##

## August 2022

Lessons we can learn from nature



**What lessons can we learn from nature? Why not put this question to your learners? Here’s our thoughts.**

**How to face fears and control risk**

Being outdoors in an unfamiliar setting can be a bit unsettling and maybe even frightening, for some children, teens and even adults! However, just as nature can settle and heal itself, once out in the open-air nature calms people, reducing stress levels and can help change moods from anxious to relaxed. Just being in nature and dealing with uneven terrain and changing conditions requires us to use our brains differently, which can cause a switch from irrational fearful thoughts to improved mood, less anxiety, and positive emotions. Tackling natural obstacles and challenges allows children to develop a sense of courage and confidence which will better prepare them to make intelligent risk assessments later in life.

## How to show patience and perseverance

Unlike the salmon repeatedly trying to overcome obstacles to get upstream or a seed waiting patiently to begin to grow, we aren't born with patience and perseverance. As humans we develop these traits. Spending time in nature encourages us to slow down, enjoy the beauty around us, and understand that success doesn’t always come without hard work. Climbing a mountain can be hard work but you can be rewarded with wonderful views and a sense of achievement. So, when working towards a goal, try and stay motivated and keep going. You might not see the fruits of your labour immediately but keep working away and hopefully all your hard work will pay off.

**Give don’t take**

From food on our plates, natural resources to build our homes to places for us to visit and enjoy, nature provides us with a wealth of things for free! ‘Leave nothing but footprints. Take nothing but photographs.’ Spending time in nature and its beauty makes us more appreciative and more likely to feel the need to conserve and protect the environment. So, follow nature’s lead, give something back, plant some flowers which in turn will help the bees. Leave some water out for thirsty birds and animals – not only will you be helping the natural environment but the act of giving our time or resources has been proven to make us happier!

**How to work as a team**

This is an important life-skill highlighted by spending time outdoors and appreciating that tasks are often easier when working together with others. Like ants who live and work together in huge teams called colonies to dolphins who use multiple methods of communication to direct, lead, and protect each other, teamwork rules. Nature works as a team with all species of plant and animal reliant on each other and their place in the chain. So, the next time you want to put the tarp up for shelter or you need some help to carry resources outside, don’t go it alone, work as team.

**How to work independently**

The other side of the coin to teamwork is working independently. Like animals, as leaders and educators, our role is to encourage children to learn the skills they need to eventually become independent and stand on their own two feet. Learning important skills such as cooking on a fire or putting up a shelter can give children confidence, a pride in their own achievement and the ability to be more self-sufficient.

**How to learn like animals**

Animals learn by playing. Playing contains all necessary life lessons for animals – learning to use their bodies, learning about relationships with others, learning to hunt and feed. Natural Resource Wales places great value on children and young people’s right to play in natural spaces. Nature play contributes to physical, social, emotional and cognitive development, forging a strong connection to nature and helping to lay down lifelong pro-environmental and healthy behaviours. Playing also provides children with opportunities to learn and practice ‘real-life’ skills. If you would like to learn more, take a look at our [**‘The benefits of playing in nature’ poster**](https://cdn.cyfoethnaturiol.cymru/media/694574/poster-benefits-of-playing-in-nature.pdf).

**How to use our senses**

Animals rely on their senses to survive. From finding food, locating a mate and avoiding danger, sensory organs are vital for animals. As humans, we are no different! Being outdoors can heighten, stimulate, and train our senses. Many therapies that help people overcome learning difficulties are focused on providing sensory stimulation. Using our senses also helps us develop concentration and focus.

**How to still the mind**

It’s difficult to be distracted by thoughts when your mind is being stimulated by the sounds, colours, and experiences of nature. Many people report that simply being in nature is as effective or even more effective than meditating indoors. Nature’s relaxing effect is all in the science! Phytoncides are substances that are given off by trees to protect themselves from harmful bugs, disease and bacteria. Present in the air, phytoncides benefit human forest visitors by lowering the concentration of stress hormones in our blood. So go on, head to your local woodland or beach and feel the sunshine and the breeze on your skin, listen to the birds in the trees and let the phytoncides do their work!