

May 2025

Nature Therapy for Psychosis

Jocelyn Ogle, MS, Professional Counselor Associate



About Me

- Masters degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling
- Professional Counselor Associate
- Spent a summer as a kayak guide
- 2 years as a climbing instructor and routesetter
- Began a therapeutic recreation program at an emergency youth shelter
- Co-led adventure therapy trips such as backpacking and rafting with at-risk youth for 3 years
- 75+ hours of specialized training in adventure and nature-based therapy





Table of contents

01

What is Nature
Therapy?

03

Application

02

Research

04

Considerations





Workshop Objectives

- Gain a deeper understanding for how nature-based interventions can be an effective tool for mental health professionals
- Explore the existing research for utilizing nature-based interventions with people struggling with psychosis
- Build a therapeutic toolbox of at least three nature-based interventions for use with clients who are engaging in an FEP program





01

Introduction to Nature Therapy



Definitions



Nature Therapy


A broad term describing various techniques or treatments that utilize the natural environment to improve mental health.



Adventure Therapy

“The prescriptive use of adventure experiences provided by mental health professionals that kinesthetically engage clients on cognitive, affective and behavioral levels.” (Gass et al., 2012)





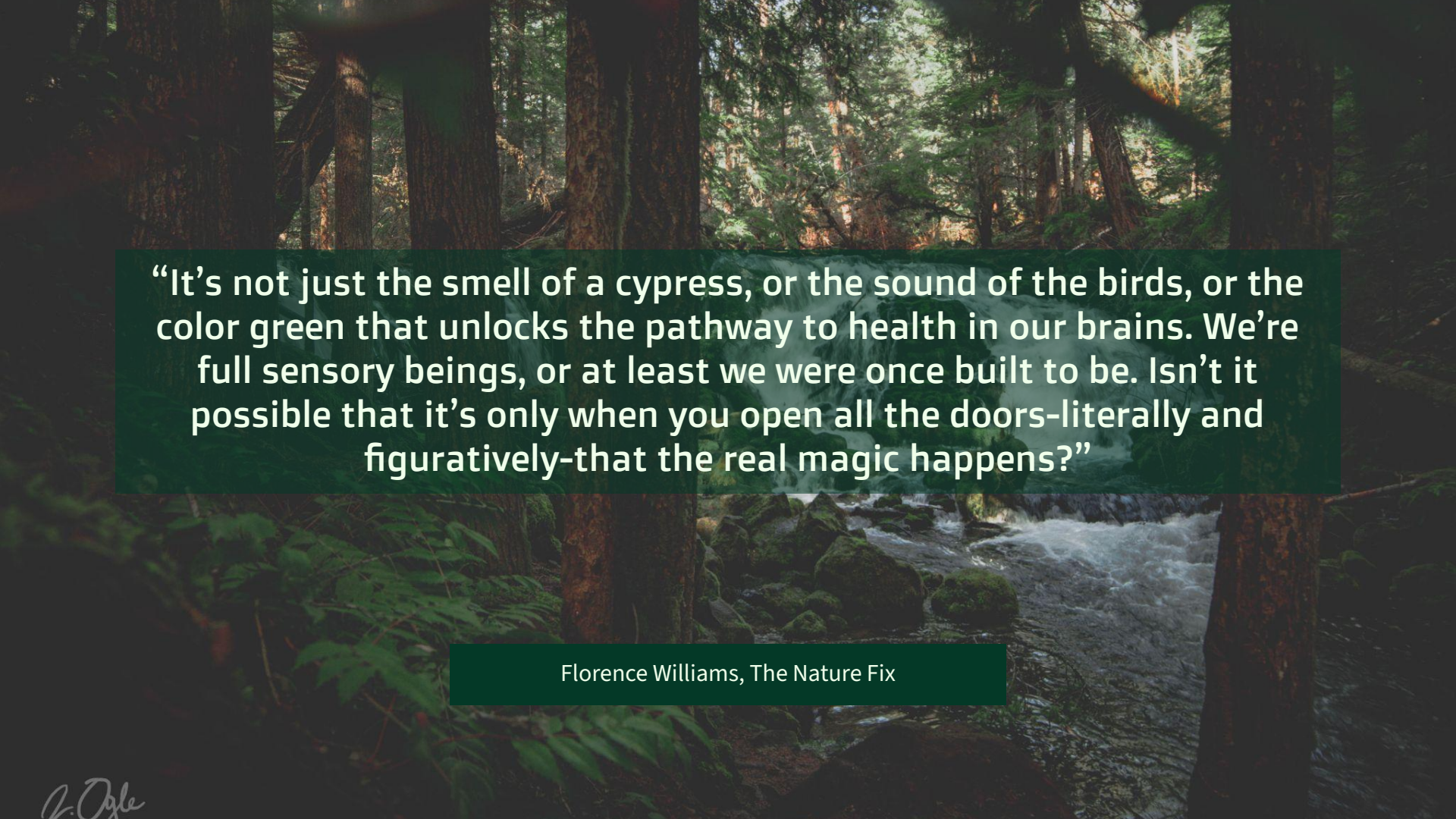
02

Research



Human History





“It’s not just the smell of a cypress, or the sound of the birds, or the color green that unlocks the pathway to health in our brains. We’re full sensory beings, or at least we were once built to be. Isn’t it possible that it’s only when you open all the doors-literally and figuratively-that the real magic happens?”

Florence Williams, *The Nature Fix*



The Research Doesn't Lie: Go Outside!



Attention Restoration

Through less choices and less filtering...provides us the capacity to focus on deeper thought.



Stress Reduction

The smell of trees alone as been shown to reduce stress by 53% and lower blood pressure by 5-7%.



Brain Resting

Soft fascination...watching a sunset or the ocean leads to engaging the parahippocampus which helps us regulate our emotions



Improved Emotional States

Other benefits include decreased heart rate and facial muscle tension, lowered blood pressure and cortisol, improved mood, stronger cognitive performance, feelings of vitality, and psychological reflection





AT and NT on Psychosis

Anxiety

Several studies indicate reductions in anxiety, increases in calmness, relaxation states



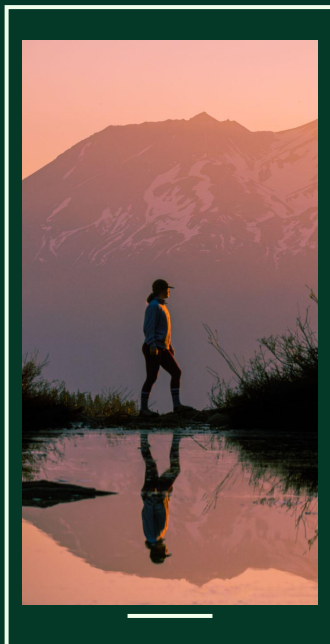
Confusion/Cognition

Some studies show reduced confusion and increases in cognitive ability



Global Functioning

Almost all studies indicate increases in global functioning



Social Connectedness

Several studies indicate an increase in feelings of connectedness to others



Psychosis


One study indicated a shift in perspective on their psychosis



More Research Needed

Definitely a developing field of research





03

Application



Color Walk

Pick a color to focus on as you walk through an area. Find everything you can that is that color. Try to pick a color that's not going to be everywhere (ie. green in a forest). Some variations could include using a camera and making a collage, or trying to find each color in the rainbow.

- ☐ Here and Now
- ☐ Active Mindfulness
- ☐ Easy to do anywhere

Some debrief questions you could ask: what does this color remind you of? When you were looking for that color specifically, did it become harder to find? Easier? Why do you think that happened?





Safe Place Map

This can be done in the office or out in the field. If doing in the office, have the client imagine a place from their childhood that brings them joy and peace. It doesn't have to be outside necessarily, just anywhere that they can picture that was a fun and safe place for them. Have them draw this place from memory. Remind them this is not about drawing ability, but about recalling the place. If doing this outside, find a place that the client finds peaceful (near a creek, next to a view, etc.). Have the client draw this space. Same principles as above.

- Here and Now
- Active Mindfulness
- Concrete reminder of a calming space they can imagine and visualize

Some debrief questions you could ask: Can you tell me about the place you drew? What feelings came up for you as you drew this place? Does this place have any distinct smells that you can remember?





Nature Metaphors

This can be done in so many different ways. It can be used as a debrief activity, a group icebreaker, or a way to bring our nature experiences into the “real world”. One way this can be done is by encouraging the client to find a natural object that they believe represents them, represents their psychosis, represents their struggle (you get the idea).

- Encourages alternative perspectives/new ways of viewing things
- Creates a sense of connection with nature
- Reduces resistance

Other ideas: how is the natural landscape mirroring your inner landscape? Where are you noticing resilience in nature right now?





Fireside Sessions

If reservable firepits are available in your area this is a great way to get sessions outside and have clients experience novelty. There are lots of great fireside meditations, activities, and metaphors that can be used in addition to simply sitting around a fire and chatting.

- Campfires provide metaphors
- Novelty is a way to encourage growth and excitement
- Fire can act as something that takes the attention away from the client resulting in less feelings of vulnerability





04

Considerations



Important Considerations

Risk

There is inherent risk assumed in adventure therapy especially. When utilizing this modality, risks should be discussed with client and team members, mitigation measures should be taken when appropriate

Challenge by Choice

One of the key components of adventure therapy is that the client gets to choose what level of challenge they're willing to accept that day

Insurance/Liability

Know what you are and are not allowed to do with your clients at your organization.

Mindfulness/Meditation

There has been some research that says certain types of mindfulness and meditation can be harmful to those experiencing psychosis, know your client and their limits

Know Your Limits

If you are not comfortable hiking to the top of a mountain, don't take your client up one! You need to still be a therapist, so being able to manage yourself in the outdoors is important.





Resources and References

Places to find more information:

- **The Nature Fix by Florence Williams**
- **The Well Gardened Mind by Sue Stuart-Smith**
- **aeo.org (The Association for Experiential Education)**
- **Nature Meditations Deck**

References

Bielinis E, Jaroszewska A, Łukowski A, Takayama N. The Effects of a Forest Therapy Programme on Mental Hospital Patients with Affective and Psychotic Disorders. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2020; 17(1):118. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17010118>

Cuthbert S, Sharp H, Berry C. Green care in first-episode psychosis: short report of a mixed-methods evaluation of a ‘woodland group’ in an early intervention service. *BJPsych Bulletin*. 2021;45(4):235-237. doi:10.1192/bjb.2021.54

Girard, C., Dubé, J. É., Abdel-Baki, A., & Ouellet-Plamondon, C. (2021). Off the beaten path: Adventure Therapy as an adjunct to early intervention for psychosis. *Psychosis*, 13(4), 338–348. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17522439.2021.1901301>

Voruganti LN, Whatham J, Bard E, et al. Going Beyond: An Adventure- and Recreation-Based Group Intervention Promotes Well-Being and Weight Loss in Schizophrenia. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*. 2006;51(9):575-580. doi:10.1177/070674370605100905



May 2025

Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

oglejk@jacksoncountyor.gov
541-816-8178

Please keep this slide for attribution