



# Megan de Beyer

In anticipation of the busy holiday season, I have written a few parenting tips straight from the therapist's couch. This is all about parenting with nature in mind.

## How Nature Heals

Most South Africans know about the extraordinary influence of nature and the outdoors on health and wellbeing. However, it may be worth reminding your teen. In the field of environmental studies and Eco-psychology, there are a zillion new studies trying to mount a case for the essential benefits of nature connection- animals, plants, trees and landscapes. All these aspects of the natural world have been proven to calm us, broaden perspective, enhance empathy, improve mood and offer a sense of meaning. Further studies on children have shown that time in nature remedies ADHD, anxiety disorders, improves depression and even social anxiety!

## Have Teens Lost Their Connection?

It does seem weird that so much time is spent on research to prove the need of green spaces and spending time in nature. Yet, many of our teens have lost their connection to the wild. They may have lost their reverence for vast open landscapes, for the magnificence of mountains and the exhilaration of dipping in mountain streams. A big part of this is the addiction to all things digital and screens, where even the Discovery Channel turns animals into entertainment.



## Restoring The Connection

Therefore, as the holidays draw near, may we all be reminded to delve into the elements of nature? Could this be the ideal cure for disconnect and disease for both teens AND adults? Can we create space to declutter, unplug, and switch off. Can we take our eyes off the screen, to the horizon? Our feet out of shoes to bare earth? Our bodies to air as we jump off warm rock into natural pools of dark blue? Wouldn't that be the ideal way of restoring connection - right here, right now?

Find the Big blue skies or ocean depths or the endless stars of a dark quiet night. Go to where the nightjars call. Keep it simple. Surrender to all things natural: ask your teen to fix a rope, ride a horse, make a fire, climb a tree, walk a trail, create a shelter or just hoot like an owl. You can have fun with this as a parent!

I know we are all worried teens will be bored if we take them away to remote places. They may complain if they have no cellphone signal. But maybe that's just the thing they need.

Consider travelling equipped with cards, games, puzzles, sketchpads, binoculars, and TheTree app. Find a book on 'how to connect to nature' and try some of the fun exercises together. It may take a few days (unless he/she has a friend along!) but soon your teen will sing around a fire, forget their image, be dazzled by fish or actually have a long, real conversation with you .....and the whole family will remember what really matters!

## To conclude, in Einstein's wise words

"....Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of understanding and compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty!"



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Awakening Purpose Through Parenting

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