

Eagle Creek Nature Notes Transcript for Episode 1: Mindfulness Hike

Narrator: Hello and welcome to Eagle Creek Nature Notes, the audio series created to help you plan your next adventure to beautiful Eagle Creek Park in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Dr. Blair McKissock: Welcome to your Nature Connected Mindfulness Audio. Remember that you can use this audio wherever you want to, here in the park, here at home, wherever it makes sense and wherever it's needed. You can also use it whenever you'd like to.

That means that you can pause the audio at any time, and you can press play again when you're ready to move on to the next exercise. However, we do recommend listening to the mindfulness prep exercise before you begin.

So, you can probably transition into a space where you're more open to connecting with nature and the world around you. So, let's begin by just taking a moment to transition, transitioning from the world that you left behind and bringing yourself into the present.

Leave behind the stresses, the needs, and the demands on your time and just arrive. Take a moment to arrive to the present.

We can do this by finding our feet. Feel your feet connected and rooted to the ground. If you choose, you can imagine you have roots growing into the ground that are literally holding you to the spot that you're in, helping you to feel grounded in this moment.

I invite you to close your eyes or to cast your eyes to the ground and just take an internal check of the body, checking in on each of those intersections and joints of the body.

We need just to a quick scan, noticing what we notice in the body, not trying to fix it, not judging it as good or bad, but just noticing, beginning with the ankles, the knees, the hips, the lower back, between the shoulder blades, the fingertips, wrists, elbows, shoulders, the eyes, the jaw, and then coming back to heart center.

Then we begin by taking a deep breath in through the nose and letting it out through the mouth and a big sigh. Just deep breath in and let it out. Then we can begin to deepen the breath, taking the breath in for a count of four, one, two, three, four, pausing for just a second, and then exhaling for a count of six, six, five, four, three, two, one.

Pausing at the bottom of the breath, taking another deep breath in for a count of four, 3, 2, 1, pausing at the top of the breath, exhaling again for a count of 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and pausing for a moment at the bottom of the breath.

Continue this deep breath for another three rounds, pressing pause on the audio. And when you're ready to begin the next mindfulness exercise, press play.

Welcome to your next nature-connected mindfulness exercise.

Let's begin by walking and starting out on the trail that we've chosen to walk today. Now that we've done our grounding and breathing exercises, we should feel like we're in the present and we've let go of as much as we can.

But we also let go of judgment if those thoughts continue to come up in our head of the situations that we left behind, instead breathe into them and again go back to the feet.

Feel how your heel strikes the ground and rolls forward to the ball of your foot and to where your toes touch the ground right before they lift off as you take another step.

Feel the rhythm of the right and the left foot moving. If you use a chair or a walker, feel the rhythm of your hands on the wheels or your hands on your walker, focusing in on the rhythm and pace of our movement.

As we move through the environment, take a moment to open your senses and open yourself up to the world.

As you take a deep breath in, notice what you smell in the air. Can you smell the earthiness of the ground, of the litter of leaves on the ground, maybe water nearby, or other sense and smells. What do you hear? Can you hear birds in the trees?

Can you hear the wind through the leaves? Can you hear the crunching of your feet as they walk over the ground? What do you feel?

Do you feel the air over your skin? Maybe the temperature, the sun? Do you feel the breeze on your face? Can you turn your head into the breeze or up towards the sun and take a moment just to appreciate the feeling on your skin?

Notice the way that you view the environment. Do you see the plains and the trees? Can you see the contrast of the sun coming through? Can you see the darkness beneath the canopy?

Can you see how the sun catches the light on the water? Maybe there's a puddle or a stream nearby.

Take a moment to notice: when you look at an object or look at something in nature, are you looking at it with a hard eye or a soft eye? A hard eye is when we focus on one thing so much that we tighten the muscles behind our eyes and we lose sight of what's in our peripheral.

Instead I invite you to relax the muscles behind your eyes and soften your eyesight. Even if you're gazing at an object in front of you, you can still see everything in the periphery around

you. Notice how just that one change of changing to a soft eye, how that changes the way that we view the world around us.

So, take a moment to practice taking in the environment through each of our senses.

What do we feel? What do we smell? What do we hear? And what do we sense? Can you intuit or sense the life that's around you?

Press pause on the audio and take as long as you would like, practicing each of these and connecting through our senses. Press play again when you're ready to continue with the next exercise.

Welcome to your next nature-connected mindfulness exercise.

In this exercise, we're gonna pay attention to those things that draw our attention in the environment around us. I invite you to again open up your senses and just notice what you are drawn to. What do you want to connect with?

Do you hear a bird that calls, that piques your curiosity? Do you see something, a tree or a plant that you want to go over and touch and look at a little bit more closely, it could be a puddle or a stream or something that draws your attention that you want to go and take a closer look or maybe touch.

Think of these as the invisible strings that connect us together and take a moment to connect with that sound, that animal or plant or aspect of the environment that draws your attention. Many times, we often don't pay attention to those things that are calling to us, and we ignore them. But in this exercise, I ask that you find that thing that draws your attention.

Press pause on the audio and take as long as you would like, practicing each of these, and connecting through our senses. Press play again when you're ready to continue with the next exercise.

Welcome to your next nature-connected mindfulness exercise.

In the previous exercise, we practiced connecting with the things that draw our attention in the natural environment. In this exercise, I'm gonna invite you to find something and connect with it physically.

See what draws your attention. Something that piques your curiosity. Something that you would like to connect with physically and touch. Remembering to always ask permission before touching anything. Making sure that we're not touching something like poison ivy, but sticking to the flowers, the leaves, the trees, the ground, that we see.

Also remembering not to remove anything to take with us. We don't pick the leaves, we don't pick the flowers. We simply explore in a gentle way.

Remembering that asking for permission before connecting is a sign of respect and practicing reverence for the natural world that sustains us.

Pause for a moment and see what draws your attention and reach out. Can you see the texture when the light catches it?

Is it a different texture on one side versus the other? Gently explore through touch, looking at all of the different perspectives,

the different colors and the variations. Feel the sensation with your fingertips. Does it make a sound? Are there other insects or things that are around it?

How does it connect to something larger? Is it connected to a larger branch or the trunk of a tree? Or imagine it being connected through a larger root system.

Take a moment to explore and press pause on the audio. After you've done this exercise, you can continue walking a little bit further until you're ready to press play for the next nature-connected mindfulness exercise.

Welcome to your next nature-connected mindfulness exercise.

As we've spent some time along this hike, connecting through our senses and through physical touch, we remember our connection to nature and our connection to the trees, the plants, and the animals and the insects, and all that sustains us.

In this exercise, I invite you to think about what the Earth gives us. Think about the exchange that happens between humans and the natural world. As you walk, think about the fresh oxygen that we breathe and how that is given to us by the plants, the trees and living organisms.

As we breathe out, think of the carbon dioxide that we put back into the air that the trees take in.

When we see the water and the creek or the puddle or the rain that falls gently from the sky, and we know that it provides life, think about what that water means to our survival and how it nourishes our bodies, how it supports the fish and other organisms and microbes that live in the water.

Think about its purpose to the ground and how it provides nourishment to the earth that grows the living plants and food that we eat.

Think about the rain and how it cleans our atmosphere and brings those elements back to the soil. Think about how the rain has a really hard job of taking out all of the things that we put into the air that our human habits contribute.

We don't judge them as good or bad. They are what they are. This is the world that we live in, and it is a product of our choices. No one else's choices, but our own.

But we give thanks for that exchange. We think about the wood that comes to the trees that builds our homes. We think about the flowers that adorn our tables and bring happiness and cheer.

We think about the seeds that we plant and the things that we give back to nature. So as you walk and you conclude your hike, think about that exchange and the meaning that it has in your life as we give gratitude to the natural world and what it provides us and we think about what we give it back in return.

You can press pause on this audio and take a moment to just think as we walk along and enjoy the environment, and we press play on the audio when you're ready to continue.

Welcome to your last nature-connected mindfulness exercise on this hike.

You've had a chance to connect, you've had a chance to spend time in nature, breathe deeply, come into the present moment and connect. Before you end your hike and before you leave the space, take a moment. I invite you to close your eyes or to cast your eyes towards the ground and remember this feeling.

Remember the feeling of relaxation, the sense of peace and the sense of being connected to something greater than ourselves. Remember that piece that you feel you can call upon at any time during the day, at any time in your life when you begin to feel overwhelmed. You can remember this feeling. You can carry it with you.

Remember that you can return to these exercises at any time. You don't have to be on a trail. You don't have to be in a park to use them. You can practice these audios sitting outside and connecting with a plant.

You don't have to be on a trail to practice noticing those invisible strings that connect us to nature and to connect us to the biological life around us. And as you take the steps towards your car or wherever you are and you transition back into the hustle and bustle of everyday life, take a moment to practice gratitude and saying thank you.

Thank you to the natural world. Thank you for those elements that connected with you and practice gratitude for the exchange and your part in that biological process of life.

This is Dr. Blair McKissock, and I thank you for joining me through this nature-connected mindfulness experience.

Narrator: To see full episode transcriptions and to learn more, visit eaglecreekpark.org.
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