

# **Ten Favorite Ecotherapy Practices**

Experiential practices for clinical and non-clinical use

**Compiled by Ariana Candell LMFT, R-DMT, founder of The Earthbody Institute**

Working document 4/28/18—to be expanded in fall 2018

## 1. Sense Walk

**Goal/Benefits:** To help people to arrive in the natural environment in their senses, body, present moment, curiosity.

**Recommended populations:** groups, couples, or individual clients (if have established safe touch)

**Description:** Since sight is such a dominant sense, if we close our eyes, our other senses are enhanced. A sense walk opens us to a new experience of ourselves, our senses and the natural world.

### Steps:

- Demonstrate the sense walk process to the group (as described below) to create safety.
- Choose partners and who will guide first (leader) and close their eyes first (follower).
- Establish safety in each dyad by the leader asking their partner how they'd like to be guided: holding their hand, or a hand on their shoulder. Leader asks partner about any other physical or emotional safety needs.
- As a dyad decide where to start the walk, or just start from where you are.
- Leader guides follower to several different sensory experiences, such as trees, plants, ground, water, stones...
- Leader attunes to how long partner needs with each sensory experience
- Encourage using non-verbal communication instead of speaking unless there's a physical safety issue,
- Be creative, have fun, explore!
- When 1st bell rings, switch roles without talking. Come back when you hear 2nd bell.

### Reflection/Processing:

See below with timing section

### Possible timing:

3 min demo and description of experience

7 min each sense walk

5 Dyads share about what was surprising, what they liked, feelings, etc.

5 Group share about any aspects of their experience

5 Optional: Journal or draw about the experience

### Author/Credit:

Ariana Candell, LMFT, R-DMT  
<https://theearthbodyinstitute.com>  
[arianaca@sbcglobal.net](mailto:arianaca@sbcglobal.net)

## 2. Embodying Nature

**Goal/Benefits:** To enhance connection with the natural world: somatically, relationally and creatively. To experience diverse qualities of nature to support the development of somatic qualities in oneself.

**Recommended populations:** Groups, individuals, couples, families, youth

**Description:** Nature is abundant with diverse somatic qualities: the solidity and stillness of boulders, rootedness and expansiveness of trees, flow and adaptability of water... These qualities can serve as somatic, visual and energetic models for people needing to develop these in their body and life.

**Steps** (with suggested timing):

- 5-10 Group or leader picks one or two aspects of nature to demonstrate the experience, such as a tree and a flower.
- Model and do the experience all together from the steps below.
- Send group off for 10-15 minutes to find an aspect of nature they want to explore in this way.
- What do you see as you look: colors, shapes, textures?
- What somatic or energetic qualities do you notice?
- Ask permission to connect and feel yourself in this new relationship: open your heart, your mind, and your body
- Notice what qualities you feel from it such as: strength, gentleness, opening,
- Staying in relationship, explore embodying the qualities it is offering with: your posture, movements and stillness.
- Explore embodying various qualities: such as: bark, height, branches, roots...
- Follow your intuition in the communication process and notice your sensations and feelings
- Thank your nature partner for sharing this experience with you.

**Reflection/Processing:** Starting in dyads and/or continuing with the whole group, describe and/or show your what qualities you experienced in your body and what you learned from embodying your aspect of nature.

**Suggested timing:** See above

**Author/Credit:**

Ariana Candell, LMFT, R-DMT  
<https://theearthbodyinstitute.com>  
[arianaca@sbcglobal.net](mailto:arianaca@sbcglobal.net)

### **3. A Love Letter to the Earth**

**Goal/Benefits:** Connect with our love or gratitude for the Earth or an aspect of the natural world, and strengthen our bond with them. A good way to connect with nature when we're indoors.

**Recommended populations:** Individuals or groups with the ability to write.

**Description:** Writing a love letter or a thank-you letter to the Earth or to a special being or place in nature allows us to connect with them wherever we are, although it's more powerful in a natural setting. It's usually easy even for those who don't typically like writing.

**Steps:**

- Have paper and pencils or pens available, or people can use their own journals or notebooks. (Write by hand, not on a computer.)
- Ask people to call to mind a being or a place in nature that they feel a special connection with and write a love letter or a thank-you letter to them, or to the Earth. Encourage participants to really feel their love or gratitude and express themselves freely in the letter.
- Clarify timing and what to do when they are done. Let them know they will have the option to share about their experience or read some or all of the letter, but this won't be required.

**Reflection/Processing:**

- With an individual, ask them to share about their experience writing the letter, and give them the option of reading part or all of it to you.
- With a group, invite them to share in partners and/or ask who wants to share with the full group.
- Suggest that they read the letter aloud some time, and directly to the place or being they wrote to if possible.

**Suggested timing:**

1-2 min to introduce

10-15 min to write a letter

3-10 min for sharing (depending on number of people and type of sharing)

**Author/Credit:**

Kai Siedenburg

OurNatureConnection.com

PoemsofEarthandSpirit.com

kai@ournatureconnection.com

#### **4. Three Things**

**Goal/Benefits:** Help people connect more directly and intimately with the natural world and experience themselves in new and creative ways.

**Recommended populations:** Individuals or groups with physical ability and willingness to move around a bit outdoors.

**Description:** Finding three things in nature that call to us and then speaking as one or more of those things helps us explore our surroundings and express our own nature in intriguing ways, revealing new insights and reducing the sense of separation between us and the natural world.

#### **Steps:**

- Go outside into an area that has some natural elements, including small things that can be picked up safely.
- Invite people to wander, notice what draws their attention, and then gather up to three natural things that call to them and that can be picked up without causing harm. Establish the boundaries of the physical space, give any safety info if needed (e.g. presence of poison oak).
- Clarify how much time they will have, how you will signal when time is almost up and when it is up, and where to go once they have collected three things.
- With an individual, ask them to simply be with the three things and let those things speak to them. And then invite that person to speak directly and spontaneously in the voice of one or more of those things (I am...) You can allow them to speak as long as they want to, or let them know when it's time to wrap up.
- With a group, ask them to choose a partner and take turns speaking as described above. Let them know how much time they will have and how you will signal when to wrap up and when to switch, and that the partner's job is simply to listen and be present.
- Return the things that were gathered to the natural environment (or give people an option of keeping one or more of them if that's appropriate).

#### **Reflection/Processing:**

- With an individual, invite them to comment and reflect on their experience. You could ask a general question (e.g. how was that for you? what did you notice?) and follow up with more if appropriate. (Which of the three things did you feel most drawn to? Was anything surprising? Did you learn something about yourself and your process?)
- With a group, you can invite them to share with their partner (focusing on their own experience.), and/or invite volunteers to share brief comments with the full group.

#### **Suggested timing:**

2 min to introduce the activity

4-6 min to meander and gather three things (depending on the group size and the area)

3-5 min each to speak

3-8 min for sharing and reflection after (depending on number of people and type of sharing)

#### **Author/Credit:**

Kai Siedenburg

OurNatureConnection.com

PoemsofEarthandSpirit.com

kai@ournatureconnection.com

## **5. Mindful Eating Basic – Appreciation and Interconnection**

**Goal/Benefits:** Create a deeper connection and appreciation of food, food source and natural world

**Recommended populations:** Anyone – everyone eats!

### **Description:**

This practice helps cultivate mindful appreciation of food, increasing satisfaction, pleasure, and a sense of interconnectedness, and can lead to greater discernment.

### **Steps:**

- Pause, breathe and behold food before you
- Notice colors, textures, aromas
- Contemplate and reflect. Where did this food come from? How did it get to you? What elements in nature went into making this food?
- Enjoy eating with all your senses

### **Reflection/Processing:**

- What did you notice?
- How did paying attention in this way inform your experience?
- Did you eat the food differently that you might usually?
- Were you aware of the water, rain, earth, sunshine and air that went into the making of this food?

### **Suggested timing:**

10 minutes, allowing time for guidance and eating the food, plus 5-10 minutes discussion/processing time

### **Author/Credit:**

Andrea Lieberstein, MPH, RDN, RYT

Adapted from “Well Nourished: Mindful Practices to Heal Your Relationship with Food, Feed Your Whole Self and End Overeating” by Andrea Lieberstein

Mindful Eating Training Institute, [www.mindfuleatingtraining.com](http://www.mindfuleatingtraining.com)

## 6. Open Sentences from Joanna Macy's "Spiral of The Work that Reconnects"

**Goal/Benefits:** To validate, honor and empower a client experiencing emotional challenges related to being alive on this planet today. To strengthen the client's connection to self and the Earth through the body and into the world.

**Recommended populations:** Adults or teens who are experiencing (or suppressing) grief, anger, fear, hopelessness, or helplessness related to the health of our people and/or planet.

### **Description:**

Working through open sentences to follow Joanna Macy's Spiral in "The Work that Reconnects." The therapist supports the client in answering questions following the order of 1) Coming from gratitude, 2) Honoring our pain for the world, 3) Seeing with new eyes, and 4) Going forth.

### **Steps:**

- Start by creating safety and groundedness in the body and with the therapist.
- Identify and welcome the difficult emotion; inviting exploration of the client's experience; and perhaps a nature-based ally to support the exploration.
- Work through open sentences with the therapist asking the question, and the client speaking or writing out answers as full sentences.
- Support the client in noticing their experience in the moment, tracking sensations, emotions, thoughts, impulses as you work together through the sentences.
- Here are examples of sentences for each step (or you can create your own):
  - 1) "When I think about our lives today, what inspires me is..."
  - 2) "When I see what's happening to the natural world, what breaks my heart is..."
  - 3) "What I hope can happen for us in the future is..."
  - 4) "Something I can do to participate is..."
- Finally, help the client to identify what action(s) they can take to help meet the need that these emotions are related to, and co-create an action plan for what they can do .

### **Reflection/Processing:**

Process with and support the client in validating these as natural responses to life, identifying that they are not alone, and that this interconnectivity can be a support to the client.

Lastly, identify supportive allies or activities during the following week that can help them in experiencing the difficult emotion when it arises.

**Suggested timing:** One hour psychotherapy session, possibly several depending on client's responses and level of engagement.

### **Author/Credit:**

Adriel McCluer, MFT

[www.adrielmcluer.com](http://www.adrielmcluer.com)

This practice is adapted from *Coming Back to Life*, by Joanna Macy and Molly Brown

<https://workthatreconnects.org/spiral/>

## **7. The Power of the Roots: Recognizing and Valuing the Gifts of Your Maternal and Paternal Inheritance**

### **Goal / Benefits:**

Acquire an awareness of the qualities of your identity that come from the male and female ancestors of your family tree.

Develop gratitude towards your male and female figures of reference, recognizing the resources that they have passed to you and that contribute to the uniqueness of your personality.

### **Recommended populations:**

Adults involved in career and professional development, adults in personal growth paths.

### **Description:**

This is a practice of mindfulness, guided visualization and sensory activation, in connection with nature, preferably in a forest or near a tree. By connecting to your roots, you can identify the most solid and fundamental qualities of both your masculine and feminine sides, and recognize which men and women have contributed to their development.

### **Steps:**

- Go with the client/patient into a small wood, garden or park.
- When you arrive at the place chosen for the experience, invite the client to stretch, and do all the movements she/he needs to find their physical comfort.
- Invite them to choose a tree, and step in front of it or place their back against the trunk, finding a comfortable standing position in which to close the eyes.
- Then invite them to feel roots extending below the left foot, connecting them to their maternal ancestors.
- Ask them to feel the qualities of these roots, and the sensations they feel below their feet.
- Then do the same with the roots extending below the right foot, connecting the person to their paternal ancestors. This should last about 10 minutes for both roots.
- Then gently ask the client to close the felt visualization, open the eyes, and stretch.

### **Reflection/Processing:**

- Invite the person to freely share how the experience was, sensations they felt, what they learned, and how listening to the roots connects to their self-knowledge and uniqueness.
- The therapist can explain that the roots represent all that of one's personality is solidity, engagement with reality, security, strength, relationship with material reality.
- The sensations coming from the symbolic roots can be associated with self-confidence, self-esteem, and strength that is attributed (or not) to one's male and female side. The roots also represent the foundation of one's own possibility of professional achievement.
- The results of this practice are greater serenity in relationships, reduced conflict, and more awareness of the positive sides of people who have shaped their lives.

### **Suggested timing:**

About 20 minutes, not including the time needed to reach and return from the place.

### **Author/Credit:**

Diana Tedoldi

[www.dianatedoldi.com](http://www.dianatedoldi.com)

[diana@dianatedoldi.com](mailto:diana@dianatedoldi.com)



## **8. Tapping into our Inner Elder**

**Goal/Benefits:** Tuning clients into their own wisdom, gaining perspective, connecting with our inner nature.

**Recommended populations:** Individuals, couples, families, youth

**Description:** I have used this when clients are facing major life transitions. This theme invites clients to find hope in their struggle, and to tap into their own inner elder, no matter what age they are.

### **Steps:**

- Provide space for the client to express their experience of the challenges they are facing right now.
- Ask permission to ask something a little different. Invite the client to imagine themselves when they are elderly; a face full of wrinkles, white hair, bent over (women tend to squirm at this point!), moving slowly. Imagine the wisdom they will have gained (I say this part slowly to emphasize).
- Consider the many triumphs they will have lived, the many heartbreaks and challenges they will have weathered.
- Consider how having survived all of those ups and downs they have grown a sense of inner calm, a sense of perspective for life's challenges. What wisdom does she/he/they have to offer them now?

### **Reflection/Processing:**

- Give client space to process what their inner elder would say to them at this stage of their life. Offer back reflection questions.
- Once they have thoroughly processed this, offer the observation that they are growing this inner elder right now.
- Offer back my observations of the strengths and resilience I witness in them, even today.
- Invite them to reflect on the growth that is happening in them right now, in the midst of the struggle.

**Suggested timing:** As long as needed! Perhaps 20 minutes.

### **Author/Credit:**

Melissa Clews-Hunt

[www.healingspacestherapy.ca](http://www.healingspacestherapy.ca)

## **9. Life Energy Under the Snow**

**Goal/Benefits:** Tapping into hope and new beginnings in the midst of grief

**Recommended populations:** Individuals, couples, families, youth

### **Description:**

This theme has arisen with people who are feeling the grief of old ways of being coming to an end, ways of being that are no longer life-giving. This practice is designed for use on a winter day.

### **Steps:**

- Check in with clients the day of to ensure they are wanting to go outside based on the conditions of cold, wind, and ice. Prepare clients to dress very warmly if needed, including snow pants.
- Energetically open to the natural space, asking permission to be present and what manner of being do we have permission to be present.
- Provide space for a person to express their sense of loss or bewilderment over aspects of their life that are changing.
- Ask permission of the person to try an activity related to this. Invite the client to notice a nearby deciduous tree or plant that seems to call to them.
- Invite the client to notice ways this being has shed parts of itself to prepare for winter, to tune into what might be happening for this being during winter, and to consider what might be happening under the snow or buried from sight as the seasons begin to turn.
- Provide client silent time to connect with this tree or plant and to open themselves to what wisdom this being might have for them.

### **Reflection/Processing:**

- Once client appears ready to process, provide space for them to describe what came up for them. Offer reflection questions back.
- Ask if the client might want to hear my experience of witnessing this connection time.
- Before leaving the space invite the client in whatever way feels fitting for them, to offer their sense of gratitude to this being. Offer my gratitude also.

**Suggested timing:** 20 minutes, if it is very cold you will need to get walking again!

### **Author/Credit:**

Melissa Clews-Hunt

[www.healingspacestherapy.ca](http://www.healingspacestherapy.ca)

## 10. Ecotherapy Group Closing Ritual: Owing and Letting Go

**Goal/Benefits:** Letting go of burdens, building self-esteem, identity building, being witnessed in a safe setting.

**Recommended populations:** Any population, works well with women's groups.

**Description:** A nice closing ritual that can be used at the end of any group workshop and can be adapted to use with individual clients. Participants will experience and embody letting go of and owning chosen aspects of Self while being witnessed and encouraged by others.

### Steps:

- 5 minutes//Create a circular threshold of non-living nature items large enough to surround the group. Build a fire in the middle of circle if possible.
- 2 minutes//Invite participants to enter the circle intentionally, reminding them of the sacred, non-judgmental and safe space within the threshold. Welcome everyone.
- 2-3 minutes//Share that in several minutes they will be doing a short medicine walk in search of two non-living nature pieces, one that represents something they would like to let go of and one that represents something they would like to own. (The goal of the medicine walk is to exit the threshold into the unknown/spirit realm and to let oneself be guided by intuition, rather than a specific plan.)
- 7-20 minutes//(ideally closer to 20 minutes) Ring bell to initiate medicine walk. Remind participants to stay within earshot of the bell.
- 2 minutes//Ring bell to call participants to re-enter threshold. Welcome them back.

### Reflection/Processing:

- 10-20 minutes//Instruct that each person will share experience in a circular fashion, starting with the nature piece that represents something to let go of. Invite them to say, "I am letting go of \_\_\_\_\_" and then destroy or dispose of their item in the way that they choose, e.g. burn it in the fire, bury it, throw it.
- As each person does this process, the group will witness and use encouraging sounds and/or percussive instruments to mirror and demonstrate acceptance.
- Do the same process with the piece that they are owing. inviting them to incorporate a movement that helps with integration, e.g. hold it close to the heart, hold it high above their head, kiss it.
- Again the group will witness and use encouraging sounds and/or percussive instruments to mirror and demonstrate acceptance.
- Encourage participants to bring this nature piece home with them if it feels appropriate.

**Optional:** 3-5 minutes//Instruct participants to turn outward toward the land and speak gratitude for the land and experiences shared throughout the workshop or weekend. This should be done popcorn style and in one word, for example, "trees," "connection," "birds," "openness."

**Suggested timing:** 30-50 minutes.

### Author/Credit:

Miranda Emmanuel

miranda.emmanuel.mfti@gmail.com

This gratitude practice is adapted from Ariana Candell, LMFT, DMT, Ecotherapist