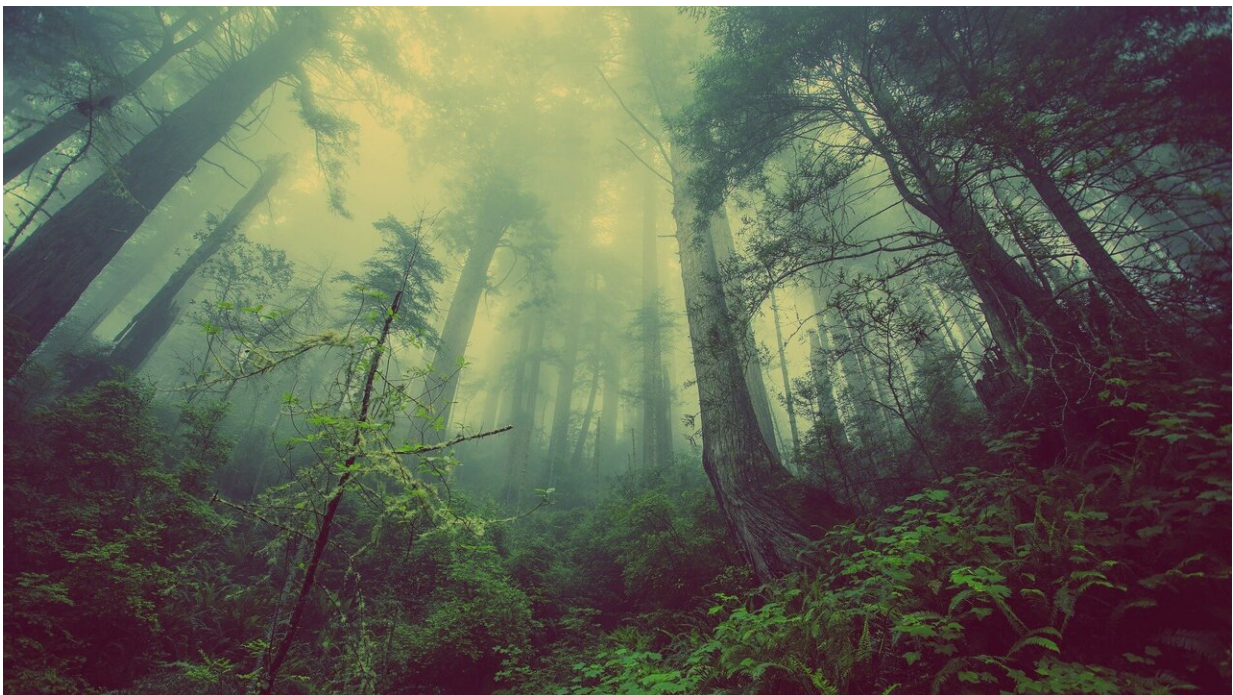


Childhood connection to nature has many benefits but is not universally positive, finds review

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A literature review by Dr Louise Chawla, Professor Emerita at the University of Colorado, finds that children are happier and more likely to protect the natural world when they have a greater connection to it, but this connection is complex and can also generate negative emotions

linked to issues like climate change.

The review, published in the British Ecological Society Journal *People and Nature*, is the first to focus on nature connection in children and adolescents. In the article Dr. Chawla comprehensively reviews the full scope of literature on the topic, covering peer-reviewed articles, books and studies by environmental organizations.

The review finds that connecting with nature supports multiple areas of [young people](#)'s wellbeing. "There is strong evidence that children are happier, healthier, function better, know more about the environment, and are more likely to take action to protect the [natural world](#) when they spend time in nature." said Dr. Chawla.

Several studies found that children's connection with nature increased with time spent in natural environments. Time spent in this way was also a predictor for active care for nature in adulthood. These findings support strategies and policies that ensure that young people have access to wild areas, parks, gardens, green neighborhoods, and naturalized grounds at schools.

However, a connection with nature is not universally positive. "My review shows that connecting with nature is a complex experience that can generate troubling emotions as well as happiness." said Dr. Chawla.

"We need to keep in mind that children are inheriting an unravelling biosphere, and many of them know it. Research shows that when adolescents react with despair, they are unlikely to take action to address challenges."

Thankfully the review finds that there is overlap in the strategies used to increase children's feelings of connection with nature and supporting them with difficult dimensions of this connection.

These strategies include helping young people learn what they can do to protect the [natural](#) world, as individuals and working collectively with others, and sharing examples of people who care for nature. Research covered in the review finds that young people are more likely to believe a better world is possible when friends, family and teachers listen sympathetically to their fears and give them a safe space to share their emotions.

One of the most surprising findings from the [review](#) was the complete disconnect between researchers studying the benefits of childhood connection to nature and those studying responses to environmental threats. "People who study children's connection with nature and those who study their coping with environmental risk and loss have been pursuing separate directions without referencing or engaging with each other." said Dr. Chawla. "I am arguing that researchers on both sides need to be paying attention to each other's work and learning from each other".

More information: Louise Chawla et al, Childhood nature connection and constructive hope: A review of research on connecting with nature and coping with environmental loss, *People and Nature* (2020). [DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10128](#)

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