

Nature as Nurture: Nature as Co-Regulation

Name _____ Date _____

Understanding Nature as Co-Regulation

Co-regulation is the process of calming and stabilizing our nervous system through connection. Traditionally this connection takes place with other people, but also with the natural world. Nature offers a steady, nonjudgmental presence that can help soothe stress, slow our breathing, and restore balance. The rhythm of waves, the sway of trees, and the sounds of birds can gently guide us toward calm. By intentionally connecting with nature, we allow our bodies to settle, supporting emotional regulation, nurturing, and overall well-being.

Reflection Questions

When do you feel most calm or emotionally regulated in natural environments?

What elements of nature (sounds, movement, stillness) help soothe your nervous system?

Does your body respond differently in natural settings compared to busy or stressful environments? If so, how?

What signs tell you that your nervous system is becoming more regulated?

How can you intentionally seek out co-regulation through nature in your daily life?

Ecotherapy Exercise: Nature Co-Regulation Practice

Instructions

1. Go to a natural setting (park, garden, waterfront, or even a quiet outdoor space).
2. Sit or stand comfortably and begin by noticing your breath without changing it.
3. Gradually shift your attention to one natural rhythm—such as wind in the trees, water movement, or birdsong.
4. Allow your breathing to gently match or respond to this rhythm.
5. Spend 5–10 minutes simply being present, letting your body settle into the environment.

Prompted Reflection

Which natural rhythm did you connect with most, and why?

How did your breathing and body sensations change during the exercise?

What emotions or thoughts shifted as you allowed yourself to settle?

Did you feel nurtured or “held” by the environment? In what way?

How can you return to this sense of regulation during stressful moments?

Integration: Co-Regulating with Nature

Take brief pauses throughout the day to notice natural elements (light, air, sound) and allow them to guide your breath. Use nature intentionally as a calming resource when you feel overwhelmed or dysregulated.

Journaling Prompts

What natural environments help you feel most calm and balanced?

How does your body signal that it is becoming more regulated?

What small daily practices can help you connect with nature for support and nurturing?

How can you use nature as a resource during moments of stress or anxiety?

Micro-Practice

1. Pause and notice one natural element around you (light, breeze, sound).
2. Take three slow breaths, allowing your breathing to match its rhythm.
3. Let your body soften as you allow the environment to support your calm.

Optional Challenge

Spend 10–15 minutes daily in nature, intentionally practicing co-regulation with different natural rhythms. Keep a “Co-Regulation Log,” noting which environments and elements most effectively support your nervous system.

Nature as co-regulation helps calm the nervous system through connection with steady, rhythmic environments. By allowing natural elements to support and nurture our sense of emotional balance, we cultivate resilience and ease.