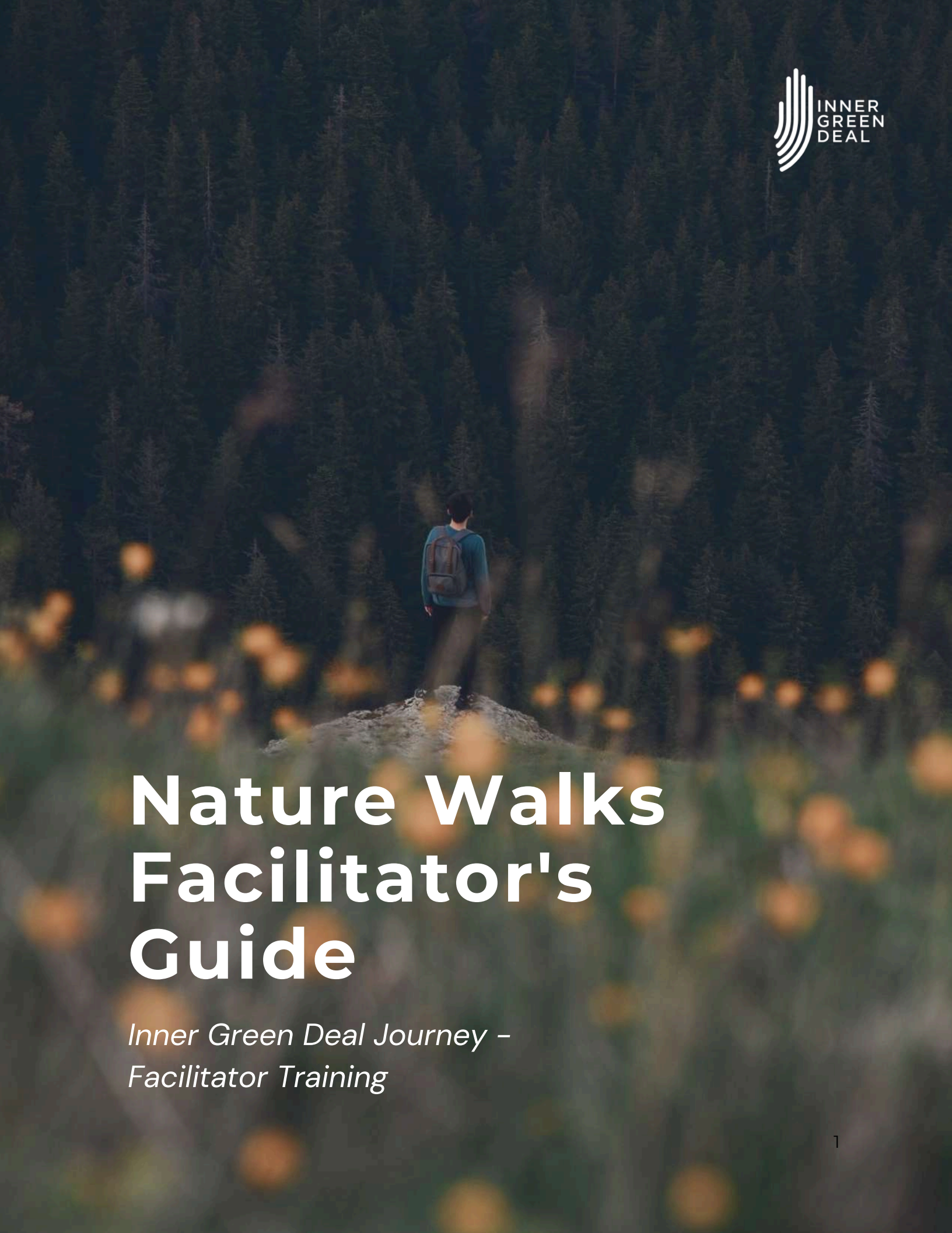




Nature Walks Facilitator's Guide

*Inner Green Deal Journey –
Facilitator Training*

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1.Introduction



1. About this document

We all have our own unique lived experience of nature, how being in nature feels from the Body-Heart-Mind perspective, and how it impacts us in many subtle ways we may often not be fully aware of.

One purpose of the IGDJ Nature Walks Facilitator's Guide (NWFG) is to share insights from science illuminating the benefits of partnering with nature, and how nature connection can cultivate conditions conducive to mindset shifts. We also bring in other potential perspective-shifting capacities - language, storytelling, poetry - to expand the openness cultivated with nature.

The NWFG outlines the key phases and guiding principles for leading nature walks, inviting you to bring in your own experience of mindfulness practices and nature.

In the appendix, there is a link to a framework for leading a half-day, and a full-day nature walk, that includes the structure and flow, with a library of options including different Practices, Exercises, Stories, and also practical considerations.

The IGDJ Nature Walk Facilitators Guide is intended as a living document that will evolve and grow as we learn together with the wider IGDJ and Inner Green Deal community, and with nature as our teacher.

2. Why nature walks?

Reconnecting with our inherent
ecological belonging

2. Why nature walks?

Embracing the idea that we are an integral part of nature, nature walks become a profound way to reconnect with our inherent ecological belonging. These walks provide firsthand experience of the intricate beauty of the natural world, fostering a sense of unity with the environment. Recognizing that we are not separate entities but interwoven threads in the tapestry of nature, the importance of preserving ecological balance becomes deeply rooted and ingrained. In this context, nature walks can serve as a transformative experience, reminding us of our interconnectedness and inspiring a commitment to sustainable practices in the face of the climate crisis.

2.1 The human story of separation

Emergent research shows **that today's societal crises are fundamentally, relationship crises**. They are rooted in a lack of conscious connection to ourselves, others, and the world we share.

They stem from modern societies' individual and collective mindsets of disconnection that drive increasing mental ill-health, social alienation and exploitative behaviours, and inhibit sustainability responses at all levels (individual, collective and systemic).

They are also rooted in our collective consciousness. To activate responses we must therefore also look within: shifting the collective ways of being, thinking and doing that have produced the current crisis.

2.2 Inner Transformation for Outer Transformation

Facts and evidence of the consequences of the climate crisis have failed to engage a majority of people and ignite requisite action. UN Secretary General, António Guterres said in March 2023 “*We are sleepwalking to climate catastrophe.*”

How do we shift our collective ways of being, thinking and doing that have produced the current crisis? How does inner development and connecting to self, others and nature link to outer development and greater planetary wellbeing? Perhaps a good place to start is to ask: **How can nature change consciousness?**

3. How can nature change consciousness?

3. How can nature change consciousness?

We may not be able to answer that question directly, yet a growing body of scientific findings on the effect nature has on humans, provides many insights.

3.1 What the science tells us

Here are just some of the scientific findings related to nature's influence on health, well-being, productivity, and creativity:

- Being in nature contributes to cognitive functioning, mental, physical and emotional wellbeing (O'Neill et al., 2023, O'Connor & O'Donovan (2022); Capaldi et al., 2017; Wiese et al., 2017; McMahan & Estes, 2015; Capaldi et al., 2014)
- Connection with nature has been shown to increase wellbeing (Pritchard et al., 2019) and reduce stress (Gaekwad et al., 2023)
- Walking in nature improves memory by up to 20% (Berman et al, 2008)
- When immersed in a natural environment, people report feeling more connected to others and the world around them (Terhaar, 2009)
- Connection with nature has a significant positive effect on autonomy, personal growth, and sense of purpose in life (Nisbet et al, 2011).
- People are more considerate and generous when exposed to nature (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009).
- Being in nature reduces pulse rate, blood pressure and cortisol levels (Chiba University, 2009).
- Being in nature unplugged from multi-media increases creativity by 50% (Atchley et al, 2012).
- Being in nature leads to improved cognitive functioning and mental well-being (Kaplan, 2001).
- Flowers and plants in the workplace increase cognitive functioning and can create a 15% rise in innovative ideas and more creative, flexible problem-solving (Ulrich, 2009).
- Kaplan & Kaplan describe four characteristics of environments that would contribute to attention restoration and stress reduction:
 - 1) 'Being away' implies being in a place that does not remind people of their daily life.

- 2) 'Soft fascination' is a way of looking that brings us out of our over-focusing, overthinking minds, associated with patterns and textures in nature.
- 3) 'The effects on people of restorative environments are not limited to stress reduction'.
- 4) Literature posits that peak experiences in natural environments are associated with changes in thought and behaviour (Smith).

3.2 Intention & Attention

Walking in nature, with the intention to be fully present, often we slow down, naturally.

We relax, as our soothing calming (parasympathetic nervous) system is activated and our attention becomes more available for what's around us. As our gaze lifts to the horizon, our attention shifts from a narrow, often inward focus to a more open spacious awareness.

"When I slow down, I see twice as much." Tara Brach

3.3 What happens when we are in nature?

Science often confirms what we already know from our '*felt experience*' of being in nature. Tuning into our embodied experience of nature can be very revealing. As author Bessel van der Kolk wrote "our body keeps the score."

We invite you to tune into your *embodied experience of nature*, and notice what resonates with you from what's shared below. Everyone has their own unique experience, yet many commonalities point to ways how nature can support shifts in consciousness.

3.4 An embodied experience of the senses

"Lose your mind and come to your senses"

Deliberately tuning into all our senses - sights, sounds, smells, sensations, tastes - can bring a deeper sense of connection. When we are more attuned to our bodies, we may experience a subtle shift from head (cognitive) to heart (feeling), an embodied feeling. Our nervous system may relax more, and this can increase our receptivity to different ways of thinking, perceiving, being, and connecting.

***Nature as a
doorway.***

***“Cultivating
conditions where
mindset shifts can
happen”***

3.5 Spaciousness

“Space is a way of living. Space is not something we have. Space is something we practice. Space is a very important aspect to embrace complexity.”

Thomas Hübl

In the busyness of our daily modern lives, often people have little time or space. Being in nature, with the intention to be present, can create a sense of spaciousness. Spaciousness cultivates conditions conducive to shifts in consciousness, where worldviews and mindsets are more receptive to change. Our capacity to work with uncertainty and embrace complexity can expand.

3.6 ***“Sitting is the new smoking. Movement is medicine.”***

James Levine, Professor of Medicine, Mayo Clinic

Movement can also play a powerful role in helping shift habitual ways of thinking about and perceiving the world. When we are stuck, sitting in an office brainstorming ideas may not be the most useful way to be creative. Our bodies are designed to move, and walking in nature brings movement. As we walk, our perspective is constantly shifting, making it easier to be more creative, to see with ‘new eyes’.

3.7 Psychological Safety & Trust

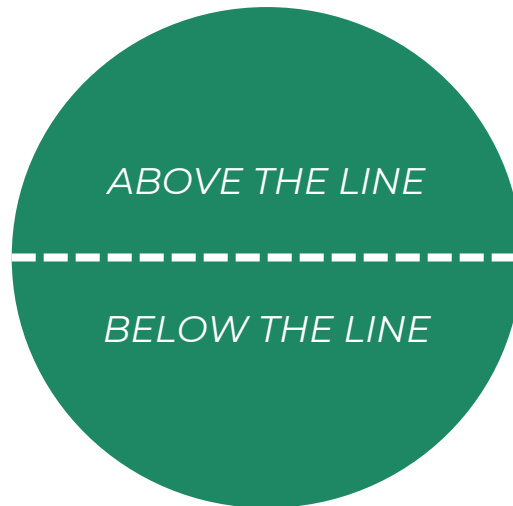
“Psychological safety is a belief that we will not be humiliated or punished for speaking up with ideas, or questions, concerns or mistakes.” Amy Edmonson, Harvard Professor.

When we walk side-by-side with others, there may also be more of a sense of equality. Also, we have less direct eye contact, and this can embolden people to share and to allow themselves to be more vulnerable. All of these subtle cues contribute to creating a sense of psychological safety and trust, where we may feel safer to share more of how we feel. These conditions which are often very subtle and nuanced, allow people to open up more.

As nature works in its own inimitable way, Nature Walk facilitators are invited to pay attention to other capacities that support ‘letting go’ of habits, stories, and narratives that no longer serve us well. Below are

other methods we can consciously employ to support people with shifting perspectives and worldviews.

3.8 Above the Line / Below the Line



Joseph Campbell's Circle of Awareness
Above the Line = conscious awareness
Below the Line = unconscious

"There is an epidemic of obedience in the world."
Nancy Kline, author of The Thinking Environment

What's below the line?

Often we are conditioned to think and act in certain ways. For example, at a societal level, media constantly reports on the growth of GDP. The usually unquestioned underlying assumption is that GDP growth is good. Yet, GDP is not a measure of a healthy economy and / or a flourishing society. GDP includes money spent rebuilding houses destroyed by floods, wildfires, climate events. It includes money spent on prisons, on mopping up oil spills.

Often these unspoken assumptions are below the line, and are largely invisible to us, yet they drive our behaviours. Behaviours that may no longer serve us well.

Another societal narrative, largely invisible to many of us, is the **problem-solution framing**. If there is a problem, the implication is there must be a solution. We typically prefer simple solutions to complex problems, as this also feeds a sense of knowing what to do, of control, and certainty. Once a suitable solution can be found, a problem can be solved.

A predicament by contrast to a problem has no solution. Faced with a predicament, people can develop responses, but not solutions. The climate crisis is not a problem to be solved. It is a predicament. When we realise this, how does this change your thinking related to the climate crisis? To the polycrisis?

- What other societal stories that no longer serve us well are below the line?
- What can we bring from Below the Line into conscious awareness, Above the Line?
- How do we start to shift some of those stories?

Making visible the invisible

Eckhart Tolle says “Awareness is the greatest agent of change.” Through our mindfulness practice, we can become more aware of what stories, narratives, drive our individual and collective behaviours. As more of these collective narratives and stories move above the line, as we let go of stories, as the veil begins to drop, it becomes an ongoing process.

The Kubler-Ross Change Curve Model, which depicts 5-stages of grief, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance is also worth noting here as it can help us understand what people may be experiencing as they are challenged to let go of old stories and habits that no longer serve them well.

The human story of progress we have told ourselves for many years is falling away as we start to confront the realities of the polycrisis. The sixth mass extinction. The rise of global inequality. The loss of biodiversity.

It's time to create a better story. A story of planetary flourishing, where humans live in harmony with the more-than-human world. With all life.

“

**Space is a way of living.
Space is not something
we have. Space is
something we practice.
Space is a very
important aspect to
embrace
complexity.**

Thomas Hubl

Above the Line

"The soil of our mind contains many seeds, positive and negative. We are the gardeners who identify, water, and cultivate the best seeds."
Zen Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh

What are the seeds we wish to cultivate and bring above the line?
What qualities, values, beliefs do we wish to cultivate that will contribute to, as author Charles Eisenstein calls it *'the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible?'*

In the IGDJ programme we consciously cultivate five key inner qualities, awareness, compassion, courage, gratitude and resilience. During the IGDJ course, as we watered these seeds, these qualities deepened. And as many of us experienced, nature walks and nature connection is often one of the most simple and powerful ways to further enrich these capacities.

3.9 The Power of Language - words as a doorway

"Words make worlds."
Abraham Joshua Heschel

Mind Your Language

As IGDJ and Nature Walk Facilitators we invite you to pay attention to language. To be conscious, bringing the language and words you use above the line. Words matter. Words exert subtle and powerful forces that reinforce habitual ways of thinking. Our words can open or close minds.

*"Mind your thoughts as they become words.
Mind your words as they become actions.
Mind your actions as they become habits.
Mind your habits as they shape your life."*
Lao Tzu

The words we use often act like anchors that reinforce our thinking and habits. Words that reflect mechanistic ways of relating to the world. That promote linear ways of thinking. Problem - solution. Or reflect the language of war. Targets. Strategy. Execute. Our words have unspoken assumptions.



We invite you to pay attention to the language that you use and that the participants use. We invite you to consciously integrate language mirroring nature. Cultivating conditions. Intention, rather than targets, goals, KPI's.

We can support participants in nature walks to become aware of the language they use, and how it shapes their thinking. Their mindsets. Their worldviews.

Language has a capacity to open people up or close them down. As we know, mentioning the climate crisis is triggering for many people. Creating a sense of psychological safety, where people feel free to express their opinions and beliefs without feeling judged helps them remain open.

Nature also offers many metaphors which is perhaps another subtle way to help shift people's perceptions.

Drawing on your own experience, what else supports shifts from narrow ego-centric worldviews, to wider eco-systemic perspectives?

3.10 The Power of Habit

"The most powerful force in the universe is habit, and the greatest addiction is the call to comfort." Michael Mallows

If we go for a walk in nature, with our headphones on, it can be easy to be on autopilot, where nature is 'wallpaper', and we are largely unaware of our surroundings.

Habit interrupters: shifting from autopilot to manual

How can nature support us to develop human capacities that re-connect to ourselves, other and nature? (see diagram below)

As we cultivate spaciousness during nature walks, we can use this opportunity to step back, and see with 'new eyes'. With our 'witness / observer consciousness' we deepen our capacity to become aware of what's below the line, of habit energies that are our friends, and habit energies that may no longer serve us well. As we become aware of

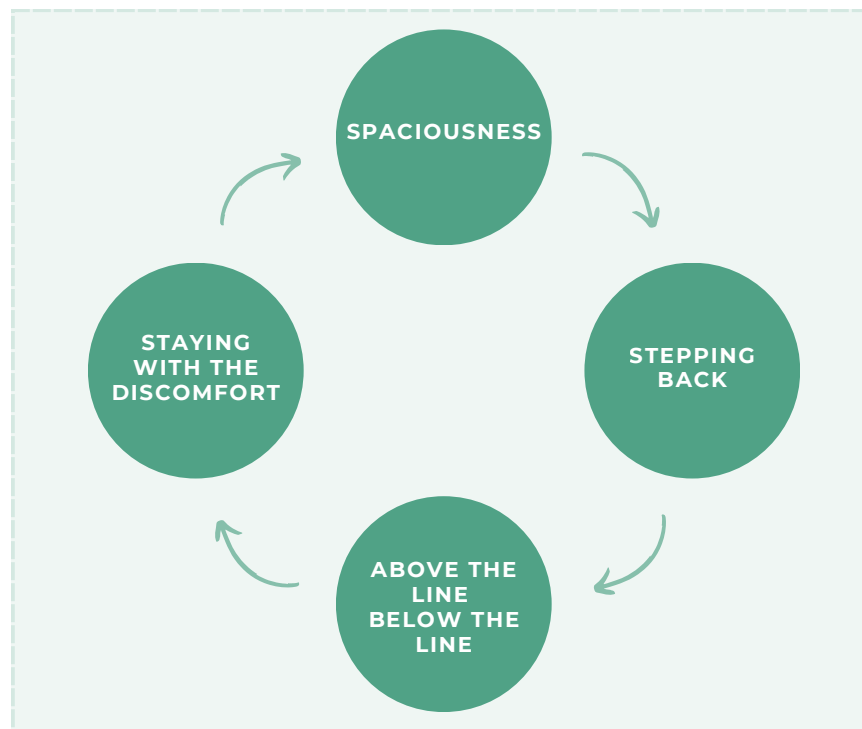
these habits, often we will experience a sense of discomfort. How we meet this discomfort or resistance informs what happens next.

If we can learn to stay with the embodied experience of discomfort, and allow whatever sensations, emotions, thoughts, arise in the bodymind to be present, without needing to get rid of them, we can begin to *interrupt habitual ways of reacting and shift to consciously responding.*

How can we do that?

“Turning judgement into curiosity.”

What do we mean by this? When we experience discomfort our mind typically rushes to judgement. “I don’t like this. I want to get rid of that.” We can view these ‘judgements’ as an invitation to curiosity. Inviting the question *‘Isn’t that interesting?’* - more of a rhetorical question - as a way to explore and stay with the discomfort, in wise and compassionate ways. If we have a sense of overwhelm, the wise choice can be to take care of yourself in the moment, and allow yourself to disengage from the overwhelm. We can also physically take a step back, as a way to mentally create some distance. To gain a new perspective. And the more we practice ‘turning judgement into curiosity’ the more we heal old wounds or traumas, that are in our subconscious.



Developing human capacities helping to re-connect to ourself, others and nature

Exploring Habits:

- What habits are your friends?
- What habits no longer serve you well?
- What habits do you really want to change?

These questions could be explored through reflection and journaling during a nature walk.

3.11 Trauma: what do we do if / when trauma shows up?

As we do this work, it's important to be trauma aware. To be aware that when we invite people to stay with discomfort, that can touch into places of trauma.

It's important as facilitators to contract with participants at the beginning of nature walks. To emphasise the importance of self-care. To go only as deep as is beneficial for them. To take responsibility and recognise our own capacities, while also emphasising the importance of self-compassion, and what it is to be human. Allowing space for

everything. And knowing when it may be wiser to pull back rather than push through.

"There is no difference between healing ourselves and healing the Earth."

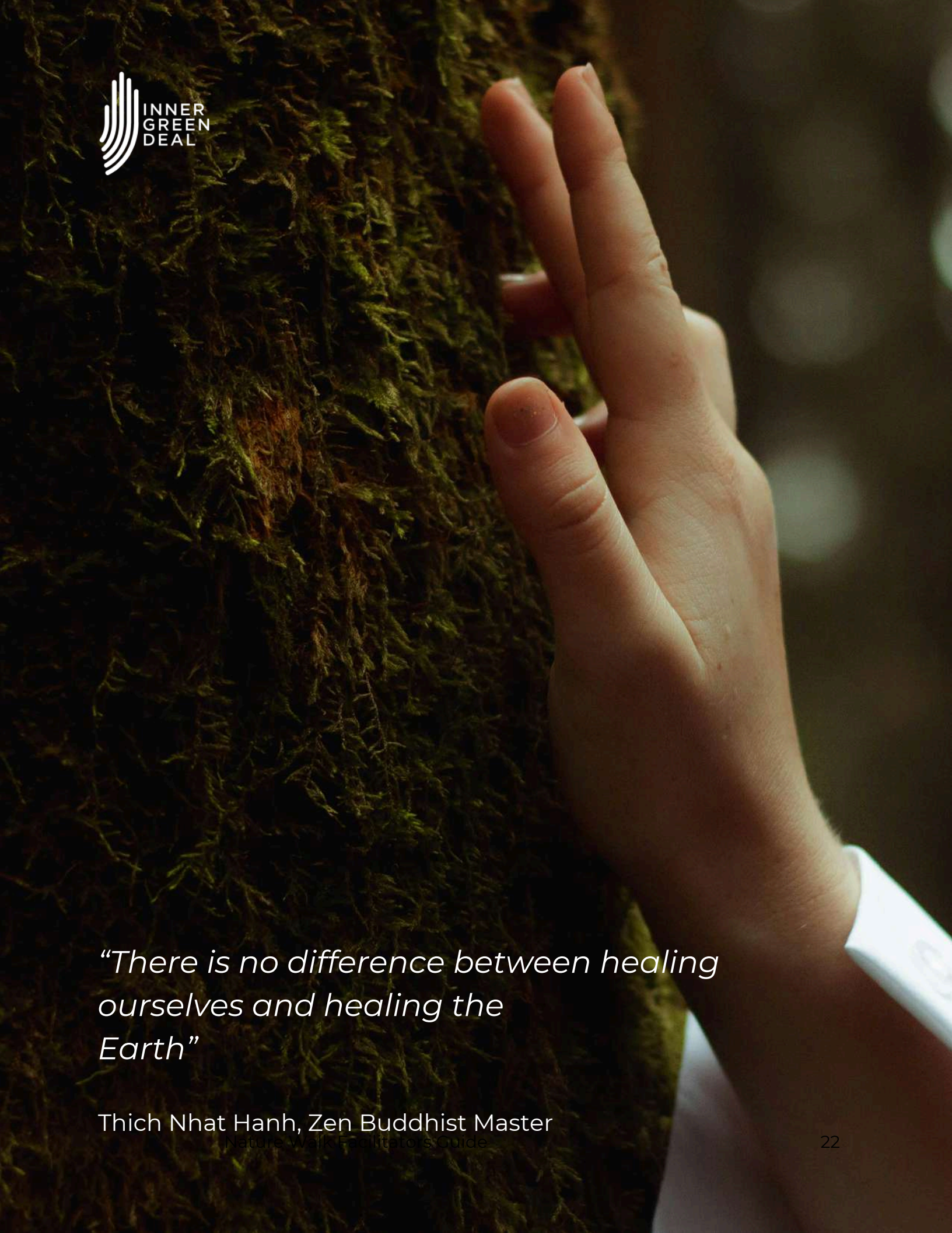
Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen Buddhist Master

Nature can be restorative at many levels - physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. Allowing ourselves time in nature can be healing in ways we may not understand cognitively or fully appreciate.

What happens when we learn to trust the wisdom of nature? When we open to the interconnectedness of everything? What if we trusted nature's capacity to open our hearts to healing?

"When I heal, the world heals." Thomas Hübl

Nature has a capacity to engage and open our hearts in ways we may not fully fathom. When our hearts are open, our connection to the suffering of the world deepens. That suffering can be our motivation to heal the human story of separation, and create a new human story of reconnection. Nature walks are a doorway to deepen that process.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand reaching out to touch a tree trunk covered in thick, green moss. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with fingers slightly spread. The moss is dense and textured, covering the entire visible surface of the tree trunk. The background is dark and out of focus.

*“There is no difference between healing
ourselves and healing the
Earth”*

Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen Buddhist Master
Nature Walk Facilitators Guide

3.12 Other doorways to widen perspectives

Drawing on your own experience, what else supports shifts from narrow ego-centric views of the world, to wider eco-systemic perspectives?

2 doorways that have potential to widen perspectives are storytelling and poetry.

Storytelling: The power of storytelling captures the imagination. If the human story of separation is at the root of the climate crisis (polycrisis) how can we use our imagination to craft new stories to engage people to take action to protect nature, to protect our home?

"Nature is not a place to visit. It is home."

Gary Snyder

What are the stories that inspire you? What are the stories you can tell during your nature walks to inspire people to take action?

It's important to recognise the stories and narratives that no longer serve us well. For example, many popular stories - think Hollywood, celebrity CEO's - laud the myth of individualistic 'self-made men', who will then somehow save us. There's also a distinction between 'utopian' (vision) stories and 'journey' (adventure) stories.

Story: Mycorrhizal Networks

Where to tell: *Ideally in the woods or the forest*

Intention: *making visible the invisible, connecting people to the mystery of nature and to what we don't know. Bringing what's below the line, in our individual and collective unconscious, above the line, so we become more aware of how stories, narratives, habits drive our behaviours.*

Story: Have you heard of mycorrhizal networks?

Suzanne Simard, a professor of forest ecology at the University of British Columbia has a TedTalk "How trees talk to each other." Underneath the forest floor is a vast network of fungi, of mycelial 'threads' that connect trees and plants together. Through this vast

network, Mother trees can transfer to their saplings nutrients they are lacking. Underneath your feet, is a vast mycorrhizal network that most of us have no idea exists. Trees share water and nutrients through the networks, and also use them to communicate. They send distress signals about drought, disease, and insect attacks, and other trees alter their behaviour. Much like neural networks or social networks, the fungal mycelia of mycorrhizas allow signals to be sent between trees in a forest. These mycorrhizal networks are effectively an information highway, with recent studies demonstrating the exchange of nutritional resources, defence signals and allelochemicals.

Most of us have no idea of their existence. The mycorrhizal networks are largely invisible to us, as they lie below the surface of the forest floor. What happens when you allow that to sink in? What else do we not know? About nature? About how life works? What came first, the acorn or the oak tree? How do you even begin to answer that question? What else do we not know about? How might this affect how we see the world? What are you seeing with new eyes?

Together as part of this IGDJ community we can share stories to inspire and support us with shifting narratives, worldviews and mindsets.

Another doorway is **poetry**. Poet David Whyte says “poetry is language against which you have no defences.” Some of us will have our favourite poets and poems. Together as part of this IGDJ community we can create a library of poems to share.

I go among trees and sit still (by Wendell Berry)

I go among trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
Around me like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places
Where I left them, asleep like cattle...
Then what I am afraid of comes.
I live for a while in its sight.
What I fear in it leaves it,
And the fear of it leaves me.
It sings, and I hear its song.

4. Exploring the Principles of Nature Walks

4. Exploring the Principles of Nature Walks

Nature walks offer a way to step back from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, allowing participants to reconnect with the natural world while reaping numerous physical, mental, and emotional benefits. Rooted in the principles of mindfulness, exploration, and appreciation, nature walks provide a holistic experience that enriches body, mind, heart and soul. When we experience nature walks together with others, from our community, team, family, this can deepen our collective connection with nature.

4.1 Mindfulness

Central to the essence of a nature walk is mindfulness – the practice of being fully present in the moment, attuned to the sights, sounds, and sensations of the environment. As participants stroll through forests, meadows, along coastlines, they are encouraged to engage their senses, fostering a deep connection with the natural world. By immersing themselves in the present experience, individuals can cultivate a sense of calm and clarity, alleviating stress and anxiety.

“The real voyage of discovery consist not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.” Marcel Proust

It's also important to remember, cities are places where we can experience nature too. What's around us, as we are walking outside? Raising our gaze we can connect with the sky. What else is around us? Plants? Rivers? Birds? Insects? Animals? Clouds? Clouds can provide insights into impermanence. We can also recognise that the water in the tea that I'm drinking once was a cloud.

Perhaps there is a walk alongside a river in the city, which offers a different space, where we can bring our curiosity to explore together with participants.

4.2 Exploration

Nature walks have a spirit of exploration, inviting participants to venture out and discover the wonders of the natural world. Whether walking in forests, parks, or urban settings, each step uncovers new landscapes often teeming with life and beauty. We can marvel at the native flora and fauna, at geological formations, at the beauty of nature,

sparkling curiosity and wonder at every turn. Noticing plants we've labelled as weeds, and being curious as to why some plants are 'weeds' and others are beautiful plants and / or flowers.

4.3 Appreciation

At the heart of every nature walk lies a profound appreciation for the intrinsic value of the natural world. Participants are encouraged to pause and reflect on the awe-inspiring intricacies of the environment, acknowledging its role as a source of inspiration, sustenance, and solace. By fostering a deep sense of gratitude and reverence, nature walks instil a heightened awareness of the interconnectedness of all living beings, fostering a desire to conserve and protect our planet for future generations.

4.4 Reflection

Nature walks provide an opportunity for introspection and reflection, allowing individuals to escape the distractions of modern life and reconnect with their inner selves.. To feel more connected and grounded. As they meander along winding paths or linger beside tranquil streams, participants are encouraged to contemplate life's mysteries, pondering the deeper meanings of existence. In the tranquility of nature's embrace, profound insights may arise, guiding individuals on a journey of self-discovery and personal growth.

4.5 Restoration

Amidst the chaos of daily life, nature walks offer a sanctuary for rejuvenation and renewal. Surrounded by the restorative power of the natural world, participants can replenish their spirits, revitalising mind, body, and soul. Whether basking in the warmth of the sun, listening to the gentle rustle of leaves, or breathing in the crisp, invigorating air, or feeling the rain on our faces, each moment spent in nature serves as a tonic for the weary soul, replenishing energy and vitality.

In essence, nature walks embody a harmonious union of mindfulness, exploration, appreciation, reflection, and restoration, providing a pathway to profound connection with the natural world, oneself and others. We know from research that the more people feel connected to nature, the more likely they are to take pro-environmental action.

Participants may also experience a sense of grief and / or pain when we face the destruction of nature. It is important to acknowledge the intelligence and importance of these emotions, and allowing space for whatever arises to be present. On the other side of grief is love.

*"Grief can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom." **Rumi***

5. The faces of Nature Walk

5. The Phases of a Nature Walk:

Nature walks typically consist of several phases designed to enhance the experience and appreciation of the natural environment. The Inner Green Deal Nature Walks have a few intentions. The first intention is to connect participants with themselves, others, and nature, in a way that inspires them to want to protect nature. The second intention is to inspire participants to take pro-environmental action, both personally and collectively.

The phases of the nature walks are designed to allow space for participants to explore their experience individually, in pairs, small groups, collectively, and inspire each other to take action. The phases of Nature Walks can vary depending on the purpose of the walk and the preferences of the participants, but they generally include:

5.1 Preparation: This phase involves planning the route, informing participants of what they need to bring, water, snacks, appropriate clothing, sunglasses, sun screen, and a journal and something to write with. It's also essential to inform participants about the duration, difficulty level, and any safety precautions. An important part of the preparation is to include questions that engage participants with their intention for the nature walk and stimulate thinking in advance.

5.2 Introduction: The walk typically begins with a **short introduction** where the facilitator provides information about the area, its history, ecological significance, and any guidelines to follow during the walk, e.g. mobile phones switched to aeroplane mode. Also an overview of the intention and purpose of the walk, and an outline of the rhythm and flow of the day. Keep the introduction short.

5.3 Rhythm and Flow

Nature Walks have a rhythm and flow, with a mix of walking in silence, reflecting, sharing in plenary, walking in pairs, threes.

It's useful to begin with a short **Grounding Practice** (c. 3 minutes or so may be good), inviting participants to open to all their senses, to connect with where they are. Allowing them to arrive fully.

Grounding Practice: (c. 2 - 4 mins.)

This is a short grounding practice which you can adapt to suit the needs of your nature walks participants. Once you have found a suitable spot, you can invite them to do this.

Inviting you to stand with your feet hip distance apart.....allowing your attention to go inwards.....eyes slightly open, your gaze 2 or 3 metres in front of you, not focusing on anything in particular.....now, feeling your feet in connection with the earth.....your head held in the embrace of the sky.....,sensing into your entire body as you are standing here right now.....becoming aware of any sounds, smells, sensations, sights.....and inviting you to take 3 slow long deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth as if you are blowing out through a straw.....now allowing the breath to return to its own unique natural rhythm.....and slowly bringing your attention back to the people who are here today, and inviting you to make eye contact with each person.....and noticing how you feel now having done that grounding practice.

This can be followed by a **check-in** with questions such as:

- How do you feel now?
- What did you notice as we did that practice?
- What's your **intention** for the time we have together today?

(NB: intention is different from goal or objective and can help participants to let go of expectations which can often get in the way of simply being open to the experience of being in nature).

As the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu says:

"Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished."

Crossing the threshold Exercise:

After the Grounding Practice and check-in, you may also like to introduce a symbolic "crossing the threshold" exercise as a way to begin the nature walk. With this exercise we are inviting participants into a liminal space (liminal comes from the Latin word "limen" which means threshold) which is the uncertain transition between where you've been and where you're going physically, emotionally, or metaphorically, where we are on the precipice of something new, but

not quite there yet. In this practice, we are inviting participants to cultivate beginner's mind, while also being open to experiencing fresh ways of perceiving, connecting, relating, feeling and being with nature. A threshold walk is possible anywhere, in the city, a park, or deep in nature.

The threshold walk begins with a conscious and symbolic crossing of a "threshold" into this specific space and time, where we are wide open to the infinite wisdom in our hearts. We cross this "threshold" with the curiosity and openness of an awe-struck child. Something within us knows that whatever we see, hear, or feel is only a reflection of something deep within ourselves.

Below is one example of how a reading may be used as a precursor to the ritual of crossing the threshold. You may want to choose a practice, or an exercise, that is appropriate to your nature walks participants.

Crossing the Threshold reading:

I'd like to share this excerpt below, which is from Irish poet John O'Donohue, before we invite you to step across the threshold, which is here (indicating roughly where it is), imagining that line, and knowing that in a few moments, you will be crossing that threshold.

"At any time you can ask yourself: At which threshold am I now standing? At this time in my life, what am I leaving? Where am I about to enter? What is preventing me from crossing my next threshold? What gift would enable me to do it?"

A threshold is not a simple boundary; it is a frontier that divides two different territories, rhythms, and atmospheres. Indeed, it is a lovely testimony to the fullness and integrity of an experience, or a stage of life that it intensifies toward the end into a real frontier that cannot be crossed without the heart being passionately engaged and woken up.

At this threshold, a great complexity of emotion comes alive: confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope. This is one of the reasons such vital crossings were always clothed in ritual. It is wise in your own life to be able to recognize and acknowledge the key thresholds: to take your time; to feel all the varieties of presence that accrue there; to listen

inward with complete attention until you hear the inner voice calling you forward. The time has come to cross.”

Excerpt from To Bless the Space Between Us (US) / Benedictus (Europe) by John O'Donohue

(Inviting the participants) Now, let's step across the threshold, and allow space for that reading to sink in, as we walk in silence for the next few minutes,.

Typically the earlier phase of the walk will have an 'inner development focus' and the middle to later phase of the walk will integrate 'outer development' including potential for collaboration on handprint projects and actions. It's important to familiarise yourself with and know the terrain, where to take breaks, suitable for lunch, stopping for refreshments, and if there are toilet facilities available or not.

5.4 Walking in Silence & observation

During this phase, participants are encouraged to observe their surroundings closely, while walking in silence, paying attention to the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of the natural environment. It's useful to invite participants to pay close attention to their embodied experience of walking in nature, and to notice how they feel during and after walking in silence.

5.5 Reflective Journaling

Reflective journaling is a good way to get participants to capture their experiences in the moment. Just as we use Journaling during the IGDJ course, we can use it during and after nature walks. Some people might like to capture their experience visually, in drawings and pictures.

5.6 Perspective Taking Exercises & Practices

Introducing different perspective taking exercises, that invite in fresh perspectives, for example seven generations thinking, are useful exercises. After each exercise participants can share in plenary, as this can deepen connection, learning, and spark ideas for all.

5.7 Breaks for lunch & refreshments

Depending on the duration of the walk, it's important to have identified suitable places - picnic benches, places in the forest, open places in the park, etc. - where the group can stop for lunch and bio breaks. Where you are unlikely to be disturbed.

5.8 Walking the Question

Walking questions in pairs, threes or small groups is a good way to spark creativity, inspire action and identify opportunities for collaboration. Going uphill is good for feeling into and defining challenges, and going downhill can be good for gaining momentum.

5.9 Reflection

Towards the end of the walk, participants are given time to reflect on their experience, and to reflect on *What's mine to do? How can we be good ancestors?* This may involve journaling, group discussions, or simply taking a few moments of quiet contemplation to appreciate the beauty and significance of nature.

5.10 Conclusion & appreciation

The walk concludes with a check-out where participants have the opportunity to share how they feel as they are leaving, and what they appreciate about the overall experience and nature.

These phases are flexible and should be adapted based on the specific interests, backgrounds, and needs of the participants. The overarching desire is to foster a deeper connection with nature, promote environmental awareness and stewardship, provide an enjoyable and educational experience for all involved, and inspire people to move to wise action.

A group of five diverse young adults are gathered in a forest, looking at a map. The group consists of three men and two women, all smiling and engaged. They are dressed in outdoor gear like jackets and hats. The background is a dense forest with tall trees.

6. Logistics & Practicalities

6. Logistics & Practicalities:

When organising nature walks, there are important logistics and practicalities to consider.

6.1 Choosing a suitable location / venue considerations include:

- How accessible is a destination by public transport? Car? Bicycle?
- Parking facilities?
- Forests, parks, parks in urban settings, mountains.
- For ½ day and 1 day walk what is a suitable walking distance? If ½ day is 3 - 4 hours, calculate c. 50% walking time.
- How is the terrain for walking? Walks should be appropriate to participants' capabilities, fitness, mobility, requirements.
- Check if there are any mobility issues with participants.
- How busy is the location likely to be?
- What days of the week are better? If working with organisations, nature walks will likely be done during work days.
- Are there places to pause, stop and sit where it's unlikely you will be disturbed.
- Are there picnic benches? Places to sit.
- Are there toilet facilities?
- Meeting place with start & finish time.

6.2 What to bring?

For participants:

• Food. Snacks for sharing. Water. Appropriate gear suitable for weather. Hat. Rain gear. Walking boots. Sunglasses. Sun factor. Insect repellent.

For facilitators:

- Water. Coffee, tea. Food. Snacks for sharing.
- Appropriate gear suitable for weather. Hat. Rain gear. Walking boots. Sunglasses. Sun factor. Insect repellent.
- First Aid Kit.
- Map if available.
- Route plan.
- Contingency plan for adverse weather conditions.
- Fully charged mobile device.

Other considerations:

Self-care: the emphasis is on participants taking care of themselves, and knowing their capacities, capabilities and limitations.

Dogs or no dogs? It's probably best to exclude dogs for a variety of reasons. One is that not every participant may like dogs. Another is that dogs can attract a lot of attention, which can be a distraction, so the person with the dog often has divided attention.

Other recommendations you might like to consider, depending on your context....

- If you offer nature walks for big groups alone, a First Aid Course
- might be a good thing to do
- If nature walks is a key professional focus, then you may need to
- take out professional indemnity insurance.
- What is relatively easy and straightforward to do is to ask
- participants to sign a waiver form (please see example below
- Appendix 4)



Appendix

I. Relevant Resources:

Providing links to most relevant nature research papers, resources.

Outrage + Optimism Podcast: Our Story of Nature - from rupture to reconnection (3 part series)

- [Living from Nature](#)
- [Living with Nature](#)
- [Living as Nature](#)

II. Excel spreadsheet with ½ day and full-day nature walks outline

Links will be provided during the IGDJ Teacher Training with outlines for a ½ day and full-day Nature Walks.

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IV. Sample Disclaimer form for Nature Walks

DISCLAIMER FORM FOR NATURE WALKS

Everyone taking part in the group activities does so at their own risk.

We do not have qualified guides, leaders or first aiders on any of our events. The group works on the same basis of being a group of friends who go out walking together, who invite others to join them on this basis.

Event organisers and event hosts assume no responsibility for anyone attending any group event. The group, group organisers, event organisers and event hosts will not be held responsible for any accident, injury or loss occurring as a result of any Group event or in connection with travel to such event, however caused.

When you join a nature walk or other event, you indicate that you accept these conditions and accept that no legal liability is accepted by the group, group organisers, event organisers or event hosts in the event of accident or injury, however caused.

Participants in Group events are reminded that outdoor activities frequently need specialist equipment (boots, waterproofs, etc) and the group does not provide these. Participants are responsible for assessing their own risk, the safety of themselves and their guests and the suitability of any equipment used. Any Medical Conditions that may affect the participants during the walk should be notified to the walk leader prior to the start of the walk.

Disclaimer:

I understand that I participate in the nature walks completely at my own risk.

I acknowledge that if I have a health issue, it is my responsibility and mine alone, to take appropriate steps in safeguarding myself.

I fully understand that, nature walks has a risk of personal injury and that I walk at my own risk, and I accept these risks and I am responsible for my own actions and involvement.

I understand that if I want insurance, I must insure myself.

I understand that the event organiser does not recognise any liability for injury or damage caused to, or by, walkers, climbers, third parties or property arising from such persons.

I have read and understood and agree to this disclaimer with its general principle that I understand that nobody else is responsible for me and I'm not responsible for anyone else.

Name (PRINT): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Mobile: _____

Emergency Contact Number: _____



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