



## Nature-Based Somatic (Ecopsychology) Practices Exercises for (Re)Connecting to the Earth

An ecopsychology practice is an exercise or activity that supports our ability to connect with, relate to, and deepen our understanding of the Earth and the natural world. It can be simple or elaborate, something done with any variety of frequency or length, and done in almost any setting. The activity is not as important as our intention and attitude as we engage in the practice. The practices are inherently body-based (somatic) and require the mindful engagement of our bodies in the environment. The more you attune to the relationship between your body and the nature-based practice, the more depth you are likely to experience.

Pick one practice to engage in over the course of the next 18 weeks of the Learning Collaborative. Choose **one** practice in order to develop some depth with the practice. Engage in the practice a **minimum** of two times per week. Practice “beginner’s mind” and enter into each time of practice with an openness to whatever may arise or happen. *We will check in about this practice during Reflective Consultation.*

1. Contrast – (light intensity or color) – fundamental signal encoded by the retina in the eye. Spend time noticing contrast. What happens as you do so? How does the practice affect your perception of “objects”? Notice the impact on your breath, heart rate, or other aspects of your body and experience.
2. Patterns – Walk around and stop at a place that seems appropriate. Let it be an intuitive process. Take a moment to be still. What patterns do you notice? With each one, take your time. Let yourself experience the patterns. What is the impact on you while you notice and watch the pattern (breath, heart rate, sensations, thoughts)? Repeat with a new pattern. When you are ready, if there is time, move to a new place, or simply change your perspective (stand up/sit down/lie down).
3. Metaphor – Pick a place. Spend some time examining it, or some part of the place. What does it remind you of in your own or a loved one’s life? What is the parallel? What meaning does this parallel bring to you? Notice your breath and body as you explore the metaphor and its parallels and meanings.
4. Resonance – Wander around slowly without a goal or predetermined direction. Let yourself be drawn to places in an intuitive, instinctual manner. Stop at places where it feels right to stop. What is your experience of this place? Check in with your body – what are you aware of in your body? Let yourself be aware of the overall quality of your awareness. Practice alternating between an open, diffuse awareness and a focused, precise awareness. Notice what draws you in and how your body responds to each part.

5. While outside, direct your attention in the 6 directions (east, south, west, north, up, and down). See what you notice in each direction. You may “just notice” what is or you may find that each direction has a “teaching” or insight for you. You might do this at the same location each time, or change locations depending on circumstances. Explore what happens when you do this practice at different times of day (i.e. dawn vs. midday vs. sunset). Notice your body and breath in each direction.
6. Spend a given amount of time (10 minutes? An hour? A day?) considering various aspects of nature (i.e. a tree, a bird, an insect, a rock, a hill, a cloud). Whether you believe that each aspect of nature has its own spirit or not, consider, “What if this thing has a spirit? How would that change my choices? How would that change how I relate to it?” Notice indicators of how the different items have grown, changed, or moved over time. Notice your energy level, sensations, and emotions as you explore each aspect.
7. Lie on the earth. Let yourself feel your body make contact with the earth. How much are you part of the earth? How much can you let yourself (physically, emotionally, spiritually) be supported by the earth? Notice what happens when you lie on your stomach vs. your side vs. your back. Notice what happens when you let your body tune into the sensation of gravity pulling your body towards the earth. Notice the waves of sensations, emotions, and energy levels in your body.
8. Notice air – every place it is. What does air surround? What does air and/or hold? What does air move and influence? Notice the relationship between your body and air.
9. Let yourself be drawn to an aspect of nature (i.e. tree, flower, spider, air, snow, mushroom). Contemplate how your life intersects with this aspect/item. Be curious about your relationship to this aspect/item and its relationship to you. Notice your body throughout the process.
10. Notice some aspect of “civilization” (i.e. computer, car, cell phone, building). Contemplate all the ways it helps you feel closer or more connected with nature. Notice how your awareness, during each time of practice, impacts your breath and body.
11. Contemplate 5 things in nature for which you are grateful. Notice the ebb and flow of emotions, sensations, and energy levels in your body as you explore gratitude for each of the five different things.
12. Contemplate the ways your actions (i.e. movement, relationships, getting food and eating) parallel the actions of other natural beings. What are the similarities? Notice the impact on your bodily experience as you notice the connections and similarities.
13. Find a location to be for a period of time. Notice the presence of the four elements (earth, water, air, fire) in this environment. Bring awareness to your body and how the four elements (earth, water, air, fire) exist within you. Notice the way your body relates to the environment differently with this awareness.
14. Develop your own ecopsychology practice. *Essential Spirituality: Exercises from the World’s Religions to Cultivate Kindness, Love, Joy, Peace, Vision, Wisdom, and Generosity* (R. Walsh, 1999), and *Awake in the Wild: Mindfulness in Nature as a Path of Self-Discovery* (M. Coleman, 2006) both have many practices that may give you ideas.