

## **Build a deeper connection with nature and boost your health!**

*Dr Jade Gunnell is a Nature Engagement Consultant. She explains how we can feel better by simply being outside more. And especially in the Great Ouse Valley!*

What would your life look like if you spent as much time out in nature as you do in front of your computer or phone screen? How would you feel? What would be different?

In his book *Last Child in the Woods*, journalist and author Richard Louv coined the phrase 'Nature Deficit Disorder' to highlight the dangers of a lack of access to nature for the development and well-being of children. This seminal work sparked a whole area of academic research that has since demonstrated that nature deficit is a health issue for adults and communities too.

People who spend more time in nature have more positive social relationships and less anxiety and depression. They suffer less from mental tiredness and attention deficits, and are more creative, with higher levels of life satisfaction. And for those of us lucky enough to live in Cambridgeshire, the Great Ouse Valley is the perfect place for building a closer connection to nature, and revelling in these benefits. But the real advantages come when we develop a deeper connection through our interactions and experiences.

Research at University of Derby has identified five pathways that progressively help us to develop these deep connections:

- Explore nature through your five **senses**. How? Sit on the riverbank with eyes closed and tune into your other senses.
- Notice your **emotional** responses to nature. Try writing a journal about what you have witnessed in the natural world and how it makes you feel.
- Recognise the **beauty** that exists in nature. Create artworks inspired by the things you have seen.
- Develop a sense of the **meaning** nature has for our lives. Celebrate the changing of the seasons by bringing natural tokens of each into your home.
- Have **compassion** and take action to protect and enhance nature. You might build wildlife homes and take part in projects like the Big Garden Birdwatch.

Each of these pathways can be pursued for free in any natural space, from your local woods or meadows, to your garden or local park. And if getting out of the house isn't practical for you, research has shown that engaging with nature through your window also brings health benefits. What matters is doing these activities regularly and engaging with as many of them as possible. The deeper you can connect with nature the more it will reward your health.

Dr Jade Gunnell



Joining a guided early morning walk through a spring wood is guaranteed to heighten your senses.  
Photograph by Ian Jackson

**The Great Ouse Valley Trust promotes for public benefit the conservation, restoration and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and heritage of the Great Ouse Valley and environs in the county of Cambridgeshire. For more information about the Trust please visit [www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk](http://www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk)**

