

# Mental Health Benefits

Healthy  
in nature



## How to Use this Information

This information highlights the *mental health benefits* people receive when they connect with nature and how being outdoors improves our overall well-being.

### ► Promote the concept!

Use this information to help promote healthy in nature activities, policies and programs in your area.

### ► Spread the news!

- Give this information and research to members of the public, fellow staff members, municipal leaders, community partners and others.
- Incorporate this information in your communication materials such as a recreation newsletter or programming guide or in correspondence with municipal council and community partners.



## Know the Information



- Whether it's spending time in nature, playing outdoors or living in greener, more natural neighbourhoods. The more a person visits an urban open green space, the more the person reports lower stress levels. Even five minutes outdoors has a positive impact. <sup>5,8</sup>
- Walking outdoors has a positive effect on one's mental health. It reduces stress, hostility and symptoms of depression. It improves sleep and it creates feelings of liveliness and energy.<sup>3</sup>
- Being outdoors:
  - contributes to a positive outlook on life and enhances life in general. <sup>2,3</sup>
  - improves a person's mood.<sup>2,3</sup>
  - creates feelings of positive self-esteem and promotes vitality and meaning to life.<sup>2,3</sup>
  - contributes to our ability to cope with and recover from stress, illness and injury.<sup>1</sup>
  - reduces feelings of anger, confusion, depression, sadness, anxiety and tension.<sup>3,4</sup>
  - promotes self-healing from depression, abuse and chemical dependency.<sup>3,4</sup>
  - gives a person a greater ability to cope with adversity and life issues.<sup>3,4</sup>
  - enables a person to feel calmer, think more clearly and demonstrate generosity.<sup>3,4</sup>
  - encourages people to be creative and curious.<sup>7</sup>
  - help people develop a sense of wonder.<sup>7</sup>
  - improves a person's ability to make decisions, solve problems and control and direct one's emotions and behaviours.<sup>7</sup>
  - improves academic performance because people concentrate better. <sup>9,10</sup>
  - provides cognitive restoration that improves one's memory, attention and reaction time.<sup>2,3,6</sup>



- ▶ When children play outdoors:
  - it nurtures language and collaboration skills;
  - it improves awareness, reasoning and observational ability;
  - they are more eager to learn and play in more diverse ways.<sup>5</sup>
  
- ▶ Studies show that children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) behave better and have less severe symptoms when they are outdoors.<sup>1,7</sup>
  
- ▶ Even indirect exposure to nature, such as looking out a window at nature, has benefits, including:
  - helping people feel relaxed and calm;
  - improving one's mood;
  - recovering from mental fatigue;
  - focusing the mind;
  - helping to restore the brain's ability to process information.<sup>2,3</sup>
  - Even imagining nature or imagining being outdoors provides mental and emotional benefits.<sup>1</sup>
  
- ▶ Gardening is associated with enhanced cognitive functioning such as processing thoughts, memory and speech, improved mood and less anxiety.<sup>2,9</sup>



FOOTNOTES

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