



Behavioral Health Department

June, 2024 NEWSLETTER



June is Great Outdoors Month

Spending time in nature benefits our mental health. The human body, such as the brain and nervous system respond positively to the natural world, resulting in feelings of increased relaxation, reduced anxiety, and higher self-esteem. No matter the time you devote to spending outdoors, being out in nature does help to substantially enhance your well-being.

Nature can have a positive effect on mental health, as being outdoors can result in experiencing calming sensations such as breathing in fresh air, soaking up the sun's warmth, and listening to soothing sounds. By forming a connection with nature, this will help you to feel less stressed and you'll begin to see improvements to ailments, like sleep disturbances, depression, and loneliness.

Here's 10 benefits that nature can have on mental health:

- 1) **Better Sleep at Night**—Sleep quality is improved when we spend time outside since being in the presence of natural light helps to regulate the body's internal clock, leading to more restful sleep each night. Exposure to natural light also helps the body produce serotonin, which promotes relaxation and can improve one's mood. In addition, natural environments can lower cortisol, which is a hormone the body releases when stressed.
- 2) **Decreased Bouts of Anxiety & Stress**—The act of simply being around nature has a significant affect on our brain and entire physiology. The sights, sounds, and smells associated with nature help the sympathetic nervous system to stay under control—this is what sets off a person's fight-or-flight stress response. In response to nature, our breathing slows down, stress hormone production decreases, and blood pressure drops, giving us the opportunity to shift our thoughts away from the things that cause us to worry and gives us anxiety. It matters where we go on to spend our time, since spending a majority of it indoors can lead to increased stress and further exacerbate mental health disorders. However, being outside in nature does help to counter these effects and reduce anxiety symptoms.
- 3) **Decreased Occurrence of Depression Symptoms**—Sunlight is a key factor in synthesizing vitamin D, which has an influence on the body's ability to regulate mood and plays a role in helping to reduce symptoms of depression. Being out in nature also serves as an opportunity to break away from the stresses and pressures that result in the development of negative emotions. Engaging in activities such as hiking, walking, or gardening can provide an individual with a sense of accomplishment and be what inspires you during the times when you lack motivation. For improved mental well-being, it's often the result of these four benefits being combined with one another: the act of going outside, exposure to natural light, stress reduction, and physical activity.
- 4) **Improvements Seen in ADHD Symptoms**—Nature serves as a unique and stimulating environment aiding towards reducing the intensity of ADHD symptoms. It's common for individuals with ADHD to become easily distracted, disorganized, or restless. But exposure to nature with its large array of sights, sounds, and textures can be helpful as it's an escape from the constant stimuli of the modern world. Due to nature being a sensory-rich setting, there are many ways it could benefit those with ADHD including helping to rejuvenate and recapture attention, reduce hyperactivity, and calm impulsive behavior. Furthermore, by engaging in physical outdoor activities, excess energy can be released and help with gaining more focused awareness.
- 5) **Reduced Anger & Aggressive Behavior**—Nature is peaceful and serene, making it a great environment to support anger management efforts. Outdoor settings like a forest or beach have a natural beauty to them that promotes a feeling of relaxation and a sense of tranquility. Being surrounded by elements of nature like trees, water, and fresh air can help soothe the mind and allow an individual to release any tension or frustration they may be holding. Another healthy outlet to release anger and other pent-up emotions is with physical activities. Otherwise, you could channel your energy into doing healthy hobbies, as this will reduce stress, helping to enhance your well-being.
- 6) **Decreased Feelings of Loneliness**—People who lack social connectedness to others do experience a decrease to their overall well-being, but a suitable alternative to another human being is nature, as the benefits it offers are similar to that of a human connection—this being noticeable improvements to emotional and mental health.
- 7) **Self-Esteem Boost**—A boost in self-esteem can result due to several factors connected to nature. One of the main reasons being that nature offers opportunities to feel a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy. Activities reliant on energy and commitment to the task at hand like hiking or camping, offer people the chance to notice their abilities improving and help to build confidence in themselves. Outdoor settings are a great environment to escape the societal pressures and expectations of everyday life, as it gives you the opportunity to explore your mind and inner thoughts without disruption. This gives individuals the chance to get to know themselves better and form a stronger connection to their surroundings, leading to increased self-appreciation and self-love.
- 8) **Increased Motivation**—Spending time in nature can inspire and rejuvenate individuals, which helps to increase their motivation and drive. The sensory experiences found in nature can excite one's curiosity and interest enough to be the spark that encourages exploration, learning, and pursuit of new activities. By being out in nature and escaping the stresses of the modern world, this gives people the chance to replenish their energy and concentrate on goals and aspirations they want to work towards.
- 9) **Improved Focus, Concentration, & Memory**—Some of the benefits that come from nature and the unique environment it provides include learning to manage distractions, enhanced cognitive functionality, and strengthen memory recall. Nature is where you can go to clear mental clutter and distractions, but, if not taken care of, it could lead to impaired concentration.
- 10) **Stronger Social Connections**—Finding an outdoor activity to do with others, creates a shared experience and common interest for all those involved, which can result in stronger bonds being formed.

Source

"10 Benefits of Nature on Mental Health" *choosing therapy*, 12 Oct. 2023. <https://www.choosingtherapy.com/nature-mental-health/>. Web. 31 May 2024.

CERTIFIED PEER SPECIALIST SERVICES

A Peer Specialist is an individual with lived recovery experience who has been trained and certified to help their peers gain hope and move forward in their own recovery. By sharing experiences, peers bring hope to people in recovery and promote a sense of belonging within the community (SAMSHA)

PEER SUPPORT IS..

- Delivered by individuals who have common lived experiences.
- People with mental health and/or substance use disorders have a unique power to help one another based on shared connection and deep understanding of this experience.
- Peer Specialists offer support, strength, and hope to their peers, which allows for personal growth, wellness, and recovery. (SAMSHA)
- Peer support is ongoing, available, and flexible.
- Peer support enhances other health care services by creating emotional, social and practical assistance necessary for staying healthy and managing. (Peers for Progress)

WHAT SERVICES DO PEER SPECIALISTS PROVIDE?

Peer specialists support their peers both individually and in small groups.

- Help peers create individual service plans based on recovery goals and steps to achieve those goals
- Use recovery-oriented tools to help their peers address challenges
- Assist others to build their own self-directed wellness plans
- Support peers in their decision-making
- Offer a sounding board and a shoulder to lean on...and more!

PROVIDING HOPE

Modeling recovery, engaging, and connecting are just some of the ways peers make a difference in the lives of others. The bond that is essential in peer support means that both the person giving support and the person receiving support benefit from the relationship. (MHA)

SERVICES INCLUDE:

Education and skill- building

- ⇒ Wellness planning
- ⇒ Crisis planning
- ⇒ Self- advocacy skills
- ⇒ Budgeting

Services that help

- ⇒ Identify strengths and use the strengths to reach goals
- ⇒ Identify and overcome barriers to participate in community resources

Connect with resources

- ⇒ Visiting community resources to familiarize
- ⇒ Teaching and modeling skills needed to utilize resources
- ⇒ Wrap around services
- ⇒ Cultural wellness and healing

Building relationships and encouraging community based activities

- ⇒ Employment
- ⇒ Relationships
- ⇒ Physical activity
- ⇒ Self- directed hobbies

Using SAMHSA's Eight Dimensions of Wellness to guide a holistic approach to recovery, a Certified Peer Specialist will work with you to discuss meaningful goals in one or more of these important dimensions; financial, social, spiritual, occupational, physical, intellectual, and emotional. Each of the dimensions contribute to your overall wellness and individual recovery.

Migraine Prevention Techniques

The pain from migraines can be quite excruciating for those who experience it, so when it comes to preventing migraines, it's important to strive towards healthy decisions and doing what you can to take good care of yourself. Lifestyle choices that promote good health can help to reduce the number of migraines you experience and lessen the migraine pain itself. In celebration of June being National Migraine and Headache Awareness Month, below are some tips you could use to cope with migraine pain when it strikes; the content featured here comes from the Mayo Clinic (<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/migraine-headache/in-depth/migraines/art-20047242>).

Seek Out a Calm Environment

When you feel the first signs of a migraine, stop what you are doing and step away for a few minutes to take a short break.

Shut Off the Lights.

Migraine pain can get worse due to light and sound. Adjust the setting of the room you are in to be dark and quiet. Use this time to sleep if possible.

Consider Temperature Therapy.

This involves hot or cold compresses being used to combat migraines by situating these items against your head and neck. While ice packs can be used to numb pain, hot packs and heating pads help tense muscles to become more relaxed. Aside from hot packs and heating pads, for similar effects you could take a warm shower or bath.

Take a Few Sips of a Caffeinated Drink.

A small amount of caffeine can help when you first start to feel migraine pain. Be careful how much caffeine you end up ingesting however. If you have too much caffeine at one time, you could get withdrawal headaches later on. Also be wary of the time when you have caffeine, as you should avoid the later part of the day or at night, since doing this could interfere with your sleep, which in turn can affect migraines.

Practice Healthy Sleep Habits

Getting migraines may prevent you from a goodnight's sleep by making it difficult for you to stay asleep or they could be what's causing you to wake up at night. Similarly, migraines are a common symptom of restless sleep.

For sound sleep, here are some strategies you could try:

Stick to a Regular Sleep Schedule.

Commit to the exact times you'll be waking up and going to bed each day—this includes weekends too. If you nap, do so during the daytime and try to keep it short. Ideally naps should be between 20 to 30 minutes, any time over this could affect a person's nighttime sleep.

Relax After a Long Day.

To get better sleep at night, do something relaxing beforehand: Listen to gentle-sounding music, unwind by taking a bath, or sit down to read a book.

Be mindful over what you choose to eat and drink before bed. Avoid the following as they could interfere with sleep: intense exercise routines, heavy meals, caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.

Limit Distractions Around You.

Once you are in bed, don't watch television or work on assignments you brought home from your job. Keep your bedroom door closed at night. Use a fan or ambient sound app to drown out any distracting noises.

Don't Try to Force Sleep.

The harder you push yourself to fall asleep, it will instead do the opposite and you'll actually find yourself feeling more awake. If you have a difficult time trying to sleep, then divert your attention to doing a quiet activity like reading until you start to feel tired.

Look at Your Medicine Labels.

Check your medicine to make sure it doesn't contain a stimulant like caffeine, as this could interfere with your quality of sleep. If you have medicine specifically for migraines, be sure to look at the labels on those as well.

Eat Well, Eat Wisely

The intensity of your migraines can be influenced by your eating habits. Due to the affect eating can have on migraines, consider keeping to the basics:

Stay Consistent.

Stick to a schedule, you should eat your meals at the same time every day.

Avoid Skipping Meals.

You risk getting a migraine when you fast.

Track Your Eating Habits in a Food Journal.

By writing down which foods you eat and when migraines occur, you could potentially figure out which food items may be triggering your migraines.

Don't Eat Foods that Trigger Your Migraines.

If you suspect eating a certain food is giving you migraines, then remove it from your current diet to see if this ends up making any difference. This may include foods like aged cheese, chocolate, caffeine, and alcohol.

Exercise Regularly and Stick to it

When your body is doing a physical activity, there are chemicals it releases to your brain that block pain signals. These chemicals are also responsible for reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression—two conditions that can cause you to have intense migraines.

Obesity is linked to the increased risk of chronic headaches. To manage migraines and prevent them from getting worse, work to maintain a healthy weight with exercise and by practicing good eating habits.

Seek advice from your health care provider on the recommended level of intensity you should engage in when it comes to exercise and based on the answer, pick an activity to do that you enjoy. Some good choices you could consider include walking, swimming, and cycling. An important thing to remember when starting a new exercise is to gradually ease into it, as pushing yourself right away with a vigorous exercise can trigger migraines.

Keep Your Stress Under Control

Stress and migraines often co-occur with one another. While it's impossible to avoid stress, here are some ways to help manage it:

Slow Down and Make Your Life Easier.

Instead of struggling to fit in all the things you want to complete in a day, prioritize the most important ones and consider not doing everything you had originally planned to do.

Be Efficient at Managing Your Time.

Write a to-do list and make updates to it every day—include both the at work and at home tasks you need to do. Delegate what you can onto others in your life and divide the long-term projects into much more manageable chunks.

Take Breaks.

When you start feeling overwhelmed, step away from the task you were doing. To renew your energy and clear your mind, try some slow stretching exercises or go take a walk outside.

Improve Your Attitude.

Try to stay positive. If you start thinking negative thoughts, stop and reframe your mindset. Instead of "I can't do this," switch gears and think "This may be a tough task, but I can get through this and make it work".

Do Things You Enjoy.

Spend at least 15 minutes each day doing something that makes you happy. Examples include things like playing with a pet, getting coffee with a friend, or working on a hobby that interests you.

Breathe and Relax.

One way you can relax is by deep breathing from your diaphragm. Consider setting aside 10 minutes every day to breathe in and out, slowly and deeply. Along with helping to calm down the thoughts running through your head, doing this might also help your muscles to relax.

Emotional Well-being: Strategies to Express Your Feelings Better



Have you ever suddenly burst into tears without warning or overacted with anger due to experiencing a small inconvenience? If so, you were probably taken by surprise by the unexpected burst of emotions. It can be disorienting when you find yourself stuck in a situation where you're unsure of how to express your feelings.

Compare this circumstance to that of a volcano: trapped on the inside is molten rock, as time passes pressure continues to build, until one day, boom—the volcano erupts. Lava flows out. Everywhere.

The feeling of bottling up your emotions is similar to that of a volcano, where you can find yourself uncontrollably exploding like one at anytime. However, uncontrollable outbursts aren't at all good for you, and they can scare or offend others, as well. These are a few of the reasons why it's important to learn to express what you are feeling through healthy, productive means, whether it be at work or in the presence of friends or family.

Do you get knots in your stomach just thinking about how to emotionally express yourself? Expressing emotions is no easy task, as not only does it take courage to do so, but it forces you to be vulnerable and be out of your comfort zone.

Putting in the effort to come up with constructive ways to express how you are feeling isn't always the easiest, especially if you lacked a healthy role model in your family while growing up. It's also harder for those without a strong sense of belonging or acceptance to do this sort of thing—it doesn't matter where the insecurity itself stems from—whether it be the workplace or your personal life.

If acceptance is something you don't have in your life, you might come to view all interactions as being high-stakes. The effort of expressing strong emotions or showing vulnerability is no easy task for anyone with this kind of outlook. To differentiate your feelings from your thoughts, you need to be very self-aware to do so and have to work towards becoming better at word articulation.

In celebration of June being Effective Communications Month, below is information on the important role expressing your feelings plays when interacting with others and suggestions of how you could improve your skills in this area. The content featured here comes from the website, BetterUp (<https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-express-your-feelings>).

The Difference Between Expressing Feelings Versus Thoughts

It's very easy for us to confuse our thoughts and feelings with one another. But if we want to express what we are feeling, then we will have to do more than just express our thoughts.

Thoughts are the words we think up in our heads that combine with the beliefs and values we have. While thoughts aren't something that'll always turn into feelings, we at least have the power to control what we are thinking. As a result, with effort it's possible to train ourselves to think more positively.

Feelings are a symptom that occur as a result of our emotions and are much harder to control. The feelings we have are a sensation that's felt all throughout our bodies. Sometimes our body language gives away exactly the emotions we are feeling, for example, the inability to prevent looking disappointed if you are given an order by your boss to stay in the office and work late.

In order to more easily differentiate your feelings from your thoughts, you should consider putting them into words with the "I think vs. I feel" rule. To do this, create a sentence using the "I feel" portion. If you say "I feel embarrassed," this statement signals a feeling you have. Using "I think" is a consideration at the most, while "I feel" is a solid confirmation.

Try Out These 10 Ways to Express Your Feelings Better

Expressing our feelings is undoubtedly important. However, not everyone has the confidence in their ability to do this sort of thing. It's no easy feat becoming comfortable with expressing ourselves and does take some time to get the hang of. With practice you will get better and begin to see some improvements in how you go on to express your feelings.

Here are 10 strategies you could use to express yourself better:

- 1) Start doing either meditation, yoga, or breathing exercises to practice mindfulness
- 2) Make an effort to be more vulnerable around people you are close with
- 3) Don't put pressure on yourself to voice your feelings perfectly the first time—to become better at this skill, practice
- 4) Use your body language to convey the emotions you want to express
- 5) Find a hobby that'll help you to be more expressive, go for something that'll inspire you to be creative
- 6) Don't just focus on trying to express the hard feelings, allow yourself to be open about your positive feelings too
- 7) Participate in games that will give you the opportunity to talk about yourself in front of others, so you are prepared and will feel more comfortable in real-life situations
- 8) Show patience to those you interact with, as they adjust to you being more expressive
- 9) Distractions such as cell phones or music should be avoided when having a conversation where you are trying to share your feelings
- 10) Look into if there's anything that prevents you from wanting to share your feelings and work towards a solution once you identify what's holding you back

Consequences That Can Occur When You Don't Express Your Feelings

If you don't learn to communicate by expressing your feelings, things have the potential to get messy and boil over (like a volcano). By avoiding discussions about what you are feeling, this could have a negative impact on both your physical and mental health. Additionally, one's ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships can be affected.

A person who holds in their feelings and doesn't express them can go on to suffer from high blood pressure and cardiovascular problems. These people are often more stressed because of the emotional labor that comes with them trying to suppress their emotions.

When we don't allow ourselves the opportunity to healthily express our feelings, there's a greater likelihood of isolation and being overwhelmed by feelings of loneliness. As a result, we are left feeling like no one understands or cares about who we are.

It's when we go on to express our feelings positively, our relationships benefit and become stronger. There are far more health benefits that come from being able to express yourself than worrying and not doing anything at all.

No matter the relationship, whether it be romantic or platonic, we should make the effort to freely express ourselves. If we don't share our emotions with our loved ones, it can be difficult for them to pinpoint exactly how we are feeling. People can't read our minds to see what we are thinking, so that's why it's important to be expressive when around others.

**NEW 24/7, FREE, AND CONFIDENTIAL
SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE**



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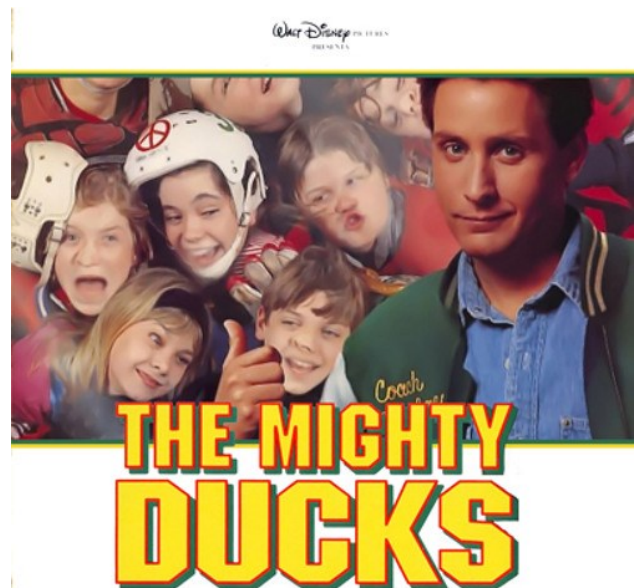
OR VISIT 988lifeline.org TO CHAT

Dial 988

If you are facing a suicidal crisis or are in emotional distress, dial 988 to contact the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. The lifeline will connect you to a local crisis center, where you'll talk to a crisis counselor who can provide emotional support and can help find crisis resources for you as well. This lifeline offers free, confidential support—24 hours a day, 7 days a week

-ACCEPTANCE-

Name it to Tame



If you have ever seen the movie, "The Mighty Ducks" you probably know what "acceptance" is. The main character, Gordon Bombay is the one who struggles with the emotion of acceptance throughout the entire movie, where after committing an offense at the start of the film, he needs to serve 500 hours of community service coaching a Pee-Wee hockey team. However, being put in this situation reminds him of his own Pee-Wee hockey experience and how he feels responsible for losing the State Championships back then because he missed making a shot in the goalie net.

From losing the State Championship back in Gordon Bombay's childhood, it led to him being disappointed in his abilities and he decided to quit what he enjoyed doing most, playing hockey. With coaching, Gordon Bombay is confronted with having his Pee-Wee hockey team play against the team he originally played on, the Hawks and having to compete against that team's coach, who originally trained him. Being in this environment and reminded of his past, sees Gordon Bombay questioning his values, as he comes to realize from coaching the Pee-Wee hockey team, the Mighty Ducks that winning isn't everything and what's more important is teamwork and having fun.

Acceptance undoubtedly isn't an easy thing to come to terms with, but if you let your disappointment in yourself fester like Gordon Bombay did, you may find yourself like him at the start of the movie, unhappy and feeling constant regret when thinking back to what happened in the past.

To learn more about acceptance, including how dwelling on the past can affect your mental health and some strategies you could try to help you with moving on/focusing on the present, visit the links below:

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/how-to-stop-ruminating-on-the-past>

And
[betterhelp.com](https://www.betterhelp.com)