

# Mindfulness in Nature



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# MiNa

Mindfulness in Nature – embodying sustainable  
values, valuing sustainability

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# I N T R O D U C T I O N





# Introduction

## The Project

The present document is an output of the Erasmus + project “MiNa - Mindfulness in Nature – embodying sustainable values, valuing sustainability”. The aim is to promote the practice and benefits of mindfulness in an outdoor environment. Having contact with nature not only has its own benefits to the mental health, but also helps to connect with nature, contributing to the link with sustainable values.

The flipbook is designed as a tool for anyone who wants to practice mindfulness in nature. It can be used by single persons, a group of persons, or someone who wants to lead a group of people in these activities.

## Introducing Mindfulness in Nature

The concept of mindfulness training involves mental exercises aimed at developing specific skills. Different mindfulness approaches use various terminologies. Here, we use the definitions from Unified Mindfulness, developed by Shinzen Young.

Mindfulness consists of a set of three mutually reinforcing skills:

### **Clarity, equanimity, and concentration.**

**Clarity** helps us to better recognize what is happening within and around us.

**Equanimity** is the ability to let perceptions come and go without pushing them away or clinging to them.

**Concentration** is the ability to focus attention on what is relevant to us.

We all possess these skills. Through mental training, we can enhance our level of these abilities.

Mindfulness in nature is a concept that makes it easy to train and thus improve these three skills. When we spend time in nature, processes in the body are immediately activated which help regulate e.g. the blood pressure. Numerous studies have documented these positive effects.

Even if we benefit from being in nature without consciously paying attention to it, it is conceivable how much more intense the results can be when we actively engage with our perceptions.

## How to Practice:

### **Place:**

All exercises are designed to be performed outdoors. Always choose a place where you feel undisturbed and safe. The exercises can be done standing/walking or sitting, with eyes closed or open

When we talk about nature, we mean being in a natural environment. The size of this natural setting is not relevant. It can be a balcony, a park, a garden, or a tree outside the window. Of course, it also includes being by the sea, in the mountains, in the forest, or in meadows and fields.

## Safety

It is important that you stay within your personal comfort zone and do not cross any uncertain boundaries during these exercises, do not put yourself at danger. Observe the location where you are planning to do the exercises, and be mindful of possible dangers, ask yourself, can we walk without a risk of falling, or tripping? Do I feel safe to close my eyes here? What other dangers can you detect in that environment, wild animals, other persons, water risks? If you are near the ocean, maintain a safe distance, take in consideration that the reach of the sea, with the waves, can vary a lot. If you are going on a walk, keep in mind that you have to make your way back.

## Preparation

If you are going to do the exercises by yourself, please read through the instructions once or twice beforehand so that you can perform them later. Your personal experiences are more important than the instructions. They do not need to be followed exactly but rather provide an idea of how you can connect with nature to enhance your personal well-being.

If you are going to lead a group, consider if you want to follow the procedure just described above, or if you want to take the descriptions of the exercise in a phone or tablet, or if you want to print it. Make sure you take some time so everybody in your group can find a comfortable position.

Consider if you need to take with you:

- Water bottle
- Hat
- Sunscreen
- Comfortable footwear
- Adequate clothing
- Blanket
- Picnic rug/ Yoga mat
- Compass
- Smartphone
- Tablet or printed out instructions
- Charged Power bank

## Duration

The exercises can be done in 1 minute, or you can take more time, 5, 10, 20, or 30 minutes. If you wish to take longer, it may be helpful to set a timer. On the following pages, you will find some mindfulness and relaxation exercises to choose from.





EXERCISES

02



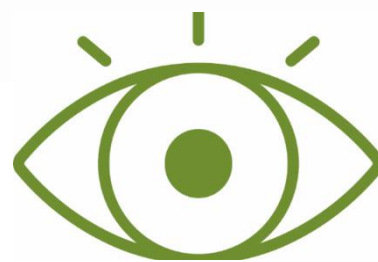


# Exercises

## 1 -Seeing – Hearing – Feeling

### 1. 1. Seeing

- Find a spot where you can observe a piece of nature.
- Choose a comfortable stance and place to start the exercise
- Take three deep breaths, as comfortably as possible. This signals to your body that you are starting an exercise.
- Look at one thing around you: e.g. a plant, a leaf, a tree, or a forest.
- Start from the "outside," seeing the whole and then "zooming" in.
- Zoom 1: What does it look like, its color, size, extent?
- Zoom 2: Look more closely, observe details, like branches, leaves, leaf structures.
- Zoom 3: Look even closer. Do you see individual marks, differently coloured structures?
- Zoom back out to Level 2, then Level 1.
- If you get distracted by thoughts or what is happening around you, that's okay. Gently redirect your attention back to your focus without thinking about or following the distraction.
- End the exercise.



**Reflection:** How do you feel? What do you notice around you?

### 1.2. Hearing

- Take three deep breaths in and out to signal your body the start of the exercise.
- Close your eyes and focus on what you hear.
- What sounds do you hear directly near you?
- What sounds do you hear further away?
- How do the sounds change?
- If you get distracted by thoughts or what is happening around you, that's okay. Gently redirect your attention back to your focus without thinking about or following the distraction.
- End the exercise and return to yourself.



**Reflection:** How do you feel? What do you notice around you?

### 1.3. Feeling

- Touch a piece of nature: a leaf, a blade of grass, a flower, a plant, or a tree.
- What is the shape of the piece?
- How do the edges feel?
- What structure can you feel?
- Is it soft, hard, rough, smooth, hairy, cold, or warm?
- How does it feel for you to hold this piece of nature in your hand?
- If you get distracted by thoughts or what is happening around you, that's okay. Gently redirect your attention back to your focus without thinking about or following the distraction.
- End the exercise and return to yourself.



**Reflection:** How do you feel? What do you notice around you?

## 2 -Walking mindfully

Stand in a place where you feel comfortable and safe.

Use your eyes to choose a distance of about 1.5 metres that we want to walk. You will take 5 minutes to cover this distance.

Take three deep breaths in and out.

Then start walking. While walking, focus your attention on your feet.

When one foot lifts, the balance of the body changes and the weight shifts to the other foot. Observe the shift in your weight and how the balance of your body changes.

Pay attention to your movement. And observe the moments in which you are stable and in balance, and the moments you are not.

Question: What did you observe and feel, how strong was your concentration?

After that, you move in your own pace.

Take 5 minutes to walk as you like, in your “normal” pace.

Question:

- How do you feel?
- What do you notice?
- Where is your attention?
- What feels more "comfortable".
- When are you more concentrated?
- Which exercise makes you more mindful in the here and now?



### 3- Walking Mindfulness in Nature

Wherever you are walking, observe the space around you.

Start by noticing what you are seeing, the nature, take a good look at your surroundings. Maybe you can see things you haven't noticed yet. Look at what is close to you, and then calmly notice what is further, and then further away.

Now bring the attention to the other sensations, just increase your awareness.

Focus on what you can hear, the sounds around you, the obvious ones, and also the more subtle ones. Maybe birds, maybe water, maybe the wind.

Change your attention to the smells, what can you detect?

What about the sensation of touch, the wind in your face? Maybe a backpack on your back? The feet touching the ground?

Can you reach out to some flowers, rocks, trees, water? Maybe you can touch them? Be aware of the temperature, the texture... the weight...

Move your attention to your movement, the way you walk. Which part of your body moves during your walk. The obvious, the feet, the legs, but also the arms and the upper body.

This attention to your movement might feel a little bit weird, we normally do not notice our movement like this.

Maintaining your walking style, observe the rhythm of your legs moving.

Now take attention to the pressure changes in your foot, that are linked to your rhythm. One foot after the other.

If there are other inputs from the other senses, you can notice them, but if it is uncomfortable or too much distracting, just let it go, and bring your attention back to the rhythm of your walking.

Continue walking, if you get distracted, just notice, and go back to your walking rhythm, or the inputs from your surroundings.

Continue walking in a comfortable pace.

I was inspired by the meditation "Walk in Nature" in the App "Headspace" of Andy Puddicombe and Rich Pierson



## 4 - Making mindful decisions

Before the exercise, think about what kind of decision you want or have to make.

Whether it's a big decision, such as "I'm going to eat vegan from now on".

or a smaller one, such as "I'm going to clean up this afternoon".

Now formulate 2 sentences: 1. "I will.... (I will eat vegan food/clean)."

2. "I will not.... (eat vegan food / clean)."

Sit upright, take three deep breaths in and out.

And start the exercise with the visual perceptions: **See**

Say the "I will..." sentence in our mind and see what images arise or emerge, you can also actively look at what your future might look like.

Change your focus to the "I will not..." sentence and observe or create the visual perceptions.

The visual perceptions are allowed to fade into the background.

Switch your perception to the auditory area: **Hear**

Say the "I will" sentence in your mind and focus our attention on the area in which we hear. List why the "I will" sentence is a good idea.

Or listen to the conversations or sounds of our thoughts.

Then say the "I will not" sentence again and list why this is a good idea. Or listen to the conversations or sounds of our thoughts.

The auditory area is allowed to fade into the background, and you focus your attention on the sensory area: **Feel**

Say the "I will" sentence and notice which physical sensations arise. Notice whether they are pleasant or unpleasant sensations.

Say the "I will not" sentence and notice the bodily sensations there too.

### All areas

Take a short time to allow all perceptions and see if there is a result. The result can be, for example:

- I know what I am going to do,
- I don't know what I am going to do,
- I need more information
- another decision is more important at the moment.

End the exercise with your personal result.





## 5- Peripheral vision/hearing – “Owl vision”

A very easy and effective relaxation technique is to “open” your peripheral vision up. This is incompatible with the stress response (as are all these techniques). Develop the sense of “letting vision come to you” rather than reaching out for it. If this makes no sense think of a time you were relaxed and happy looking far away at a beautiful panorama, this is the feeling. There are various small muscle groups involved which in time you can feel and relax directly.

You can also “open” your hearing by listening all around in an expanding sphere of awareness, noticing noises on all sides and trying to hear all around (even below you). It has been noted that modern life often involves staring ahead at a screen/road and that this reduces our capacity for inclusivity, which is more horizontal than a goal-orientated forwards orientation.

**“Owl vision”:** Look at a point. Now allow your eyes to relax and see left and right up and down while keeping your gaze ahead. You can use the hands to help by moving them out either side slowly as if you were opening curtains and checking that you are aware of them both at once.

(from the E-book “Centring - Why mindfulness alone isn’t enough.” by Mark Walsh)



## 6- ABC Centring

**A - Awareness** - feel your body here and now, your perceptions and sensations outside and inside of your body

**B - Balance** - balance your posture, maybe move back and forth and to both sides a little bit to find the middle. You can also try to expand your awareness first to one side, then the other, to the top surfaces of your body, the surfaces facing downwards to your front and your back and to the inside and the outside of your body.

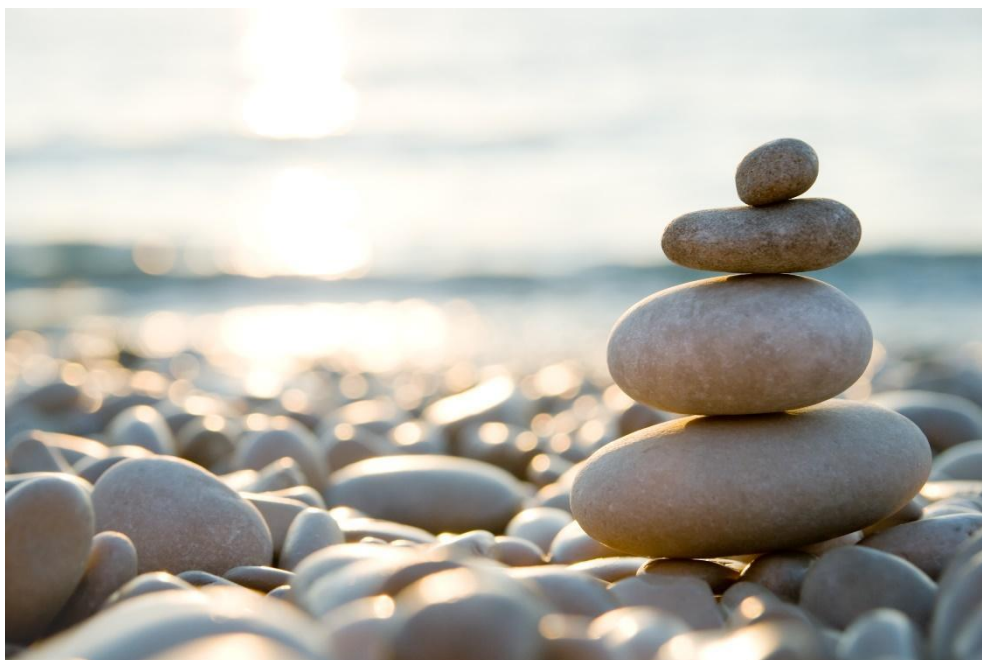
**C - Core relaxation** - Relax your eyes, mouth/tongue/jaw, stomach and back muscles - breathe deeply with your diaphragm so your belly and lower back move out slightly as you breathe in. You can tighten your abdominal muscles before you relax them if this helps. Focus on your physical centre of gravity, a point a few inches below the navel inside you. Relax the pelvic floor and the feet. This “core” or “centreline” relaxation will spread to the rest of your body enabling the muscles to be as relaxed as your (now well balanced) structure allows.

You can also add:

**Connect** – think of someone who makes you smile. Connect with people or nature around you.

**Reflection:** How do you feel? Do you feel different from before you centered?

(from the book “Embodiment – Moving beyond mindfulness” by Mark Walsh, Unicorn Slayer Press)



## 7- Wave breath

Wave breathing is a simple technique designed to calm your mind and body by creating a smooth, rhythmic flow of breath. Here's how you can practice it:

1. Find a comfortable position: Sit or lie down in a relaxed position, with your back straight and your shoulders relaxed.
2. Inhale deeply: Close your eyes and take a slow, deep breath in through your nose. As you do, visualize your breath as a wave rising from your lower abdomen, expanding up into your chest. Let your belly gently expand first, followed by your chest.
3. Pause: When you reach the peak of your inhale, hold your breath for a brief moment, feeling the fullness of the wave at its highest point.
4. Exhale slowly: Now, exhale slowly and fully through your nose or mouth. Imagine the wave receding, releasing the air from your chest first, and then your abdomen, like a gentle tide flowing back out to sea.
5. Repeat: Continue this pattern of breathing—slow, steady inhales, a brief pause, and slow, controlled exhales. Visualize the wave rising and falling with each breath, keeping the rhythm smooth and fluid.
6. Focus on the sensation: Stay mindful of how your body feels as the breath moves through it, allowing any tension to release with each exhale.

Practice wave breathing for several minutes, or as long as it feels comfortable, to promote relaxation and reduce stress.





## 8- Breathing Exercise 4 – 7 – 11

The 4-7-11 breathing exercise is a simple yet effective technique that promotes relaxation, reduces stress, and calms the mind by slowing your breath. By focusing on controlled inhales, holds, and long exhales, this exercise helps to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which encourages a state of relaxation. Here's how to do it:

1. Get comfortable: Sit or lie down in a relaxed position. Make sure your back is straight, and your shoulders are loose.
2. Inhale for 4 seconds: Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose for a count of 4. Focus on expanding your belly first, then your chest.
3. Hold for 7 seconds: Once your lungs are full, hold your breath gently for a count of 7. Try not to strain—this should feel calm and controlled.
4. Exhale for 11 seconds: Slowly release your breath through your mouth for a count of 11, making the exhale longer than the inhale. Focus on emptying your lungs completely.
5. Repeat: Continue the cycle for several minutes or until you feel calm and centered. Aim to complete 4-6 rounds at a time.

### Tips:

- Breathe smoothly, without forcing any part of the process.
- If 11 seconds feels too long for the exhale, adjust slightly but maintain a slower exhale compared to the inhale.

This technique helps to reduce anxiety, promote relaxation, and can be particularly useful before sleep or during stressful moments.



## 9-Getting to know your stress response:

Sit or stand comfortably. Do a quick “check in” with your body – notice your breath and posture. Maybe you want to close your eyes for this. Now think of something a bit stressful in your life. Nothing too hardcore or traumatic, but something a bit annoying or anxiety-provoking. After a few seconds, notice what happens in your body. Maybe you can feel some kind of tension or collapse. How is your breath now? Notice the changes in your body carefully. Now, stop doing this. Do you feel parts of your body tense, like the shoulders, or neck? Try to relax them. Does your breathing speed up? Did it become shallower? Take a few deep long breaths. Simple practices like these ones can help you. Very simple, isn't it? You just got to know your stress response and managed to reduce it. The stress response of our body is, in many cases, not useful, as it makes us less healthy, less smart, less creative and less kind.

Inspired by the book “Embodiment – Moving beyond mindfulness” by Mark Walsh, Unicorn Slayer Press

## 10- Tea – Coffee – Water breathing

### Water Category Breathing (Balancing)

Balancing breathing exercises are meant to relax you when you're feeling overwhelmed and to energize you when you're low on energy. Similar to drinking water, they can be done at any time. The idea is to slow your breathing to about four to six breaths each minute—around half your usual pace, but with more air intake. Picture it as smooth, deep breathing.

Here's how to practice:

- Inhale through your nose 1-2-3-4
- Exhale through your nose 4-3-2-1
- Repeat for 10 rounds



### Tea (Whiskey) Category Breathing Exercises (Relaxing/Sleep-Inducing)

Breathing techniques that promote deep relaxation activate the parasympathetic branch of your autonomic nervous system, which is responsible for rest and digestion. Breathing slowly increases carbon dioxide in your body, widens your airways, decreases your heart rate, and reduces cortisol levels. Whiskey-style breathing usually involves a pace of three breaths per minute or fewer. This is an extremely slow, deep breathing pattern that tends to make you drowsy, so it's commonly done before sleep.

Here's how to practice:

- Inhale through your nose 1-2-3-4
- Exhale through your nose for 8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1
- Repeat for 10 rounds

### Coffee Category Breathing Exercises (Stimulating/Energizing)

As the name implies, coffee-style breathing exercises stimulate the sympathetic nervous system, helping to energize and to stay alert. These techniques are best done in the morning or just before a physical workout. The primary exercise in this category is called kapalabhati, or "breath of fire." It involves quick, forceful exhales using your abdominal muscles, like the



sensation of a sharp sneeze. The inhales occur naturally as you relax between the forceful exhales.

Here's how to practice:

- Forcefully exhale by engaging your lower abdomen
- Sneeze the breath out in a short, sharp sneeze
- Relax and allow the inhale to happen naturally
- Repeat for 20 rounds at a pace of 1 exhale per second

You can get more information about this breathing technique in this [video](#).

## 11- Wim Hof BREATHING EXERCISE

His method combines specific breathing techniques, cold exposure, and commitment. For this guide, we will mainly focus on the benefits of the breathing technique, and its use in mindfulness exercises.

Wim Hof's method involves powerful inhalation, relaxed exhalation, and prolonged breath holds.

The Wim Hoff technique can be a compliment to mindfulness activities due to the following reasons:

**Breath Awareness:** The method emphasizes conscious breathing. By focusing on each breath, you cultivate present-moment awareness. This aligns with mindfulness principles.

**Stress Reduction:** Regular practice of the technique reduces stress hormones and promotes relaxation. Mindfulness and stress reduction go hand in hand.

**Body-Mind Connection:** The Wim Hof Technique encourages tuning into bodily sensations. This connection between body and mind enhances mindfulness.

The Wim Hof Method is a powerful breathing technique, it combines specific breathing patterns with breath retention to enhance physical and mental well-being. Here's a guided text for practicing the Wim Hof breathing technique (there is also a guided breathing exercise in video format, if preferred):

### Script:

"Hello, everyone! Today, we're going to explore the powerful Wim Hof breathing technique. This method combines deep rhythmic breaths with breath retention to boost energy, reduce stress, and enhance overall well-being. Let's get started!"



[Step 1: Get comfortable] "First, find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed. You can either sit or lie down. Loosen any restrictive clothing to allow for free breathing."



[Step 2: Power Breaths (30 Rounds)] "Next, let's do some power breaths. Follow these steps:

Inhale deeply through your nose.

Exhale gently through your mouth (like you're whistling).

Repeat this cycle for 30 breaths.

Focus on filling both your belly and chest with each breath."



[Step 3: Breath Retention] "Now, we'll practice breath retention:

On the 30th breath, exhale to about 90% of your lung capacity.

Hold your breath for as long as you comfortably can.

When you feel the urge to breathe, inhale fully.

Hold the breath for an additional 15 seconds."



[Step 4: Repeat] "Complete 3 to 4 rounds of power breaths and breath retention. Take breaks if needed; listen to your body."



Disclaimer:

Even though this technique is suitable for people from all ages (including children), it should always be supervised by a guardian or a professional. Some safety precautions are to be considered, such as:

- Not suitable during pregnancy or for epileptic individuals.
- Consult a medical professional if you have cardiovascular issues.
- Avoid practicing before diving, driving, or swimming.
- Tingling sensations and light-headedness are normal; stop if you feel like fainting.
  
- Sit or lay down when performing the exercise, since you may feel some light-headedness and tingling in your limbs



H A P P Y   E N D I N G

03





# The Green Comp

The development of a European sustainability competence framework is one of the policy actions set out in the European Green Deal to promote learning on environmental sustainability in the European Union. This framework is called “GreenComp”, and we used it as an inspiration for this project.

GreenComp identifies a set of sustainability competences to feed into education programmes to help learners develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that promote ways to think, plan and act with empathy, responsibility, and care for our planet and for public health.



The visual representation of GreenComp builds on bee pollination as a metaphor for the framework where bees, flowers, nectar and beehives represent the four areas of the framework. The GreenComp consists of 12 competences, organized into four areas. For this project, we focused on the first area, “Embodying sustainability values”, with the competences as listed below. Our goal was, by using mindfulness techniques in a natural environment, to foster a sense of connectedness and a healthy relationship with nature. The area “Embodying sustainability values” of the GreenComp consists of the competences:

## Valuing sustainability

- The competence area ‘Embodying sustainability values’ encourages us to reflect on and challenge our own personal values and world-views in terms of sustainability.
- Valuing sustainability aims to foster reflection on values and perspectives.
- It could be defined as a metacompetence, since its primary aim is not to teach specific values, but make learners realise that they can choose which values to prioritize in their lives.
- It enables learners to reflect on their way of thinking, their plans, and their actions.

### Supporting fairness

- To support equity and justice for current and future generations and learn from previous generations for sustainability.

### Promoting nature

- To acknowledge that humans are part of nature; and to respect the needs and rights of other species and of nature itself in order to restore and regenerate healthy and resilient ecosystems
- It is about developing empathy towards the planet and showing care for other species.
- It fosters a healthy relationship with the natural environment and aims to ignite in people a feeling of connectedness that can help contrast the psychological distress and negative emotions that people worldwide experience because of climate change. This can help improve their mood and mental health.

We are trying to promote this feeling of connectedness with nature through this project because research indicates that not only do we need to be in contact with nature, but we also need to feel connected to nature:

While the former involves physical interaction with the natural environment mainly at surface level, the latter concerns our feelings and views resulting from meaningful relationships being developed and the internalisation of our experiences in the natural environment. Such internalisation can, in the long term, promote the restoration of nature.

If you would like to find out more about the GreenComp, or use it for your work in adult education, it can be downloaded for free on the website of the EU Science Hub:

[https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/greencomp-european-sustainability-competence-framework\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/greencomp-european-sustainability-competence-framework_en)

## Partnership:



[Systeme in Bewegung eV](#) is an association for Europe-wide networking and support of families. We carry out projects for family support and child and youth work at regional and European level. Our multiprofessional team consists of body-oriented psychologists, social workers, mindfulness trainers, stress competence coaches and trainers for movement and circus arts.

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[Empoderar- Desenvolvimento Organizacional, Social, Profissional e Pessoal, Lda](#) is a training and consulting company that uses psychological science to promote well-being and effectiveness in society, organisations, and individuals. The team of consultants has experience in promoting positive changes in different contexts. Their training is Psychology, with an extensive intervention practice, which combines this knowledge with other areas of expertise, allowing them to create effective solutions in various situations.

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