

Climate Anxiety: Mind, Body & Soul - Reconnecting with the outdoors

Kit Marie Rackley

The setting is an outdoor space of any description that contains 'natural features'. If you're not fortunate enough to have a large immersive space such as a covering of trees, a field/meadow or a park, then it could be an urban allotment, a (safe) grassy verge, or a urban street space that is adorned with natural decorations like flower beds, planters etc. The main thing is to have a space large enough to accommodate your group, where each person has their own space or 'bubble'.

Feel free to deviate from this script to suit your setting, context and audience. The setting that this script is based on is a patch of earthy grass or under the canopy of a cluster of trees.

Ask the participants to spread themselves out - just far enough away from each other that they feel like they are comfortable with the personal space. They may sit, stand, prop themselves against something - whatever - so long as they are comfortable. So long as their centre of gravity is neutral and sustainable.

Script

Give yourself a few moments to ensure you are comfortable and centred. Find a stable centre of gravity, which will allow you to be still for a period of time, whether than be standing, sitting, leaning, kneeling or maybe even lying down. Draw attention to your breathing. Just notice it, don't try to change it.

Once you are comfortable and still, close your eyes. Listen. Take a few moments to allow your ears to become your primary way of noticing your surroundings. Now try to filter out and separate a natural sound or two. Perhaps it could be the tweeting of birds, the rustle of the leaves in the wind. Focus on those sounds and notice how they make you feel. If an unnatural sound, sudden or persistent, disrupts your focus, acknowledge it, briefly note the feeling it invokes, and then bring yourself back to the sounds you were focussing on.

Now let's bring in touch. Keeping your eyes closed if it is safe to do so, place your hands on the ground or on the tree you are next to or leaning on, anything that is a natural surface. Feel the texture. Use that sensation to imagine there is an exchange of energy between your hands and that natural surface. Take a deep breath, and as you inhale, imagine drawing that energy from the surface, through your fingers up your arms and into your chest. As you exhale, imagine recycling that energy back. Do this a few times and image, keeping that image of a back-and-forth exchange of energy.

Release your hands and open your eyes. Resist the urge to brush your hands against themselves or your clothing, and look closely at them. Has there also been an exchange of something physical? Some moisture, some dirt, specks of bark? Or maybe just a change in sensation on your skin if nothing is evident?

The urge to wipe our hands and sanitise them, and the feelings of anxiety induced by artificial sounds, sights and so forth are partially the result of our disconnection to nature. For most of human history

we have worked with the environment, immersed ourselves in it, and used all our senses to read it, be in tune with it and even thrive in it. And yet, just 5 or 10 minutes of reconnection, whether it is in the manner we have done just now, or even if it is simply going for a walk and tuning into natural features as we do, can reduce our anxieties.

As we make our way back inside, discuss how you feel with others. If you are willing, stay as tuned to the natural environment as much as you can by continuing to listen and touching as we go.

- *Kit Marie Rackley*