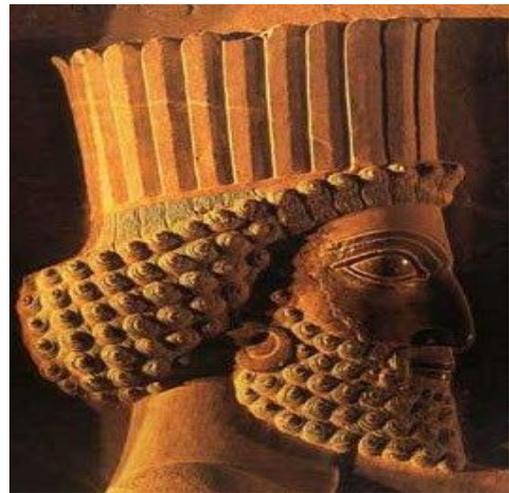


The outdoors and mental health

It has long been known that being outdoors is good for our physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. As early as 2500 years ago in Persia, Cyrus the Great (the founder of the empire) planted a garden in the middle of the city because he recognised the need to increase human health and the feeling of calm that green spaces produced.

However it doesn't appear that anyone properly studied what the apparent draw of nature was until the 1950s when the US began its wilderness studies. Those long term studies found that we seemed to have an affinity for nature that was rooted in our genes. Although we had been living in villages, towns and cities for several 100 years we had primarily evolved on savannas, seashores, forests etc for a lot longer and still felt physically and mentally comfortable in those surroundings.



These days brief visits to green spaces offer respite from our normal day to day lives. We spend a lot of our time in offices, shops, warehouses and homes within four walls, small windows (if



they are there) and under false light. Many of us don't have access to a garden and those that do often do not have the time, energy or inclination to look after or maintain one. For a lot of us our outdoor spaces are communal parks and green spaces created by town planners, as soon as there is the remotest flicker of sun we rush there.

How does being outside make you feel? Do you feel calmer, less anxious and more grounded when you are outdoors? It has been found that time spent in nature, reduces stress, can help relieve anxiety and depression

The scientists found that citizens who grew up with the least green space nearby had as much as a 55 percent increased risk of developing psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse in later years.

So What is Walk’N’Talk?

Without wanting to come across as sarcastic, it is “exactly what it says on the tin”. Your therapy sessions are conducted outdoors, maybe not always walking, benches are good and when it's raining a shelter has its benefits but essentially its not sitting in a chair, in an office, within four walls. For a lot of people the act of physically moving the body can aid in moving the mind, have you ever gone for a walk just to clear your head, to help you think or make a big decision? Or maybe you've sat somewhere and been distracted from what's going on inside you by watching/hearing birds singing, bees buzzing, the wind in the trees, the scent of pretty a flower or the trickle of water? Perhaps it helped you to “blow the cobwebs away?”, an old saying from the 19th century which we still use today, essentially meaning to get rid of the unused, dusty stuff in our heads and to get more organised, and have clarity of thought.



Being in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, reduces anger, fear, and stress and increases pleasant feelings. Exposure to nature not only makes you feel better emotionally, it contributes to your physical wellbeing, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the production of stress hormones.

The concept is to gain the benefits from nature such as the calming, grounding effects and that will aid and complement what you would be gaining from the therapy. Being outside can be a freeing experience, and for some it lessens the feeling of being closed in, anxious and put on the spot. Many of us feel uncomfortable with the idea of sitting in an unfamiliar room staring at a wall with someone else there, in close proximity focused on us trying to come up with answers that won't come. Nature can be that distraction from ourselves in order for us to be able to refocus on ourselves, on what's important and what we really need/want.

What does a session look like?

Before we begin you will do all the normal documentation, the same as any counselling session, then you choose a couple of locations from several different ones I have identified as potentially good places to go; a forest, a park, maybe a lake, that can be close by if needed and easy to access. Then its a bit like “just going for a walk” we arrange a time and place to meet, ensure you are suitably dressed and comfortable, from there the time is yours, we can walk, find somewhere to sit, maybe some shelter and talk.

One of the biggest questions I get is, what about all the other people around us, won't they see and hear us? Yes there is always that possibility, but how much attention do you normally pay to other peoples conversation? 9 times out of 10 I'll bet you catch a few words as you're walking

past and that's it. Are you/they likely to remember those words unlikely, why would you/they unless it maybe concerns them. You are a stranger, talking about things they may or may not know, understand or be at all interested in and there is no reason why they should be. So many of us are just "going about our business" too busy to notice anyone else let alone what they are



saying unless it's to them, and even then for some it's like a wake up call when someone is talking directly to them. I've done it on many occasions, shook my head to kinda wake myself up because someone is actually asking me a question and it isn't just part of the background noise I've zoned out of. I won't have a sign on me saying "Counsellor" so there would be no reason to believe you are not just out having a walk with someone you know to have a chat like anyone else. Ok there will be

times when someone may be behind us where it'll be easier for them to hear, but then there is nothing wrong with us stopping to let them pasS or changing direction to move away from them.

What happens if we bump into someone you know? As with everything that's up to you, wherever possible i would always recommend trying to do walks where this is least likely to happen, but i obviously can't guarantee it won't happen. Just be mindful of the possibility and what you would want to do, again I am not going to be obvious as your therapist and will follow your lead in that situation. Just be aware that if you do decide to stop and chat it will be cutting into your time with me so maybe a polite nod and I'll "catch up with you later" would work.

Above all else walk'n'talk sessions are there to help you to sort out whatever it is you have come to me for help with. As with all counselling they are not always going to be the most comfortable, enjoyable things to do but they are there to try and make your journey better and easier for you.

If you're interested why not take a look at my website or contact me?

[Carol's Support Services - Counselling and Hypnotherapy - Northampton](#)

[Facebook](#)

Acknowledgements

Study finds access to nature in childhood helps mental health Augusta Dwyer 27 March 2019

<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing>

For further information on the benefits etc. of nature therapy and other study links please follow this link https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nature_therapy#cite_note-5-6

