



NATURE MINDFULNESS CHALLENGE | *Use your senses to connect to nature*

FOR THIS ADVENTURE, PRACTICE MINDFULNESS OUTDOORS

All activities in this challenge are meant to be completed outdoors; in your own backyard, a nearby park or nature center, or on our beautiful public lands. The natural world—from a single patch of grass to a towering forest—transforms into a gentle classroom ready to engage all five senses.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness means paying attention to what you are thinking and feeling in the moment.

- Being present in nature can encourage creativity, focus, and a sense of wonder for the natural world.
- Practicing mindfulness reduces anxiety and brings a sense of calm.

SENSORY & OBSERVATION GAMES

These activities focus on engaging all the senses to help your child be fully present in the moment and tune into the natural environment.

How to Play

Mindfulness Prompt

The Listening Walk: Go for a short walk and be as quiet as possible. Stop and point to a nature sound.

"What is the quietest sound you can hear right now? Can you hear the wind talking to the leaves?"

Texture Detectives: Gently touch different natural items like smooth river stones, bumpy tree bark, the softness of sagebrush leaves, and rough sandstone. Try going barefoot on the grass!

"How does the bark feel against your hand? Is the sandstone rough or smooth? Is the grass cool or warm under your feet?"

Mindful Viewing: Choose a single, small object—a flower, a ladybug, a seed. Look at it closely for 30 - 60 seconds. Repeat with clouds, noting their shapes.

"How many colors can you see on that tiny flower? What shape is that cloud—is it a dog or a big pillow?"

Nature Scavenger Breath: Stand still and slowly sniff the air. Try inhaling through the nose and then gently through the mouth to "taste the air."

"Take a long, slow breath. What smells can you find? Does the air have a taste today? (e.g., wet dirt, pine needles, desert sage, or fresh rain)"





BREATHING AND MOVING GAMES

These activities teach children simple ways to calm their bodies using breath and gentle motion, inspired by the surrounding nature.

How to Play

Growing Flower Breath: Have your child start in a small crouch (a "seed"). As they breathe in slowly, have them gradually stand up, stretching their arms up and out to become a fully bloomed flower. Exhale slowly as they gently return to the seed shape.

Mindfulness Prompt

"Breathe in and slowly grow tall, tall, tall! Feel the sun warm your flower petals. Now breathe out and gently curl back down to sleep."

Swaying with the Wind: On a breezy day, have your child stand tall and sway slowly like a tree or flutter like tall grass, letting the wind gently move their body.

"Feel the wind push on your clothes. Let the wind move you! Can you sway your arms slowly and gently, just like a tall tree?"

"Mindful Feet": Do a simple body scan while walking, focusing on the sensation of their feet connecting with the ground. Walk barefoot where it is safe and appropriate (like on grass or sand).

"Wiggle your toes. Do you feel the ground pushing back? Walk slowly and feel your heel touch first, then your toes. How does the earth feel on your bare skin?"

CREATIVE PLAY & CULTIVATING AWE

These activities encourage creativity, focus, and a feeling of wonder and gratitude for the natural world.

How to Play

Pebble Stack Focus: Find a few flat pebbles or small, smooth stones. Carefully try to stack them one on top of the other, focusing entirely on the slow, deliberate action of balancing the next piece.

Mindfulness Prompt

"Slow, slow, slow. Watch where you put the next stone. Be quiet and still so the tower doesn't wobble!"

Awe and Wonder: Find moments of big natural beauty to share: watching a colorful sunset, standing near a waterfall, or looking at a full moon rise.

"Wow! Look how many colors the sky is changing to! Isn't that amazing? How does that make your heart feel?"

Make a Tree Friend: Encourage your child to choose one special tree to be their "friend." They can name it and give it a hug. Visit this tree often to notice how it changes through the seasons.

"This is your special tree friend! What color is its coat today? Let's hug it and see how big it is!"

Pooh Sticks Game: Find a small bridge over a creek or river. Drop natural items (sticks, maple pods, leaves) into the water on one side and race to see which one flows out first on the other side.

"Ready, set, drop! Which stick will win the race under the bridge?"

Gratitude Practice: Sit quietly outside. Talk about what they are thankful for in nature (the sun, a favorite tree, a bird's song).

"What is one thing in nature that you are happy is here today? Tell me why."





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Natural spaces can look different. Studies have shown that even looking at images of nature can produce benefits for our mental health. As you explore these suggestions, take advantage of whatever resources are available to your family.

Use Your Senses - Take some time in a natural space. Find a comfortable position. Then, when you are ready, focus on what you see. Then, direct your attention to each of your other senses. This is a great activity to experience during different seasons and notice what changes and what stays the same.

Yoga - Many yoga poses incorporate nature. Find some of your favorite yoga poses and do them in a natural space.

Hunt for Colors - During time outside, look for different shades of a specific color. Notice how many items you find!

Careful Steps - As you walk, notice each step that you take. Can you take silent steps? Do your steps leave a footprint? Try taking steps like animals- big dinosaur steps, gallop like a horse, or teeny tiny steps like a ladybug.

Gratitude - Practice gratitude for the things you see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. Each of them is there for you to enjoy. Mindfully think or talk about the things you are grateful for.

Breathing - Natural spaces can be a powerful place to focus on your breathing. Try an activity like box breathing. Breathe in for 4 seconds. Hold your breath for 4 seconds. Breathe out for 4 seconds, then hold your breath for another 4 seconds. Breathing activities like this one can support self-regulation and are great strategies to use anywhere.

Cloud Gazing - A blanket and a cloudy day can make for real fun! Find a comfy place and observe the clouds. What direction are they moving? Can you find clouds that look like something else? This [site](#) has additional ideas for mindful cloud gazing.

Forest Bathing - Forest bathing is a mindfulness, meditative experience in a natural space. [National Geographic Kids](#) has a helpful article on how to start forest bathing.

Go for a picnic - Take your meal or even a snack outside! Find a comfy spot, enjoy your food, and take some deep breaths in a natural space.

Identify Bird Songs - Learn more about your local birds. When you are outside, listen for the calls from a specific bird. What time of day do they sing the most? Where is the song coming from?

TAKE IT UP A NOTCH!

Challenge Course - Outdoor ropes courses build confidence and resilience. Try one out!

Take a Class - Forest bathing and yoga classes are offered all over Utah. Try enrolling in a class or guided session.





Nature Journaling - Nature journaling is an excellent way to be mindful of your surroundings. Find a leaf, rock, or other item that catches your interest. Draw or write about the item in your nature journal. Use writing prompts or drawing strategies to notice details about the item and its surroundings.

Sit and Listen - While in nature, sit and listen for all the sounds you may notice. Listen to streams as they flow over rocks, or the wind in the trees. What do these sounds make you feel?

Talk to a friend - Nature has a way of allowing us to open up! Bring a friend outside who may be struggling with loneliness or sadness. Spending time outdoors can help provide us with necessary vitamin D to help boost our moods, and is even better to do with a friend!

Practice Kindness - Living and recreating in Utah means you will encounter other people while recreating outdoors. Be sure to practice kindness when you encounter others outdoors. If you are riding a bike, be sure to yield to walkers or hikers. If you bring pets outside, be sure to keep them on a leash unless it is okay to do otherwise. Be kind to everyone you meet and share good vibes with new friends!

Read, write or paint outdoors - Natural spaces can help spark creativity. If you enjoy painting, try doing it outdoors! Try using nature as a form of inspiration for your art.

Start a garden - Connecting with nature through growing food is a great way to stay grounded. Learning how to tend to a garden during many seasons will help you be in touch with how weather changes and where and how certain foods grow!

Be a steward of the earth - Make everyday earth day! Taking care of our natural spaces can be a great way to boost your mental health and find peace during chaotic moments.

Go for a run - The repetitive motion of running or cycling can help our brains unlock some of the stress that we may be holding onto. Try doing something repetitive outdoors and see how your brain might come up with creative solutions to problems.

EKO Challenge - As you earn all your adventure badges throughout the challenge, find ways to be mindful during each activity. Be aware of how you're feeling as you follow a trail, go camping or stare at the starry skies. We hope the challenge allows you to not only have fun, but learn something new about yourself and the world!

