

Looking after our mental health is important. When we feel emotionally well, we are able to look after ourselves, parent well and enjoy the things we care about.

To enable us to feel emotionally well we need to find ways to step aside from our fast-paced lives and find ways of supporting good mental health. Research shows that spending time in nature affects the health of both our body and mind.

Why not try some of these tips

1. Increased use of electronic devices can increase levels of stress. Why not unplug devices and spend time in nature walking the dog or on a bike ride with the children to help you unwind.
2. Breathing fresh air helps regulate our levels of serotonin and promotes feelings of happiness and wellbeing. When your mood is low or you find it hard to be motivated try taking your morning coffee into the garden and practice some breathing techniques or try some mindfulness by tuning into the sounds in your garden.
3. Growing flowers, plants or vegetables can help improve your mood while improving both mental and physical health. You can grow salad leaves and herbs successfully in a pot or window box if you do not have a garden.
4. Introduce your child to the wonder of growing flowers or veg from seed. Tending seedlings can produce feelings of empathy and watching their growth demonstrates resilience and hope. This can be a good starting activity if you find being with other people challenging.
5. Natural light can help with conditions such as seasonal affective disorder (SAD) so take advantage when days are bright and enjoy some sunshine.
6. Encourage children to enjoy being in nature by setting up a play table outside when the weather allows and letting them enjoy play activities that you would find stressful in the home such as Play Doh or painting.
7. Try fruit picking as a family activity and making something delicious with the produce that makes it home. This activity provides time away from the stress of everyday life, enjoy family time and increase feelings of belonging.
8. Watching the sea or counting stars helps many people to feel relaxed and connect with nature so why not enjoy a family picnic at the seaside or as a special treat have a late tea in the garden to allow the whole family to feel relaxed and enjoy time together.
9. Take your dog for a walk, or offer to take a neighbour's dog, look for local wildlife when you are out for a walk or visit a local petting farm. Animals have a calming effect, and many are used for therapy. It is hard to have your mind on worries when a playful pup is on the end of the lead, or you are stroking a fluffy kitten.