humans and the natural environment, and environmental psychology is a field of psychology that studies the relationship between human behaviour and the natural environment. Forest therapy or forest bathing is a specific form of nature therapy that focuses on the benefits of spending time in a forested environment. Ecotherapy, on the other hand, is a broader term that encompasses a variety of nature-based therapies.



BENEFITS OF ECOTHERAPY

Ecotherapy has a wide range of applications in mental health and well-being. The following are some of its main applications:

- **Stress and anxiety:** Ecotherapy has been found to be effective in reducing stress and anxiety by providing a sense of calm and tranquillity in the natural environment.
- **Depression:** Ecotherapy can be helpful in treating depression by providing a sense of purpose and meaning, and by increasing self-awareness and self-reflection.
- **Trauma:** Ecotherapy can be used to support individuals who have experienced trauma, as it can provide a sense of grounding and a safe space to process and heal from traumatic experiences.
- **Addiction:** Ecotherapy can be used as a prevention and treatment approach for drug and alcohol addiction. It can help individuals to connect with nature, decrease stress levels, and increase self-awareness.
- **Physical health:** Ecotherapy can also be beneficial for physical health, such as increasing physical activity, reducing blood pressure, and improving cardiovascular health.
- **Children and Adolescents:** Ecotherapy can also be beneficial for children and adolescents, as it can help them to learn about the environment, develop social and emotional skills, and improve their physical health.
- **Elderly people:** Ecotherapy can be beneficial for elderly people, as it can improve their physical and mental well-being and reduce their risk of depression and loneliness.

There are several reported benefits of ecotherapy on physical and mental well-being. These include:

Physical benefits



Improved cardiovascular health:

Spending time in nature has been linked to lower blood pressure, heart rate, and stress hormone levels.



Improved physical fitness:

Nature-based activities such as hiking and gardening can improve overall physical fitness.



Improved immune function:

Exposure to nature has been linked to increased activity of natural killer cells, which play a key role in fighting cancer and infections.



Improved respiratory function:

Breathing in the fresh air of a forest has been linked to improved lung function and decreased risk of respiratory diseases.

Mental benefits



Reduced stress:

Spending time in nature has been linked to decreased levels of stress hormones and improved mood.

Improved mood:

Nature-based activities have been linked to increased feelings of happiness and well-being.



Improved cognitive function:

Spending time in nature has been linked to improved attention and concentration, as well as increased creativity.

Improved self-esteem and self-worth:

Nature-based activities can help individuals feel a sense of accomplishment and self-worth.



Improved social connections:

Nature-based activities can provide opportunities for social interactions and connections with others.

ECOTHERAPY PROFESSIONALS

Ecotherapy is an emerging field and the professionals who are currently allowed to provide ecotherapy sessions may vary depending on the country or region. However, some of the professionals that may currently be authorised to provide ecotherapy sessions include:

- Therapists or counsellors: Ecotherapy can be provided by licensed therapists or counsellors who have specialised training in ecotherapy. They may provide individual or group therapy sessions in a nature setting.

- Nature guides: Some organisations or programs may employ trained nature guides to lead ecotherapy sessions. These guides may have specialised training in leading nature-based activities and facilitating group discussions.
- Outdoor education instructors: Outdoor education instructors may lead ecotherapy sessions as part of their work with schools, youth groups, or other organisations.
- Medical professionals: Some medical professionals may be authorised to provide ecotherapy sessions, such as doctors, nurses, or occupational therapists.

The qualifications required to become an ecotherapist may vary depending on the country or region, but generally, the following qualifications are considered important for professionals who wish to provide ecotherapy sessions:

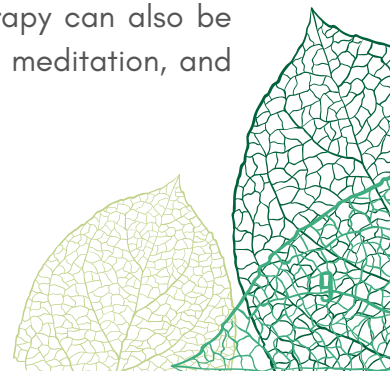
- A degree in a related field: Many ecotherapists hold a degree in fields such as psychology, counselling, social work, or nursing.
- Training in ecotherapy: Many ecotherapists have specialised training in ecotherapy, which can be obtained through workshops, training programs, or continuing education courses.
- Professional licensure or certification: Many ecotherapists are licensed or certified in their field, such as counselling, psychology, or social work.
- Experience in nature-based activities: Many ecotherapists have experience in nature-based activities such as hiking, camping, or outdoor education.
- Knowledge of the natural environment: Ecotherapists should have knowledge of the natural environment, including knowledge of local plants and animals, as well as an understanding of the ecological and environmental context in which they are working.

APPLICATION OF ECOTHERAPY

Ecotherapy can be used as a stand-alone treatment or as part of other forms of therapy. It is considered as an addition to traditional forms of therapy like cognitive behavioural therapy, talk therapy, and others.

When used as a stand-alone treatment, ecotherapy sessions may involve nature-based activities such as hiking, gardening, or bird watching, as well as discussion and reflection on the experiences in the natural environment. This can be beneficial for individuals who are seeking a holistic approach to their mental health and well-being.

However, when used in conjunction with other forms of therapy, ecotherapy can serve as a complementary treatment. For example, a therapist may use ecotherapy as an adjunct to traditional talk therapy, or an occupational therapist may use ecotherapy as part of a treatment plan for individuals recovering from an injury or illness. Ecotherapy can also be used in conjunction with other alternative forms of therapy such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness, which can enhance the benefits of Ecotherapy.



Ecotherapy has been used as a prevention and treatment approach for drug and alcohol addiction. The theory behind the use of ecotherapy for addiction is that the natural environment can provide a sense of tranquillity and grounding that can help individuals to overcome addictive behaviours.

Pros of using ecotherapy for drug and alcohol addiction include:

- **Connection to nature:** Ecotherapy can help individuals to connect with nature, which can provide a sense of purpose and meaning, which can be beneficial for individuals recovering from addiction.
- **Decrease in stress:** Research suggests that nature-based activities can decrease stress levels, which can be beneficial for individuals who are recovering from addiction.
- **Increased self-awareness:** Ecotherapy can help individuals to become more aware of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, which can be beneficial for individuals who are recovering from addiction.

Cons of using ecotherapy for drug and alcohol addiction include:

- **Limited accessibility:** Ecotherapy may not be accessible to all individuals, particularly those who live in urban areas or who have mobility issues.
- **Limited availability:** Ecotherapy may not be available in all areas, and it may be difficult to find a qualified ecotherapist.
- **Limited effectiveness:** Ecotherapy may not be effective for all individuals, and it may not be appropriate for individuals with severe addiction or mental health issues.

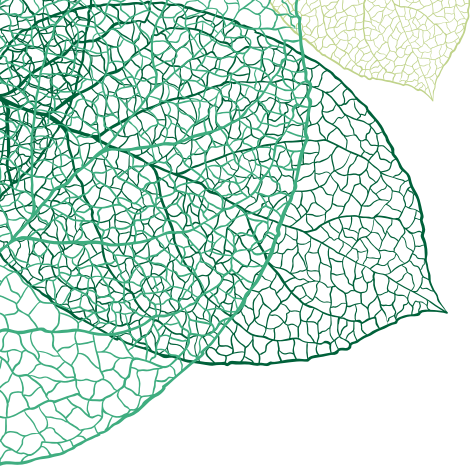
CONCLUSION

This unit focuses on understanding ecotherapy and its various applications. Through this unit, learners explore the theoretical foundations of ecotherapy and its benefits, such as its impact on mental health and well-being, as well as its applications in promoting environmental sustainability and social justice. Additionally, it covers the diverse practices and interventions involved in ecotherapy and the various professionals that work in this field. Overall, this unit highlights the importance of ecotherapy in promoting holistic health and sustainability.

PART TWO

IS THERE SPACE FOR
ECOTHERAPY?





IS THERE SPACE FOR ECOTHERAPY?

INTRODUCTION

Addiction is a complex and multifaceted problem that affects millions of people around the world. Traditional addiction treatment programmes typically rely on evidence-based therapies and interventions to address the psychological, emotional and physical aspects of substance use disorders (SUDs). However, there is growing interest in alternative or complementary approaches that can enhance the effectiveness of these interventions and provide additional benefits to people with SUDs. One such approach is ecotherapy, which involves using nature and outdoor environments as a therapeutic tool to support recovery and improve overall well-being. In this module, we will explore the potential benefits of ecotherapy for people with SUDs, the types of experiences and skills they may need, how and when ecotherapy should be introduced to the therapy process and common practical challenges that may arise when using ecotherapy in practice.

GOALS & LEARNING OUTCOMES



The goal of this training is to equip addiction professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to incorporate ecotherapy into their treatment plans for individuals with substance use disorders.

By the end of the training, participants will be able to:

- Understand the potential benefits of ecotherapy for individuals with SUDs, including its impact on mental and physical well-being
- Identify the specific experiences and skills that individuals with SUDs may need in order to benefit from ecotherapy, such as emotion regulation, stress management, and goal-setting
- Assess when and how ecotherapy should be introduced to the therapy process based on the individual's current therapy stage, treatment phase, and other relevant factors
- Implement ecotherapy in practice by using it to complement or support existing evidence-based therapies for addiction treatment
- Address common practical challenges that may arise when using ecotherapy in practice, such as the absence of green spaces or unfavourable weather conditions

Overall, this training aims to provide addiction professionals with a new tool in their toolkit for addressing the complex and multifaceted problem of substance use disorders, and to help them better meet the unique needs of each individual they serve.

EXPERIENCES AND SKILLS THAT PEOPLE WITH SUDS NEED

(emotion regulation, stress management, goal-setting etc.)

Before starting to explore if there is space for Ecotherapy in the context of Substance Use Disorders Treatment, it is necessary to first identify the basics of the mechanics of addictions. More specifically what addiction is, why people take drugs and what kind of experiences and skills that people with SUDs need. According to ADR, "addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors." (Rose, Panagiotounis, Theodorakis, Mydland, Kouthouris & Ruiz de Cortázar Gracia, 2019 pp. 8)

Additionally, as stated in ADR, people take drugs for the following reasons:

- **To feel good.** Most abused drugs produce intense feelings of pleasure. This initial sensation of euphoria is followed by other effects, which differ with the type of drug used.
- **To feel better.** Some people who suffer from social anxiety, stress-related disorders, and depression begin abusing drugs in an attempt to lessen feelings of distress. Stress can play a major role in beginning drug use, continuing drug abuse, or relapse in patients recovering from addiction.
- **To do better.** Some people feel pressure to chemically enhance or improve their cognitive or athletic performance, which can play a role in initial experimentation and continued abuse of drugs such as prescription stimulants or anabolic/androgenic steroids.
- **Curiosity and "because others are doing it".** In this respect, adolescents are particularly vulnerable because of the strong influence of peer pressure. Teens are more likely than adults to engage in risky or daring behaviours to impress their friends and express their independence from parental and social rules.

(Rose, Panagiotounis, Theodorakis, Mydland, Kouthouris & Ruiz de Cortázar Gracia, 2019 pp. 8)

In order to treat issues associated with substance abuse, psychosocial interventions are systemic psychological or social interventions. They can be utilised at various stages of drug treatment to pinpoint the issue, resolve it and aid in reintegrating socially. Behavioural and social interventions are employed to address a variety of drug use issues, including psychological addictions. Beneficiaries are assisted in understanding the reasons why individuals take drugs and discovering techniques for incorporating those triggers.



Treatment professionals strive to aid patients in recognising alternative ways of people who encourage them to consume drugs and therefore promote their restoration. Psychosocial interventions can help drug users to identify their drug-related problems and make a commitment to change, assist individuals in following the prescribed line of action and boost their achievements. *(Jhanjee, 2014; EMCDDA, 2016; Murthy, 2018).*

Life skills, which include self-awareness, empathy, assertiveness, equanimity, resilience, and general coping techniques, are aptitudes that help the addicted person adopt a positive outlook and make it possible for him or her to successfully manage the demands and problems of daily life. The word "life skills" refers to a collection of cognitive, socio-psychological, interpersonal, and behavioural abilities that support an individual's adoption of an active, healthy lifestyle, informed decision-making, effective communication, and self-management. Better health can be attained by the organisation of one's own, other people's, and environmental actions. This improved health can then result in more physical, psychological, and social comfort. These abilities enable the addicted person to accept the obligations of his social role and successfully manage his or her own needs and expectations without endangering others or themselves. The development of beliefs, abilities, and knowledge in people through life skills training takes a holistic approach, enabling them to safeguard both themselves and other people in a variety of risky scenarios. *(UNICEF. Life Skills-Based Education Drug Use Prevention Training Manual)*

How to achieve desired new behaviour and goals

- Increase coping capacities
- Increase awareness and resiliency
- Provide alternative routes
- Through targeted efforts to counter individual deficits
- Increase match between individual needs and opportunities
- Meeting goals



IS THERE SPACE FOR ECOTHERAPY?

Because it can present natural obstacles, nature is a therapeutic environment that can help a person's physical and mental health. The individual gains self-assurance, regains tranquility, and has thoughts in nature that could result in the identification of a new, different self. Adventure therapy typically occurs outside. *(Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Miles, 1987; Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002).* Given that exposure to nature has been proven to be an important health predictor, creating intervention techniques must give careful consideration. Because it can present physical obstacles and benefit a person physically and psychologically, nature is a therapeutic setting. enhance cognitive function since exposure to nature can help with cognitive control in major ways.

In addition to replenishing exhausted resources, the individual can gain new talents from their experiences in the natural environment. The person acquires more self-assurance, regains calm, and has thoughts that can inspire reflection, which can reveal a new, less conflicted, less tense version of themselves. (Mitchell, 2013; Bowler et al., 2010; Hartig et al, 2010; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Miles, 1987; Kaplan, 1995; Berman et al., 2008).

Experiences with nature restoration can happen accidentally while a person is living in a natural environment, as well as a planned approach for managing adaptive resources. In this context, adventure therapy is a type of program that typically takes place outside and uses physically and/or psychologically taxing outdoor activities in a safety and skills training context to promote interpersonal and interpersonal development, utilising a range of activities/experiences like goal setting, awareness raising, trust activities, group problem solving, and individual problem solving (Luckner & Nadler, 1992).

KNOWN PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING BENEFITS OF ECOTHERAPY TO PEOPLE WITH SUDS (SPECIFICALLY)

Benefits of Eco Therapy

It was believed that Ecotherapy may assist individuals in not just recognising and differentiating their feelings, but also in accepting rather than suppressing them. Additionally, advantages for cognitive functioning were discovered, including an enhanced capacity for self-expression, innovative thinking, and complex scenario perception. Further, it was believed that engaging in outdoor activities would foster greater creativity, responsibility, and skill development in people as well as a greater sense of competence. Of course, a lot of respondents also agreed that being in nature helps one feel calmer and more relaxed. Ecotherapy has also been shown to have positive social and environmental effects.



People with SUD were thought to benefit from learning new hobbies to focus their energy, especially when they felt deprived. Ecotherapy may be effective in preventing relapse in this way. However, participating in outdoor activities was deemed to provide extra advantages. One counsellor stated, for instance, that "contact with nature generates a symbolic location that is softer and helps the person to accept the primary therapy more easily." Others said that low self-esteem, emotional weariness, and excessive thinking are common in SUD and that ecotherapy may be effective in treating these issues. Moreover, the load of compulsive thinking, which is obvious in addiction, can be lessened through body activation. Persons with SUD were stated to have a foundation of despair, inverted rage toward themselves, and a lack of acknowledgement of negative feelings. A connection to nature was believed to help people with SUD connect with, recognise, and express their emotions.

- Creativity
- Inventiveness
- Skills development
- Feeling competent
- Feeling useful
- Cultivates responsibility
- Motivates
- Helps to express oneself
- Helps to think out of the box
- Helps the subconscious to emerge
- Helps to perceive complex situations
- Helps with concentration
- Elicits positive memories
- Helps to function more spontaneously
- Peacefulness
- Relaxation
- Grounding
- Happiness
- Provides satisfaction
- Sense of freedom
- Facilitates connection with other people
- Gives a new meaning to life
- Brings a better balance
- Cultivates love and respect for nature
- Leads to a more ecological perspective on life
- Provides knowledge about the ecosystem
- A deeper sense of trust in life
- Cultivates self-awareness
- Facilitates connection with the self
- Cultivates self-confidence
- Allows access to emotions without filtration
- Helps to differentiate and accept emotions
- Cultivates body awareness
- Stress management
- Helps to overcome fears
- Promotes self-discovery
- Helps the immune system
- Blood pressure regulation
- Cardiac rate regulation
- Activation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic system
- Breathing regulation
- Helps to cope with lockdowns



Reported Outcomes of Ecotherapy

Analysis of the reported outcomes of the Ecotherapy procedure revealed several pattern codes, including the following:

- Development of Self-Concept
- Knowledge and Skills
- Realisations to Change Behaviour
- Strengthened Family Relations

Development of Self-Concept

Beneficiaries have learned how to access and express their emotions as well as the value of talking about feelings thanks to the process. The beneficiaries believe that if they can finish ecotherapy, they can also do other difficult activities, which is part of the development of their self-concept. Beneficiaries leave wilderness treatment with the understanding that their journey has just begun and they must continue to be active participants in their own personal development.

Knowledge and Skills

The wilderness treatment approach combines the development of the self with the acquisition of many personal and social skills, such as communication skills, drug and alcohol awareness, and coping abilities. Together with an improved sense of self, these abilities support beneficiaries in making wiser decisions and assisting them in avoiding harmful peer and cultural influences. The 12-Step model of recovery's initial steps is completed by clients with drug and alcohol problems, marking the start of the process of ending the cycle of addiction.

Being aware that beneficiaries may relapse, parents collaborate closely with clinical supervisors to create a relapse prevention strategy throughout the ecotherapy process, ensuring that the required structure and support will be available if and when a relapse happens. Additionally, customers learned to understand the consequences of their actions.

Realisations to Change Behaviour

Beneficiaries using ecotherapy can better comprehend the adjustments they desire and need to make. During graduation ceremonies and post-trip discussions, parents are informed of their children's realizations of their prior behaviour and are given the opportunity to suggest adjustments. The major insights that individuals gain from the experience are the necessity and desire to modify old habits, the fact that they have a chance for a new beginning, and the fact that they must want to advance. They have learnt to see various views, notably their parents', and are more thankful for the things they have in life, such as loving and caring parents. They show wish to mend fences and reinforce bonds with their parents. They also view their previous problematic behaviours differently, realising that these behaviours were frequent signs of other problems in their life.

Strengthened Family Relations

Without the parents' commitment to and participation in the therapy, the individual would not be accepted for ecotherapy. A better functioning family is the premise that frames the purpose of the wilderness treatment practice. Parents attend seminars that teach parenting techniques and techniques to help families function more effectively. The goal of ecotherapy is to assist beneficiaries continue their personal growth. Wilderness therapists work extremely hard with families throughout the process to ensure that the family realises their involvement in the individual's problem behaviours. Key goals of ecotherapy interventions include reuniting families that have been ripped apart by the client's problematic behaviours and reintegrating family structure around the needs of the client and parents.

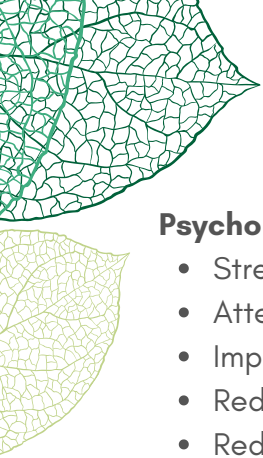
Staff members claim that ecotherapy has created a window of opportunity for clients and their families to change, and they work incredibly hard with families to seize that opportunity.

Nature can contribute to health in the following ways (*Miles, 1987*):

- In nature, the person is experiencing an inability to control the environment, which can help to cope with the stress of everyday life
- Limited environmental control in nature may lead to a reduction of forced control over other aspects of a person's life, leading to a more relaxed and comfortable attitude
- Nature can help the individual to improve self-esteem and self-confidence
- In nature, the person improves the ability to learn through engagement with the environment

Physical challenges can improve physical fitness

- Vitamin D (lowers blood pressure, and decreases the risk of colon, prostate, and pancreatic cancers)
- Increases calcium uptake
- Better diet (kids who garden eat more vegetables)
- Immune system strengthening (kids who play outside have stronger immune systems)
- Promotes healing
- Reduces pain
- Decreases the effects of jet lag
- Increases life expectancy
- Provides opportunities for exercise
- Lowers systolic blood pressure
- Reduces avoidable disease risk factors
- Reduces cancer risk
- Reduces osteoporosis risk



Psychological and Emotional Benefits of Spending Time Outdoors

- Stress reduction
- Attention restoration
- Improves mood states
- Reduces depression
- Reduces anger and anxiety
- Enhances feelings of pleasure
- Increases mental acuity (kids who grow plants scored 12% higher on academic tests)
- Reduces mental fatigue
- Improve problem-solving ability and concentration
- Improves body image for women
- Reduces the impact of stress
- Increases feelings of empowerment
- Encourages nurturing characteristics
- Decreases risk of seasonal affective disorder (SAD)
- Mitigate the impact of dementia, including Alzheimer's

ASSESSING IF, HOW AND WHEN ECOTHERAPY SHOULD BE INTRODUCED TO THE THERAPY PROCESS

(current therapy stage, treatment phase, early intervention, relapse prevention etc.)

Studies have shown that spending time in nature can reduce stress, improve mood, and increase feelings of well-being. For individuals with substance use disorders, ecotherapy may help to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, which are commonly associated with addiction. Research has also shown that ecotherapy can improve cognitive functioning, including attention and working memory, in individuals with substance use disorders. This is particularly relevant given the cognitive deficits that can occur as a result of drug or alcohol use. Additionally, spending time in nature may help to reduce cravings for drugs or alcohol by providing a healthy and natural source of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward.

It's important to note that ecotherapy, should not be used as a standalone treatment for substance use disorders. Instead, it should be used in conjunction with evidence-based treatments, such as medication-assisted treatment and cognitive-behavioural therapy. Practices in ecotherapy are more beneficial during the social reintegration phase and less so during the rehabilitation phase. Ecotherapy is not a replacement for traditional addiction treatment, but rather a complementary approach that can enhance the effectiveness of other interventions. For example, some addiction treatment centres incorporate ecotherapy into their programming as a way to provide holistic, multidimensional care.

One potential challenge with ecotherapy is that it may not be accessible or feasible for all individuals. For example, people living in urban areas or with mobility impairments may have limited opportunities to connect with nature. In these cases, alternative approaches to ecotherapy may need to be considered. ecotherapy can be particularly effective for individuals who have struggled with other forms of addiction treatment in the past or who have a history of resistance to traditional talk therapy approaches. By providing a different type of experience that emphasises connection to nature and the environment, ecotherapy can help to engage individuals in their treatment and promote feelings of empowerment and autonomy.

Moreover, Ecotherapy can also stand as an early intervention approach in several ways:



1. Prevention:

Ecotherapy can be used as a prevention strategy to reduce the likelihood of substance use disorders developing in the first place. For example, ecotherapy programmes can be implemented in schools, community centres, or other settings to promote healthy behaviours and coping mechanisms among at-risk populations.

2. Early identification:

Ecotherapy can also be used to identify individuals who may be at risk for developing substance use disorders early on. For example, a clinician may refer a patient to an ecotherapy programme as a way to assess their level of engagement and response to treatment before a full-blown addiction has developed.



3. Intervention:

Ecotherapy can also be used as an intervention method for individuals who are in the early stages of a substance use disorder. By providing an alternative approach to traditional addiction treatment, ecotherapy can help to engage individuals in their treatment and promote positive behaviours and coping mechanisms before the addiction becomes more entrenched.

4. Relapse prevention:

Ecotherapy can also be used as a relapse prevention tool for individuals who are in recovery from a substance use disorder. By providing ongoing support and engagement in nature-based activities, ecotherapy can help to reduce the risk of relapse and promote long-term recovery.





By incorporating nature-based activities into addiction treatment, ecotherapy can provide a unique and holistic approach to addressing the complex physical, emotional, and social factors that contribute to addiction.

USING ECOTHERAPY IN PRACTICE

(how ecotherapy can complement or support the existing therapeutic modalities, such as evidence-based therapy programmes on addiction treatment, etc.)

Some people believed that Ecotherapy made sense as a way of thinking rather than as a tool for their work since they believed that current therapeutic techniques are already extremely effective. "We need to be in harmony with the environment and to be cognizant of what this means for us and our existence," said one ATC representative. According to one counsellor, every professional has a particular area of expertise, and the integration of ecotherapy in therapeutic programs may be more effective when different specialities are involved. She said, "I could work with someone who specialises in this to take this up. I'm not sure whether I could provide using this counselling approach on my own."

Many people considered ecotherapy as an additional therapeutic approach to primary therapy rather than as a stand-alone therapy in and of itself. A typical response from an interviewee regarding the place of ecotherapy in the treatment of addiction was, "Ecotherapy is quite useful but secondary to other therapies that deal with cognitive and emotional regulation, which are the main and most significant ones." Opinions were more divided in regards to whether greater information on ecotherapy could assist practitioners to be more effective in working with those who have SUD. The majority of people had nice things to say about it; some were certain of the benefits of ecotherapy, while others just assumed it may be helpful. Furthermore, some people believed that ecotherapy made sense as a way of thinking rather than as a tool for their work since they believed that current therapeutic techniques are already extremely effective.

COMMON PRATICAL CHALLENGES

(absence of green spaces, weather conditions etc.)

The most often mentioned obstacles to using ecotherapy were the requirement for organization, which can be challenging, especially if one lives in a city, and the necessity for experts to adjust to this new approach. The latter was applied to a number of dimensions, including the need to depart from more conventional viewpoints, the difficulty of stepping aside and letting nature serve as the primary therapist, the difficulty of incorporating the experience of being in nature into the therapeutic process, the requirement to combine soft (such as counselling) and hard skills (such as tying ropes in adventure therapy), and the challenge of adjusting to a setting in which one has little control.

Patients faced difficulties due to varying levels of interest in or underestimation of such practices, feelings of insecurity or exposure in outside settings, and difficulty understanding and committing to it. Ecotherapy hence might not be suitable for everyone. It was also suggested that because patients are unfamiliar with such an environment, this technique may occasionally operate as a distraction for the counselling process. Some counsellors mentioned that the previous relationship of the patient with nature may pose challenges, as it could elicit negative memories that would have to be reframed. For example, some people with SUD may associate excursions in nature with the need to isolate and use substances. Moreover, the need for resources (such as money, time), suitable infrastructure, and support for its coordination, the restricted availability and accessibility of green spaces (particularly in metropolitan areas), and the limitations imposed by the weather were other difficulties that were cited. As a result, it could be challenging to regularly engage in outdoor activities.

CONCLUSION

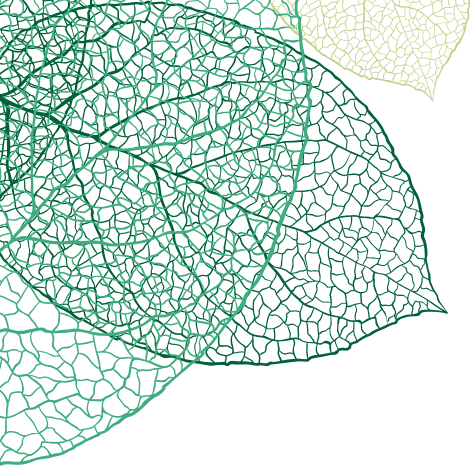
In conclusion, Ecotherapy is a promising approach that can complement and enhance existing evidence-based therapies for substance use disorders. The benefits of nature and outdoor environments on mental and physical well-being have been well-documented, and the potential applications of ecotherapy in addiction treatment are numerous. By helping individuals with SUDs develop essential skills such as emotion regulation, stress management and goal-setting in a natural setting, ecotherapy can provide a unique and valuable perspective on recovery. However, as with any therapeutic approach, ecotherapy also presents its own set of challenges, such as the availability of green spaces and weather conditions. Therefore, it is important to carefully assess when and how ecotherapy should be introduced to the therapy process to maximise its benefits while minimising its potential drawbacks. Overall, ecotherapy offers a promising avenue for addiction treatment that deserves further exploration and consideration by clinicians and researchers in the field of addiction.



THREE

ORGANISING INDOOR AND OUTDOOR ECOTHERAPY ACTIVITIES





ORGANISING INDOOR AND OUTDOOR ECOTHERAPY ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

When working with activities in Eco- Therapy, it is important to have the learning objectives in mind from the beginning as well as the organizing and planning of the activities. Some activities are preferably held indoors as others are more suitable to be held outdoors.

Generally, when planning activities, whether they are indoor or outdoor, the motivation factor of the participants is key; in order to obtain flow, enjoyment, acquire new skills etc., the participants need to see a meaning with the activity in order to fully emerge and participate. One way to motivate the participants is by asking about their interests, their life story and their goals of life, and connect it to an activity. Another way is to have enthusiastic instructors/facilitators, as motivation and engagement is contagious from one person to another.

Another consideration to have in mind when choosing if the activity should be held indoors or outside, is of course the weather and the proximity to nature, but also the need of the participants. If the participant needs to be able to leave and find an isolated room, if being too overwhelmed by the activity, maybe it will feel safer to do an indoor activity. If the participant needs some room and space between him and the other participants, maybe outdoor activities should be the first choice etc.

GOAL & LEARNING OUTCOMES



The goal of this module is to equip professionals with ideas for indoor and outdoor activities either individually or as a small group, to incorporate in eco-therapy and what to consider when planning these activities.

By the end of the training, participants will be able to:

- Understand the benefits of the application of activities in eco-therapy
- Identify which activities are suitable for the individual participant with SUD
- Assess how the activity should be planned, including which regards should be made in the choice of environment, group composition and preparation of the activity
- Implement activities as part of eco-therapy for individuals with SUD
- Address the challenges that may arise when introducing planning, introducing and implementing the activities

Overall, this module aims to provide knowledge, analytical- as well as practical skills in analyzing and implementing activities, as well as serve as an inspiration to explore what other activities may be useful as part of eco-therapy. The suggested activities are merely suggestions and not the only options for activities for individuals with SUD.

DURATION, TEACHING METHODS AND PLANNING



Duration:

The duration of the module will vary, depending on the level of depth as well as testing you want to cover.

It is purely a theoretical overview of the benefits of indoor and outdoor activities you are able to use when working with eco-therapy as well as considerations and tools needed in when planning these activities. Indoor and outdoor activities can be carried out individually, or individually with a trainer, as well as in small groups.

When planning an activity always remember to set of enough time for the participants reflection during and after the activity as well as enough time for small breaks if needed.

Teaching methods:

The teaching methods and aim of using activities in eco-therapy is to ensure an engaging and interactive learning experience for the participants. Different teaching methods can be used when facilitating indoor and outdoor activities:

- Introducing the activity and aim of the activity for the small group or individuals participating in the activity. This can be done by using lectures, power-point or as a hands-on demonstration.
- Lectures and presentations to provide knowledge and points of attentions of the activity.
- Experiencing the activity by participating to experience how the activity affects you mentally and physically as well as being aware of the specific technique or skills needed for the activity.
- Reflection and discussion during and after the activity as well as during and after lectures.





Planning:

Before starting the activity, it is important that you have considered what is the aim of the activity as well as the physical and mental abilities of the group or individual participant.

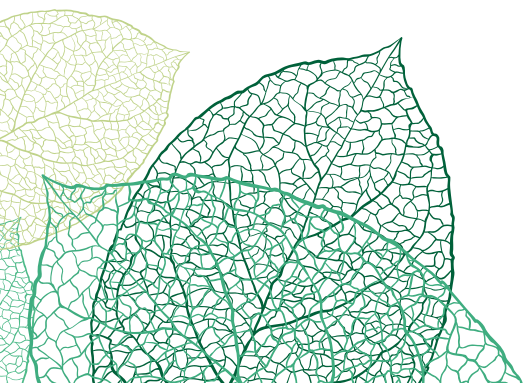
- Should it be an indoor or outdoor activity, and do I need to have any specific tools with me before or during the activity?
- How do I increase or decrease the intensity and difficulty of the activity?
- Do I need any tools for the activity?
- How will I follow up on the activity afterwards? How will I facilitate feedback from the participants? And why is the feedback relevant to me? What is the use of it?
- Is my role a trainer, facilitator or will I participate on equal basis as the rest of the group?
- Do we need to set up any rules before the activity? Breaks, participant level etc?

ICF:

When planning the activity, ICF (International Classification of Functioning) ([1: cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) is an efficient tool to use in order to remember all factors of planning a successful activity. In the ICF, function and difficulties are multi-dimensional concepts relating to the activity.

The main areas to consider in planning the activity are:

- the body functions and structures of people, and impairments thereof (functioning at the level of the body). This includes any impairment physically: e.g. the physical form and condition, any injuries (muscular, fractures nerve damages etc.), strength and any trauma to their body.
- the activities of people (functioning at the level of the individual) and the activity limitations they experience. This includes any impairment mentally and cognitive: e.g. their social capacity (e.g. social anxiety, personal space, trust issues etc.), their cognitive resources e.g. capability of working with other people, capability of concentration, capability of receiving an information etc.



- the participation or involvement of people in all areas of life, and the participation restrictions they experience (functioning of a person as a member of society) e.g. do they need any aid from another person, tools or the environment in order to be able to participate equally with the rest of the group, do they need to have safe space to withdraw to if overstimulated, do they need to be able to sit down during the activity, do they need assistance in order to stay focused throughout the activity, are they capable of doing activities in a group or do they need individual activities etc.
- the environmental factors which affect these experiences (and whether these factors are facilitators or barriers) e.g. do the room need a certain temperature, do environment need to be stripped of sensory inputs, do the need any specific tools in order to participate, do the participant need to be in the middle of the room or the corner etc.

The ICF integrates a person's level of functioning as a dynamic interaction health conditions, environmental factors, and personal factors in order to participate in activities as expediently as possible.

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The learning experience can be on a pure mental and cognitive level by reflecting on the activity during and after;

- How did it made you feel during the activity? Did you feel overwhelmed? How did you cope during the activity when it was difficult?
- If the activity gave you energy and joy – how did you recognize those feelings? Did other positive feelings emerge during the activity?
- Do you have previous experiences with such an activity? Was it useful to have a previous experience and how did you transfer that experience in this setting
- Did you feel energized or overwhelmed after the activity? What does your body feel like?
- Can you use any of your experience and feelings from participating in this activity to other aspects of your life?

The learning experience can also be on a purely physical level by discussing how the body feels during and after the activity:

- Are you out of breath?
- Do you feel any anxiety in your body?
- Are you tired?
- Do your body feel light or heavy?
- Do you feel strong?

Another benefit of participating in activities, is the possibility of community. When you join a group activity you are not alone, and you and the rest of the participants are together as a group in order to achieve a common goal; e.g. recovery from addiction, getting in a better physical and/or mental form, getting some fresh air outside etc

INDOOR ACTIVITIES

The benefits of using the indoor space to activities, are several:

- You do not need to worry about the weather or accessibility to nearby nature.
- There are no sensory inputs and distractions from the wind, birds, humidity, strangers passing by etc., which makes it easier to control the indoor environment.
- If participants have a coping mechanism in terms of a need to be able to leave the activity and find a safe space e.g. another room, it is also beneficiary for them to attend indoor activities.
- A fourth benefit of planning and executing indoor activities, is the possibility of planning activities with no requirement of shape or condition of the participants. Of course, there is also a possibility to do physical activities indoor should you choose to do so.

Some indoor activities are furthermore beneficial if you want to obtain grounding e.g. singing in a choir where you are standing and your feet are firmly placed into the ground.


Grounding is a way of connecting mind and body, helps you breathe, as deep breaths reduce stress, anxiety and often reduces muscle tensions in your head and neck (4: [helbredsprofilen](#)). When being grounded, your self-awareness rises, and combined with the deep breathing you will facilitate a higher cognitive function which will enable you to be more assertive and create appropriate coping mechanisms.

If your breathing is very fast and superficial, your brain will be more likely to work on a lower cognitive level, which often concentrates on surviving instead of coping (5: [stressfar.dk](#)).

When singing in a choir, your lungs also ventilate to a high capacity. At the same time, you get sensory inputs, when singing – you feel the vibrations from the song throughout your body, especially your upper body. When creating your own sensory inputs in a calm environment, it affects your autonomous nervous system which will make you feel calm, and enabling you to collect your thoughts, and create suitable coping mechanisms (6: [etf.dk](#)).

It is important to have offers of indoor activities in groups, which do not require eye contact with the other participants. If you are in a fragile state of mind, it can be very difficult and confrontational having to make eye contact with other people (7: [scientificamerican.com](#)).

A well-planned indoor activity will also provide with the possibility of feeling flow. When experiencing flow “You know that what you need to do is possible to do, even though difficult, and sense of time disappears. You forget yourself. You feel part of something larger.” (*Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi on experiencing ‘flow’*) (8: [peadagogikogdidaktik.wordpress.com](#) 2012).



When feeling flow you are concentrated on the activity, time and space are no longer important to you, if you are fully submerged in the activity. This provides motivation, but also a free space from all your worries and struggles in your daily life, giving you safe space for thoughts and reflection either consciously or subconsciously.

Another possibility when planning indoor activities, are being creative e.g. painting, working with ceramics etc. You can use the creative activity as a tool to express your feelings and reflections on life, the good as well as the challenges and difficulties, without having to use your words and talk about it. If you are conflicted in life, if you have mind overload, doubts, joys, worries, pain etc., it is sometimes easier to express them through a painting than through words. We can use creativity as a way to understand our life journey, to find our motivation to change our life and accept ourselves (9: sundhedsguiden.dk). When painting, you will often increase your self-awareness, thus making it possible to reflect upon your previous coping mechanisms, process what you have been through in life and how to change your coping mechanisms in order to obtain resilience and create the life you wish for.

Being creative is also a “safe space” – it is your tool and yours alone, there is no right or wrong, and nobody is able to judge your work. It does not require any previous skills, just a brush, paint and canvas. When working creatively it is also easy to feel flow as mentioned previously.

Indoor activities can also include craft workshops, which are very beneficial as a part of Eco-therapy.

When working with different forms of craft, you create something, you acquire a new set of skills and ultimately that will have an impact on your self-awareness, your confidence and life skills.

By succeeding in learning new skills it will affect your outlook on life and your perception of who you are and what you are capable of. When you change the view of who you are and your capabilities, it will make it possible for you to successfully manage the demands and problems of daily life in small steps.

When working with the clay/ceramics/wood etc. you are surrounded by other people working with the same material as you are, which create a sense of community, but you are not required to talk to these people or make eye contact with them, if you do not have the resources to do so (7: scientificamerican.com).



Working with different forms of crafts has a physical, mental and cognitive impact. Physically, being able to shape different forms for different purposes, provides many sensory inputs, and makes you aware of your body, as well as relaxing it, facilitating deep breaths, which will increase the sense of equanimity and sense of body and mind working together. Mentally, working with different forms of craft, is also a tool to express your feelings and reflections on life, the good as well as the challenges and difficulties, without having to use your words and talk about it.

If you are conflicted in life, if you have a mind overload, doubts, joys, worries, pain etc., it is sometimes easier to express them through working with your hands than through words. Cognitively, you have to plan the order of the tasks, what the outcome and goal of your creativity should be, and when starting to reflect upon yourself, your strategies and life goals, the cognitive element is highly required in order to change your coping mechanisms and -strategies in order to increase your self-management and make the necessary changes in your life.

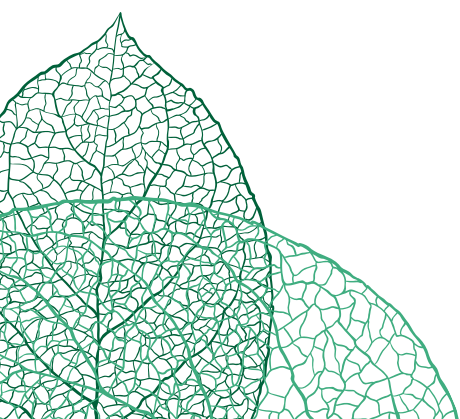
Workshops are also “safe spaces” - it is your creativity and thought-process which determinates the outcome and yours alone, there are no right or wrong, and nobody is able to judge your work. It does not require any previous skills, just clay, water, wood, tools and the proper environment and instructions if needed.

Lastly indoor activities can also be physical activities. If you are doing physical activity indoor, you do not need to worry about the weather or how to dress appropriately. When doing physical activities indoor, all tools are available and within reach if needed.

Physical activities are excellent for creating flow and grounding. It also increases your body awareness; what do you fell right now, how does your muscles fell? Your balance? Your respiration? Etc. Does it feel good or is it overwhelming? The focus is on how your body feels right now in the moment without environmental distractions.

Your felling of strength, endurance, agility, fitness, coordination, flexibility, deep respiratory breathing, can be transferred to the psychological aspect of your life (Bunkan 2008), such as keeping calm and in control of your emotions in difficult times, being able to say yes or no in everyday situations, keep your balance in life etc. Furthermore, physical well-planned activities adapted to the needs and challenges of the participants will give a sense of well-being, the feeling of a unified body and not just fragments and increased body awareness including who am I, what are my strengths and what are my resources as a person.

When ending an activity with physical exercises, it is expedient to end with some sort of session based on mindfulness to recollect the bodily impressions, give the participants time to reflect on how to transfer value to everyday life and its challenges from the activity, being able to focus on their strengths, and end the activity on a positive note.



TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF INDOOR ACTIVITIES

- It is important to find a suitable room preferable with a natural lightning.
- The room should be in a controlled environment sensory-wise, sounds, people walking by, smells etc.
- For the creative activities It has to be okay if you spill some paint on the floor, or otherwise make a mess.
- In the room you need the proper tool e.g. stafellis, chairs for all participants, aprons, exercise equipment etc.
- It is important to consider the timeframe, if there is not enough time, it is difficult to emerge in the activity and find your flow? If it is too long, the participants might get bored or emotionally drained.
- It is also important to consider when you have a break and how long it should last – maybe it is not necessary to have a fixed break, but instead let the participants decide when they need one.
- Another important aspect of the activity is the size of the group; is the room suited for 4 people or for 15? What size of group is the facilitator comfortable with? Is it important that it is homogeneous groups or is that irrelevant?
- Furthermore, it is important to plan the instructions/facilitation to the participants according to the activity
- Do any participants have a physical or mentally impairment, and how do we minimize these impairments?
- And lastly; how will you follow up on the activity. Do we invite the participant to give feedback as a group, do we talk to them separately, do we observe the group during the activity and then follow up with certain participants etc.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

As in the indoor activities, it is important that the outdoor activities are meaningful to their life, and that they are an active part of choosing and planning the outdoor activities, in order to obtain motivation throughout the activity.

The benefits of planning outdoor activities are many:

- If you succeed in creating an outdoor activity, where the participants experience a positive assessment of themselves and their capabilities, it will have an impact on their choices in life and adaptation of a positive outlook
- When having a positive outlook, it will make it possible for them to successfully manage the demands and problems of their daily life by choosing more constructive coping mechanisms.
- Outdoor activities will provide many different sensory inputs; the wind, sun, the surrounding environment, the grass, the trees etc. and also many sensory inputs from your body; the breathing, the muscles, your balance etc.
- There is no doubt that stays and activities in nature can be both health- and mood promoting. This
- does not mean that everyone should go out and do the same thing. On the contrary. It is very much about the individual or groups of people should be able to experience nature in a way that enhances and sustains the individual's health (3: natur-vejleder.dk).
- Being outside in nature strengthens the participants senses, provides well-being, provides the participants a possibility to put into words what they have experienced and form potential networks. Participants need to become curious about what is going on in nature and learn to pay attention, see, smell and listen when they are out cycling or walking etc.(1:suelteam.dk).
- Physically there are also many benefits in doing activities outdoor; your strength and condition improves, your balance and coordination improves, your flexibility and lung capacity improves etc.

Being outside is an activity you can do on your own or as a group. It is important to introduce participants to activities they are able to do on their own, as a suggestion to fill in spare hours during the day without being dependent on other people and their time and initiative.

When being outside in different surroundings, you become more aware of yourself, your body and your reactions and coping mechanisms.

As a facilitator it is important to acknowledge the participants when they discover new things, and over time it becomes a competence of the participants to discover new things, become excited and enthusiastic.

The facilitator asks what participants experienced, so thoughts and feelings are expressed. It is an alternation between using language and learning to speak and express. Participants experience glimpses of joy, well-being and inner peace. Feelings of worry, sadness and inner turmoil diminish or disappear for a while. At the same time, a whole new world opens up and participants have something new and positive to talk about.

Being outside is in an environment most of us are used to either from our childhood or now as an adult. It is a familiar and well-known environment, which allows us to use our bodies in the speed and force we are able to at the current time. Being outside also provides many sensory inputs from the surrounding environment as well as our bodies.

When being outside and using your body, you will become naturally tired, giving you a better sleep quality as well as keeping the daily rhythm, being awake during the day, sleeping at night. This is especially essential if you are suffering from sleep deprivation or a displaced circadian rhythm.

In recent years, it has become clear that sleep, especially deep sleep, plays a key role in our lives and well-being, for example in the production of hormones that develop and maintain our body and brain. Sleep improves the immune system, strengthens our memory and creativity, and helps prevent stress, anxiety and depression. It also helps your body to recover from previous physical exercises and activities. A good night's sleep contributes to a good life. In other words, good sleep is as crucial to our well-being and well-being as a healthy diet and exercise (13: psykiatrifonden.dk).

It's easy to be talented in nature. If you can plant a tree, you have talent. The participants discover that they have skills they didn't think they had, which gives them an initial sense of confidence and belief that they can do something in other areas too.



For example; when gardening, you will see results within a short timespan depending on the task you have chosen to do. This will provide you motivation, and energy to continue with a new task. When completing the tasks, your self-awareness and confidence rises, and affects your self-image in a positive manner.

When immersing in gardening, it facilitates a more positive outlook on life, on what you are able to achieve on your own and resilience.

Being outside gardening, gives you the feeling of achievement and pride of having laboriously planted a flower, felled a tree, collected garden waste etc.

Participants need to feel that they can take back control of their own lives in a healthy and constructive way. By doing so through activities and stays in nature, they get to experience a whole new "them" and whole new sides of themselves.

It is also possible to choose more calm activities outdoor such as fishing, walking etc., which leaves room for reflection. When being in contact with nature, it has a calming and stress-reducing effect (11: center-for-fokus.dk), which is beneficial to your mental and physical health. It allows you to be in flow, fully submerged in the moment, obtaining mindfulness without demanding any physical effort from you, besides being able to sit or stand outside in a longer period of time.

Outdoor activities give the possibility to start to taking back control of your own lives in a healthy and constructive way. By doing so through activities and stays in nature, you get to experience a whole new "you" and new sides of yourselves.

Another activity to do outdoors, is connecting to animals e.g. horseback riding.

Nature and horses have a stress-reducing effect as well as lowering your blood pressure. The calming signals from the horse are recognized by our nervous system. When reducing stress, it is easier to reduce the mental barriers and defenses, which increases the mental health and the possibility to work with your mental challenges (12: naturensommedicin.dk).

It is possible to go horseback-riding at many natural sights. You can rent a horse, which is used to the different trips and surroundings. The pace is calm and steady, so it does not require any specific riding skills of the participant.

Horseback-riding strengthens your muscles as well as your mental health. The combination of physical activity and mentally relaxing activities affects your self-awareness, body-awareness, ability to feel and show empathy and equanimity as well as bonding with another non-judgmental living being.

When riding a horse, you have to be the leader of the two of you, and take charge of the companionship of you and the horse, which increases your assertiveness (14: ridehesten.dk).

When you're guiding a big, strong animal full of instinct, you need to use your leadership skills well and wisely. When you experience success with your leadership skills, it gives you confidence that you can draw on in many other situations in life.

Even though horseback-riding is an individual sport, there is a very strong community among riders and other people in the stable. You all share the same interest and passion, for the horses and the riding-activities.

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

- Outdoor activities often require a basic physical condition of the body. It is therefore important to have in mind the length and the challenges of the planned activity – should it be a demanding activity, should there be focus on the balance, are there benches for resting if needed, do we need snacks and water etc.
- Is it possible to shorten or expand the activity distance if needed?
- Is it important to do the activity as a group, or is it more suitable to be individual with only one participant and one facilitator?
- What is the goal of the activity? To reflect upon life, life goals, express feelings or is it to train the strength of the body?
- How is the weather, and do the participants have the needed clothes, e.g. a warm coat, hat and gloves, or summer clothes?
- And lastly, we have to consider how we will follow up on the activity. Will we talk to the participants afterwards, will we talk to them during the activity and in that way collect our feedback, will we just observe the participants during the activity.
- Gardening is an activity which does not require much planning – if you have the different tools at hand, it is just to start the activity when you feel like it. You can choose the different task depending on your mood and strength of the day; if you are feeling tired, planting a flower in a pot is a straightforward and manageable task, whereas if you are feeling good and full of energy you can mow the grass, plant a tree, do some digging etc.
- If you need a break, you can sit outside on the outdoor furniture or go inside if you wish. Also, gardening is an activity you can do alone or with other people, and if you start as a small group, you can continue on your own if wanted.
- Just as gardening, fishing is an activity which does not require much planning – if you have a fishing rod and some bait at hand, it is just to start the activity when you feel like it.
- You can choose the duration of the fishing activity depending on your mood and strength of the day; if you are feeling tired, you can plan a short fishing trip in easily accessible surroundings, whereas if you are feeling strong and full of energy you can choose longer duration and more challenging surroundings.
- It might be a good idea, to check for places you can sit in need of a break, and also if you are planning for a longer duration of time fishing, you will need to pack snacks, food, and water in advance. Furthermore, the choice of clothing is important, so you do not become cold or too warm.
- The planning of an activity involving animals are a bit more extensive than other outdoor activities: You need to find a stable/site with horses, plan the transportation to and from the stable/site as well as contacting a horse-trainer/teacher, or a place where you can surround yourself with dogs, cats, rabbits etc. For instance, volunteering at an animal shelter and make an appointment for that.

CONCLUSION

When working with activities in Eco- Therapy, it is important to have the challenges, strengths and motivation-factors of the participants in mind as well as the learning objectives of the activity when organising and planning them. Some activities are preferably held indoors as others are more suitable to be held outdoors.

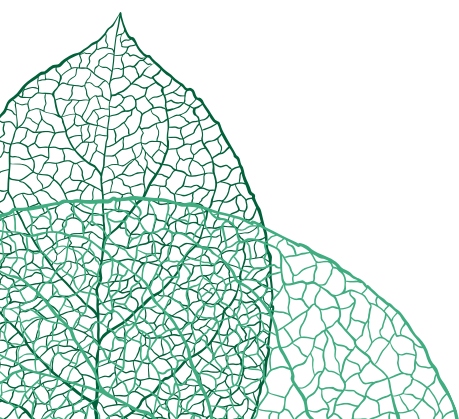
It is important to consider the physical, mental and cognitive benefits of the activity, while analyzing and planning it according to the participant, his needs and circumstances combined with the goals in order to achieve success

The main areas to consider in planning the activity are:

- the body functions and structures of people.
- the activities of people and the activity limitations they experience
- the participation or involvement of people in all areas of life, and the participation restrictions they experience, functioning of a person as a member of society
- the environmental factors which affect these experiences, and whether these factors are facilitators or barriers for the participant.

One way to motivate the participants is by asking about their interests, their life story and their goals of life, and connect it to an activity. Another way is to have enthusiastic instructors/facilitators, as motivation and engagement is contagious from one person to another.

Overall, this module aims to provide knowledge, analytical- as well as practical skills in analyzing and implementing activities, as well as serve as an inspiration to explore what other activities may be useful as part of eco-therapy. The suggested activities are merely suggestions and not the only options for activities for individuals with SUD.



PART FOUR

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN ECOTHERAPY FOR PEOPLE WITH SUDS





SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN ECOTHERAPY FOR PEOPLE WITH SUDS

INTRODUCTION

Working with people with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is not always easy. Due to the characteristics of SUD sufferers and the challenges they face, different factors and considerations need to be taken into account by professionals when dealing with them. These factors should also be taken into account when considering any therapy, especially ecotherapy.

In the following module you will find information on some considerations to take into account when trying to prepare and implement any ecotherapy activity with people with substance use disorder.

GOALS & LEARNING OUTCOMES



The aim of this module is to present different considerations that professionals should take into account when working with people who suffer from Substance Abuse Disorder and/or those who want to implement ecotherapy activities with them.

By the end of the training, participants will be able to know:

- What elements to consider when planning an ecotherapy or other therapy activity.
- On which elements to base an "intervention plan" for people with substance abuse disorder.
- Risks when working with SUDs related to ecotherapy.
- What elements can make people with SUDs not engage with ecotherapy activities?
- How to encourage engagement with ecotherapy activities
- The role of the therapist during ecotherapy

ASSESS THE PERSON'S BACKGROUND HISTORY

First of all, in order to design any kind of therapy activity (in this case ecotherapy activity) or work with any individual with SUDs issues, it is necessary to take into account the person's background. In order to do this, certain personal aspects of the individual need to be assessed:

Clinical history

Substance abuse disorders refer a group of somatic, cognitive and behavioral symptoms leading to drug self-administration repeatedly, despite recognizing the negative consequences both organic and psychological and social that entails (Sanz, 2019, p. 1). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), substance-related disorders include ten different classes of drugs (alcohol, caffeine, cannabis, hallucinogens, inhalants, opiates, sedatives, hypnotics and anxiolytics, stimulants, tobacco and other substances). Furthermore, substance use disorders can be divided into two groups: substance use disorders and substance-induced disorders, which include: intoxication, withdrawal and other mental disorders induced by a substance or medication (psychotic disorders, bipolar and related disorders, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder and related disorders, sleep disorders, sexual dysfunctions, confusional syndrome and neurocognitive disorders) (APA, 2013).

On the other hand, considering the neurological side, drug use interferes with how neurons in our brain send, receive and process signals via neurotransmitters (National Institute on Drugs Abuse, 2023a). However, not all drugs have the same effects. There are drugs that are central nervous system (CNS) stimulants such as cocaine or amphetamines, CNS depressants such as heroin or alcohol, or CNS disruptors such as hallucinogens; and the way they all affect our brains is different (National Institute on Drugs Abuse, 2023b; Sanz, 2019)

As such, substance abuse disorder includes a very broad spectrum of characteristics and symptomatology, as well as origins. Therefore, in order to start therapy, it is necessary to know the clinical history of the person and to know in detail all the elements that may influence the therapy (e.g. which drug is causing the addiction, if the person consumes more than one drug and can therefore lead to more than one effect, if the person has had other effects derived from the addiction, etc.).

In section 4.4., details on how substance abuse problems such as the occurrence of other mental disorders can influence one's adequateness to a ecotherapy programme will be assessed.





Personal history

According to the UNODC World Drug Report 2022 (UNODC, 2022), around 284 million people aged 15–64 used drugs worldwide in 2020. There are multiple reasons why people use drugs throughout their lives: social pressure and desirability, curiosity, performance enhancement, to feel better, etc., but not all people who use drugs develop addiction and/or SUD (National Institute on Drugs Abuse, 2023c)

When planning and implementing a therapy activity (also in the case of ecotherapy) it is necessary to consider what led the person to become an addict. According to the National Institute on Drugs Abuse (2023c), there is no single factor that determines addiction, but the more risk factors a person faces, the more predisposition that person has. On the other hand, the more protective factors for addiction, the less predisposition. These factors can be biological (genes, stage of development, and even gender or ethnicity), environmental (home, family, peer and school) and others such as early use and how the drug is ingested. For example, Lopez-Quintero et al (2011) found that acculturative stress, racial/ethnic discrimination, low social capital and genetic factors may contribute to explaining racial-ethnic variations among the risk of transition to SUD.

Thus, if we want to work with people with SUD, it is necessary to take into account all the factors that may have influenced the development of the addiction in order to better understand the person's situation and to have a clear idea of how to deal with it during therapy.

Relationship with nature and other stimuli

As stated by Perry, Zbukvic, Kim & Lawrence (2014), among others (e.g. Gomez & Carrobes, 1991), drug use is associated with different environmental stimuli (discrete, discriminative and contextual) that produce drug seeking by addicted individuals and encourage possible relapse. This is based on the Conditioning Theory and is an element to take into account when carrying out any type of therapy and/or activity with people suffering from SUD. This relationship is also found in other studies (e.g. Gomez & Carrobes, 1991; Goddard, Son Hing, & Leri, 2013).

In relation to ecotherapy, activities within this approach can take place in different settings, with a multitude of possible stimuli that can be a reminder of consumption. It is necessary to take this into account and ensure that the environment in which activities take place does not promote consumption.

On the other hand, beyond the presence of these stimuli, it is necessary to explore the person's relationship with nature to ensure that this contact with nature is positive. If the person has a negative relationship with nature (for example, if they have suffered a traumatic episode as a child in a forest), professionals must choose the environment that best suits the person's condition to carry out ecotherapy. For instance, if the person is not receptive to carrying out activities in a forest, start with activities in a park or in an indoor space with the presence of natural elements.

Previous experience with ecotherapy or other therapies

Another important aspect to take into account is whether the person has already been involved in some kind of therapy (including rehabilitation centres), and how it has been carried out. For a professional, it can be useful to have a visual of what activities the person has already done in a therapeutic environment and whether these have been helpful or not. In this way, one can decide whether to follow the same approach or to adapt it aiming the benefit of the patient.

In relation to the practice of ecotherapy, knowing if the person has already done any ecotherapy activities as well as his/hers assessment can be helpful in order to discuss results and expectations.

DETERMINE SUITABILITY AND MATCH THE ACTIVITY TO THE PERSON'S NEEDS AND TREATMENT OBJECTIVES

Secondly, in order to determine the suitability of the ecotherapy activities and to be able to adjust them to the individual, it is necessary to have an "intervention plan" that defines the objectives to be achieved. This plan should be based on:

Person profile

As stated in the previous section, knowing the person (and her/his SUDs condition) is fundamental in order to establish the activities you are planning to develop and to assess their adequacy as well as to foresee not only whether they will be viable, but also whether they will be effective.

Needs of the person

When planning ecotherapy activities, and before defining the objectives to be achieved, it is necessary to know the needs the individual has (relaxation, self-knowledge, affective, etc.). It is therefore advisable to take their opinion into account and not to take their needs for granted based solely on what we have read about the person.

Also, although it will depend on each case, it is possible to start by addressing the most immediate needs and redefine the intervention programme and activities over time, once these are covered.

Treatment goals and objectives

Once the needs are established, the objectives and goals can be defined. These must be realistic, reasonable, flexible (according to what the person is achieving) and evaluable (that can be evaluated in an objective or subjective way). It is also important that they are agreed upon and that the patient is aware of them.

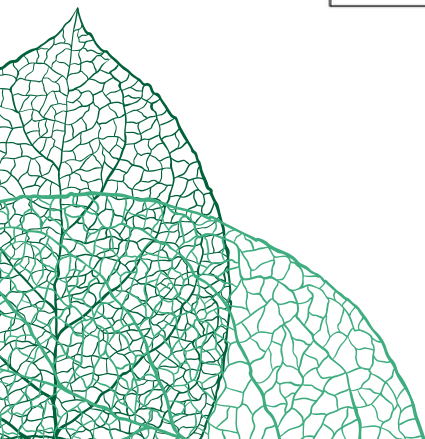
CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENT AND IDENTIFYING RISKS

Once the personal background, the individual's needs, the treatment objectives and goals are defined, other crucial aspects of the intervention plan can continue to be developed, such as assessing which environment is suitable for carrying out ecotherapy activities with people with substance abuse problems and what risks may be encountered during the activities. In Module 3 (Organising Indoor and Outdoor ecotherapy Activities) a general discussion on how to organise ecotherapy activities is presented. As such, this section is focused on working with people with SUDs.

Location: Indoor or Outdoor?

Once the personal background, the individual's needs, the treatment objectives and goals are defined, other crucial aspects of the intervention plan can continue to be developed, such as assessing which environment is suitable for carrying out ecotherapy activities with people with substance abuse problems and what risks may be encountered during the activities. In Module 3 (Organising Indoor and Outdoor ecotherapy Activities) a general discussion on how to organise ecotherapy activities is presented. As such, this section is focused on working with people with SUDs.

Indoor settings (e.g. room)	Outdoor settings (e.g. forests)
(Generally) Less space available	(Generally) More space available
Less natural elements available	More natural elements available
(Generally) Greater control of the group	(Generally) Less control of group
(Generally) Less novelty for participants	(Generally) More novelty for participants
Greater accessibility	Reduced accessibility if not close to a natural environment



In addition, when working with people with SUDs it is necessary to consider that sometimes it is not possible to choose where to carry out these activities (e.g. in the case of people in a detoxification centre, where the users are inpatient). In such cases, try to adapt the activities as much as possible to the setting (e.g. Clare, 2014).

Risks and other factors that may interfere with the feasibility of the activities and their results:

Working in groups: although the advantages of group activities are widely known, as a professional, leading a group can be a challenging task. Among other things, take into account the size of the group, motivation, interest and the existing relationship (if any) between participants when organising group activities.

Type of activity: choose an activity that fits the profile of the participant. Take into account what is described above (profile, needs and objectives) to choose the most suitable one.

Safety: Assess the security with which the activity can be conducted. Remember that working with people with SUDs is also linked to dealing with other possible pathologies (e.g. other mental disorders). Choose environments that are controllable and accessible to all types of people..

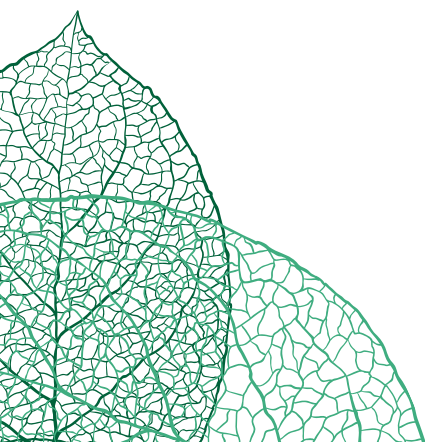
Motivation: another risk to be faced is the possible low motivation of people. This is often the case for individuals who are "forced" to come to therapy or who are not fully convinced that the activity can be of any use to them.

Don't generalise: try to adjust the activity to each individual or group. One type of activity may not have the same positive results in one group as in another. There are a multitude of practices within ecotherapy, assess which is the most appropriate for each occasion.

Communication: Communication is essential. Inform participants of each step in the process. Reinforce progress and try to communicate empathetically about goals that are not being achieved.

Boundary confidentiality and legal concerns: all professionals must be aware of this when carrying out any activity or therapy (e.g. Williams, 2007; Clare, 2014).

Other challenges: Working with people with SUDs involves being aware of other barriers such as physical and mental health issues. These barriers will be further developed in the next section.



COMMON BARRIERS FOR PEOPLE WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE DISORDER NOT TO ENGAGE IN ECOTHERAPY ACTIVITIES.

As mentioned earlier in the module, there are certain challenges that may make it difficult for people suffering from SUDs to engage in ecotherapy activities (or other therapy activities). In many cases these may be linked to the individual's clinical condition, but there are also barriers linked to socio-economic status, views on therapy or lack of motivation.

In relation to the clinical condition of the individual, many of these barriers arise because, as indicated above, substance abuse not only leads to SUDs but is also linked to other conditions such as psychosis, bipolar disorder, depression or anxiety (APA, 2013). Therefore, it is important to know what the characteristics and symptomatology of these disorders are and to know how to act in each case.

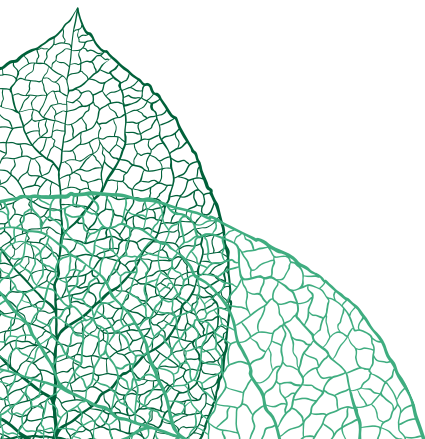
In addition, another barrier may be linked to phobias that the individual may have. In the case of ecotherapy, linked to natural elements and the performance of activities in nature, it is necessary to bear in mind the possibility that participants may suffer from any of the following linked to natural elements:

- Agoraphobia
- Zoophobia
- Botanophobia
- Anthophobia
- or other phobias linked to natural elements.

It is also necessary to take into account that, whether or not resulting from substance abuse problems, participants may have different disabilities and/or sensory or mobility deficits that may affect their performance (and therefore their engagement) with the activities.

In relation to the social-economic status of the individual, barriers such as lack of time to participate in ecotherapy activities, lack of money or residing far away from where the activity takes place and not being able to get to the location may affect how people engage with activities.

Finally, related to people's understanding of ecotherapy, barriers such as lack of motivation, resistance to therapy and considering ecotherapy as irrelevant or too simple to the goals of the treatment are some of the challenges that professionals may face (e.g. Chaudhury & Banerjee, 2020).

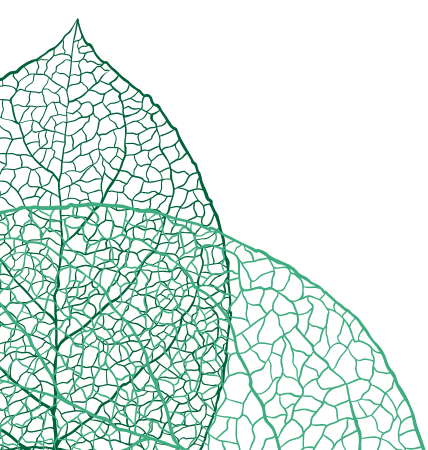


HOW TO HELP PEOPLE WITH SUDS EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE IN ECOTHERAPY ACTIVITIES

Then, how can we get people with SUDs to participate in ecotherapy activities? Below you can find some key points:

- Remind them of the benefits of ecotherapy: the benefits of ecotherapy are widely acknowledged. By reminding people suffering with SUDs of these benefits you will enhance their belief and opinion about ecotherapy activities and ecotherapy as a therapy. To further explore these benefits refer to Modules 1 (What is ecotherapy?) and 2 (Substance Use Disorders' Treatment: Is There Space for ecotherapy?) (Also more evidence is given by the research developed by Russell et al., 2013).
- It is necessary to make them "participants in therapy". Not only treat them or consider them as receivers of therapy, but as active agents in their recovery. In many cases, people who succumb to substance use accept therapies and recovery activities as something imposed, that is, something they are obliged to do (either by the institution they are in, by legal agreements, by the insistence of family and/or friends, etc.). It is necessary to change this view of therapy and make them see the need and advantages of participating in therapy as an active agent in the recovery process.
- Another important way to strengthen engagement is the promotion of responsibility with the therapy. It is necessary to stress to participants that the process of change is also their responsibility. Only when they decide to actively participate in therapy and be responsible with it will they be able to observe the results of therapy. In order to achieve this, for example, you can assign them simple activities outside of therapy, such as: "For the next time we meet I want you to have taken a walk in the park listening to the sounds of the birds".

However, it should also be noted that, as Delaney (2019) points out, "ecotherapy is not for all adults". Before starting any kind of ecotherapy activity "be sure to talk explicitly to your clients about their understanding, experiences, feelings, and hesitations about the natural world" (Delaney, 2019, p. 54). Therefore, if after trying it we notice that the person is not comfortable and does not engage with the therapy, it is best not to try to force and look for another type of therapy or activity that can help, even if this means a change of the professional.



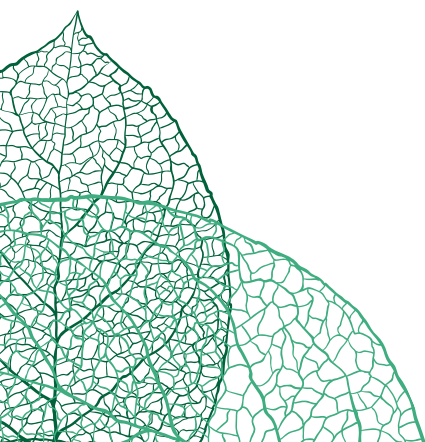
THE THERAPIST'S ROLE IN ECOTHERAPY

Above all, the therapist has to be open, supportive and understanding towards the person. Not encouraging stigma is one of the most important aspects of working with substance abuse problems. As stated by Zwick, Appleseth and Arndt (2020), stigma around people with SUDs is widespread and has detrimental effects on people with SUDs in many areas (treatment, care, research, policy and society as a whole). One of the most common ways in which stigma is perpetuated is through language and how we refer to or talk about SUDs people. Zwick, Appleseth and Arndt (2020, p. 3) propose different ways to address stigma, which professionals working with this population need to be aware of and try to encourage:

- Educate the public and professionals about substance use disorder and the effects of stigma
- When writing papers and communications be selective about the words you use and be sure to remember people who used substances are, first and foremost, people.
- Speak out about substance use stigma
- Educate the public and professionals about the use of medications for substance use disorder is an evidence based practice when combined with groups and individual sessions.
- Listen, but withhold judgement
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect
- Avoid hurtful or dehumanizing labels
- Demand equality and parity in medical coverage
- Petition government lawmakers for less criminal penalties for people who use drug and other laws that enable stigma
- Use social media to get the message out
-

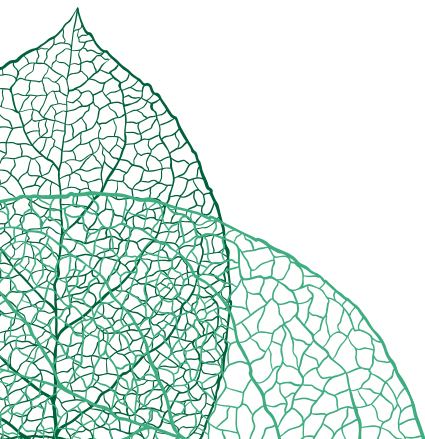
Apart from these, other actions that are part of the therapist's role in ecotherapy can be:

- Shift from traditional perspectives
- Take a secondary role to nature
- Incorporate the experience in nature into the therapy process
- Combine soft and hard skills
- Adapt to a context with limited control



CONCLUSION

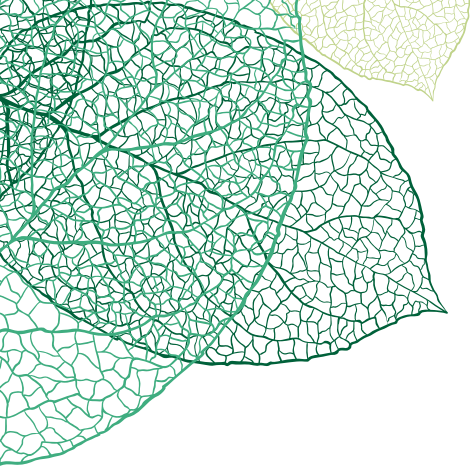
After reading this module it should be clear that working with people with SUDs is not always easy. That is why therapists and professionals must consider certain considerations in order to develop ecotherapy activities. Thus, it is essential to know what elements are necessary to design and carry out an ecotherapy activity, as well as the risks and barriers that professionals must face. ecotherapy has multiple benefits for people with SUDs, but these benefits can only be achieved if ecotherapy is done in the right way.



PART FIVE

PRACTICAL ECOTHERAPY ACTIVITIES





PRACTICAL ECOTHERAPY ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

In this module we present 10 practical eco-therapy activities that can be used by professionals (e.g. counsellors, social workers, therapists, etc.) in their work with people with substance use disorders (SUDs) as well as in addiction prevention activities. Divers activities have been selected that can be either used working with individuals or with open groups, in socio-pedagogical addiction prevention measures or in clinical addiction rehabilitation therapy. The spectrum ranges from short and simple relaxation or mindfulness exercises to complex systemic interventions lasting several hours, which can be used depending on the objective or issues to be worked on. The materials at hand describe for all activities what benefits they have or for which questions and problems they are used, how they are to be prepared and how they are to be carried out with the client.

GOALS & LEARNING OUTCOMES



The selected activities are aimed at addiction professionals who accompany people with SUDs professionally, provide counselling, or work in an educational or therapeutic capacity. The aim of this module is to enrich their work with professional and innovative approaches and methods from Eco-Therapy that are particularly effective.

By the end of this module, participants will:

- know different ecotherapy activities that are based on sound background knowledge and have been tested in practice.
- know which activities they can use to extend their own activities into the working space of nature
- be able to support their clients' processes of change, development and self-awareness in a sustainable way and use the positive impact factors of nature in doing so
- be able to select and implement suitable activities from Eco-Therapy for the current problem situation of their client.

Overall, this module serves as a reference and practice guide for addiction professionals who want to learn about and integrate nature as a federating factor in their work with people with SUDs.



ECOTHERAPY ACTIVITIES

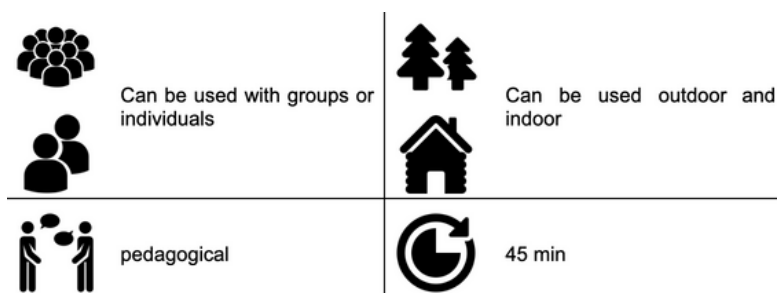
All activities are described in the same format. At the beginning you will find icons that give you some basic information about the activity:

- Conduct indoors or outdoors
- Suitable for groups or individuals
- Field of application pedagogical or therapeutical
- Duration

Activities classified as "pedagogical" can be carried out by trainers, social workers, social pedagogues etc. who have experience in supporting people in self-reflection processes or who would like to try this out. Activities that are classified as "therapeutical" are rather recommended for professionals who have a basic systemic or psychotherapeutic training in order to be able to accompany the triggered processes with the clients in the best possible way. Ultimately, however, each professional is free to decide which activities he or she feels comfortable with.

This is followed by a detailed description of the activity. Firstly, its specific use and field of application, material and preparation, then follows the detailed description of the implementation process and the exchange or integration phase to conclude the activity. For some activities, suggestions for modifications or variations are also given. Each activity ends with tips for implementation and the original source of the activity.

TRAMPOLINE MODEL



Benefits and fields of application

The TRAMPOLIN model was developed by CePT - Centre de Prévention des Toxicomanies which also owns the copyright for this activity. In the model, the trampolin represents the needs and resources of a person - ones needs are located in the center (the spring cloth), the resources for fulfilling needs represent the springs all around.

Life satisfaction and everyday well-being are essential prerequisites for successful and lived addiction prevention as well as for a way out of addiction. They give us "bounce in our step" in everyday life. The metaphor TRAMPOLIN can be used to reflect and document current needs and resources in a relatively simple and interactive way.

In the context of ecotherapy, the focus is specifically on the needs and resources in the context of nature. The trampoline model helps a client to understand what resources nature offers and that much is available in the near environment and without much extra effort. One only has (to learn) to use it accordingly.

Professionals can use this method to find out which aspects of ecotherapy might be helpful for a client by finding out what they define as resources for themselves e.g. generally building a closer connection to nature, gardening, contact with animals, art therapy approaches, etc.

In the further course of counseling/therapy, corresponding resources can be unlocked and necessary competencies can be trained and expanded. For implementation in practice, this means that caregivers and institutions in the client's environment should be called upon to create corresponding experiential spaces, offers and opportunities.

Preparation and materials

Trampoline model template

Description

The professional introduces the trampoline model and its explanatory approach to life satisfaction through need satisfaction. The group/client is told that they have resources and competencies available for their own need satisfaction. Using the following questions, the group/client is encouraged to reflect on their own needs and resources and to complete the trampoline model.

- What do I do (e.g. consume) in everyday life and why?
- Which of my needs do I want to fulfill with it?
- What do I really need or do I actually need something else?
- With what do I fulfill my needs, what are my resources?
- What does the whole thing look like when I am not well, when I have problems or stress? Are my coping strategies "in the green"?
- What do I want to or can I change? Are there critical (e.g. addictive) behaviour patterns or developmental tendencies?
- Can I tap into alternative (possibly new) resources, try them out and use them for preventive purposes, such as nature/wilderness for relaxation, stress reduction, self-efficacy, mindfulness...?
- Which competencies do I have for this, which ones could/must I expand?

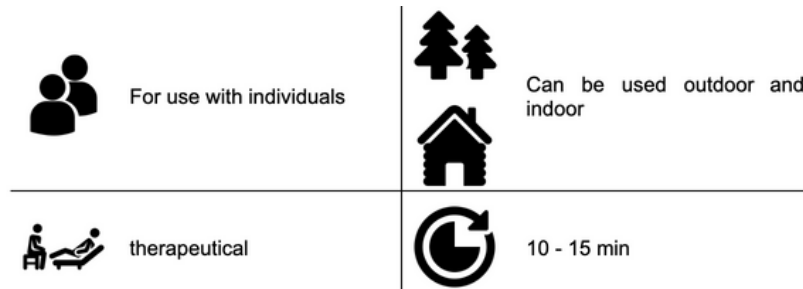
Exchange phase

The central aspect when using the TRAMPOLIN model is individual or group reflection and discussion and, if necessary, the further processing of diverse motives and needs that lie behind all human actions and thus also behind problematic behaviors. Here, for example, aspects such as group membership, new experiences or fun can be the focus.

Source: Mohra, S., Linnenberger, J., Carius, R. (2021): Suchtprävention und Soziale Arbeit mit der Natur. Luxembourg: cnapa - Centre National de Prévention des Addictions.

The copyright for this activity is held by cnapa - Centre National de Prévention des Addictions

WORKING WITH NATURE SYMBOLS



Benefits and fields of application

The work with concrete symbols (pictures and objects) was developed by M.E. and G. Wollschläger more than 20 years ago for diagnostics and therapy in psychotherapy. Symbols are also often referred to as interpreters in therapy and counselling. In the work with symbols, these are offered from the outside, arouse feelings in the patient and are selected by him, thus becoming their own symbol. Many patients show a clear lack of self-awareness, reflection and expression of one's emotions. In the outside, e.g. in pictures and objects, they can experience a reflection of their inner state of mind. Symbols often help us to identify and sort situations. They form a bridge to feelings, emotions and thoughts and help us to make the inexpressible clear.

Working with symbols can significantly help people who are escaping from negative experiences or aspects of their lives through consumption. Symbols can, for example, open a door to talk about traumatic events that are otherwise impossible to talk about.

There are different approaches to incorporating symbols into therapeutic work. For example, they can be used as a central element of systemic constellation work, where a problem system is reconstructed using symbols (see next activity). However, symbols can also be incorporated as micro-interventions in any session when the professional feels that the client is having difficulty being clear about and formulating their own thoughts and feelings about an issue.

Preparation and materials

Everything can become a symbol, if it is charged with emotions by a person: Pictures, cards, photos, figurines, sculptures, natural materials. In the context of ecotherapy, mobile natural materials (e.g. thorns, feathers, branches, stones,...) or solid elements of nature (e.g. tree, boulder, river) serve as symbols. Even unpleasant remains in nature such as dog excrement or rubbish can develop a strong symbolic power. If the therapy session takes place indoors, the professional should provide a symbol case filled with ~15 different natural materials from which the client can choose. If you include perishable items in your symbol case, please ensure they are 'fresh' before each session. If the therapy session takes place outdoors, the professional does not have to provide materials that can be used as symbols as they are freely available. However, it is helpful to have a notebook or moderation cards and pens with you to be able to make notes or labels if necessary.





Description

The professional asks the client to find a nature symbol for a certain element or aspect (person, feeling, belief, event in the past, etc.). This is especially helpful if the professional feels that this element has significant influence on the client without the client being aware of it, or if the client has difficulty talking about this element. Symbols are especially helpful for clients who have built a thick, seemingly impenetrable armour around their soul.

Nature symbols are particularly rich in possibilities and effects because nature itself lives and develops. During outdoor sessions, symbols also often "appear" to a client quite abruptly and generate resonance. The dry leaf on the snow is like me - lonely and alone'. It is the task of the professional as a process facilitator to pick up on such references and illuminate them more closely.

The professional instructs the client to direct his or her attention to associations, feelings, inner images or fantasies. The core of working with symbols is to let someone reach themselves. It is not primarily about achieving anything (Schneider, W., 2016).





Possible variations or modifications

Dialogues with persons or inner parts: Client sits in a neutral place from which they view their issue/problem from their perspective. Then a symbol/representative (tree, stone, snail, blade of grass,...) for a certain person or also an inner part is searched for/discovered in nature. Client can look at the representative, walk around it, think about why he or she has chosen it, can say something to it (cathartic effect) and has the possibility to look at him/-herself from its perspective. Dialogues between oneself and the nature proxy can arise. Through the intensive confrontation, surprising insights can arise for the client and new ideas for action can be developed (Gans, C. et al. 2020)

Source: Wollschläger, M.E. und Wollschläger, G. (1998): Der Schwan und die Spinne. Das konkrete Symbol in Diagnostik und Psychotherapie. Bern: Huber.

Schneider, W. (2016): Grundlagen für die Arbeit mit Symbolen. <http://schneider-therapiekoffer.de/Grundlagen.pdf> (06.03.2023)

MINDFULNESS WALK

 For use with individuals	 Outdoor
 pedagogical	 1-1.5 hrs if a whole mindfulness walk is to be carried out. 10 - 15 min for individual mindfulness exercises

Benefits and fields of application

On a mindfulness walk, different mindfulness exercises are performed. Mindfulness is the practice of purposely bringing one's attention to the present-moment experience without evaluation (Baer, R., 2003). Mindfulness practice is employed in the treatment of drug addiction. These treatments are successful for reducing dependence, craving, and other addiction-related symptoms by also improving mood state and emotion dysregulation (Snacho, M. et al. 2018).

Why mindfulness in nature?

Nature invites you to let your thoughts wander and listen with all your senses. It can be physically perceived through the 5 sensory channels (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory). In this way, it supports arriving in the present and adopting a mindful attitude. If one allows nature to have an open effect on oneself, something in us can feel addressed and relate to one's own inner states. This can be, for example, an anthill that one encounters while reflecting on the dynamics in a group, or dried leaves that become a symbol for sadness or despair. Letting these perceptions sink in can inspire and provide insight.

Preparation and materials

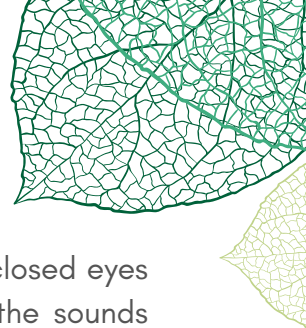
Mindfulness walks can be conducted low-threshold in a park. However, it is helpful to find places or times with fewer distractions from other people. A person passing by in the forest can be experienced as more irritating than in the park, where the client expects it.

For counselling practice, one does not necessarily need nature to be as pristine as possible. In individual work it can be sufficient to go into the garden. Just looking at an old tree and the sky can trigger a lot of resonance.

Description

On a mindfulness walk, different mindfulness exercises are performed. The basic rule is that any exercise can be changed or stopped if it is not helpful. However, it should not be stopped if the mindfulness touches something unpleasant. The exercises are non-strenuous. At the beginning, the client is asked about his or her previous experience with mindfulness and is introduced to the practice of mindfulness during the walk by doing exercises that engage different senses.





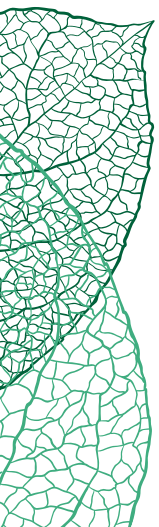
Selection of exercises

- Listening to sounds and noises: In this exercise, the client concentrates with closed eyes on all the sounds and noises he/she can hear. From which direction are the sounds coming? Are they near or far? What do the sounds and noises trigger in me? Perception of one's own inner mood, images or associations triggered by these sounds. Perception of the gaps between the noises and sounds. Focusing on the silent space around me. This mindfulness exercise can be used well as an introduction to mindfulness practice, where the focused perception of the acoustic sensory impressions slowly led into the perception of the silent space.
- Slow mindful walking: The mindfulness exercise of slow walking is known from Zen Buddhism. What do we perceive outside and inside when we walk fast or slow? How is the ground shaped and how does our body react to it?
- Perceiving an inner image: A natural object or a section of a landscape is observed. Afterwards, with eyes closed, "an inner picture of what has been looked at can emerge". By repeatedly alternating between brief external perception and completion of the inner image, visual perception can be intensified and one's own reaction to the changed perception can be observed.
- Perceiving gaps: This exercise is about noticing gaps or the "empty" space between objects, such as the branches of a tree, and feeling inwardly what this triggers in me. Through the unfamiliar perspective, we can detach ourselves from our perceptual concepts and focus our attention on the conceptless space in between. This can move us deeply on an emotional level.
- Wide Mindfulness: In wide mindfulness, we switch our focused gaze to one that does not hold an object. To do this, we perceive the surroundings with a soft, relaxed, receptive gaze. All optical impressions are allowed to come to us and are taken in. Then we perceive our own posture as a whole and our own breathing is perceived without changing it. Finally, all focus is abandoned and all impressions from outside and inside are allowed without reinforcing or repelling them.
- Contemplation with an object of nature: This exercise is about finding a natural object and directing one's attention to associations, feelings, inner images or fantasies without wanting to gain any specific knowledge. Contemplatively, an object can be looked at in silence. It is about simply looking and being inspired without wanting to achieve a result. Inner images, associations, feelings or essential themes can emerge. The aim is to trigger an individual resonance in the client. Experience shows that it can be useful to give the participants impulses in between so that they do not get lost. To do this, pick up on themes/concepts/emotions that are preoccupying the client that day and let them search for natural objects that they associate with them.
- Moments of unintentional silent walking without focus should be interspersed again and again to allow for physical relaxation through movement and short time-outs without falling out of the mindfulness practice.






Tips for the implementation

- Especially in contemplative meditations, it can be helpful if impulses are given again and again in the form of open questions, in order to be securely anchored in the experience and not to lose oneself.
- Participants often have a strong fixation on the sense of sight and objects. Therefore, it can be useful to repeatedly include wide mindfulness and spatial perceptions.
- It is often found helpful to repeatedly draw attention to the inner perception, as this is unfamiliar.
- Intermittent mindful relaxed walking can be experienced as physically and mentally relaxing. Likewise, more ease can come from shifting location every so often and creating a new focus.
- Since mindfulness exercises can be done alone but are often lost in everyday life, professional guidance is experienced by the client as relaxing and inspiring. Here, it is conceivable to provide small reminder cards for mindfulness exercises individually experienced as helpful in order to gradually anchor the mindfulness practice in the client's everyday life.
- The offer should consist of a mixture between invitations, leaving space and offered impulses that are experienced as helpful.
- As professional, one should be present, empathic, and appreciative of the client.
- Professionals should be open to the client's experience as they modify exercises and rather extend the invitation to experiment.

Source: Ortmann, Ruth (2019): *Zeit zum Spüren und Lauschen - Natur mit allen Sinnen erfahren und mir begegnen.*



BLIND WALK

 Recommended for use with groups.  Use with individuals is possible depending on the setting. See section: Possible variations or modifications	 For outdoor use
 pedagogical	 1 - 1.5 hrs

Benefits and fields of application

Blind walk is an exercise that focuses on "self-experience" in nature. The world around us changes when we block out the – for modern people – dominant view. And with that, we change too. What do we feel – and especially how do we feel – when we don't rely on our eyes? Does it help us to see ourselves more as a natural part of nature?

Participants get the opportunity to reflect on their own handling of uncertainties, new circumstances, hurdles and obstacles. Through this, own life skills are perceived and developed. The method originates from wilderness education and is often used in addiction prevention measures. The method can also be useful to familiarise people with their own competences in dealing with new and unknown things before they start withdrawal or abstinence. In this way, they can reflect on these competences in the new life situation.

Duration

1 - 1.5 hrs

Preparation and materials

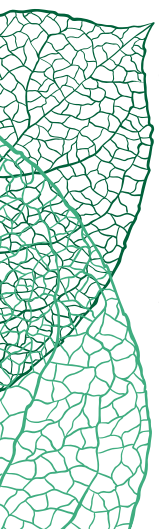
To prepare, choose an area away from a path (e.g. in a forest or park) whose soil has as many different qualities as possible, such as small depressions, foliage, roots, trees of different ages and species (animal structures should be avoided, however). Then you need about 100 meters of thread or string. A kite string or a ball of wool or similar is well suited. You stretch the string around the trees – either as a circular route or as a route with a start and finish. It is also stimulating to vary the height, which is of course adapted to the range of the participants. There is also the variant of hanging additional tactile objects on the string. The preparations are carried out out of sight of the participants.

Description

The group is invited to walk the thread course.

It is important that the group participants take part in the exercise voluntarily. However, if reservations are expressed, they can be encouraged to participate by professionals.

Depending on time, group size and depth of experience desired, individuals or small groups are blindfolded and led to the beginning of the course. Only here is the task explained, to walk to the end in constant hand contact with the cord and at their own pace.





It is helpful if an observer is waiting at the end to calmly welcome the participants, help them to remove their blindfold and quietly encourage them to do so. and quietly asks them to sit quietly nearby and reflect. For participants, a sighted companion can also accompany them along the course.

The very brave can also decide to walk barefoot.

Exchange phase

When all participants have arrived, they sit down together to share their experiences. This should still take place outdoors if possible, but can also be done indoors.

Reflection questions that can be asked:

- What did you feel, hear, perceive?
- What emotions did the blind walk trigger?
- Do you seek risk?
- How do you deal with difficulties/fears?
- Can you identify your own competences that you can use in daily life to deal with difficulties?

Not every participant has to answer the questions aloud in front of the group. Participants share their experience only if they want to and every experience is accepted with appreciation. Even participants who do not say anything in the final round reflect intensively on the experience – they are just not (yet) ready to share it.

Some people – children especially – want to walk the course again with their eyes open. At this point you can still give time to do your own experiments with the thread. The most interesting variations often arise in the playful – e.g. when a hidden person is suddenly felt on a thread-covered tree.

After the exercise, it is important to remember to completely dismantle the course!

Possible variations or modifications

Blind walks can be carried out in many different ways. Other settings could be:

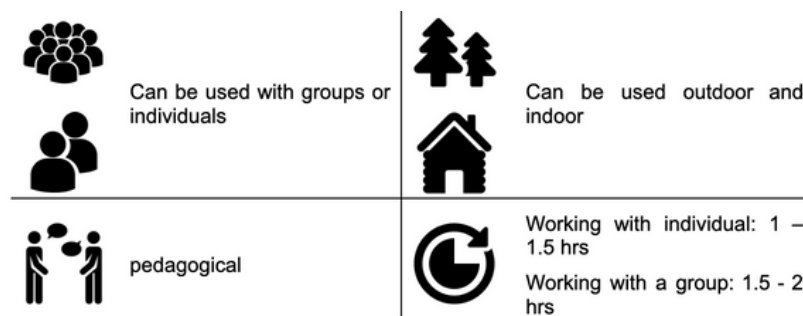
- Orienteering after the drum: Instead of a thread course, a drummer can stand at the other end of the terrain to be crossed and the participants have to follow the beat of the drum. For this, a route must be chosen where the participants can walk in a straight line to the drummer, as it is not possible to follow the sound of a drum along a winding path.
- Barefoot course: Instead of a 100-metre route, a short section with different ground conditions can be chosen that the participants cross blindly and barefoot. In this case, the perception is intensively directed towards dealing with discomfort under one's own feet. Short barefoot courses can also be used when working with individuals, as the preparation is not so complex.

Tips for the implementation:

- It is strongly recommended to walk the course once yourself with your eyes closed. On the one hand, to recognise possible dangers, on the other hand, to put oneself in a similar mindful perception mode as the participants.
- When conducting blind walks with groups, it makes sense to work with several professionals at the same time to ensure the safety of the participants. At least one person should be in charge of the start and one of the finish – depending on the length of the course, it is also useful to have someone in between.
- It is advisable to have bandages and disinfectant spray at hand to treat abrasions or small cuts immediately.

Source: Mohra, S., Linnenberger, J., Carius, R. (2021): Suchtprävention und Soziale Arbeit mit der Natur. Luxembourg: cnapa – Centre National de Prévention des Addictions.

"MY AREAS OF LIFE" PIE CHART WITH NATURAL MATERIALS



Benefits and fields of application

The activity supports clients in becoming aware of their individually relevant areas of life, such as work, family, friendships, financial situation, leisure time, hobbies, home, health, personal development, spirituality, etc. and to take stock of their satisfaction with the respective areas of life. Often, people with SUDs have serious problems in several areas of life at the same time, such as financial worries and health complaints, as well as conflicts with close people due to the addiction issue. It is then often difficult to find a suitable starting point for social work or therapy. In this case, it has proven useful to carry out a visual assessment of the different areas of life early on in the joint work. The activity can also be repeated at the end of a therapy/measure to show the development visually.

In pedagogical or therapeutic work, people like to work with visualisations because concerns, questions or assessments usually become clearer when they are visualised in a picture, a symbol or on a scale.

Preparation and materials

If the activity is done outdoors, a place should be chosen that offers participants/clients a selection of natural materials that they can collect and use for their chart. It does not have to be a wild forest. An area where stones, sticks, branches, leaves, etc. can be found is sufficient.

If the activity is carried out indoors, the professional must collect as many different natural materials as possible in advance in sufficient quantities, which are then made available to the participants/clients.

Description

The activity starts with an imagination of the participants' individual areas of life.

The professional names a maximum of eight areas of life that are adapted to the participants. The participants close their eyes and perceive the inner images that arise in them for the respective areas of life. The imagination can be reinforced by indirect questions such as "I wonder how satisfied you are with your job" or "What would you say if someone asked you if you were happy in your relationship".

After the imagination, the participants are given about 30 minutes to choose areas of life that are relevant to them and to create an individual pie chart out of natural materials. First, a circle is made of e.g. stones or branches and then divided into pieces of cake. Each piece represents an area of life. Then the pie pieces are filled with natural materials from the inside out – the happier a participant is, the further out the pie piece is filled.

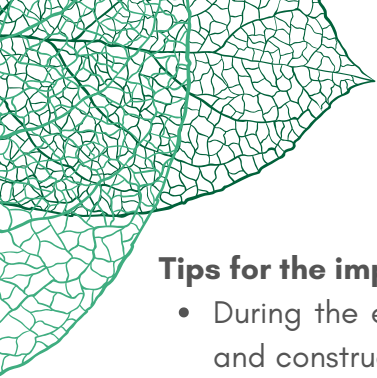
Exchange phase

After 30 minutes, the group reassembles (or professional with client) and participants one by one present their individual pie charts. Participants explain their greater or lesser satisfaction with individual areas of their lives and also tell whether they had any special insights when laying out the diagram. The audience has the opportunity to give feedback or ask questions. Possible questions could be "Your pie chart indicates that you are very satisfied with your financial situation. For me it is strange that you filled this pie piece with thistle because they are so picky and hostile. Was that a conscious decision? Can you explain why you picked this material?" In this way, the presenter receives impulses to look at his or her areas of life from a different perspective. Often new insights are gained in the process.

At the end of the exchange phase, all participants name the area of life in which they perceive the greatest need for change or development. This does not necessarily have to be the area of lowest satisfaction.

Afterwards or in the next session, a clear goal for further cooperation/therapy can be set. It would be possible, for example, to fill in the pie chart with natural materials to such an extent that it expresses the desired satisfaction.



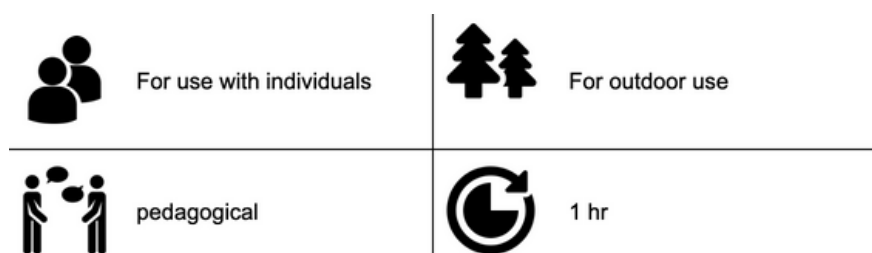


Tips for the implementation

- During the exchange phase feedback should always be formulated in an appreciative and constructive manner. Especially in group work, the professional must make sure that all participants adhere to this rule.
- If the professional has the feeling that the group might have difficulties giving positive and constructive feedback, sentence starters should be given to the participants in advance to ensure that their statements are marked as an expression of opinion and are not generally valid statements. Examples could be: "When I look at your chart, I have the feeling...", "From my perspective...", "I believe..."

Source: Gans, C. et al. (2020): *Arbeitsraum Natur*. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH.

RITUALS - CLOSING THE PAST / WELCOMING THE FUTURE



Benefits and fields of application

The term "ritual" can be used in different ways. It can describe a recurring action or routine. In ecotherapy understanding, however, a ritual is a translation of an inner intention or change into concrete action. The ritual marks the transition between a theoretical plan and its practical implementation. Through a ritual, the transition often seems stronger and more binding.

In working with individuals with SUDs, rituals can be especially helpful to start withdrawal but also to work through addiction triggers.

Many people in therapeutic treatment really live in the past, where they are trapped with their thoughts and feelings. It is difficult for them to actively connect with the present and even more difficult to imagine a future that is relevantly different from the past. A ritual is designed to help a client make just such a transition - to honor the past and welcome the new.

A ritual should be simple and uncomplicated and should not distract the client with esoteric accessories. Nevertheless, there are no limits to what the client and professional can choose as ritual. In principle, it is to be welcomed if the client develops his own ritual, which supports self-efficacy and integration. If this is too much for the client, the professional can of course make suggestions. However, the implementation is up to the client.



Preparation and materials

Before performing a ritual with a client, the professional should give some thought to planning. What is the right time? Which place is suitable? What kind of change is being sought and what kind of ritual might be appropriate?

Furthermore, it is important to make it clear to the client in advance that a ritual is not a magical practice that will solve their problem. It is only a symbolic action that gives more weight to the client's own decision.

Description

A ritual can be initiated in different ways by a professional. The process described here is only an example.

A client can be invited to walk the "path of the past" on a little-used field or forest path. Similar to a timeline, the client is invited to tell about their past while walking. Starting with birth, through childhood, school years until today. On the way, the client remembers different experiences and stations of his life. The client is invited to consciously perceive and observe the path and the surroundings. To pay attention to resonances in one's own body and mind that are triggered by what is perceived. What life event does the boulder that lies alone on the side of the path and makes him sad remind him of? Why does the small spring have such inspiring power? What "gifts" (symbols of nature that awaken positive resonance) can the client find along the way?

At a certain point of the walk, the present is finally reached. The professional marks the spot to make it visible (e.g. with a stick on the path). Before the client takes a step into the present, it is necessary to make a review. What was observed? Has the perspective changed? Could aspects be let go of? What gifts can be taken away from the walk? What is holding the client back from taking the decisive step? It may also be necessary to go back with the client to the relevant point on the path where an issue is still unresolved. Sometimes there are events in the past that remain unchanged. Not everything can be healed... Then it is important to register and respect this and to support the client in finding a way to move on anyway. Only when the path of the past has been thoroughly traversed can the client consciously dare to take the step into the present and from there into the uncertain future. This step is actually a very small but symbolic action.

Follow-up

In the follow-up conversation, the aim is to find out from the client how they felt during the ritual. The most important stations of the past can be reflected on again. The gifts and presents that the client took home from the walk in the form of nature symbols are important resources of strength for the way ahead. In the follow-up discussion, it should be discussed how these can now be used most helpfully. Carry them in your pocket and be able to touch them regularly? Put them in a specific place in the home? The goal is that the client's mental focus is no longer stuck in the past, but is anchored in the present through the symbols.

Possible variations or modifications

There are many different rituals that can be performed.

- Crossing a symbolic barrier, in the form of a stick, stream, woodpile, park bench, crossing a road,...
- Letting go of the past through nature symbols – during the walk, physical symbols are collected for aspects of the past that should not enter the future. These symbols might be buried, sunk in the river, burnt, placed in a casket and locked away, etc.

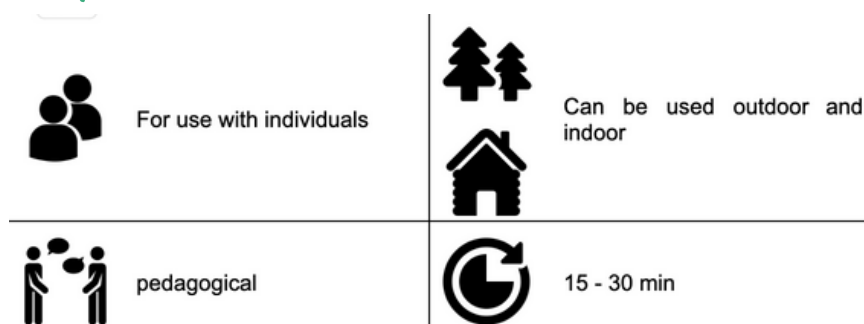
Experienced professionals can, with some inventiveness, use the ritual in settings other than the "path of the past". For example, the ritual could be the starting point for a specific change of action. During the session, a specific plan could be developed – as detailed as possible – how to act in the future in a specific situation and which behavior should be replaced by it. For example, a person with alcohol problems might make a specific plan for how he or she will go grocery shopping in the future to avoid buying alcohol. As a starting point, all of the client's beer glasses could be disposed of or smashed in the form of a ritual.

Tips for the implementation

- When treading the "path of the past", it must under no circumstances be a matter of awakening old traumas. Old issues that have already been dealt with should not be reactivated, but only looked at "from a distance".
- The ritual is an activity that should rather be used in the 2nd half of an educational/therapeutic programme. As a professional, it must be ensured beforehand that there is no activated trauma in the client's life and that the client is in principle ready to move into the future.

Source: Gans, C. et al. (2020): *Arbeitsraum Natur*. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH.

THE 3S TECHNIQUE



Benefits and fields of application

The 3s technique is a technique to quickly deal with mishaps, defeats or mistakes, but also with exuberant joy, so that these emotions do not affect further performance or decisions. The technique was originally developed for tennis players who, due to a limited time of serve, have to concentrate quickly on the next serve.



The "3s Technique" supports clients to get out of a strong emotional excitement, to regenerate and after a short time to focus again on the actual action. For example, after interpersonal conflicts, one can remain goal-oriented and capable of action.

When working with people with SUDs, this technique can be particularly helpful in trigger moments where addictive substances have been used to bring about emotion regulation - examples could be the 'frustration cigarette' smoked after a failure or the 'reward beer' indulged in.

Preparation and materials

No preparation or material needed

Description

After the client has described situations for which he/she would like to improve self-regulation, the professional presents the sequence of the exercise.

The number "three" stands for one third of an available time. For example, if you have 2 minutes in total, these 2 minutes are divided into 3 time segments of 40 seconds each.

First third of time: Consciously winding down

Strong emotions such as anger or joy release energy in the body that must first be dissipated. To do this, it is useful to gather yourself mentally for a short time and then release energy through a powerful movement. The client is invited to try different movements to experience the physical aspect of strong emotions. The given space should also be used for this. Maybe running a few steps, making big circling movements with the arms, jumping,.... At the beginning the client should try "big" movements to activate the physical component. After a few minutes the professional helps to find a suitable movement that the client feels comfortable with and that is appropriate for the situation. This can be strong movements with arms, legs or feet, clearing the throat, coughing, breathing in strongly or exhaling intermittently, jumping, short shouting, clenching the fist, etc. The important thing is that the energy release is done consciously.

Second third of time: To collect oneself mentally

The goal is to center one's energy internally. This can be achieved, for example, by breathing deeply in and out. One feels the breath and directs the attention to the center of the body.

Third third of time: Focusing on the next step.

Attention is returned to the action before the disruptive event. The client draws a mental picture of his following desired action or his emotional state.

The sequence is practiced and individually adapted until it feels coherent for the client and he can imagine an application in the mentioned typical problem situation. The practice can also be done by role-playing or in nature with nature symbols as stand-ins.

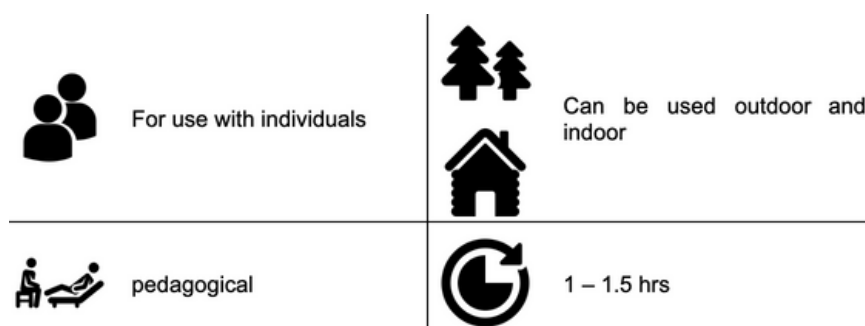


Tips for the implementation

The "3 technique" can be continuously trained in further working meetings so that it really solidifies. For example, a sign can be arranged that the client gives in angry or joyful situations (eg raising the hand), and then practice the technique. Outdoors, these situations can be bumps in the path or slopes, indoors it could be a drafty window or a joyful bird chirping outside.

Source: Gans, C. et al. (2020): *Arbeitsraum Natur*. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH.

SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATION WITH NATURE SYMBOLS



Benefits and fields of application

The general benefits of symbols acting as “translators” was already described in the previous activity on “Working with nature symbols”.

When working with symbols in the framework of a systemic intervention, a constellation is usually made in which the symbols are used by the client as a proxy to describe a problem. Through the constellation of the symbols, which take on the role of persons or aspects/elements, a complete problem system can be recognised and causes and effects can be looked at in detail. The aim of the constellation is that the client recognises and understands his own role in the problem system and thus discovers his possibilities of influence in order to gain the ability to act and change the system.

In psychotherapy, addiction is not treated as a disease in its own right but as a symptom that often finds its cause in complex psychological situations and states of life. For people with SUD, it can therefore be useful to look at their "addiction problem" in this way from different perspectives to find out what their motivators for use or even abstinence are, where triggers are, which people are enablers and which resources can best help them heal, etc.

Preparation and materials

Everything can become a symbol, if it is charged with emotions by a person. For details please see activity “Working with nature symbols”.

The professional should always bring a notebook or moderation cards and pens to be able to make notes or labels if necessary.

Outdoors, a suitable place should be chosen where the nature constellation can be carried out. This can be a piece of open ground but also, for example, a large (mossy) flat stone/rock or possibly a park bench.



Description

Introduction: At the beginning the client and the professional clarify which problem is to be worked on during the session and what goal is to be pursued. This can be formulated with: 'A good result would be if...'. Afterwards the professional explains how to work with the symbols and shows the client the collection of symbols he or she has brought with him-/herself (indoor) or demonstrates (outdoor) that all mobile nature objects can represent symbols. In doing so, the professional avoids already assigning descriptions or emotions to the objects, such as "the stone is cold and heavy, just like the responsibility you have described that weighs on you". One never knows what associations objects will evoke in clients - perhaps the stone would have had comforting qualities due to its smooth surface, or because it has a slight shimmer in the sun. Therefore, any personal associations should be kept quiet when explaining the method.

Selection of symbols: The client is asked to find symbols for all relevant aspects of the problem.

Setting up the symbol constellation: Afterwards the client is asked to lay them out on the floor so that complete picture of the problem emerges. Some clients prefer to speak already during this process, explaining their symbol choice and where to put the symbol. Other clients remain silent during this process - both are fine. During this process, the professional pays attention to the order in which the symbols are placed and in which spots. Before continuing, the professional asks several times whether all relevant aspects are represented and if the picture is correct and complete.

When the problem picture is ready, the professional gives the client a few minutes to let it sink in and create inner resonance.

Letting the symbols speak: Now the client is asked to explain the symbols. 'How do you experience this symbol? What does it say to you, how would you describe it?' The process must be accompanied empathically while the professional pays close attention to how the symbols are described. Which one first? With which emotional expression? Which one takes special attention? After the initial explanation of the symbols by the client, the professional can use different methods to support the client in gaining more clarity.

- **Associating:** After the description of symbols, the client is asked to feel how he or she feels, in the contemplation of the whole picture as well as individual symbols.
- **Focusing:** The client is asked to choose the symbol that has the greatest meaning or power for him or her, or that is most likely to give an answer to the initial question.
- **Changing perspective:** The client is asked to take the perspective of one or more of the elements involved. Questions are addressed directly to these system elements 'How do you feel about (client's name)', 'How are you doing here in this situation as (element)', 'What are your needs in this system?'
- **Dissociating:** Between the other methods and sometimes also between the observation of individual symbols, the professional allows the client to dissociate. To do this, the client can take a step back, turn around, shake out, etc.



Reconstruction: When the current state of the problem/topic is completely mapped and has been experienced interactively, the problem image is transformed/developed towards a solution image. At this point it is useful to revisit the goal formulation from the beginning of the session: 'A good outcome would be if...'. In this phase, work should only be solution-oriented. What resources can be added to the system picture to achieve the goal? The client is asked to find additional symbols for helpful (internal and external) resources and to include them in the solution picture. Often it is also necessary to move elements in the constellation, but very rarely to remove them to the margins. In any case, none of the original elements in the picture may be moved without a corresponding explanation: 'What makes it possible for you to move your profession out of the centre of the picture?'

The same methods as in the previous phase can be used to experience the solution picture in detail and to secure it as realistic.

Integration/Transfer: Finally, the client is asked to formulate concrete "next steps" that he/she would like to implement in the near future in order to turn the solution picture into reality.

As a reminder, the client may choose one or more symbols and take them home.

Possible variations or modifications






The reconstruction phase can be initiated by the miracle question. 'If you were to fall asleep and a miracle happened overnight and your problem situation just disappeared into thin air, what would your constellation look like?' The client can relocate all elements of the picture at this point without explanation or justification. One follows up with the client with the resource search and tries to find a realistic way to get to this picture.

Tips for the implementation:

- Clients often forget to place themselves in their system through a symbol. Ask accordingly 'Where are you in this system? Which symbol represents you?'
- Repeatedly ask if the picture is complete, if something is missing, if everything feels coherent, etc.
- Keep directing the client's focus to the emotions by asking specific questions when the system is described in a predominantly rational way. You can also bring in your own observations: 'You have chosen a symbol for your fear that is clearly larger than all the other symbols. How does it feel when you look at this picture?'
- The professional does not touch or move symbols in the system unless specifically asked to do so by the client.

Source: Malitz-Picard C. *Die therapeutische Arbeit mit den konkreten Symbolen.* <https://docplayer.org/37261874-Die-therapeutische-arbeit-mit-den-konkreten-symbolen.html> (06.03.2023)
Gans, C. et al. (2020): *Arbeitsraum Natur.* Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH.

PROGNOSIS TRAINING

 Recommended for use with groups	 For outdoor use
 Working with individuals is possible depending on the setting. See section: Possible variations or modifications	
 pedagogical	 Depending on the complexity chosen, between 1h to a full day

Benefits and fields of application

Prognosis training is also called "training for realistic self-assessment". Participants learn to realistically assess the demands of a situation and correctly evaluate their coping skills based on a concrete task in nature. The goal of the exercise is to transfer these coping skills into one's own private/professional daily life.

Participants have to deal with the task in detail and assess in which quality and quantity they can fulfill it with their existing competences. At the same time, they practice focusing their attention on the task at hand and dealing with the psychological stress caused by performance and time pressure and with possible failures.

The method is especially recommended for people with SUDs who take substances to relieve stress and cope with failure. A realistic assessment of requirements and one's own competencies to fulfill them can reduce stress and lead to more feelings of success, thus reducing triggers for substance misuse.

Preparation and materials

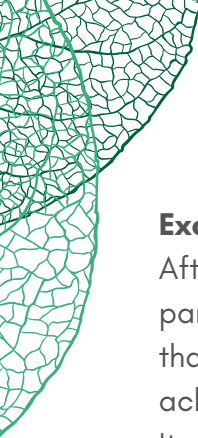
You need copied map sections of the terrain in question and a cell phone or walkie-talkie per participant.

Description

The professional hands out a map per participant with a marked path. Obstacles, tasks, etc. can be built in. Prediction training can be adapted to the physical abilities of the participants - the simplest version is to simply cover a certain distance. More complex, strenuous tasks such as climbing walls can also be incorporated. Solving logic tasks on the trail could also be an option for less athletic participants. There are no limits to the imagination of the professional at this point. It is important that the card or an appropriate supplementary sheet clearly indicates the task(s) to be performed by the participants.

Before the start, the participants give a forecast of how they will complete the task. How long will it take them to cover the distance, or how much of the distance will they manage? Will they be able to complete all or part of the built-in tasks? Participants record their prediction in writing.

After completing the task, they check to see to what extent their respective predictions have come true. Afterwards, each participant reflects for him/herself what led to his/her prediction being correct, exceeded or not achieved.



Exchange phase and transfer to practice

After the individual work, the experiences of the participants are discussed in plenary. The participants can be asked whether they have noticed thoughts or emotions in themselves that they know from other challenging situations. Were these thoughts more beneficial for achieving the task or hindering/blocking?

It can also be asked what experiences participants have had in the past with too low or too high competence expectations.

As a professional, be prepared that there may be participants who externalise failures and internalise successes. If a participant predominantly blames external factors for their failure, direct their attention to their own competencies and courses of action. 'If you felt that the information provided was not sufficient to make a realistic assessment, what could you have done about it?' 'What would you have needed to make a realistic assessment?', 'Are there factors you could have considered but did not?'

It may also be interesting to consider what external factors influenced personal performance and to what extent these were predictable.

To practise prognosis training on a daily basis, participants can think about the tasks and challenges of each day and make predictions for the day. In the evening, the course of the day is reflected upon. Over time, more and more precise forecasts can be made. The realistic assessment of requirements and one's own competencies increases self-efficacy and brings a regular sense of achievement.

Possible variations or modifications






The activity can also be done with individuals. However, the preparation of a route and tasks for individuals is relatively costly for the professional. In this case, it is recommended to plan short routes.

Tips for the implementation

- Exchange cell phone numbers with all participants in case someone gets lost or needs help on the course.
- Depending on the length of the route or the size of the group, it may be useful to work with several professionals in order to be able to provide the necessary support in an emergency.

Source: Gans, C. et al. (2020): Arbeitsraum Natur. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH.

MAKING SEED BOMBS/BIRD HOUSE

 Recommended for use with individuals	 For outdoor use
 Can be adopted for use with groups	
 therapeutical	 No specification possible. Depending on the application by the professional.

Benefits and fields of application

When clients are accompanied over a longer period of time, the counselling/therapy can be given a framework with a connection to nature. This can be achieved, for example, by making seed bombs, a bug hotel or a bird house together and placing them in nature. Making things together can already be used therapeutically – making something with one's own hands can increase self-efficacy, create a sense of achievement or simply be fun and strengthen the relationship of trust between client and professional.

In the course of the following therapy/counselling, the place of the sown plants or the erected bug hotel or bird house can be visited again and again – even in different weather or at different times of the year. This is particularly useful for clients who have lost their self-efficacy and are convinced that they are predominantly externally determined and have no influence on their lives themselves. The observed developments at their sight can provide interesting food for thought for a client. The overall goal is to let the client experience that he/she is part of nature – while the environment does have an impact on him/her, at the same time he/she can shape and influence it.

This is the most open and least structured activity in the Eco-Therapy project. It gives the professional and client a lot of freedom on how to integrate it into the joint work. The place can be visited in every session or only every few weeks/months or not until the last session. Also, the issues that arise from observing the place in the course of the future cooperation cannot be planned in advance. The project could be a complete success, a colourful meadow could emerge, many insects could buzz around, etc. whereby the client's active influence on the environment and his or her self-efficacy can become a theme. Or the project flops – nothing grows, no bird comes to visit. Then dealing with failures could become a topic.

Preparation and materials

Depending on the client's preferences and the available tools and materials, seedbombs, a bug hotel or a birdhouse can be made. Seedbombs are definitely the easiest and fastest option.

Here you can find a sample video tutorial for all three activities:

[Seedbombs](#)

[Bug hotel](#)

[Bird house](#)



Description

First, client and professional physically engage in creating seed bombs, bug hotel or birdhouse. The professional uses the physical activity to engage in conversation with the client. One can clarify the client's connection to nature, if he/she knows what biodiversity is and how it is supported by what is built, if the client sees him-/herself as part of nature, etc. Subsequently, professional and client identify a suitable place for the seeding/set-up. The location should be easily accessible for both so that it can be visited regularly during further counselling/therapy.

Exchange phase

At each visit, the professional has the client describe what changes he/she notices. 'Has anything grown yet?', 'Are there any visitors?'

The professional also directs the perception to the inner resonance of the client. 'How do you like that something is growing here now?' 'Thanks to your birdhouse, birds find shelter and food here. How does it feel?'

If the desired/expected result does not occur, this can also be an exciting impetus for further collaboration between professional and client. What were the client's expectations and were they realistic? How does the client deal with disappointments? What has to happen for the action to be considered a success for the client? Was the success of the project within the client's sphere of influence (selection of seeds, site, weather,...). All insights gained at this point can also be transferred to other life situations of the client, in order to clarify internal resources, to identify beliefs about oneself, etc.

Modification

The chosen sight for the seedbombs, bug hotel or bird house can be combined with the "sitting place" routine from Coyote Mentoring (Young, J et al., 2014). In this activity a client finds a place in nature where he or she feels comfortable. Then the client visits this place regularly alone and makes friends with it. The goal is to perceive it with ones whole being.

The client should get to know the place at all times of the day, in all seasons and in all weather conditions. Over time, a big picture of this place should develop in him or her. How plants, animals and minerals live together there and how he or she belongs to this picture. It is crucial that the client comes to rest there. In this way, the client will connect more deeply with the earth and with himself or herself. The place will actually deepen everything that comes up in therapy.

Tips for implementation

- Due to the difficulty of predictability, this activity is only recommended for experienced professionals who can react confidently and very flexibly to the emergence of unforeseen issues.

Source: Inspired by Niepel, A.; Vef-Georg, G. (2020): *Praxishandbuch Gartentherapie*. Hogrefe.

Young, J., Haas, E., McGawn, E. (2014): *Mit dem Coyote-Guide zu einer tieferen Verbindung zur Natur - Grundlagen der Wildnispädagogik Band 1 - Handbuch für Mentoren*. Biber Verlag.



CONCLUSION

This collection of practical ecotherapy activities has hopefully stimulated and motivated you to integrate this therapeutic approach into your daily work with people with SUDs. We can only recommend you to be brave and take the step into nature with your clients. In the beginning, this can be a challenge even for professionals to break out of the familiar (indoor) sphere. But as healing aspects of nature can be for your clients, they can also fertilise your work in a new way - and who knows what wonderful blossoms will sprout from the new way of working together.



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Project Ref. No.: 2021-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000025287