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.

Centre for Sustainable Energy

UKRI Natural Environment Research Council

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.