



BOOK REVIEW

**How to Get Kids Offline, Outdoors and
Connecting with Nature
200+ Creative Activities to Encourage
Self-Esteem, Mindfulness, and Wellbeing**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26203/n0a0-ey09>

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To cite this article: HARRISON, T., (2015). How to Get Kids Offline, Outdoors and Connecting with Nature. 200+ Creative Activities to Encourage Self-Esteem, Mindfulness, and Wellbeing by Bonnie Thomas. *Education in the North*, **22**(Special Issue), pp.86-87.



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Book Review

How to Get Kids Offline, Outdoors and Connecting with Nature 200+ Creative Activities to Encourage Self-Esteem, Mindfulness, and Wellbeing

Bonnie Thomas

London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers (2014) pp269

Paperback £15.99

ISBN 978-1-84905-968-8

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There is increasing international concern about the impact of 'screen time' on children and young peoples' health and wellbeing. Loss of 'connectedness' to the natural world is one of the frequently referred to impacts of the influence of modern technology on young people. Whilst there is little longitudinal research that can demonstrate conclusively that screen technology causes young people harm, Thomas refers to the work of Louve (2008) and Selhub and Logan (2012) who present convincing arguments that less time outside in nature and more time in front of screens has alarming impacts on children's mental, emotional, physical and spiritual development and health. Thomas is a parent and a counsellor who has both personal and professional concerns for children's health and wellbeing. She has written this 'how to' book to help fellow parents and professionals find effective ways to help children and young people become more connected with nature and to discover nature based interventions to help improve the general health and wellbeing of young people. The book is a treasure trove of nature based activities for children of all ages and in a variety of environments, both indoors and out.

This book is divided into two parts. Part one is aimed at professionals who are working therapeutically with children and young people. Thomas gives a wealth of advice on how nature can support clinical and therapeutic work even when the professional is office-bound or is confined to other indoor work environments. Thomas gives examples of how natural objects can be brought into indoor sessions to support relaxation, to provide prompts for talk or reflection and to aid other specific therapeutic activities. She also suggests that professionals prescribe nature based 'home work', such as walks and gardening, for clients to undertake in between sessions. This section of the book has activities that will help children practice core skills such relaxation and mindfulness. She explores the value of nature based activities that will help individuals forge positive relationships, develop better self-esteem and help support children who have experienced loss or bereavement. Thomas discusses therapeutic tools and approaches such as animal assisted therapy and gardening, helping professionals to consider a wider perspective on how nature can extend their professional practice and support their clients' health and wellbeing. This is one of the only books that focuses on nature activities that can support the work of child mental health and social work professionals.

Part two of this work is aimed at parents and care providers including professionals such as child minders, youth workers and group leaders. This section is all about having fun outdoors and Thomas provides ideas to encourage children to interact with nature 'using play, imagination, self-expression and creativity' (p131). This section addresses concerns such as safety and risk, often the biggest barriers to children playing outside. Thomas considers general outdoor activities such as games, walks and visits and then explores various outdoor environments and the potential for play and creativity in each. She gives ideas for play in

fields, beach, forest and riverside as well as exploring the potential of outdoor play in urban settings. Thomas even provides activities for all kinds of weathers with mud and puddle play as well as ideas for snowy days. She concludes part two by suggesting ways to bring nature indoors and to make links between outdoor experiences and nature based indoor play and creativity.

This book has a wealth of inspiration for professionals or parents. The activities in this book will undoubtedly help encourage children's connection to the natural world and to improve the health and wellbeing of both child and adult. It is a book to dip into for ideas and many of the activities can be a springboard for new games or activities that are tailor-made for specific individuals' needs or environments. Readers who wish to know more about the theory behind some of the claims for improved health and wellbeing will need to turn to the work of others such as Louve (2008), Selhub and Logan (2012), or to some of the many studies that have been conducted in the UK such as Lester and Maudsley (2008) and Natural England's report *Childhood and Nature* (2009). This work however is an excellent addition to the professional tool kit of mental health professionals, social workers, teachers, care practitioners and parents.

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