



The Wildlife Trust for
**Lancashire
Manchester &
North Merseyside**

Finding calm in nature

— SIMPLE WAYS TO CONNECT —
WITH NATURE AND FEEL BETTER


mYplace



www.lancswt.org.uk

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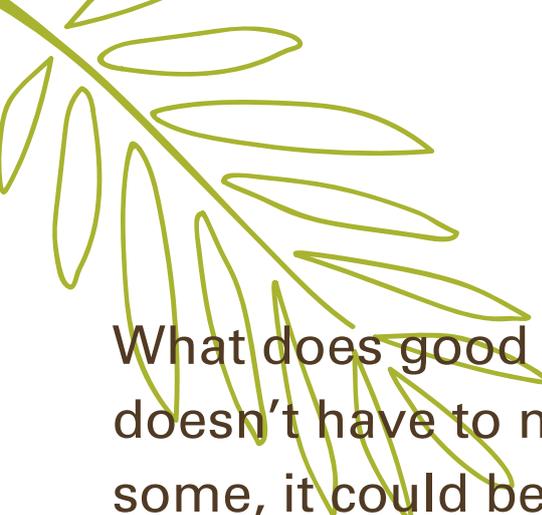
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Cover image: James Adler



What does good mental health mean to you? It doesn't have to mean feeling happy all the time. For some, it could be finding joy in a certain activity. For others, it could mean simply being able to get up in the morning and get through the day.

Good mental health means something different for all of us, but one thing is universal – we all have the potential to be affected by poor mental health. In fact, one in four people in England now experiences a mental health problem each year.

With the number of diagnosed mental health issues in the UK rising, and more people than ever saying they're struggling with their mental health, our Myplace team has put together a helpful guide that will help you find some calm – and it's waiting just outside your door.

**1 in 4 people
experience a mental
health problem**

How nature helps us feel better

The wealth of research into the science of nature's impact on our wellbeing has revealed something remarkable. The exposure to natural light on a walk can boost our mood and balance our circadian rhythm, which helps us sleep.

Contact with soil can give you a boost because it contains a bacterium that acts as a mild anti-depressant. And incredibly, some of the chemicals released by trees and plants, which we breathe in as we walk outdoors, have been proven to alter our brain chemistry and can speed up recovery from illness.

Chemicals released by trees and plants can positively alter our brain chemistry



Noticing nature: The Five Ways to Wellbeing

Nature has the potential to lift our mood, calm our minds and help us feel less isolated. That said, it isn't always easy to know how to start forging that connection with nature.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are a great place to start. First developed by the New Economics Foundation, these simple but powerful steps have been proven to help you feel more positive and are now used by people the world over to give their wellbeing a boost.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing can also go hand-in-hand with nature. Here are some ways you can use them to connect with the wonderful wild world outside.



1. Connect

Social relationships are really important for our wellbeing, helping us feel happier and less alone. Feeling close to others can give you a sense of purpose – as can feeling close to nature. You could:

- Call a friend you haven't spoken to for a while whilst you're out for a walk.
- Say hello to somebody you pass whilst out and about.
- Say thank you to someone who has done something particularly thoughtful for you recently.

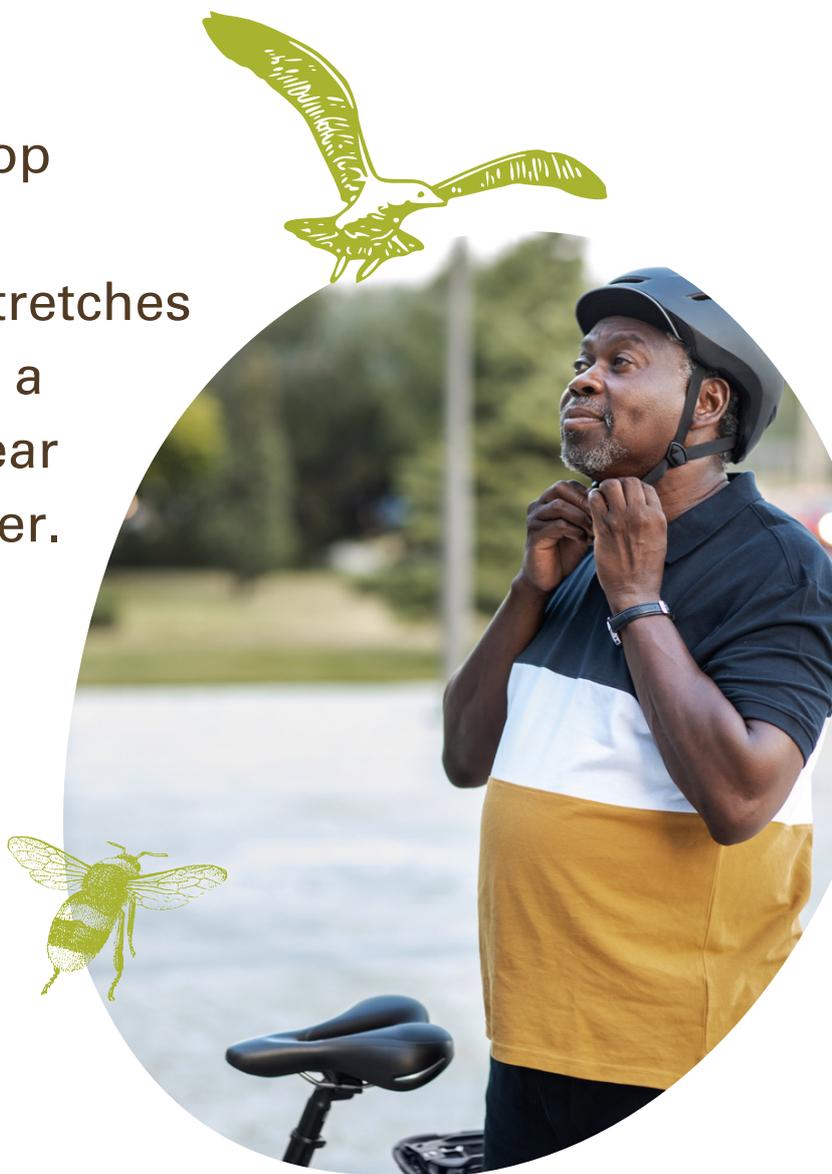
2. Be active

Physical activity is linked to lower rates of depression and anxiety, but you don't have to start running marathons to feel the benefits. While running is a great form of exercise,



something as simple as a five-minute walk can help to clear your mind. Being active is also a great way to soak up the sights and smells of nature that can be so beneficial for our mental wellbeing. Here are a few ideas:

- Get off the bus one stop earlier than normal.
- Try some light yoga stretches in the morning – open a window so you can hear the birds or the weather.
- Walk or cycle somewhere close rather than driving, which also helps the environment!



3. Take notice

Being aware of your surroundings and physical sensations like your breathing can anchor you in the present moment. This can calm your thoughts, help you process what you're feeling and give you a deeper connection with your environment – a great way to cope with periods



of high anxiety. Here are some simple ways to practice taking notice:

- Take a minute to observe what you can see and hear around you.
- Find a natural object and spend a minute exploring it with your senses. It could be a house plant, the bark of a tree or a bird sitting on your wall.
- Focus intently on a task and think only about this. For example, potting a plant or doing the washing up.



4. Learn

You might not feel it all the time, but everyone has something to share and we're all constantly learning from each other and the world around us. You could choose to learn something new about yourself, a topic you're interested in or about the wildlife on your doorstep.



Here are some suggestions based on how much time you've got on your hands:

- **Five minutes:** Watch one of Myplace's video tutorials on planting seeds or nature-friendly growing: <https://bit.ly/3zw5XuR>
- **30 minutes:** Research clubs in your area that bring together people who share your interests.
- **One hour or more:** Sign up to an online course to try something you've never done before. FSC BioLinks runs lots of nature-based courses both virtually and face-to-face.

5. Give

Sometimes it feels hard to do something for ourselves, but helping or doing something for others or for nature brings great wellbeing benefits to both them and us. In fact, research has shown that committing an act of kindness just once a week over six-weeks can increase wellbeing. Why not try:



- Leaving water out for the birds and insects on your windowsill.
- Doing a litter pick during a walk. You can even get a free litter picker through most local councils – check their website to see if yours is offering them.
- Planning a random act of kindness for a friend.



Five mindful moments in nature

Even if it isn't immediately noticeable, a connection with nature is primally wired into us. After all, we were once completely dependent on nature for our survival. All we need to do is tap into that buried instinct and we'll feel the wellbeing benefits: feeling happier, more connected with the world around us and more compassionate.

Here are five mindful activities you can do to find calm in nature.



1. Make a Woodland Eye

This calming craft is the perfect mindfulness activity, especially at the end of a long day. Head outside to find two sticks and then head back inside to start making your Forest Eye, or sit out and do it surrounded by birdsong.

What you'll need:

- Two sticks (30cm-ish).
- Wool (either one colour or multiple).
- A pair of scissors.



Once you get into a rhythm, time will run away with you and you may find you haven't once thought about the stresses that were playing on your mind. The process of weaving a Forest Eye is nice and simple – take a look at this how-to video.

[Watch the video](#)

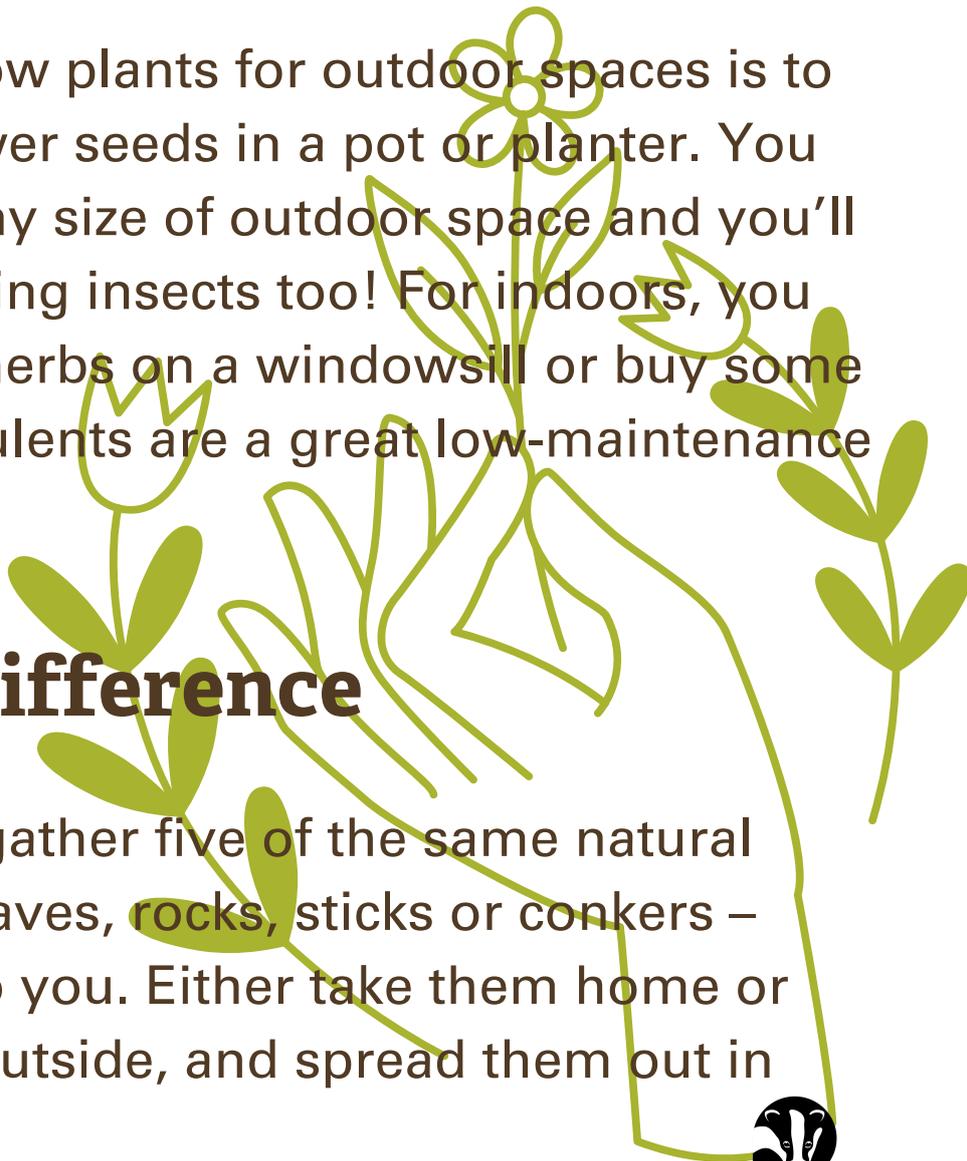
2. Grow a plant

Caring for and nurturing a plant can give you a sense of purpose. It also covers two of the Five Ways to Wellbeing, 'Give' and 'Learn', as you'll be giving your time and care to a plant plus learning to cultivate and care for it. Planting is so great for our wellbeing that some researchers have used horticultural therapy with people suffering from depression, anxiety and dementia.

An easy way to grow plants for outdoor spaces is to sow some wildflower seeds in a pot or planter. You can fit them into any size of outdoor space and you'll be helping pollinating insects too! For indoors, you could grow some herbs on a windowsill or buy some houseplants. Succulents are a great low-maintenance option.

3. Spot the difference

Head outside and gather five of the same natural item. It could be leaves, rocks, sticks or conkers – whatever speaks to you. Either take them home or find a quiet place outside, and spread them out in



front of you. Though these things may look the same at first glance, when you really look at them, you'll notice subtle differences. Pick them up and examine them. Feel for changes in texture. You could even smell each one.

4. Listen to the birds



Many experts believe that listening to birdsong can help us feel less mentally fatigued because it's an easy and pleasant thing to focus on. Tuning into the melodies and interesting sounds of birds is a wonderful way to find calm, and if you don't feel like it, you don't even have to go outside

to do so. Simply open a window and sit close by, sit in your garden or yard, or even on your doorstep.

Listening to birdsong can be used as a mindful

meditation. Here's a simple exercise you can try at home:

- Listen to the closest bird.
- Listen to the farthest bird.
- Listen to the birds in different directions.
- Listen to the silence in between the birdcalls.
- Listen for birds answering one another. What could they be talking about?

5. Draw nature

Putting pen, pencil or paint to paper can help to distract you from negative thoughts and anxious feelings. You don't have to create a masterwork, simply enjoy the process of slowing down, being creative and losing yourself in something where the outcome isn't important.

Why not head outside to find a natural object, then bring it back inside and draw it? You could also draw your favourite thing from nature.



Helplines for times of crisis

Sometimes, turning to nature might not be enough to give you a boost, and that's okay. There is still plenty of help out there and it's really important that you speak to somebody about how you're feeling, especially if you're having thoughts about harming yourself.

The people on the other end of these helplines are ready to support you in times of crisis.

- CALM (if you identify as male): 0800 58 58 58 (5pm – midnight, 365 days a year).
- Samaritans: 116 123 (24 hours a day, 365 days a year).
- Shout textline: 85258 (24 hours a day, seven days a week).
- The Mix textline (under 25s): Text THEMIX to 85258 (24 hours a day, seven days a week).
- Switchboard (if you identify as LGBTQ+): 0300 330 0630 (10am – 10pm, seven days a week).



- Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust: 0800 953 0110 (24 hours a day, seven days a week).

If you aren't in crisis and would like more information about mental health generally, these websites can help:

- Mind: www.mind.org.uk
- Mental Health Foundation: www.mentalhealth.org.uk
- Rethink Mental Illness: www.rethink.org
- YoungMinds: www.youngminds.org.uk



Feel wild and well with Myplace

Our Myplace team offers free face-to-face and online support for adults and young people who are struggling with their mental wellbeing. Myplace uses nature to help people learn new skills, build resilience, meet new people and give back to their community, with activities centering around at least one of The Five Ways to Wellbeing.

Face to face sessions

Meet in small groups once a week in a safe and relaxed environment. Enjoy a range of activities aimed at supporting wildlife and helping you to feel happier and healthier, like wildlife walks, bushcraft sessions and mindfulness activities.



Online sessions



If you aren't able to get outside with us, you can still improve your wellbeing. You'll meet regularly with a member of Myplace staff and a small group of like-

minded people on a safe, online meeting platform to learn new skills, support local wildlife and enjoy the benefits of the outdoors from your own home.

Online gaming sessions

We'll use the video game, Minecraft, to enjoy many of the activities you might expect from any other Myplace session. Exploring the virtual world of Minecraft, we'll collaborate on projects, create new green spaces, go for walks and learn about nature.



Myplace is funded by:

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



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Get back to nature

We look after 42 beautiful nature reserves right across Lancashire, Greater Manchester and North Merseyside. Some are woodland hideaways, some are coastal retreats and some are windswept wildernesses, but each and every one is a place of peace brimming with wildlife.

Head to our website to learn more about each nature reserve and find your nearest wild place.



[Find a nature reserve](#)





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If you think that Myplace could help you feel better, fill in our referral form and a friendly member of our team will get in touch.

www.lancswt.org.uk/myplace


myplace



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