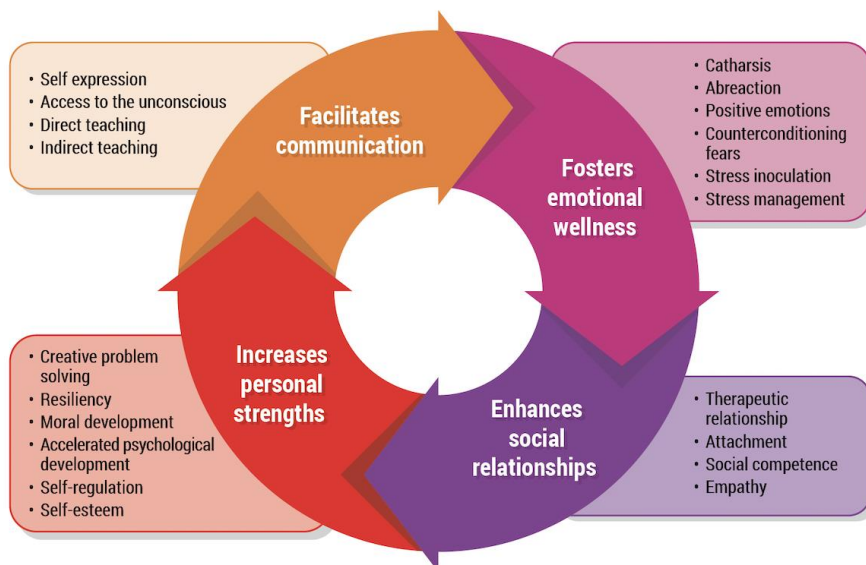




Working with Nature

Therapeutic & Nature-based Play

1



Schaefer, C. E., & Drewes, A. A. (2013). *The therapeutic powers of play: 20 core agents of change*. John Wiley & Sons.

2

Play Therapy

"Play therapy is defined as the systematic use of a theoretical model that establishes an interpersonal process, in which trained therapists use the **therapeutic power of play** to help children prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth.

"Playing alone...differs from playing under the supervision of a therapist during a therapeutic process. In the second case, the play is a means of achieving a goal. The child is under observation, is receiving care, permission is given to him and he is supported to play."

Reference: [Koukourikos, K., Tsaloglidou, A., Tzehe, L., Iliadis, C., Frantzana, A., Katsimbeli, A., & Kourkouta, L. \(2021\). An Overview of Play Therapy. *Materia Socio-Medica*, 33\(4\), 293-297. <https://doi.org/10.5455/msm.2021.33.293-297>](#)



3

Nature & the Therapeutic Powers of Play

"Play in and of itself, whether indoors or outside, provides curative factors for change...conducting therapeutic activities in nature can lead to more opportunities for messy play, risky mastery play and unstructured free play - all of which are often in short supply for children, but so very needed for optimal emotional growth and development." (Courtney et al. 2022, p. 5).

Reference: Courtney, J. A., Langley, J. L., Wonders, L. L., Heiko, R., & LaPiere, R. (Eds.). (2022). *Nature-based play and expressive therapies: interventions for working with children, teens, and families*. Routledge.

4

Connecting with Nature ('12 Cs' – Courtney, 2017)

1. Empowers concentration
2. Boost cheerfulness
3. Encourages creativity
4. Promotes calming
5. Improves communication
6. Elicits compassion
7. Provides catharsis
8. Enhances connection
9. Builds character
10. Invites cooperation
11. Inspires confidence
12. Welcomes curiosity

References: Kopytin, A., & Rugh, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Environmental expressive therapies: Nature-assisted theory and practice*. Taylor & Francis.



5



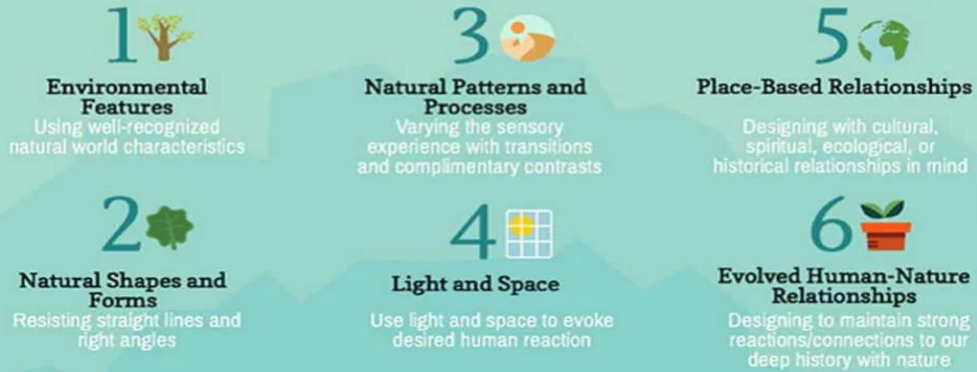
Biophilic Elements

Direct experiences of nature (and natural elements)

Indirect experiences of nature (bringing the outside in)

6

Six Principles of Biophilic Design:



<https://greenplantsforgreenbuildings.org/>

7



Nature-Based Play (Principles)

8

Nature-Based Play (Principles)



9

Yard Greening & Biodiversity

Article

Greening of Daycare Yards with Biodiverse Materials Affords Well-Being, Play and Environmental Relationships

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Received: 27 June 2019; Accepted: 13 August 2019; Published: 16 August 2019



Abstract: Nature contacts are recognized as positively contributing to humans' health and well-being. Although there have been projects to green daycare or schoolyards, yard greening and microbial biodiversity have never been studied simultaneously. We asked whether simultaneously increasing biodiversity exposure and greening urban daycare yards affects 3–5 years-old children's physical activity and play, their environmental relationships, and their perceived well-being. For transforming six daycare yards in Finland, we used a forest floor with high biodiversity: sod, peat blocks, and planters for vegetable and flower growing. We used qualitative interview and survey-based data collected from the daycare personnel and parents to analyze how green yards encourage children's engagement with their everyday life-worlds. We identified the functional possibilities provided by the yards and the dynamic aspects related to the greening. Green, biodiverse yards were considered safe, and inspired children's play, diversified their activities, and increased physical activity. The greenery offered embodied experiences of nature and provided the children with multi-sensory exploration and diverse learning situations. The dynamic and emotional ways of engaging with the natural environment increased their well-being. The activities related to caring for the yards and exploring them promoted the development of environmental relationships. The results can be used for designing health-enhancing yards.



Figure 1. (a) Before the intervention, the daycare yards were mostly covered by mineral soil materials; (b) After the intervention, the daycare yards were covered by forest floor mat and sod. Photos: Aki Sinkkonen (a) and Mira Grönroos (b).

10

Identify therapeutic aims
for:

ADHD

Neurodivergence

ACE

...and think of nature-based activities for
supporting the aims – examples:



11

Play Therapy in the Outdoors (Chown, 2018)



'At one with ourselves'



Working in nature and with nature



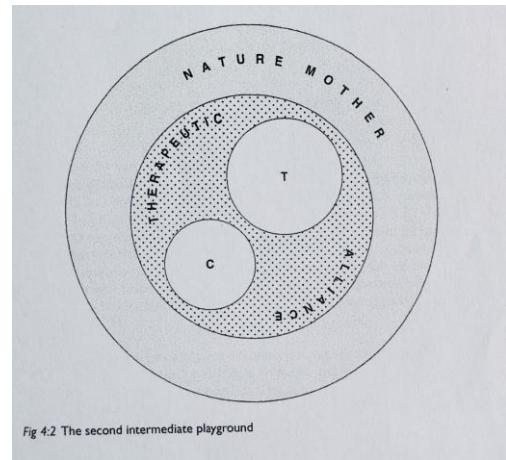
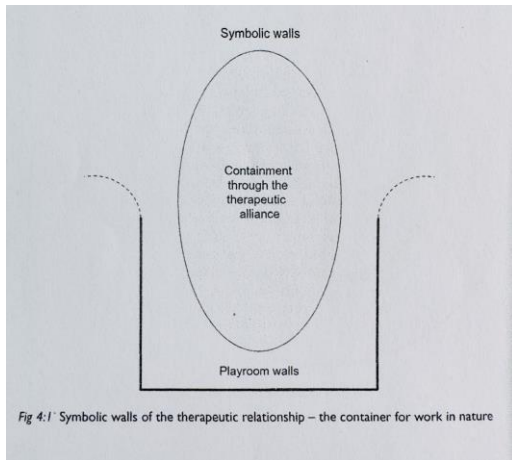
Relationship with place



Ecological self (nature connection)

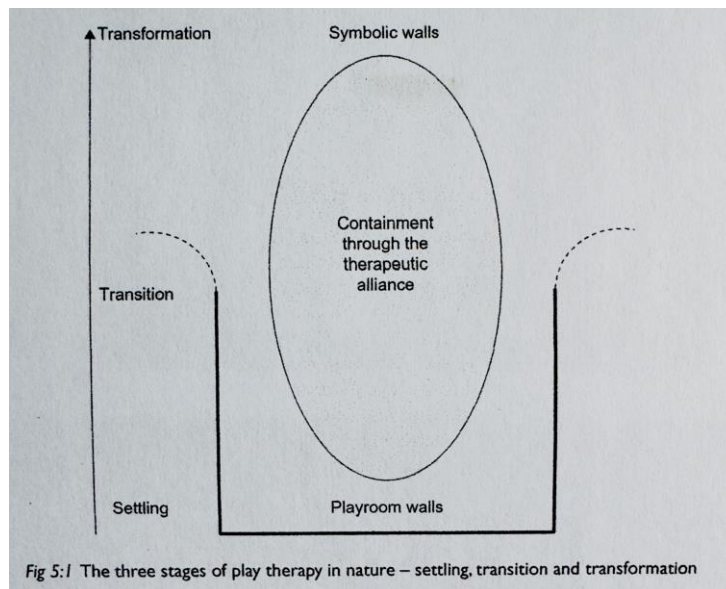
Reference: Chown, A. (2017). *A practical guide to play therapy in the outdoors: Working in nature*. Routledge.

12



Chown, A. (2017). *A practical guide to play therapy in the outdoors: Working in nature*. Routledge.

13



14

Practical Considerations

Same standards apply, but some adaptations are needed:

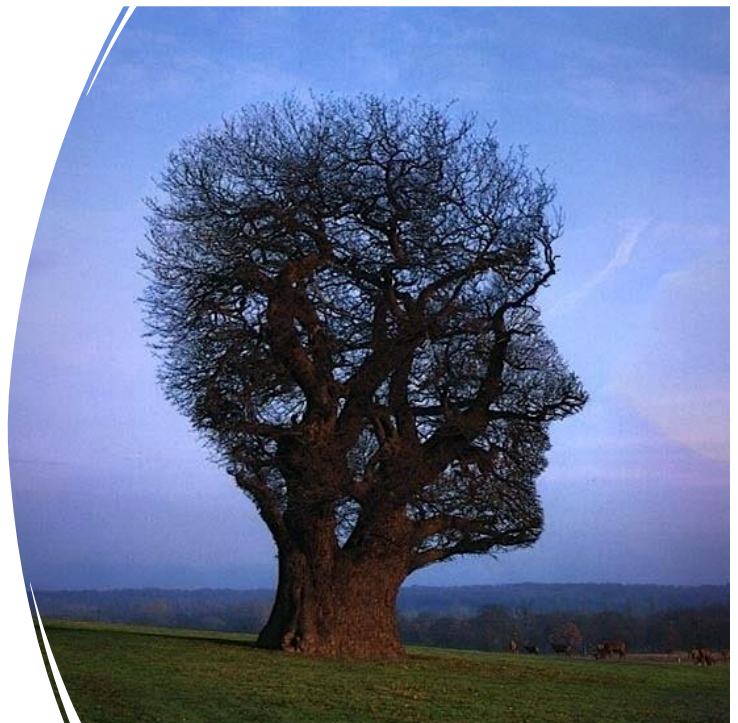
Safeguarding
Insurance
First aid training
Competency
Site & risk assessments
Cost-benefit analysis
Time management

15

Ecological Identity (Harper et.al. 2019)

- Averse
- Receptive
- Connected

Harper, N., Rose, K., & Segal, D. (2019). *Nature-based therapy: A practitioner's guide to working outdoors with children, youth, and families*. New Society Publishers.



16

Assessing One's Ecological Identity (Harper et al. 2019, p. 71)

What's your favourite way to connect with nature?

What were your favourite places to visit in nature as a child, youth, and adult?

Where do you currently enjoy going in nature?

How do you feel when you are in nature?

What activities do you enjoy doing in the outdoors?

What natural places and beings do you feel most connected with?

How do you show your love and care for nature?

(When appropriate) what pains you the most about the current environmental predicament?



17

Meeting the Elements

Water – beaches, inland watercourses, rivers, beach (relaxation, 'make an ocean drum', beach creations). Metaphors: 'rough and calm'.

Wood – forests, woodlands (relaxation, sit spot, 'talking sticks', 'forest rooms', ephemeral art). Metaphors: web of life, life cycles, seasons and transformation.

Earth & air – playgrounds, gardens, school grounds (miniature garden, games). Metaphors: Movement, hanging between earth & air'.

Fire – source of heat & warmth.

Chown, A. (2017). *A practical guide to play therapy in the outdoors: Working in nature*. Routledge.



18

Before stepping out...

Are you ready to leave the playroom?

Competence & confidence

Getting to know the place – the sit spot

Risk assessment

Important: 'Take only pictures, leave only footprints, kill only time'.

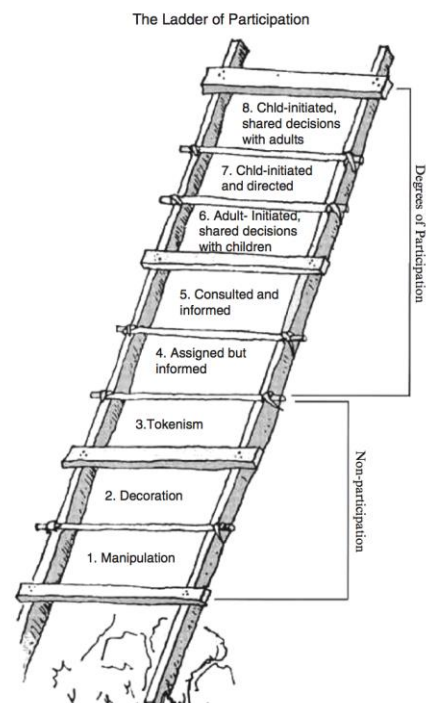
Shelter spot – a secure base (the nest)



19

Food for thought:

How can we involve children as co-creators of play spaces?



20