



## Engaging young minds in Cyprus with mindfulness

Mindfulness is about paying attention, non-judgmentally and with curiosity and acceptance to our experiences of being alive. We tend to live a large portion of our lives in an automatic mode sometimes called 'autopilot', lost in thoughts, without noticing all the other parts of our experience (sights, sounds, smells, body sensations, emotions etc.)

Becoming more mindful gives us the choice to (re)connect with other parts of our experience of being alive. In terms of engaging with nature, mindfulness is about inviting people to engage with the natural world through direct experience - rather than just through the lens of knowledge, facts and rational argument.

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Instead of learning about nature, it's about really experiencing nature - through our senses, with curiosity, imagination, creativity and feeling. Ultimately, mindfulness of nature is about remembering how to let our whole experience into our awareness – the way we perhaps did when we were children. It's about connection and belonging – bringing our awareness back to our two natural homes – our body and the rest of the natural world on this planet.

There's growing evidence that experiencing nature is essential for our health and well-being and suggestions that if we want to change our attitudes and relationship to the natural world, we need to spend time in nature,

experiencing it. These are the experiences that can inspire us to find appropriate solutions to bringing forth a happier, more peaceful and sustainable world.



Every morning for 5 days in July 2019, in cooperation with BirdLife Cyprus, we got together with 13 children between the ages of 6 and 12 from the Family House Summer school in the local park. We explored how our body is made of nature's elements, practiced using our eyes, ears, noses and hands to explore the natural world, interviewed trees, imagined what it's like to be birds, wrote poems, performed mimes and made beautiful drawings. At the end of every session, we took some time to simply rest on the ground and listen to the sounds of nature we could hear.

*"I think that we should stop building houses and maybe break them down so they can live... [We can live in tents] instead of destroying the trees so we can make houses. Because we're small things, and the trees are bigger than us, we don't need so many big things, bigger than the trees".*

This was one of the comments shared by one of the 7-year-old girls who joined the "Mindfulness of Nature" sessions for kids from the summer school.

In a world where our disconnection from nature is having such huge consequences for our well-being and for that of the rest of the planet, it's time to open our bodies, hearts and mind and bring our attention back to the natural world we are part of.

(Article by Claire Thompson)

To find out more about Claire's work <https://mindfulness-of-nature.com>

To find out more about BirdLife's Cyprus work <https://birdlifecyprus.org/>

