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LESS
stress

LESS Stress

Natural therapy as a tool for better stress management among young people

METHODOLOGY



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Why was the methodology created?

The aim of the methodology is to contribute to:

- **to better mental health among young people and**
- **support a positive relationship between young people and nature.**

The relevance of the methodology is **supported by a number of expert studies** that question:

- **the alarming state of young people's mental health** not only in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, but throughout the world, ¹
- people's **disconnection from nature** more than ever before, ²
- **the positive effects of nature** on human health. ³

The methodology was developed as a result of its creators' response to the three facts mentioned above.

Who created the methodology?

The methodology you are holding in your hands is the result of the international project **LESs Stress - Nature Therapy as a Tool for Better Stress Management in Young People**, implemented as part of the **Erasmus+ KA2 - Small-scale Partnerships** programme.

The methodology was developed in collaboration between two organisations:

- the lead organisation **Institut Euroschola, z. s.** from the Czech Republic and
- partner organisation **OBCIANSKE ZDRUZENIE KERIC** from Slovakia.

¹ Research conducted by the Psychiatric Clinic of the First Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in 2024 showed that among young adults aged 18–30, one in ten admits to symptoms of severe depression, with approximately 16% showing moderate symptoms.

Research conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health in 2023 showed that up to 40% of ninth-grade primary school pupils show signs of moderate to severe depression, and 30% of them show signs of anxiety. The study was conducted on more than 6,000 pupils from all regions of the Czech Republic.

An international study conducted by Dartmouth College in the USA in 2025 on millions of people from 44 countries showed that younger people currently exhibit the highest levels of anxiety, depression and stress.

² According to a study by British researcher Miles Richardson of the University of Derby, people's connection with nature has decreased by more than 60% over the last 220 years.

³ References to sources on the effects of nature on mental health can be found in Appendix 8.

The main creators of the methodology are Johana Pytlíčková and Lukáš Szlaur from the EuroSchola Institute. **Johana Pytlíčková** is a certified Forest Mind instructor, forest therapy guide, eco-facilitator, and is undergoing eco-therapy training. **Lukáš Szlaur** is a psychologist (including a school psychologist), psychotherapist, eco-facilitator, and is also undergoing eco-therapy training. They have been co-creating the **LESS Stress** concept for more than three years, which mainly consists of methodological, educational and experiential courses and seminars focused on supporting self-awareness, mental health and stress management with the help of nature, the body and the mind.

The methodology is also the result of collaboration between experts in the field of education and youth work (especially Mirka Petříková and Ivka Hrušková from KERIC), as well as **target groups**. Before its completion, it was tested in practice three times – twice with secondary school students (**Gymnázium Třinec and Gymnázium J. M. Hurbana in Čadca**) and once with selected youth workers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, who tried out the methodology for themselves. All three groups provided ongoing feedback, which was incorporated into the final version of the methodology. As a result, the methodology meets the needs of both the target group of participants and the lecturers (youth workers) who will work with it and convey it to the participants.



Who is the methodology intended for?

The **primary** target group is **youth workers** (formal and informal educators, leaders of extracurricular activities, school psychologists, social workers, etc.). They receive **a detailed methodology for a two-day outdoor course**, during which young people (hereinafter also referred to as "participants") learn simple but effective nature therapy techniques that will help them better manage stress.

Ultimately, the methodology will benefit **young people themselves** (aged approximately 14-20). The target group to which the methodology is to be passed on (i.e. the "participants" in the activities) consists mainly of secondary school students who today spend most of their time in school or online. Their lifestyle is associated with high use of technology, a shift away from nature and, hand in hand with this, a decline in physical activity. Yet it is precisely this disconnection from the natural environment that is one of the factors that increase stress and weaken mental health. That is why we have decided to offer them a way back – to nature, to themselves, and to simple techniques that will help them cope with everyday pressures.



What does the methodology offer?

The LESS Stress methodology offers youth workers:

- a detailed description of the two-day course programme,
- a detailed explanation of individual activities and their benefits,

- methodological recommendations on how to run the course and how to support young people in coping with stress through nature.

Thanks to its **simplicity, low cost and versatility**, the methodology can also be used in a broader European context – with various target groups, not only secondary school students. The people who will guide young people through the course and carry out the individual activities are referred to in the methodology by the collective term '**lecturer**'. We recommend that at least two lecturers participate in the course to guide the programme.

We place great emphasis on **the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature**: if we show young people that nature supports their mental health and wellbeing, we will naturally arouse in them a greater interest in protecting it.

LESS stress How is the methodology structured?

Module 1 – Introduction to the course and getting in tune with nature and stress

Module 2 – Wellbeing and stress

Module 3 – The effects of nature on mental health and

wellbeing **Module 4 – Nature therapy and mindfulness in**

practice **Module 5 – Creative nature therapy**

Module 6 – Nature mandala **Module 7 –**

Giving thanks to nature

Each module contains several activities that complement or follow on from each other, forming a logical whole.

The methodology also includes **appendices** that provide lecturers with additional information, an overview of basic theoretical knowledge, or worksheets and cards.

The methodology also includes **visual material** that complements the text and can facilitate the preparation and implementation of individual activities for lecturers. The photographs were **taken during pilot testing of the methodology** with students from partner secondary schools – Třinec Secondary School and J. M. Hurban Secondary School in Čadca – and with selected youth workers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

LESS stress How to use the methodology?

You can use the methodology in two ways:

- **as a whole** – in the form in which it was created, i.e. as a format for a **two-day outdoor course**,

- **in parts** – you can choose individual modules or activities and work with them separately, according to the current needs of the group or time constraints.

The creators of the methodology recommend using it as a whole, i.e. in the format of a two-day course, for the following reason: **The first day of the course is a kind of preparation for the second day.** It is designed so that participants gain basic knowledge about wellbeing, stress and the positive effects of nature on mental health through activities based on the principles of informal education and experiential pedagogy, and with that, motivation and interest in trying and practising the nature therapy activities themselves, which are the content of the second day of the programme.

Where possible, all **activities take place outdoors in nature.** The course is designed as an outdoor activity because we believe in the positive influence of the natural environment on mental well-being, relaxation and regeneration. At the same time, being outdoors can also bring minor discomforts (cold, wind, uneven terrain), which are a natural part of the experience and help participants **strengthen their resilience** – an important skill for coping with stress in everyday life.

The basic theoretical information about stress, wellbeing and the effects of nature on mental health, which participants are expected to learn during the course, is not taught in the form of frontal teaching by lecturers. **The methodology is based on the principles of experiential education**, which builds on personal experience, active involvement and reflection. Participants thus learn basic concepts and facts through activities in which they search for information themselves, process it visually and present it to others. This approach not only promotes better memorisation and understanding, but also develops cooperation, creativity and the ability to share one's own views within the group.

Participants are grouped in **a circle** during the activities. This arrangement has several advantages: everyone can see each other, no one is "behind someone else" or "in the background," and everyone has the same opportunity to be part of the action. The circular arrangement promotes **a sense of equality, openness, and belonging**, which is important for both safe sharing and the mutual connection of the whole group.

We hope you enjoy working with the LESs Stress methodology.

DAY 1

Module 1 – Introduction to the course and tuning in to working with nature and stress

The introductory block of the course aims to **familiarise participants with the LESS Stress concept**, introduce the creators and objectives of the course, and create **a safe, respectful and open environment** for working together over the two days.

The block also opens up the topic of self-awareness in relation to nature and issues related to stress and wellbeing.

Module objectives

After completing the module, participants will:

1. **Understand the aim of the course and its methodology**, and know the basic organisational information.
 2. **Work together to create a code of conduct** that will ensure a safe and respectful environment for the whole group to work in.
 3. **Express their expectations** of what they would like to learn about managing stress with the help of nature.
 4. **Reflect on their relationship with nature and stress** through interactive activities.
-

Activity 1.1. Introduction to the project, its creators and objectives



Title: LESs Stress - Nature therapy as a tool for better stress management for young people

The project was created as part of the **Erasmus+ KA2 - Small-scale Partnerships** programme. **Partner organisations** that created the project: lead organisation **Institut Euroschola, z. s.** from the Czech Republic and partner organisation **OBCIANSKE ZDRUZENIE KERIC** from Slovakia.

Possible introduction to the project – why young people, why nature:

Today's young people are spending more and more time in front of screens and on digital devices, while their contact with nature is significantly decreasing. This lifestyle, combined with high academic demands, the expectations of teachers and parents, and their own ambitions, leads to increased stress and anxiety. Scientific studies confirm that secondary school students are exposed to higher levels of psychological pressure than previous generations and are more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety or depression. The aim of the project is to respond to this situation and support young people in finding a balance between the pressures of everyday life and the opportunity to regenerate in nature, so that they can better manage stress and strengthen their mental well-being.

Nature is one of the most effective tools for promoting mental health and managing stress. Scientific studies have repeatedly confirmed that spending time in a natural environment reduces stress hormone levels, improves mood, promotes concentration and strengthens overall mental well-being. Working with nature, whether through observation, outdoor exercise or interactive activities, provides young people with a safe space for relaxation, self-discovery and awareness of their own emotions. This positive influence of nature is one of the key principles on which the LESs Stress concept is based. The project also aims to promote a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature: if people know that nature supports their mental health and wellbeing, they will naturally develop a greater interest in protecting it.

Activity 1.2. Common code for the course



Activity objective

The aim of this activity is for participants to jointly establish basic rules for the two-day course that will ensure a safe, respectful and productive environment for everyone. The code helps to create a sense of responsibility for one's own behaviour and promotes the acceptance of rules by the majority of the group, thereby strengthening cooperation and mutual respect.

Preparation and materials

- Flipchart and markers

Description of the activity

1. **Brainstorming in pairs:** The instructor asks participants to discuss in pairs for 1 minute what rules would be appropriate for everyone to work well and learn something at the same time. They can give one example as inspiration.
2. **Sharing with the whole group:** Each pair presents their suggestions in turn. The instructor explains the meaning of the rules, ensures that everyone understands their purpose, and evaluates their suitability.
3. **Recording the code:** The accepted rules are recorded on a blank flipchart. The instructor may add rules that the group did not mention but are recommended (see below).

4. **Adopting the code:** Each participant can make their mark (or sign) on the flipchart, symbolically confirming that they respect the code. The flipchart is then displayed in a visible place to serve as a reminder of the agreed rules throughout the course.

Recommended basic rules for the course

- **Respect** – All participants are of equal value. Even if we disagree with someone's opinions, we respect the person.
- **We do not interrupt each other** – Only the person holding the talking stick has the right to speak – agreement on what will constitute the talking stick. We recommend using a natural object, such as a stone, pine cone, etc.
- **Digital detox** – Mobile phones are not used during the programme, unless the instructor specifies otherwise. This helps participants focus on the programme, themselves and the group, and encourages them to disconnect from technology and connect with themselves, others and nature.
- **We clean up** – Everyone cleans up the space where they carried out the activity.
- **We behave ecologically** – We sort waste, take only as much food as we can eat, and do not waste.
- **Las Vegas principle** – What is shared in the course stays in the course.
- **Cosy / comfort** – Everyone makes sure they are comfortable (drinks, suitable clothing, etc.).

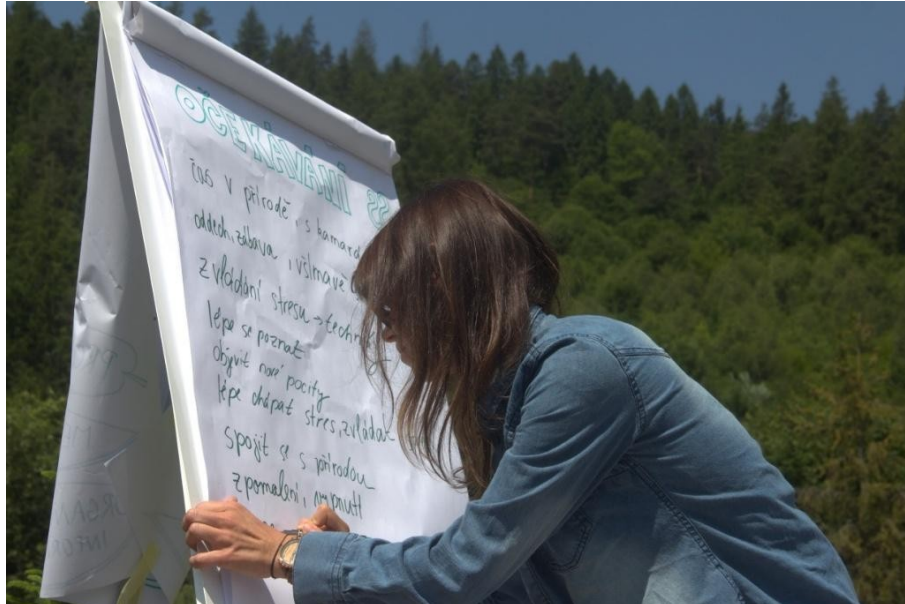
Optional rules for discussion with the group

- **Punctuality** – how to deal with latecomers.
- **Addressing each other by name** – formal/informal. Informal address – promotes an informal atmosphere, suitable for open groups.
- **Voluntary sharing of feelings** – we respect the introversion and personal comfort of participants.

Benefits for participants

- Strengthening **responsibility and autonomy** within the group.
- Creation of a **safe and respectful environment** that promotes open communication.
- Clear rules that ensure **an effective and comfortable course** for all participants.

Activity 1.3. Gathering expectations



Activity objective

The aim of this activity is **to find out what participants expect from the course** and what they would like to learn about coping with stress in relation to nature. The activity also helps lecturers to adapt the course to the needs of participants and encourages **active participation and a sense of co-creation of the course**.

Preparation and materials

- Flipchart and markers
- Talking object to support circular communication

Description of the activity

1. Each participant takes turns **presenting what they would like to learn, try, or experience** during the course.
2. The instructor **writes down each expectation on the flipchart** so that it is visually recorded and visible to everyone. If they know that the expectations are not feasible, they can point this out to the participants.
3. The rules of circular communication apply – everyone speaks when they are holding the talking object (prepared in advance by the lecturer), while the others listen without interrupting.

4. At the end **of the course**, the instructor **reflects** with the group on whether the expectations from the first day were met and what the participants gained.

Benefits for participants

- Strengthening the feeling that their opinions and needs are **heard and respected**.
- Increased **active motivation** to participate in the course, as participants see that the course reflects their expectations.
- Creation of **an open space for communication and sharing** that promotes mutual trust within the group.
- Enabling lecturers **to respond specifically to the needs of the group**, thereby increasing the effectiveness and relevance of individual course activities.

Activity 1.4. Me and nature – Self-discovery through nature



Activity objective

The aim of this activity is **to promote self-awareness, self-consciousness and mutual understanding among participants in relation to nature**. The activity helps young people reflect on their relationship with nature, become aware of their preferences, emotions and values, and connect them with their own identity. The activity promotes not only individual reflection and mutual understanding, but also **collective sharing and open communication in a safe environment**.

Materials

- 34 colourful laminated cards with various images of nature – Appendix 1
- A suitable space (outdoors) with enough room to lay out the cards and move around a little
- Circular arrangement so that each participant can see both the cards and the other participants.

Description

1. The cards with images of nature are laid out on the ground. The instructor asks the participants to **choose one image** that appeals to them the most.
2. To encourage self-awareness, the instructor may ask questions such as:
 - Why did I choose this picture?

- What emotions does it evoke in me?
 - What does it say about me?
3. In a community circle, each participant **presents their choice** (they take the picture in their hands and show it to the others) and shares their feelings or thoughts, e.g.: "I chose the picture with the dark water surface because I like to go beneath the surface, to explore things in depth..."

Benefits for participants

- Strengthening **self-knowledge, self-awareness** and mutual understanding through visual reflection and sharing one's own choice.
- Training in the art of **listening to others**.
- Deepening **one's relationship with nature** and awareness of its importance.
- Developing the ability **to share one's feelings and opinions** in a safe and respectful environment.
- Activation **of reflection on one's own emotions**, which is key to coping with stress and supporting mental well-being.

Activity 1.5. Me and stress – How I deal with stress



Activity objective

The aim of this activity is **to open up the topic of stress and how to manage it**, to engage participants and to support their **awareness of their own relationship to stress**. The activity also **energises the group**, allows them to safely reflect on their own experiences and prepares the ground for subsequent learning about stress management.

In addition, the light exercise that is part of the activity also helps to improve stress management.

Preparation and materials

- A suitable space (outdoors) where each participant has enough room for small movements
- 10+1 questions about stress
- Laminated pictures with a postural scale – Appendix 2
- Circular arrangement so that each participant can see the others

Description of the activity

1. Participants stand in a circle. The instructor explains that in this first phase of the activity, **"Me and Stress,"** they will answer individual questions non-verbally – **with their posture**.

2. The instructor presents a **scale from least to most**, shows the pictures and, if necessary, demonstrates the correct positions. The pictures can remain in a visible place throughout the activity.
3. The instructor reads the questions and the participants take the position that best corresponds to their feelings or experiences.
4. After each question, the lecturer may ask 2-3 participants to **comment on** their position **verbally**, thereby encouraging reflection and sharing of experiences.

Questions for the activity

1. *How well do you understand the word stress?*
 2. *How well could you explain what stress means in your life?*
 3. *How high was your stress level 6 months ago?*
 4. *How much stress have you experienced in the last 2 weeks?*
 5. *Can you explain the meaning of the word stressor and give specific examples?*
 6. *Can you give examples of symptoms of stress, i.e. how it manifests itself?*
 7. *How familiar are you with ways to effectively manage stress?*
 8. *Can you explain the concept of relaxation?*
 9. *Do you understand what meditation means?*
 10. *How much have you heard about mindfulness?*
- + additional question: *How good are you at managing stress in your life?*

Benefits for participants

- The activity allows participants to **safely reflect on their own experiences with stress** and become aware of its intensity and manifestations, while also opening up the topic of wellbeing.
- **It energises the group**, engaging all participants through movement and interaction, thereby promoting energy and connection within the group.
- It strengthens **non-verbal expression of emotions and states**, which is often easier than verbal sharing.
- It promotes **mutual understanding within the group**, as participants see how others perceive stress and gain a broader perspective.
- It prepares participants for **the practical stress management tools** that will follow in the next blocks of the course.
- **The movement involved in the activity is also one of the methods of stress management**, helping to release tension and increase body awareness.

Module 2 – Wellbeing and stress

Module objectives

1. The aim of the module is **to energise the group** and allow participants **to experience first-hand the minor stress** associated with the need to perform under time pressure so that they realise how stress affects the body.
 2. The main objective of the module is **to familiarise participants with basic information about wellbeing and stress**.
-

Activity 2.1. Scarf relay – a little stress in practice



Activity objective

Through a simple and lively game, participants will experience a little stress that arises under time pressure and pressure to perform. The activity also serves as **a group energiser**, promoting cooperation and attunement to the topic of stress and its physical and emotional manifestations.

Preparation and aids

- 3 scarves

Activity

1. The instructor divides the group into 3 subgroups with the same number of people. Each group stands in a circle and receives a scarf.
2. The task is to pass the scarf around the circle so that the participants alternately tie it around their wrists and ankles. Everyone unties the scarf themselves and passes it on to the next person.
 - Example: Peter ties the scarf to Paula's wrist, Paula unties it herself and ties it to Viki's ankle, Viki unties the scarf and ties it to Aneta's wrist... and so on.
3. Rules:
 - The scarf must always be tied with **two knots**.
 - The number of rounds is counted.
 - The goal is to complete as many rounds as possible in **5 minutes**.

It is advisable to assign one person (this can be a lecturer or teaching supervisor) to each team to count the rounds.

4. When the time is up, the instructor ends the activity, counts the number of rounds, evaluates the groups' performance, and asks the participants to briefly reflect on their experiences:
 - What emotions did they experience?
 - What sensations did you feel in your body?

Reflection and connection to the topic

The instructor will summarise that the participants had the opportunity to experience an example of **minor stress** caused by time pressure and pressure to perform. They will emphasise that even a short situation of this type can show us what causes stress in the body and emotions. The next part of the programme will then build on this experience.

Benefits for participants

- experiential learning about mild stress and its manifestations, awareness of one's own physical and emotional reactions
- strengthening of group dynamics and cooperation
- motivation to explore the topic of stress in more depth in other activities

Activity 2.2. Gallery in nature



Activity objective

Participants will interactively learn basic information about wellbeing and stress. This knowledge will not be imparted through frontal teaching, but participants **will research it themselves, process it visually and present it to others**. The activity promotes **cooperation, creativity and communication within the group** and provides the experience of working on one's own project, which is shared with others. The activity also includes training in presentation skills and the art of listening, as well as possible discussions.

Preparation and materials

- printed laminated questions (Appendix 3)
- 10 pieces of A3-size hard paper
- art supplies (e.g. markers, crayons, pastels, wax crayons...)
- sufficiently long jute rope
- 20 wooden clothes pegs
- Recommendation: mobile phones permitted for searching for specialist information

Activity

1. The instructor divides the students randomly into **a maximum of 10 groups of 2–3 people** (depending on the size of the group).

2. Each team is assigned one question related to wellbeing and stress.
3. Each team receives an A3 sheet of paper, art supplies and writing materials, and is given **15 minutes** to create a visually interesting poster with the answer to the question.
4. While the posters are being created, the instructor will tie **a jute rope between the trees and attach pegs to it**, which will then serve as an exhibition space for an outdoor gallery.
5. Once the posters are finished, the participants will sit back down in **a circle**. The teams will take turns presenting their posters to the rest of the group in the order in which the questions are listed. Each team will:
 - state their topic,
 - presents its poster,
 - share basic information on the issue,
 - hangs the poster on the prepared rope,
 - the instructor may supplement the theoretical information and clarify key terms (the basic framework is available in Appendix 3 of the methodology), discussion is welcome.



List of questions

1. *What do you know about wellbeing?*
2. *How can you improve your wellbeing?*
3. *What is stress and what is a stressor?*



4. *When do we experience stress in our lives? Is there good and bad stress?*
5. *How does stress manifest itself in the body?*
6. *How does stress manifest itself emotionally?*
7. *How does stress manifest itself cognitively/intellectually?*
8. *How does stress affect the social side of our lives?*
9. *What helps us manage stress?*
10. *What do you know about relaxation, meditation and mindfulness?*



Benefits for participants

- Participants actively seek out and process information, learning through experience,
- developing cooperation, communication and creativity.
- visual processing promotes better memorisation and understanding of the topic,
- presenting posters to others promotes knowledge sharing, presentation skills, listening skills and open discussion.

Module 3 – The influence of nature on mental health and wellbeing



Module objective

The aim of this module is **to familiarise participants with the relationship between nature, the nervous system, mental health and wellbeing**, in particular:

- the functioning of the autonomic nervous system (sympathetic and parasympathetic branches),
- the link between the parasympathetic nervous system and nature,
- the influence of nature on stress hormone levels,
- the influence of nature on cognitive functions.

The activity again takes the form of **experiential learning**, where participants acquire information and process it themselves. The module includes more intensive physical and mental activity with elements of teamwork, but also possible competitions. The activity also includes training in presentation skills and the art of listening and discussion.

1. Preparation before the activity

- The instructor has prepared (printed, cut out and laminated) cards **with "information about the effects of nature on mental health"** (Appendix 6), which contain ten sentences divided into two parts – a total of 20 cards.

- The cards are placed in nature (e.g. tied to tree branches) so that participants do not know where they are in advance. We recommend placing the cards visibly and sufficiently far apart.

2. Dividing participants into teams

- Participants are divided into teams of 4 or 3-5 members.
- **The draw** will be done randomly **using natural objects**: the instructor will prepare 4 pieces of each type of natural object (e.g. 4 stones, 4 pine cones, 4 chestnuts...) and spread them out on the ground. Each student will choose one natural object and then form teams based on their choice. (The participants do not know the principle of division in advance in order to promote randomness.)

3. Searching for information and creating correct pairs

Participants are tasked with finding information about the effects of nature on mental health, stress and cognitive functions, forming correct pairs and transcribing them into a record table.



Rules for finding information and transcribing it into the table:

- The lecturer distributes writing materials, a writing pad, blank paper for recording remembered information, and a record table for the final transcription of correct pairs to each team.
- The group agrees in advance on a location that will serve as a "base camp" where all teams will have the necessary equipment (see above). The base camp is located a few metres away from the area where the cards are placed (to encourage movement).

- Participants search for cards in nature, memorise each piece of information they find, and transfer it "in their heads" to base camp (supporting cognitive functions), where they transcribe it onto paper. The cards therefore remain in place for other teams.
- It is up to the participants to agree on the rules within their team – for example, each team can have one recorder, while the others search...
- Once the team has found and transcribed the information, it begins to form the correct pairs, which it then transcribes into the record table in order from 1 to 10.
- The lecturer may or may not add a competitive element to the activity of searching for and compiling information. They may also set a maximum time limit for searching for cards and compiling the correct pairs in advance.



4. Evaluation, finding additional information, presentation and discussion

Objective: to verify the accuracy of the compiled information, study more detailed information on the topic and present it to others, then discuss the effects of nature on mental health and stress.

Information on the effects of nature on mental health and wellbeing:

1. The autonomic nervous system (ANS) is divided into the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS).⁴

2. Life in an urban environment triggers the activity of the sympathetic nervous system.

⁴ For simplicity, the division of the PNS into two branches/two states is not mentioned, and we only consider the state in which the ANS assesses that we are safe (the so-called ventral vagus according to the Polyvagal Theory - author Stephen Porges, Ph.D.).

- 3. Spending time in nature triggers the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system.**
- 4. In nature, there is a significant decrease in the level of stress hormones in the blood.**
- 5. During a stay and movement in nature, the levels of certain "happiness hormones" in the body increase.**
- 6. The higher the level of "Nature Connectedness", the lower the incidence of mental illness.**
- 7. Contact with nature can help us achieve better academic results.**
- 8. Even just looking out of a window at greenery has a positive effect on mental health and cognitive function.**
- 9. Plants communicate using terpenes, and their "conversation" also affects our health.**
- 10. Nature is also used as a preventive or complementary treatment method in healthcare.⁵**

Procedure:

- Once the teams have formed pairs, the lecturer distributes "supplementary information" (Appendix 7) to each group, which has been pre-cut and laminated. Each group receives supplementary information for approximately two sentences (depending on the number of groups), i.e. two cards that expand on the composite text.
- The participants study the supplementary information in their group and agree on how they will present it to the whole group. They are given a few minutes to study it.
- Then, the teams will read the compound pair and present the additional information to the others. It is important to keep the order 1–10, as the information builds on each other.
- The presentation may be followed by a discussion on the topic of the effects of nature on mental health and wellbeing.

Questions for possible discussion:

- What surprised you most about the information you found?
- Have you noticed how the urban environment versus nature affects you?
- What activities can you do to develop your "Nature Connectedness"?
- How can you support your daily contact with nature, even if you cannot physically get out into it?
- Should nature become part of the Czech healthcare system (e.g. insurance coverage for psychotherapy in nature)? What are the pros and cons?

⁵ The information is based on the results of scientific studies and professional publications; the sources are listed in Appendix 8.

Benefits for participants

- **Increased awareness of the relationship between nature and mental health:** participants will understand how nature affects the autonomic nervous system, stress hormone levels and cognitive function.
- **Practical experience:** active involvement in searching for and matching information promotes experience and deeper retention of knowledge.
- **Development of teamwork:** participants work in teams, learning to communicate, coordinate activities and solve tasks together.
- **Improved reflection and critical thinking:** presenting results and discussions promote the ability to evaluate information, ask questions, and discuss connections.

Reflection on Day 1



Activity objective:

To encourage participants to reflect on the day, express their feelings, remember new insights, and set expectations for the next day or activities. The activity develops self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and self-regulation.

1. Introductory discussion

The instructor explains to participants why reflection is important and how it can help them.

The instructor asks participants why they think it is important to reflect on their day. They emphasise that reflection helps:

- better understand their feelings and moods,
- realise what they have learned,
- set positive expectations for the next day.

The instructor will remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers – everyone expresses their own experiences.

2. Explanation of some parts of the form

How do I feel today?

- Participants choose the emoticon that best expresses their feelings.

Something new I learned today

- Participants write down at least one thing they learned today (it does not have to be just theory, but also knowledge about themselves or others).

The best and worst moment of the day

- Participants write down one best and one worst moment of the day.
- The instructor asks them to think about why these moments were positive or negative for them.
- If appropriate, the instructor opens a short discussion:
 - *"What can we do to notice the good moments more?"*
 - *"How can we learn from the worse ones?"*

My expectations for tomorrow

- Participants write down what they are looking forward to or what they would like to see happen.
- If they don't know, they can write down a goal they would like to achieve.

3. Filling out the form

Participants work individually. The instructor reminds them that the answers are personal and serve to help them grow.

4. Discussion and sharing

Participants who wish to do so can voluntarily share their answers.

If someone mentions that they had a bad day, the instructor can sensitively ask what could help make tomorrow better.

5. Conclusion

The instructor summarises that regular reflection helps to better understand one's own emotions and promotes self-awareness and personal growth. They encourage participants to develop the habit of reflecting every day.

DAY 2

Module 4 – Nature therapy and mindfulness in practice



The aim of the module (and the entire second day of the course) is to provide **intensive practice in nature**. Participants will try out various simple but effective techniques and tools from the field of **nature therapy**. These methods build on the information and experience gained during the first day, from which participants learn about the effects of nature on the nervous system and wellbeing.

The lecturer can explain **the term nature therapy** (therapy through nature, ecotherapy): it is a therapeutic and supportive approach that uses time spent and activities in a natural environment to strengthen mental and physical health.

For maximum effectiveness, it is ideal for the entire Module 4 to **be conducted in a forest** or forest park.

Introductory information:

- The lecturer always begins by assigning the entire activity, explaining the procedure, stating the approximate time required to complete it, asking if the participants have any questions, and inviting them to undertake the activity **INDIVIDUALLY** (unless otherwise stated).
- The instructor has a so-called **calling object**, the sound of which they familiarise the participants with in advance – e.g. a Tibetan bowl, bell, whistle...

- When the time is up, the instructor will call the participants back into the circle with the pre-agreed sound to reflect on their experiences.
 - Reflection is voluntary; it is not necessary for everyone to share, 3–4 participants are sufficient. If the participants in the group are reluctant to reflect, the instructor can always address a few participants. In doing so, they ensure a safe environment. Possible questions for reflection are listed for each activity.
 - The activities are divided into several blocks, and there are many to choose from. The instructor can select only some of them, taking into account the time available and the mood of the group.
-

A) INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

Just Being ⁶



⁶The Just Be exercise is based on **the Forest Mind** exercises Here and Now and Observation. The Forest Mind concept was brought to the Czech Republic from Finland by Martina Holcová, who says: "The Finnish concept of Forest Mind is a good companion in bad weather and on sunny days. It brings more moments of pause, relaxation and mindfulness into life, but also questions that open up new perspectives and require searching for answers (life coaching) and the opportunity to see more of the good and beautiful in ourselves and around us (positive psychology). It is a concept of self-development and self-care that offers, through simple short exercises (ideally in a natural environment, but also indoors), the opportunity to train skills that are so important for the times we live in. The whole concept is based on the latest research on the effects of nature on health, and the aim is to encourage people to live a rich and fulfilling life in balance. Forest mind is for almost everyone, and here, as in Finland, thanks to a network of instructors, it is part of many different areas (primary schools, secondary schools, universities and adult education, international projects, therapy, wellbeing, coaching, healthcare)." You can learn more about Forest Mind from the book of the same name or from the website www.lesnimysl.cz

Duration: 10 minutes + reflection

Aim of the exercise: Participants find their space in nature where they can perceive their surroundings undisturbed and connect with the present moment and with themselves. This exercise promotes grounding, the ability to concentrate, opening the senses and perceiving details in the environment.

Instructions for lecturers:

Explain the principle of the "just be" exercise to participants: it is a simple introductory activity, the goal is not to analyse or evaluate, but simply to perceive.

Encourage students to find a place in their surroundings that attracts them, where they feel comfortable and where nothing will disturb them. They can sit, lie down, or stand. The distance should be such that everyone can hear the sound signalling the end of the activity.

Tell them to close their eyes or let their gaze rest freely on their surroundings (everyone may find something different pleasant), and JUST BE, i.e. try to consciously perceive the present moment, the environment – both external and internal – what is around them and what is happening within themselves (this skill of shifting attention from the outside to the inside will be further developed, so it is good to start practising it now). They can help themselves by perceiving their breath or surroundings through their senses.

Important: if there is no meditation master among the participants, thoughts will come during the exercise – the point is to NOTICE that a thought has come, but not to develop it in any way, to let it go and return to perceiving the present. And so on and so forth.

Let the participants remain in this activity for 5–10 minutes (depending on the situation). Do not announce the length of time in advance.

After the activity, the participants stand in a circle and are encouraged to reflect and share their impressions. First, it is advisable to give them space to share what they want, then you can ask questions.

Tips for reflection:

- Was it easy or difficult for you to just be and perceive what was happening without thinking?
 - What did you realise about yourself or your environment during the exercise?
 - Did you feel different after the exercise than you did before?
 - What surprised you?
 - It is interesting to ask participants how long they think the activity lasted.
-

B) ACTIVITIES FOCUSED ON THE SENSES

Introduction to sensory activities:

Our senses are the gateway to a deeper experience of the present moment.

The following series of activities focuses on awakening and sharpening the basic senses. It teaches us to perceive the world around us more intensely, more present – as if we were discovering it for the first time. The activities are inspired by the principles of mindfulness, which, as participants already know, helps reduce stress, calm the mind and strengthen resilience to everyday challenges. The more we immerse ourselves in conscious perception, the better we are able to connect with our surroundings and ourselves, which in turn helps us to better understand ourselves and manage stress.

It is advisable for the instructor to encourage participants to take a curious and playful approach to the activities. It is not about performance or right or wrong perception. It is about experience. What new things will they discover? What will surprise them?

TOUCH:

Touch is one of the most basic senses. Through our skin, we constantly perceive the world around us – the temperature of the air, pressure, the smoothness or roughness of surfaces, the movement of the wind and the warmth of the sun's rays. Yet we often do not pay conscious attention to it. Now participants will have the opportunity to do so. Through touch, they can deepen their relationship with nature and better anchor their minds in the present moment.

Exploring different textures

Duration: 5 minutes + reflection

Instructions for lecturers:

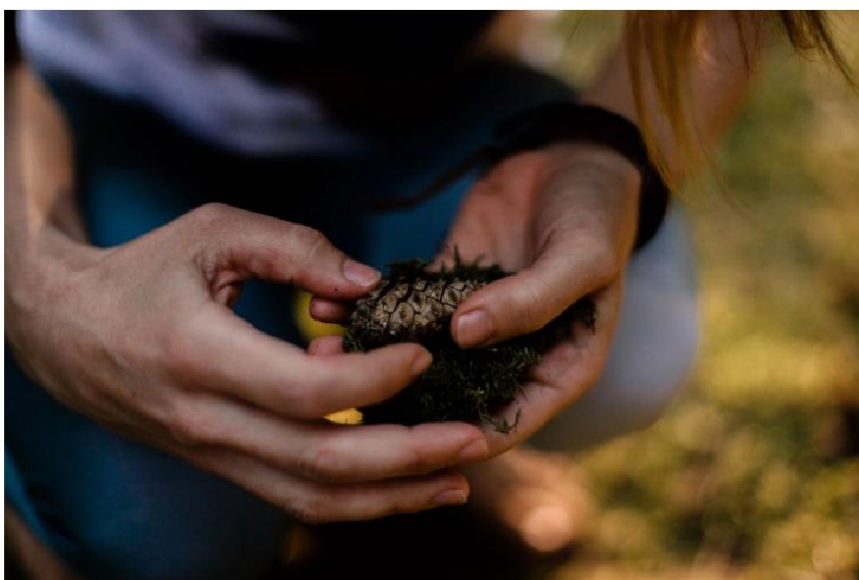
In the following activity, participants will explore different surfaces/textures. Invite participants to:

- spread out around the area and explore as many different surfaces as possible (rough, smooth, soft, sticky, hairy, cold, warm, etc.),
- use not only their fingertips, but also their palms, the backs of their hands, forearms or feet,
- try out the difference in perception through touch when their eyes are open/closed.

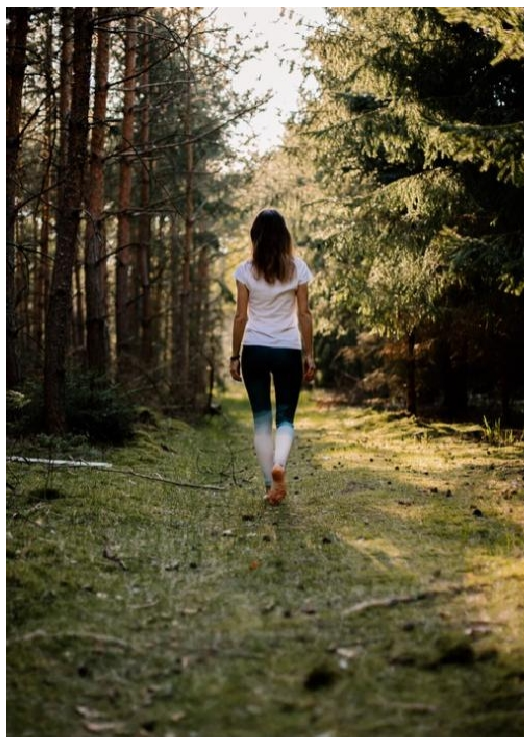
After the activity, there is a reflection in a circle.

Tips for reflection:

- What surprised you?
- Which surface was the most pleasant? And which was the most unpleasant?
- Did you perceive different temperatures?
- Did you discover something you had never noticed before?
- How do you feel after this exercise?



Barefoot walking



Duration: 5 minutes + reflection

Instructions for instructors:

Introduction:

We perceive the world differently when we touch it directly.

The feet are a masterpiece of nature. They contain thousands of nerve endings that connect us to the ground and provide us with valuable information about the surface we are walking on. Yet we spend most of our time in shoes that muffle this communication. Walking barefoot is a great way to reawaken your sense of touch, connect with the earth and practise your balance.

In this exercise, participants will slow down and feel different natural materials and textures under their feet – grass, soil, stones, moss, sand... What is the difference between warm sun-heated soil and cool shade? Which surface is pleasant? Which is unexpected?

Introduce the activity as a whole with various sub-invites, then allow time for its implementation and subsequent reflection.

Ask participants to take off their shoes and socks and give them sub-invitations:

- Stand still for a moment and feel the ground beneath your feet. How does it feel? Cold, warm, soft, hard?
- Go on a mindful exploratory walk, noticing:
 - o how you walk, where your centre of gravity is in your body, how the terrain changes under your feet,

- alternate between different surfaces – moss, tree roots, fallen pine needles, grass, pine cones, sticks, soil...
- vary your walking pace – as slow as possible, "normal", fast. What changes in your body depending on your walking pace? What is your inner environment like when you are calm, not rushing anywhere, and, conversely, when you are rushing?
- Walk differently than usual – on your toes, with your whole foot at once, on the edges of your big toe/little toe...

Tips for reflection:

- What surprised you?
 - Which surface was the most comfortable for you? And which was the least comfortable?
 - How do you feel after walking barefoot?
 - How did your body feel when walking slowly/quickly? (connection to stress)
-

SMELL:

Smell is one of our oldest senses and plays a fundamental role in our perception of the world. It is directly connected to the limbic system of the brain, which influences emotions, memory and mental well-being. That is why smells can immediately trigger memories (known as olfactory memory) or change our mood.

+ Remind participants of the link to terpenes, which enter the body through the sense of smell (and skin).

My natural perfume

Duration: 10 minutes + reflection

Introduction:

During the following activity, participants will connect with nature, their memories and each other through smell. They will strengthen their sensitivity to the natural environment and practise conscious awareness of the present moment. They may experience relaxation and calmness. They will boost their creativity.

Instructions for lecturers:

Again, first explain the activity, then give participants space to carry it out:

- Each participant finds a place in nature that appeals to them – where they feel good or are attracted to something.
- They open their senses and begin to consciously perceive their surroundings through their sense of smell.
- They will begin to discover various natural objects and examine their scents/smells.
- They choose the ones that smell the most pleasant to them. They collect them carefully, with respect for nature.
- They place the collected natural objects in their palms and gently crush them to release their scent.
- While creating their natural perfume, they perceive how the individual scents affect them, what feelings they evoke, and whether they bring back any memories.
- Once he is satisfied with his blended scent, he returns to the circle.
- In the circle, the participants let each other smell the scent coming from their half-open palms – so that others cannot see what natural mixture is inside.
- They guess what ingredients – natural substances – the perfume contains and share their impressions.

Tips for reflection:

- What natural ingredients did you choose and why?
- What feelings and memories did the scents evoke in you?
- Was it easy for you to concentrate on your sense of smell?
- How did you react to the scents of others?
- Were you able to recognise any of the natural objects?
- Were you surprised by any of the combinations?
- How did you feel when perceiving scents compared to other sensory perceptions?



HEARING

The following activities will be related to hearing. Hearing is the sense that connects us to the sound environment and provides us with valuable information about what is happening around us. Participants will listen carefully and perceive the various sounds that surround them.

Perceiving sounds ⁷



Duration: 5 minutes + reflection

Introduction:

Sounds can be quiet or loud, pleasant or disturbing... In the following activity, participants will practise mindful listening and perceiving the various sounds that surround us, even though we are sometimes unaware of them.

Instructions for lecturers:

Let participants find a place in nature where they will not be disturbed, so they can quiet down and possibly close their eyes. Encourage them to focus on the sounds around them and you can give them specific prompts:

- What can you hear?
- What sounds are coming from afar?

⁷ This exercise is also based on The Forest Mind.

- What can you hear nearby?
- What is the loudest sound in the area?
- Can you find the source of the quietest sound in the area?
- Which sounds are pleasant to you and which are disturbing?
- Once you have explored the above, focus on one specific sound that you choose and pay attention to it for 1-2 minutes. How does the sound change and evolve over time? What details do you perceive?

Tips for reflection:

In your reflection, return to the above-mentioned partial invitations.

- What sounds did you perceive most during the exercise?
- Did you perceive any sounds that you would not normally notice at all?
- What did you perceive as pleasant sounds?
- What sounds did you find disturbing or unpleasant?
- Why did you find some sounds pleasant and others disturbing?
- Was it difficult for you to focus only on sounds and leave all other sensations aside?
- Which sounds did you find quiet and which did you find very loud?
- What details did you notice in the sounds you focused on the most?
- What was your experience like when you were consciously surrounded by sounds? How did it make you feel?

Bird tracking

Duration: 5 minutes + reflection

Introduction:

Now participants will practise listening more intently to one specific sound. The activity promotes patience, encourages quiet (i.e. conscious) movement and requires a sensitive approach to the surrounding environment. It helps to connect auditory perceptions with visual perception. It promotes curiosity and observation skills.

Instructions for instructors:

Encourage participants to:

- find a place in nature where they will not be disturbed by others,
- listen to the chirping of birds, first perceive the multitude of melodies,

- then choose the one they like best and ignore the others,
- first try to guess which direction the sound is coming from,
- then carefully and quietly follow the sound and look for the specific bird that is making it.

If they managed to track down the bird, they were to concentrate on observing it. What did it look like? How did it behave? Was it aware of its observers?

If the participants do not see it, they should try to imagine what it looks like based on its song.

Tips for reflection:

- Were you able to track down the bird by its sound?
- What strategies did you use to track the bird?
- Was it difficult for you to focus on just one sound and ignore the others?
- Did you learn anything about birds and their behaviour during this activity?



Find your tree



Duration: 10-15 minutes + reflection

Materials: scarf

Work in pairs

Introduction:

The following activity will bring participants closer to nature and mindful awareness of the present moment, opening their senses. The aim of this activity is also to build trust between participants and deepen their bonds.

Instructions for lecturers:

Randomly divide participants into pairs (using natural objects or cards, see previous modules) and give each pair one scarf.

First explain the entire exercise, then give instructions for its execution.

One participant from each pair blindfolds their partner with a scarf (hereinafter referred to as the leader and the follower).

The leader looks for a tree in the vicinity and leads the follower to it (with various detours and turns). The leader guides the follower either by holding their hands or using only their voice (e.g. "Now we're going to turn left, take a small step forward"... etc.). We recommend trying both options.

The leader ensures the safety of the followed, warning them of obstacles or other hazards. At the same time, they try to make the journey interesting, playful, and "convoluted".

Once the pair reaches the tree, the person being guided is given space to touch the tree and perceive its details – the bark, the shape of the branches, the height, how the texture feels, the temperature, etc. They focus on specific features that can later help them identify the tree.

After the guided person has sufficiently "felt" the tree, the guide takes them back to the starting point. They can take a detour again, choose a different route back, which will make it more difficult to find the tree later.

After returning to the starting point and removing the scarf, the guided person must find their tree based on what they remember about it from touch (perception of textures, size, sensations).

After finding the tree, the roles are reversed and the other participant in the pair undergoes the same experience.

Tips for reflection:

- What was your first feeling when you closed your eyes and let yourself be guided?
- What surprised you about perceiving the tree only through touch? What details did you discover that you might otherwise have overlooked?
- Did you try being guided by both hand and voice? How was it for you? Which did you prefer?
- Did you feel better in the role of leader or follower? How does this relate to your personal life? Do you prefer to be led or to lead?
- Was there a specific moment that surprised or confused you when you searched for your own tree with your eyes open?
- How did it feel when you found "your" tree? What emotions or feelings did it evoke in you?
- How did you perceive the relationship between your intuition and your perception of the tree during your search?
- What did this activity bring you in terms of your relationship as a couple?

Module 5 - Creative Nature Therapy

The aim of the module is to encourage creativity in young people in relation to nature.

Introduction:

Creativity is a natural part of each of us, but in the modern world we often suppress it, focusing on productivity and performance. Nature offers a unique space where our creative abilities can freely develop and deepen. When we immerse ourselves in nature, our senses awaken, our mind calms down and opens up to new possibilities. Nature provides us with inspiration, silence and space for discovery, which are key conditions for creativity. Creative activity connects us with our emotions and thoughts, helping us to better understand ourselves and develop our inner strength.

During creative activities, we often enter a state known as FLOW. Flow is a state of complete concentration, where we are completely absorbed in the activity we are doing. During this state, there is a harmonious connection between mind and body, where time is lost and all our attention is focused on the task at hand. In the flow state, we feel relaxed but highly motivated, losing awareness of external distractions. This state increases productivity and brings a sense of fulfilment and joy from creation.

Creative nature therapy is an approach that combines art, the natural environment and psychology. Participants try to express their feelings, thoughts and experiences through various creative techniques – such as painting, drawing, writing or other forms of artistic expression. Nature provides not only materials (leaves, stones, branches, flowers), but also inspiration and a safe space for experimentation.

Balancing stones

Duration: 10 minutes + possible reflection

Materials: stones

Introduction:

Life is about constantly seeking balance... Participants will try this out in the following activity. Stone stacking is an art or meditative activity in which stones are stacked on top of each other so that they remain in balance, often in seemingly impossible ways, requiring patience, gentleness and concentration.

This simple but profound process teaches participants to:

- To calm the mind and be fully present – we cannot think about our worries when we are concentrating on balance.
- Work with inner calm and breath – if we are tense, the stones fall. When we relax, everything goes better.
- Accept failure as part of learning – if the stones fall, that's okay. We'll try again.

The instructor can assign the activity as follows:

The activity is not about building the tallest structure possible, it is about balancing, finding equilibrium.

Find several stones, choose different sizes and shapes.

Start stacking them on top of each other.

Find a stable base – this is the key to success (just like in life). Slowly place the stones on top of each other and find their natural balance. Breathe calmly and concentrate on each movement.

If the structure falls, try again with ease.

Reflection:

- How did you feel while building?
- What did this experience teach you about patience and concentration? How are you doing in these areas?
- How could you apply the principles of this exercise in your everyday life?



Balancing stones in pairs

The activity can also be done in pairs, with participants taking turns to stack the stones. It is not about who makes the "better move", but about the joint process and result.

Benefits of teamwork:

- **Cooperation and trust** – participants must trust that their colleague's stone will keep the whole structure balanced.
- **Listening and attuning to others** – participants learn to adapt to the rhythm, pace and style of others.
- **Letting go of control** – participants do not have everything "in their hands"; they must accept the intervention of others.
- **Shared joy and frustration** – when the stones fall, the shared structure falls. This can be a challenge, but also a beautiful moment of sharing.
- **Training patience** – participants wait for their turn and cannot act immediately.

Tips for reflection:

- What was it like not to have full control over the outcome?
 - What did you learn about cooperation and communication?
 - How did you react when your partner's move caused a collapse?
 - How is this experience similar to cooperation in everyday life (family, work, relationships)?
-

The following are two "**writing activities**".

Teachers can assign them simultaneously so that everyone can choose the one that appeals to them more.

Haiku



Duration: assignment, 10 minutes for the activity itself, reflection

Materials: paper (ideally recycled), writing implements, mat

Introduction:

What is **haiku**:

- A short Japanese poem without rhyme.
- Traditionally about nature, it captures the fleeting moment of the present.
- Structure: **3 lines**
 1. each line has 5 syllables
 2. line has 7 syllables
 3. line has 5 syllables

Instructions for lecturers:

The instructor explains to participants what haiku is and invites them to find their place in nature and try to create a haiku there, following the rules above.

This is followed by voluntary sharing with others and reflection on the creative process and the emotions that arose during it...⁽⁸⁾

Love letter to nature

Duration: assignment, 10 minutes for the activity itself, reflection

Materials: paper (ideally recycled), writing materials, mat

Instructions for lecturers:

The instructor invites participants to try writing a personal love letter to nature. In it, they can express what nature means to them, what it gives them, what they like about it, but also what they wish for it.

When writing, they address nature directly – "Dear nature..."

It is advisable to encourage participants not to be shy about immersing themselves in the activity, to be authentic and honest with themselves. This is followed by voluntary sharing with others and reflection on the creative process and the emotions that arose during it...⁹

⁸ During the pilot testing of the methodology, several very successful haiku were created, which dazzled with their ingenuity and depth – for your enjoyment and inspiration, you can find them in Appendix 10.

⁹ Appendix 10 also includes an example of a Love Letter to Nature.

A piece of nature on paper



Introduction:

The following activity is from the eco-art therapy "package".

Eco-art therapy is a therapeutic approach that combines **art therapy** (treatment through art) with **eco-therapy** (connection with nature). It uses creativity and artistic expression in a natural environment or with natural materials as a way to improve mental health, reduce stress and promote self-awareness. This process helps people to better perceive and experience nature, improve their creativity and deepen their inner peace.

Duration: assignment, 10-15 minutes for the activity itself, reflection

Materials: paper (ideally recycled), drawing supplies – pencils, pastels, crayons, coloured pencils, etc., mat.

Instructions for lecturers:

Offer participants several options for what they can capture on paper:

- **The landscape around them** – capture a piece of the landscape around them, either concretely or abstractly.
- **Detail** – focus on a small piece of nature (a leaf, a drop of dew, the texture of grass) and transfer it to paper in as much detail as possible.

- **Frottage** – frottage is an art technique in which a pencil, crayon or other medium is rubbed over paper placed on a textured surface. The relief under the paper is thus imprinted, creating an impression of its structure. Participants can try, for example, tree bark, stone, leaves or other interesting surfaces.

TIP: Participants do not have to use only art supplies, but also nature itself – images can be created with the help of clay, grass, flowers... The collection and use of materials is carried out with respect for nature.

The activity is not about who creates the most beautiful "picture". It is about **perceiving nature differently**. Expressing oneself creatively.

This is followed by a voluntary display of the creations and **reflection** on the creative process and the emotions that arose during it...

Module 6 – Natural Mandala



The aim of the module is to provide participants with an experience of joint creation at the end of the 2-day course, an experience of cooperation that can become a final team-building activity. The activity also provides an integrating moment in the form of reflection on the entire course.

Duration: 20 minutes + reflection

Materials: available natural materials collected by the participants themselves

Introduction

The natural mandala is **the joint culmination of the course**. The group as a whole will create one large mandala, which will enhance the festive atmosphere at the end of the programme. The activity promotes concentration and mindfulness, allows participants to express their feelings and thoughts through symbolic creation, strengthens relationships within the group and teamwork, and also serves as a means of reflection.

Mandala (from Sanskrit "circle" or "cycle") symbolises unity, wholeness and balance.

Instructions for lecturers:

Introduce the activity as a **final joint creation** and the culmination of the course, setting the participants in a festive mood.

Explain that the goal is for **the whole group to create one large mandala** from natural materials. Participants agree on the appearance of the mandala and the division of roles so that everyone can participate in the creation. Some may collect natural materials, others may arrange them, and still others may fine-tune the details – the important thing is that everyone has the opportunity to contribute.

After completing the mandala together, each participant takes one more natural object and the whole group stands in a circle around the mandala.

Course evaluation

- The instructor explains that the mandala will now serve as a **symbolic "target" for expressing satisfaction with the course**.
- Each participant will gradually enter the mandala, mention what they contributed to the final form, and place their natural object:
 - **the closer to the centre** they place it, the more satisfied they are with their experience;
 - **the closer to the edge** they place it, the more they feel that something was missing or could have been different.
- This process is similar to the **scaling** technique – it allows individual evaluations to be expressed visually.
- Each participant also has **the opportunity** to briefly add what they have taken away from the course, what was most beneficial for them, or what they would appreciate differently next time.

Module 7 – Thanking nature



Duration: 5–10 minutes

Introduction:

One of the aims of the LESS Stress course is **to deepen participants' connection with nature**. This is so that they can realise for themselves how essential nature is to their lives and so that their own interest in nature conservation can grow naturally from this awareness.

Instructions for lecturers:

Explain to participants the term **reciprocity between humans and nature** = mutuality of relationship – that humans and nature **give** and **receive** something from **each other**.

Remind them that throughout the course, nature provided them with a space in which they could learn new information, try out activities and be creative. It was their environment, a source of inspiration, but also a source of materials.

Below are several different activities that participants can use to thank nature and thus strengthen their connection with it. Everyone can choose the method that suits them best – some may prefer a symbolic gesture, others a specific action.

The activity is **individual**.

Symbolic method

Thanks to nature – participants thank nature – aloud or just in their minds – for what it has given them and for what they are grateful for.

Practical actions

Micro-clean-up – participants can walk around the area and pick up litter that does not belong in nature.

Caring for the place – participants restore the natural surroundings where the course took place to their original state so that no traces of them remain. For example, stones from the Stone Balancing activity or materials from the Natural Mandala activity are "scattered" back into nature...

Personal commitment

A promised step for nature – each participant can set a small personal commitment for the future – how they will give back to nature in their everyday life (e.g. sorting waste more, walking more, planting a plant, saving water...).

Every small action is significant because it stems from a conscious attitude. Whether it is a word, a gesture, a piece of paper picked up or a small daily commitment – everything is part of the same message: that nature has a firm place in our lives and deserves care, respect and gratitude.

Thanking nature is a symbolic conclusion to the time we have spent together.

Bonus material

Nature-inspired anti-stress techniques



As a bonus, the methodology concludes with a **practical set of simple anti-stress techniques** that lecturers can use at any time during the course, independently of the individual modules – whenever there is a need to reduce tension, improve concentration or return attention to oneself and the present moment.

All techniques use, among other things, the method of visualisation, which leads participants to nature.

Ocean breath

Duration: 3 minutes + possible reflection

Introduction:

Breathing is one of the most powerful tools for influencing our body and mind. Although breathing is automatic, conscious work with the breath allows us to quickly reduce stress, calm the nervous system and induce a feeling of balance. **Breathing techniques** help activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for regeneration and relaxation. They are easily accessible anytime, anywhere – before a difficult exam, during a stressful situation, or as part of a daily ritual for mental well-being.

Ocean Breath is a breathing technique that:

- Calms the mind and activates the parasympathetic nervous system.
- Helps manage stress and anxiety.
- Promotes concentration (great before an exam or when feeling nervous).
- Helps you slow down.

Instructions for instructors:

- Invite participants to assume a comfortable position – standing or sitting, with a straight spine.
- Have them close or half-close their eyes and briefly focus on their normal breathing without changing it.
- Then guide them through the following breath:
 - a long inhale through the nose,
 - an even longer exhalation through a slightly open mouth accompanied by a "shhh" sound reminiscent of the sound of the sea.

Visualisation:

The instructor can invite participants to do a simple visualisation, which might sound something like this:

"Imagine you are sitting on the shore of the ocean, hearing the gentle sound of the waves, feeling a light breeze on your face. With each breath, you receive energy and calm from the ocean. With each exhalation, you watch as the waves carry the tension away from your body."

Tip: To support visualisation and a deeper sense of relaxation, you can play a gentle soundtrack of the ocean or the sound of sea waves during the technique. The sound of water helps participants to tune in better to the imagined space, increases their sense of calm and makes it easier to focus on their breathing and relaxation.

Possible reflection:

- How do you feel after the breathing exercise compared to before the exercise?
- What was your breathing like at the beginning? And what is it like now?
- Were you able to release tension in your body? Where did you relax the most?
- What thoughts or feelings arose during the exercise?

Tropical rain

Duration: approx. 3 minutes + reflection

Effects:

- Releases tension – gentle tapping stimulates nerve endings and promotes muscle relaxation.
- Improves energy circulation – stimulates blood circulation and helps release stagnant stress.
- Promotes concentration – brings attention to the body and the present moment, reduces anxious thoughts.
- Induces a feeling of calm – activates the parasympathetic nervous system, slows the heart rate and reduces stress hormone levels.
- Connects breath and movement – the combination of conscious breathing and gentle touch promotes deeper relaxation and "turning off" the overloaded mind.

Instructions for instructors:

- Invite participants to assume a comfortable position – standing or sitting with a straight spine.
- Have them close/semi-close their eyes and focus first on their breathing – slowing down and deepening their inhalations and exhalations.
- Encourage visualisation: participants imagine that their fingers are drops of warm tropical rain gently falling on their bodies and releasing tension. Each drop of rain brings a feeling of relaxation and calm, washing away tension and stress.
- Direct them to start tapping their fingertips first on the top of their head – as if the first drops of rain were falling on it – and gradually continue across the forehead, temples, cheekbones and chin, keeping the face relaxed.
- Then continue tapping the breasts, neck, shoulders, upper chest, arms, abdomen, hips and thighs; if they wish, they can also include the calves and insteps.
- Finally, recommend taking a deep breath through the nose, holding it for a moment and, with a long exhalation, imagining that the rain is washing the tension away from the body.
- Then have participants slowly open their eyes and notice the lightness and relaxation in their bodies.

Tip: During the exercise, you can play a gentle sound of rain or a tropical forest. The sound of raindrops and the natural environment helps participants to better imagine a tropical scene, increases the feeling of relaxation and promotes concentration on the breath and gentle tapping of the body.

Possible reflection:

- How do you feel after the exercise compared to before?
 - Where in your body do you feel the most relaxed?
 - What emotions arose during the exercise – joy, relief, uncertainty, awkwardness, or something else?
-

Autumn tree

Duration: approx. 3 minutes + reflection

Introduction:

The body stores stress in the muscles, among other places. Tension often manifests itself in the form of clenched jaws, shoulders and other parts of the body. **Body shaking** is a natural way to release accumulated physical and mental tension.

Animals in nature also use shaking – after a stressful situation, they instinctively shake themselves to restore balance.

Effects:

- Relieves muscle tension and stress.
- Improves blood circulation and energy flow.
- Reduces nervousness and inner restlessness.
- Induces a feeling of lightness and freshness.

Instructions for instructors:

Ask participants to make enough space around themselves and guide them as follows:

- Stand with your knees slightly bent and your feet hip-width apart.
- Close or half-close your eyes and visualise: you are a deciduous tree in autumn that needs to shed its leaves.
- Begin to shake gently, moving your whole body naturally.
- Leave your arms, shoulders and head loose – like tree branches swaying gently in the wind.

- Gradually increase the intensity and speed of the shaking, letting your whole body "vibrate" and release tension.
- Imagine that you are shaking off all your worries and tension.
- Slowly slow down the movement until it stops completely.
- Close your eyes and take several deep breaths in and out, feeling the lightness and relaxation in your body.

Tip: To aid visualisation and the feeling of relaxation, you can play background music (e.g. Osho Shaking Meditation) or the gentle sound of wind or trees rustling during the exercise. The sound helps participants to tune in better to the movement of their bodies and deepens the feeling of relaxation.

Possible reflection:

- How do you feel in your body after the exercise?
 - Where do you feel the most relaxed?
-

Final words from the creators of the LESS Stress methodology

We hope that the LESS Stress methodology has met your expectations and **provided you with easy-to-apply and practical guidance** on how **to help young people** better manage stress, deepen their relationship with nature, and realise the importance of nature for mental well-being and overall life balance.

We believe that through the tried and tested activities, participants **have** playfully **acquired practical eco-therapeutic tools for better stress management** that will be useful aids in their lives, and that they have also gained basic theoretical information about wellbeing, stress and the positive effects of nature on mental health.

Last but not least, we hope that this methodology will help us **raise awareness of the importance of nature in our lives** and, at the same time, strengthen interest in its protection.

We believe that the methodology will be widely used by teachers, youth workers and other professionals. **We** kindly **ask you to support us in spreading the word** and help us share it so that its benefits can reach as many young people as possible.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions regarding the methodology, please do not hesitate to contact its creators directly via the website: www.less-stress.cz. We would also be very happy if you would share your experience with us, respond to the content or contribute feedback that can help to further improve the methodology and adapt it to the needs of lecturers and participants.

We would like to ask you to use the hashtags **#lessstress** and **#less-stress** when sharing the methodology in the form of photos, observations or reports on social networks. This will help spread our concept further, make it easier to find for other interested parties and facilitate their connection.

We would also like to inform you that **the LESS Stress concept** is not limited to this methodology. Under the LESS Stress Centre banner, we also create **other programmes and activities focused on supporting mental health with the help of nature**. In addition to our website, you can also find us on social media (FB, IG under the name LESS Stress Centre).

Finally, we would like to **express our gratitude to the Erasmus+ programme**, without whose financial support this methodology would not have been possible.

On behalf of the team behind the LESS
Stress methodology, Mgr. Johana Pytlíčková and Mgr.
Ing. Lukáš Szlaur