

Forest bathing

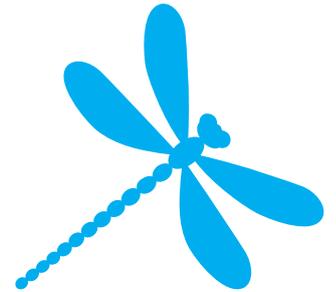


Section: Guides and Rangers

Time needed: 30 minutes to two hours

Equipment needed (if doing all the activities)

- Plain paper and pens
- Blindfolds
- Bags for collecting natural materials
- Flasks or stove and cups for hot drinks



Why?

Forest bathing¹ began in Japan and is a popular way of unwinding and connecting with the natural world. Spending time in nature has been shown to reduce anxiety and improve mental health.² The recent Girls' Attitudes Survey from Girlguiding showed that 74% of girls aged 7-21 want more opportunities to spend more time outdoors and in nature.

How?

There are many ways to go about it, but here are some ideas that you can use with your group. You might do all the activities, or just pick one or two. Make sure the girls put away their devices for the whole session.

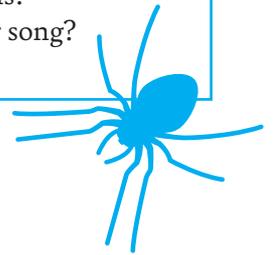
- Start by explaining that you are going to go for a walk in the woods or other outdoor space, and that for part of the time you are not going to talk, just listen and look around you, and think about how it makes you feel.
- Find a good starting point. This could be two trees forming a gateway, or maybe a log that you can hop over. Get the girls to help you find a good place, and explain that once you cross this threshold, you're going to walk for a few minutes without talking.
- Cross the threshold and walk along your chosen path. Stay together and walk at a slow pace, looking out for interesting things with your eyes. (You may wish to plan the route in advance, or let the girls decide, depending on how well you know the site).
- After a few minutes, stop in a clearing. Ask the girls to report anything they saw that was interesting. If they are too shy, offer your own ideas.
- Walk for another few minutes without talking, this time focus on sounds that you can hear around you, whether natural or man-made.
- Find a place to sit or stand. Use a piece of paper to draw a sound map. Draw a rough sketch of the area, and mark on any sounds that you hear from, say, a bird, squirrel or road. After a few minutes compare maps.



- Find a suitable spot and use blindfolds to play ‘get to know a tree’. In pairs, one partner is blindfolded. The other partner leads her carefully to a tree which she can touch but not see. After a minute, lead your partner back to the centre. Remove the blindfold and see if they can find the tree again. You can extend this activity by using tree ID guides to try and identify the trees on your site.
- Continue walking. Now the group can chat. Look out for any interesting leaves or tree fruits on the ground. Pick them up. Make a piece of art on the ground using the leaves and things you have found.



- A traditional Japanese Forest Bathing session ends with a tea ceremony. Head back to base and make tea or hot chocolate to drink together. How did you feel while you were walking in the woods? Can you come up with some sort of ‘ceremony’ while you have your drink, such as a poem or song?



Don't forget:

To protect nature, only pick up fallen items that you find on the ground. Don't pull things off living plants or trees. To protect yourself, remember not to touch rubbish or dog mess. Have a look for any nettles or brambles in the area, and make sure everyone knows what these look like before you start.



Please take a few minutes to tell us how you got on with this challenge: <https://forms.office.com/e/w49a9b2w39>



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