



Nature connection guide

Session plans for youth clubs to help young people develop personal connections with nature



Introduction

These sessions were designed by Centre for Sustainable Energy in partnership with Hartcliffe Club for Young People and Avon Youth Club and funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), part of UK Research and Innovation. The sessions were delivered between December 2025 and March 2026.

Aims

The aim of the sessions was to inspire young people to develop a personal connection with nature in a meaningful way. We utilised The Five Pathways to Nature Connection (namely: sense, beauty, emotions, meaning and compassion) to guide delivery. This framework was developed by the University of Derby and is detailed in [The Nature Connection Handbook](#).

Co-design process

Before writing the sessions, CSE Youth Facilitators explored ideas and input from the Youth Workers to ensure that the activities would be of interest and appropriate to the young people who attended the club sessions. Different activities were delivered at different youth clubs as a result of the co-design process. Avon Youth Club had the activities as part of a regular club night, so these were on offer to an open access session. Hartcliffe Club for Young People launched a club night session specifically to deliver the project. The sessions are designed to be flexible and adaptable to local contexts.

Reflection tools: scrapbooks and instant cameras

Each young person was given a scrapbook that they could use for the duration of the programme. These were used in sessions as a tool for self-reflection, as well as to stick in images or drawings that meant something to the young people.

Each club was provided an instant print camera, so the young people could take images of things that inspired them or they liked during sessions.

Top tips

- **Start small, keep it simple.**

Pace the activities according to where the young people are with their nature connection. Not every young person has been provided the opportunity to explore nature. Young people in urban areas can often see green spaces as 'not for them' or as dangerous. For this reason, we delivered sessions at the clubs and brought nature into their settings.

- **Grow from what you and they know.**

Build on themes as they emerge; look for opportunities to change the way they perceive nature on their doorstep. Nature is everywhere and slowing down to appreciate it in everyday life is one of the powerful elements of nature connection. The fire was a great way to explore how they feel about nature: how it feels to slow down, feel its warmth, and delight in its power to melt marshmallows.



Igniting a love of nature

In this session, young people will...

- Map nearby green spaces to discuss connection to nature.
- End with a fire pit circle with marshmallows to talk about personal connections to nature.
- Use star gazers to discuss the night and be given tools for orienting themselves outside at night.

The aim of the session is to...

1. Open discussions about personal connection to nature and local green spaces with young people and between young people.
2. Create opportunities for young people to enjoy connecting with nature in a familiar setting through a fire and through star recognition.
3. Introduce mapping skills and create a map of local green spaces that young people value together.
4. Introduce the concept that we are nature and that nature doesn't look one way.

Activity 1a: Mapping nature connection

In this activity, young people mark areas where they feel a connection to nature on a large map of the area around the youth club. Young people make a land art map of a green space they like and photograph and scrapbook it.

Different ways to engage could include marking green spaces they like, writing why they do or don't like them on sticky notes, stickers to mark special places, drawing routes they enjoy, marking where they live / where the club is.

Accessibility

Make sure the map is pinned up at a height that a young person could reach sitting down. Staff nearby to support with step-by-step instructions. Write down instructions and pin up nearby in case people want to avoid conversation with new adult.

Talking points

- What is nature? Why?
- How can you find nature on the map?
- What kind of nature do you care about?
- Do you ever use maps?
- When was the last time you noticed something in nature?
- Are we nature? Is what we eat nature?
- What does nature mean to you?

Resources

- Large map of the area around the youth club.
- Coloured pens.
- Stickers and post-its.
- Blu tack or pins to stick on wall.
- OS maps of the area.
- Instant cameras.
- Scrapbooks.

Extensions

- Finding a new place they could explore from the OS map.
- Talking about where feels safe and why.
- Finding out where they can go and where they don't have access (and why).

Activity 1b: Star gazer craft

In this activity, young people learn constellations and make a star gazer for a constellation of their choice. Instructions can be found [here](#).

Different ways to engage could include colouring the star gazer sleeve, cutting out constellation templates, making holes in the tube.

Accessibility

Write down instructions for the activity on the table in case people want to avoid conversation with new adult.

Talking points

- Do you look at the stars?
- Do you know the names of any stars?
- What is a constellation?
- What is a star?

Resources

- Planisphere (star map).
- Glue.
- Pringles cans.
- [Template constellations](#).
- Glow stars.
- Torches.
- Coloured pens.
- Blu tack / pins to make holes.
- Instant cameras.
- Scrapbooks.

Extensions

- Finding their constellation on the planisphere.
- Making their constellation with glow in the dark stars.
- Recording their constellation in their scrapbook.

Activity 2: Fire pit

In this activity, young people light a fire together, gather sticks for marshmallows and toast them while talking about personal connections to nature and the seasons.

Accessibility

Youth staff should create a calm and safe environment around the fire, with a clear area for sitting. It should be in an accessible part of the youth club (e.g. the back garden if it's step-free). Make sure there are a few options for food available (vegan, gluten-free, soy-free). There should be no pressure to interact with the fire more than feels comfortable.

Talking points

- How do you feel being near the fire?
- Are in you touch with nature if you are cold? If you see grass? If you get a burn from the fire?
- Does a marshmallow count as nature? Does the plastic wrap count as nature?
- How would you build a campfire?
- What's your favourite season?

Resources

- Fire pit.
- Logs and firelights.
- Marshmallows and Starburst.
- Back-up toasting sticks.
- First aid kit.

Extensions

- Helping to build and put out the fire.
- Thinking about what else you could cook on a fire.
- Games like one word story.
- Putting wishes on the fire.
- Ghost stories.
- Star mapping.



Exploring local nature: Night walk

In this session, young people will...

- Walk to a local green space in the dark and be introduced to nature in a way they may not have experienced before.
- Play games and pay attention to our senses in nature.

The aim of the session is to...

1. Spend time in nature near the young people's homes – connecting with local green space.
2. Excite and inspire the young people – affective. Support them to enjoy being in nature and feel safe.
3. Foster a sense of ownership or custodianship over the green space.
4. Grow confidence and autonomy to use the outdoors as a tool for resilience and self-worth. Introduce them to ways to enjoy being outside in nature.

Activity 1: Mapping the route

This activity is an Introduction to the walk. Give a safety talk and show the route, then introduce journey sticks, scrapbooks and camera. Hand out torches and high vis. Assign one adult per five young people.

Accessibility

Keep it a short introduction. Distribute torches and bibs. Set expectations around keeping to groups, walk length, terrain, route and timings.

Set torch expectations: avoid flashing, keep it turned off on the roads, don't shine it at people's faces.

Talking points

- Have you been this way before?
- Do you often go out at night?
- What creatures do you think we will see?

Resources

- Large map of the area around the youth club.
- Coloured pens.
- Torches .
- High vis.
- Instant camera.

Extensions

- Invite young people to mark out points they like along the route.

Activity 2: Night walk

This activity consists of seven parts: screaming into the dark; silence and darkness; talking about stars; reflector games; walking by yourself; other games; and finding a favourite tree.

1. **Scream into the dark.**

Encourage participants to be as loud as possible and shout together for a short time.

2. **Silence and darkness, letting our eyes adjust.**

Turn torches off and spend a few minutes in silence, letting eyes and ears adjust. What can you see?

3. **Talk about stars / look for constellations. Make constellations with glow-in-the-dark stars on the floor. [Star-hop the night sky.](#)**

Guide young people to find stars. Ask if anyone knows any constellations. In advance, look up constellations for the time of year and where to find them. Use last week's star gazers to find constellations.

4. **Reflector games.**

In groups of five, each with an adult, the young people spread out around the field, with one group remaining at one end. The other groups' aim is to sneak behind the centre group silently. Each group holds a reflector, and the centre group scans the field with a torch to find the reflectors. When the light is shone on a group, they must freeze. No hiding reflectors.

5. **Walking by yourself.**

For a level, known stretch of path, position an adult at each end. One at a time, young people turn off their torches and walk alone between adults. Everyone else is quiet so they can experience the dark and silence.

6. **Games: Light tag / making a den / tapping sticks.**

Hide and seek with lights and high vis.

7. **Find a favourite tree.**

By yourself, choose a tree, give it a name, and whisper a secret to it.

Accessibility

Make it clear that if anyone has concerns or finds it scary to be in the dark to talk to an adult. Make sure there are enough adults to bring young people back to club if needed. Introduce the route in advance to set expectations and timings.

Will cancel in event of bad weather.

Vision: pair up with a guide buddy (youth volunteer?) if it will be too difficult to see.

Mobility: warn that it will be a half mile walk each way with some uneven ground and low visibility.

If people get spooked: turn on torches, safe adult accompanies, invite to use calming techniques, if needed return to a familiar well lit area or the youth club.

Talking points

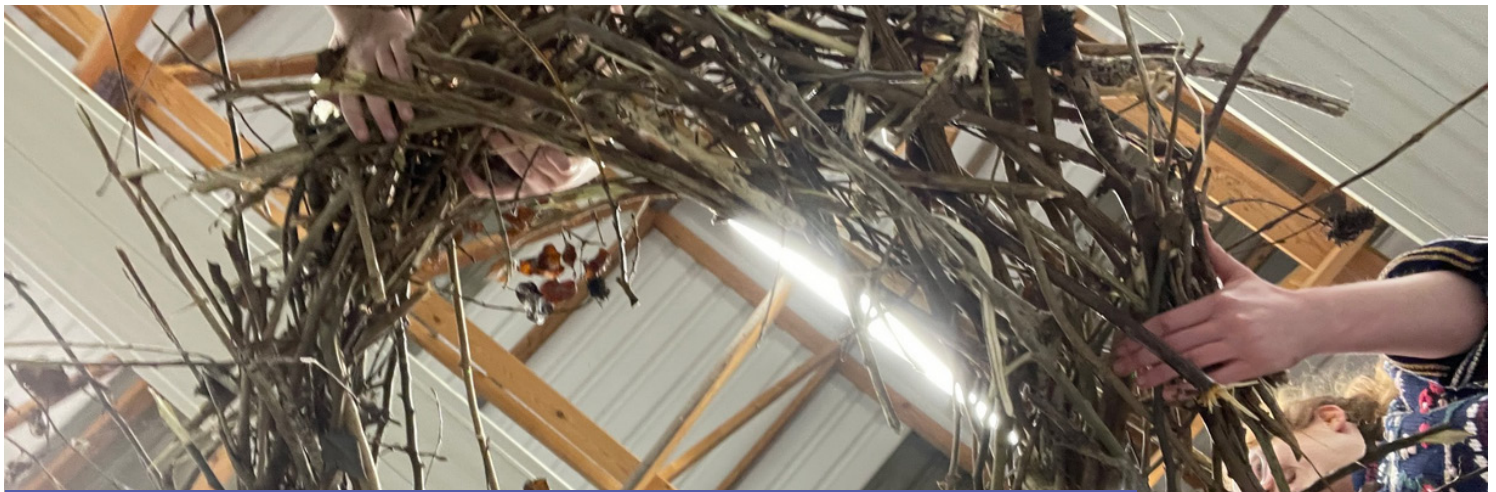
- How does it feel to be in total darkness?
- Does this area feel different at night?
- What can you hear that you can't normally hear?
- Do you feel safe?
- Have you been camping before?

Resources

- First aid kit.
- Instant camera.
- Torches.
- High vis.
- Planisphere.
- Star gazers.

Extensions

- Adding to sensory bingo.
- Collecting things for scrap book.



Sharing the beauty of nature

In this rainy day session, young people will...

- Create objects from natural materials, focusing on the touch sense.
- Make walk sticks and nests and decorate their scrapbooks.
- Be challenged not to use tape or glue.

The aim of the session is to...

1. Provide opportunities for young people to handle natural objects and create things with them.
2. Develop personal and tangible connections with nature, even when inside.
3. Practice working together (to build the nest) and work independently to make objects that feel personally satisfying.
4. Explore the idea that young people can look out for natural objects “in the wild”.

Activity 1: Building a nest

Can you make a nest fit for a bird? Birds start building their nests in February (or earlier due to climate change). In this activity, young people are challenged to use the materials birds use to make a person-sized nest, working as a team and not using glue or tape.

Accessibility

Option for young people who need more movement to find additional sticks around the site. Provide some gardening gloves to protect hands / anyone with sensory needs around touch.

Provide some large, printed images for inspiration for anyone who needs more guidance.

Different roles could include: decorating nest, preparing materials, weaving sticks, looking for inspiration, providing a size guide. If a few are dominating the building, introduce taking turns to place a material in the nest.

Talking points

- Have you ever seen a bird's nest?
- How long do you think it takes to build a nest?
- What materials would you use to build your nest?
- Are birds nests nature? Are human houses nature? What's the difference?
- Where's a good place to build a nest in a city?

Resources

- Sticks.
- Moss.
- Wool.
- String.
- Feathers.
- Other natural materials.
- Printed photos for inspiration or a pre-made nest.
- Torches.

Extensions

- Challenge to identify types of birds nest.
- Trying to copy different nest building techniques from different birds.
- Making a soft inner lining.
- Finding more materials outside to use.

Activity 2: Making materials for a nature walk

In this activity, young people make a walk stick and personalised collection bag ready for the next nature walk. A walk stick is a decorated stick to which they can tie natural objects that they find.

Accessibility

Buddy up for help with fiddly tasks.

Talking points

- How much is okay to take from a green space?

Resources

- Big sticks.
- Colourful string and wool.
- Printed examples of journey sticks.

Extensions

- Sharing stories around who uses journey sticks and why.
- Telling a story with the journey sticks.



Activity 3: Sharing the beauty

In this activity, young people take pictures of the objects they like and explore with a phone microscope. They take pictures in the nest and store them in scrapbooks. They have one-to-one chats about what nature is.

Accessibility

Use youthwork phone for anyone who can't access a camera.

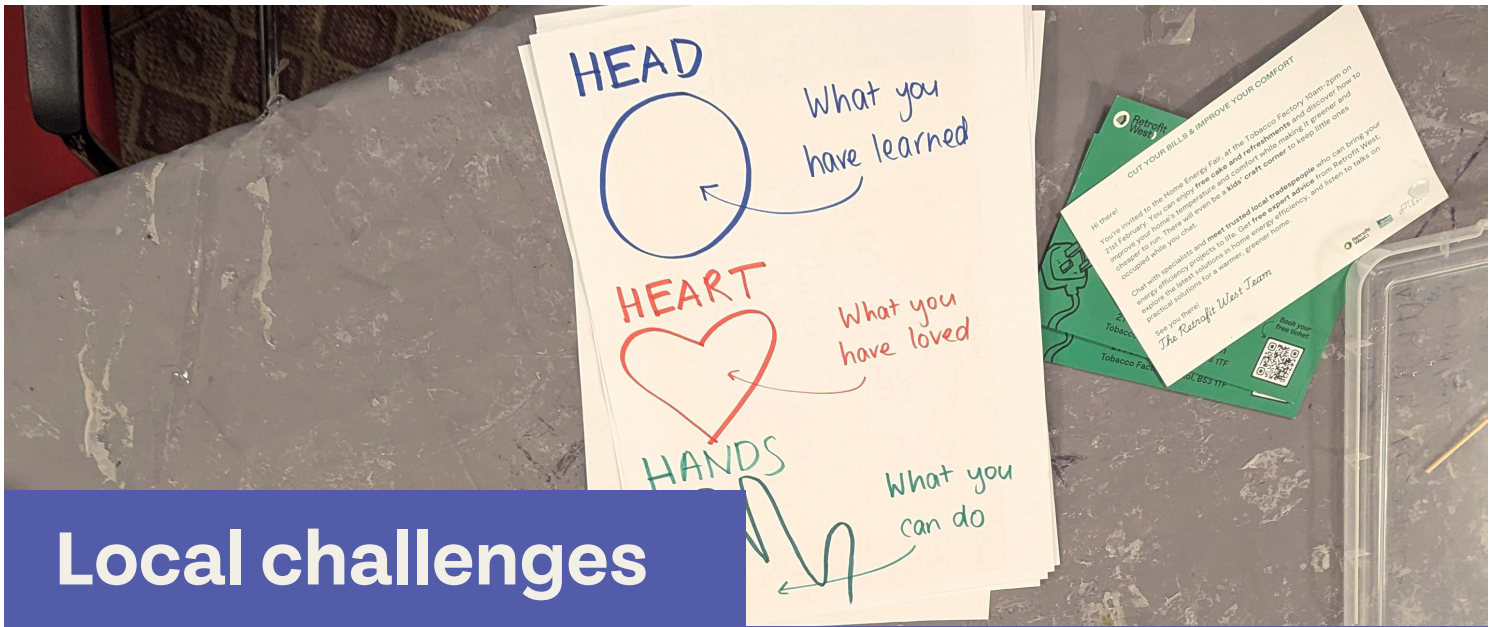
Printable photos means everyone gets to take one home – don't rely on the young people's own phones.

Talking points

- What counts as nature?
- Are nests always nature?
- Are humans nature?
- What about our houses?

Resources

- Camera.
- Scrapbooks.
- Pens.
- Glue.
- Scissors.



Local challenges

In this session, young people will...

- Work in groups to explore collective challenges in the local area.
- Be encouraged to experience collective responses to these.
- Move between small group conversations and practical science activities to learn about tools to help solve the challenges.

The aim of the session is to...

1. Identify local challenges and find out how young people and other communities experience them similarly or differently.
2. Recognise the skills they have to create change collectively.
3. Learn practical skills around environmental monitoring.

Activity 1: Local challenges

In this activity, young people engage in a short small group discussion about problems in the local area and discuss the effects of air pollution, water pollution and high carbon dioxide levels.

Discussion points

Drive towards environmental problems, including air and water pollution. Discuss knock-on effects of an unhealthy environment, including on wildlife.

Introduce the air quality monitor at the beginning. Note differences in CO₂ between inside and outside. Discuss what CO₂ is.

Accessibility

Scribe for young people who don't want to write. Encourage writing and drawing for young people who don't want to talk.

Talking points

- Is there anything that isn't right in your area?
- What problems are there?
- What's it like to be near a busy road?
- What would it be like to be an animal around here?
- What is carbon dioxide?
- Where does it come from?
- What effect does it have? In a room vs. in the atmosphere?

Resources

- Big paper.
- Pens.
- Air quality monitor.

Activity 2: Water and air testing

In this activity, young people test tap water using a water test strip. They test water from outside and compare the results. They also explore how the air quality has changed since the beginning of the session.

Discussion points

Show young people how to use a water test strip using tap water. Discuss the different things it tests for and what healthy water means. Encourage young people to take cups and go and find wild water outside – from puddles, gutters, buckets, etc. Let young people test their own water and compare with each other and tap water.

Come back to the air quality monitor and note how it's changed. Discuss why.

Talking points

- What does it mean if water isn't healthy?
- Why might puddle water be different from tap water?
- What can pollute water?
- Who is responsible for making sure the water and air are safe for everyone?
- Can you drink directly from the river? Are there other places that you can drink the water? Why not here?
- What makes air pollution?
- Why is there more air pollution in some areas compared to others?
- Do other people in the city experience the same air quality?
- How can we make it better?

Resources

- Water testing kit.
- Air quality monitor.
- Cups.
- Instant camera.

Extensions

What else could be tested that isn't water? Look around for other drinks, hand sanitiser, etc.

Activity 3: Fire pit

In this activity, young people toast marshmallows and use the fire pit to reflect on activities so far, including what the environment around the club is like, using the Head, Heart, Hands framework.

Discussion points

Reflect on the programme so far by talking about **Head**: what you have learned so far; **Heart**: what you have loved; and **Hands**: what you can do now.

Link these reflections about the programme to the local environment around the club. What have young people learned about their area? What do they love about it? And what can they do to support it now?

Accessibility

Use Starburst for a vegan/halal alternative to marshmallows. These get very hot – make sure young people wait for them to cool down.

Talking points

- Who makes the energy that powers your home?
- Why do you have to pay for it?
- Where else in the world experiences this problem?
- How is it different/the same in this area?

Resources

- Fire pit.
- Marshmallows.
- Starburst.



Spring into action for nature

In this session, young people will...

- Start two project ideas based on activities from Grow Wilder.
- Reflect on next actions locally.

The aim of the session is to...

1. Build on learning from Grow Wilder.
2. Develop a youth-led project idea.
3. Embed passion for impacting and nurturing nature locally.

Activity 1: Group reflection

In this activity, young people discuss their ideas from last week and reflect on what to do next.

Accessibility

Support discussion with reminders of Grow Wilder activities. Provide post it notes for young people who would rather not speak.

Talking points

- What have we learned?
- What have we seen?
- What should other people in Hartcliffe know about nature?
- What should we do?

Resources

- Flipchart.
- Markers.

Extensions

- What will we need to carry out your ideas?

Activity 2: Mammal trap making

In this activity, young people make a footprint tunnel to track local wildlife and discuss what they might find, what the habitat is like for the animals, and how they could make it better.

Directions

Make a cardboard tunnel and stick tape and paper inside. Mix ash or charcoal with vegetable oil to make nature-safe ink and paint onto the tape. If it's likely to be rainy, cover the tunnel with a bin bag. Place in a location animals might use and leave a pile of pet food in the middle. Full instructions can be found [here](#).

Talking points

- What animal might we find?
- What food, shelter and water is there around here for animals?
- How could we make it better?

Resources

- Big cardboard.
- Ash and vegetable oil to make mammal-friendly paint.
- Paintbrush.
- Paper.
- Dry cat biscuits.
- Tape.
- Somewhere to hide the tunnels.

Extensions

- Making a bigger mammal trap (double sized).
- Putting the trap outside the club grounds.
- Making signs to tell people science is in progress.
- How can we tell people about what we're doing?

Activity 3: Seed paper making

In this activity, young people make seed paper that they can take home or plant at the youth club, and reflect on the importance of native flowers.

Directions

Blend shredded paper and warm water until it creates a smooth, soupy paste. Transfer to a bowl and stir in seeds. Place a biscuit cutter on cling film and spoon the pulp into the cutter. It should be an even, thin layer. Leave the paper to dry. Next week, young people can take the seed paper home or plant it at the youth club.

More information can be found [here](#).

Accessibility

Ensure young people stay clear of the blender.

Provide latex gloves if any young people have sensory needs that makes dealing with paper pulp difficult.

Talking points

- Why do humans like flowers?
- Have you ever made anything with seeds?
- What do humans use seeds for?
- Why are native flowers important?
- Are there native flowers in Hartcliffe?
- Where should we plant or share our seed paper?

Resources

- Shredded paper.
- Wildflower seeds.
- Biscuit cutter shapes.
- Cling film.

Extensions

- Making seed paper to share with other people so they care about nature and wildlife too.



Our nature

In this session, young people will...

- Do some hands on local planting.
- Engage in final fireside reflections.

The aim of the session is to...

1. Build on learning from Grow Wilder.
2. Develop a youth-led project idea.
3. Embed passion for impacting and nurturing nature locally.
4. Reflect on the project and next steps.

Activity 1: Check the mammal trap

In this activity, young people see what prints have been left in the mammal traps. They compare the prints to images of native mammal prints and discuss what is likely to be around locally.

Accessibility

Print several animal print pictures so young people can compare themselves.

Talking points

- Which mammals are most likely?
- Where might these mammals shelter/eat/drink?
- How can we make the space around the youth club safer and friendlier for this kind of wildlife?

Resources

- Mammal trap.
- Animal print pictures.

Extensions

- Cut and stick prints into scrapbooks.

Activity 2: Planting

In this activity, young people find spots around the youth club or plant up hanging baskets to take home. They plant hardy native flowers that support wildlife and pollinators and that might grow back next year.

Accessibility

Provide gardening gloves.

Break activity into bitesize steps and pair young people up – planting is easier with two pairs of hands.

Provide other tasks like preparing ground and watering new plants for anyone who would rather help than plant.

Talking points

- How can we look after our new plants?
- Why is it a good idea to plant native species?
- How might these plants benefit the local environment?

Resources

- Native plants.
- Gloves.
- Trowels.
- Soil.



For more information about the project, visit cse.org.uk/youth-nature-connection