



# EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION

MOVING LIVES FORWARD

## MINDFULNESS WITH MOTHER NATURE

*"Mindfulness has been called a powerful form of self-healing by many teachers and practitioners... somehow in a slow, hidden way, we're able to be with the depths of ourselves – our true natures, our souls – while at the same time observing our thoughts and feelings and not becoming caught up in them." (Sue Monk Kid)*

Sometime in March our world changed. I, for one, do not expect things to return to "normal." I'm not sure what the "new normal" will be. All I know for sure, is we must take better care of our physical and mental health more than ever! I am beginning to acknowledge that what we are learning (as we all work to adjust to the world caught up in COVID-19) is that our lives will be more involved sitting in front of some type of screen. I am not an avid TV consumer, but I know with our eyes on screens 5 or 6 hours each day, we need to find ways to stay healthy. Self-care for ourselves is even more important as we take on additional roles to care of our children. Also, we need to remember that their little worlds have changed too.

I believe (as do many others that I will reference) that time outdoors improves our mental and physical health. I feel obligated to start with the safety rules to follow while doing activities outdoors. This is a limited list, but will help your stay safe during COVID-19.

- Keep groups small; recreate with people from your family/close friends.
- Limit your visits to public open spaces/parks/trails, etc.
- Follow ALL the CDC rules e.g. social distancing, use masks and hand sanitizer.
- Avoid crowded areas; go early in the a.m or evening.

With that said and with so many physical activities cancelled, one of the best things we can do is visit Mother

Nature. National Parks and other areas visited frequently in the summer are seeing a minimum of 40 to 150% more people visiting than previous records. Many of them, like Rocky Mountain National Forest, require reservations and are doing their best to enforce social distancing.

I can't think of anything more relaxing than sitting by water reading a good book. What can be better than soaking up some Vitamin D for your body and refueling your mind with entertainment or learning something new. Any bookstore today is full of books on "healthy living". I recently found a book on the subject of Mother Nature: The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier and More Creative, written by Florence Williams.

*Here is more proof of the benefits of spending time in nature:*

**IMPROVES FOCUS:** Studies show that it's not what activity people do, it's the "greenness" of the outdoor space. Kids with ADHD were able to focus better on a task after a walk in the park rather than a walk in an urban area.

**BOOSTS ONE'S CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITIES:** The more time you spend outdoors, the greater the benefit. The outside world engages your attention in a quieter way that lets your attention refocus. (WOW – maybe writers experiencing "writer's block" should just work outside!)

### Cheryl's Corner of Caring

*"Mother Nature has the power to please, to comfort, to calm, and to nurture one's soul."  
Anthony Douglas Williams*

# FREEDOM WITH CHOICES CONTINUED

It may be that other countries (e.g. those who watch less TV and have fewer tech toys) are further ahead with this concept. I've chosen some examples from both Asia and Europe:

- Finland recommends spending at least 5 hours per month with Mother Nature to prevent depression. This can be explained by the fact that when you are outside, your prefrontal cortex (part of the brain associated with negative thoughts) becomes less active.
- The Japanese have always had a great appreciation of the world's beauty. Shinrin Yoku "forest bathing" helps boost energy and helps a person recover faster from illness, as well as being an aid for falling asleep easier. (Hey, this sounds better than driving around and around the block until the baby falls asleep)
- In a study of 20,000 people on a team led by Matthew White of the European Centre for Environment & Human Health at the University of Exeter, it was found that people who spent two hours a week in green spaces (local parks or other natural environments) either all at once or spaced over several visits – were substantially more likely to report good health and psychological well-being than those who don't. Two hours was the hard boundary; there were no benefits for people who did not meet that threshold.

What was interesting about this last study was that it included many ethnic groups, people rich and people poor, and people with chronic illnesses and disabilities. I won't include studies that have been done on the benefit of being near water, but now scientists are quantifying the positive cognitive and physical effects of water because contact with water induces a meditative state that makes us happier, healthier, calmer, and more creative. There is a biological connection that triggers an immediate response in our brains. The mere sight of water (or even sound) induces a flood of neurochemicals that promote wellness, increases blood flow to the brain and heart and reduces stress.

Sadly, this brings me to another study done in 2017 by The American Psychological Association relating stress to technology: "Just under half of all adults and 90% of young adults have become 'constant checkers,' engaging with screens and social media all the time." The APA says that this vastly increases levels of stress. One has to ask: "What level of stress does it cause when your technology is NOT working?"

In summary, getting out and letting Mother Nature nurture you has unlimited benefits, but it also means that we may need activities for children to enjoy. Most children in today's world may be unaware of "Tag" or other ancient games that adults used to play.

TRUST ME, THERE ARE LOTS OF OPTIONS AND RESOURCES OUT THERE.

Those who homeschool know that the simple act of taking a walk can be a science lesson:

- Identify different types of clouds, trees, plants, rocks and animals.
- Take picture of anything that is interesting; when you get home make a research project out of it. If that's too much, paint the rocks.
- GO fishing. If someone isn't into that, let them hunt for frogs, build their own little dam, teach them how to skip rocks, or just sit by the water and listen to all the sounds that Mother Nature can play.
- If traveling is not an option, do backyard camping; best perk of this – no reservations needed! Set up the tent close to the kitchen so snacks are readily available. Let little ones bring their stuffed animal friends. Teenagers can do without their tech connections for a few hours. Tell them that cowboys still do not have iPads. If still too much resistance, let them take pictures to share with their Facebook friends. If that isn't impressive enough, set up a Friday night, star-lite movie night. Patio table will suffice for TV; DVR allows them to show their favorite movie to BFs. Thank God for extension cords. Tell them to BYOP (bring your own pillow.) Your only expense will be the pop and popcorn.

So, even though this may be a summer of uncertainty, we can make it into a summer to remember because we had quality time with our kids and Mother Nature.

## Resources:

Colorado County Life (magazine)  
[https://cpw.state.co.us/things to do](https://cpw.state.co.us/things%20to%20do)  
[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)  
[www.harvardschoolofmedicine.edu](http://www.harvardschoolofmedicine.edu)





# MEET CENTENNIAL'S EARLY CHILDHOOD CONSULTATION TEAM



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Lincoln & Yuma

For additional support during  
the COVID-19 Pandemic you  
can call Centennial's  
**COMMUNITY  
SUPPORT LINE**

You can do this by calling your  
nearest Centennial office:

Akron - 970.345.2254

Burlington - 719.346.8183

Cheyenne Wells - 719.346.8183

Elizabeth - 303.646.4519

Fort Morgan - 970.867.4924

Holyoke - 970.854.2114

Julesburg - 970.474.3769

Limon - 719.775.2313

Sterling - 970.522.4392

Wray - 970.332.3133

Yuma - 970.848.5412

Contact your local Centennial Mental Health Center for assistance with any Early Childhood need.

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