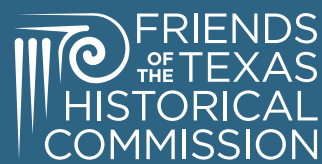


# CRISIS AND TRAUMA RESPONSE TOOLKIT FOR CULTURAL WORKERS 2023



# CHAPTER 7: TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## INSTRUCTIONS

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This toolkit is designed to be used as a whole or in-part. It contains stand-alone chapters, which can be used on an as-needed basis. The organization of the toolkit proceeds from larger topics to more specific topics.

### TIPS FOR USAGE:

1. Watch the video(s) for the toolkit chapter(s)
2. Review the toolkit chapter in its entirety.
3. Use the discussion prompts to facilitate discussion with staff, community members, or others.
4. Engage in the recommended trainings or programming as desired.

Please note that this toolkit includes content that will continue to be updated.

As stated in the introduction, this toolkit is offered as “permanently incomplete” product and will be continually updated as new information and resources become available. The views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations shared in the video presentations are those of the presenting experts and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission.

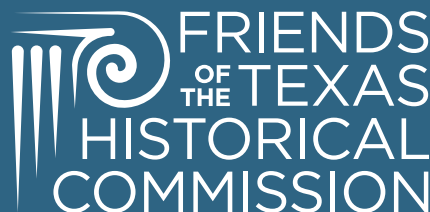
While some of the video presentations are provided by licensed therapists, the training and programming recommendations, which came out of the “lab” sessions, are presented as suggested practices to be used by cultural workers at their discretion and NOT as therapy.

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This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Grant #CAGML-247929-OMLS-20 ([www.imls.gov](http://www.imls.gov)).

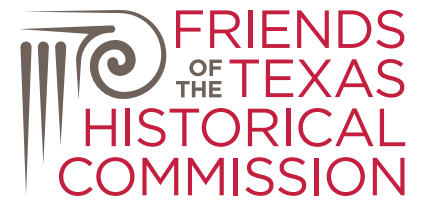
The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this “Crisis and Trauma Response Toolkit” do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

FRONT COVER: Images of Caddo Mounds State Historic Site, Fulton Mansion State Historic Site, and Maggoffin Home State Historic Site.



# ECOTHERAPY AND MINDFULNESS

*Understanding ecotherapy and mindfulness as tools for healings*



Nature can be a powerful balm for some of life's most difficult moments. Its healing power has been well documented. From alleviating depression to lowering blood pressure, research shows that simply being in nature provides substantial benefits to human wellness. For cultural organizations, providing opportunities to connect with nature can deepen visitor experience with the site, its workers, and the local communities. This can look like anything from creating a small area with plants and seating for visitors to reflect on the site to nature walks, investigating the site while moving through the natural surroundings. Sites impacted by traumatic events or historical trauma may find incorporating nature into its programs particularly helpful, as it can help provide an opportunity to process difficult feelings and to recover. In her presentation "Healing with Nature: Ecotherapy and Mindfulness," Starla Simmons emphasizes the importance of connecting with nature for health, healing, and harmony.

Simmons begins by drawing on her own relationship with nature, relaying how as a child of color in a predominately white community, she experienced hardship and racism, and nature was a safe place of refuge and healing. In nature, she was able to process the difficult emotions and complicated feelings of her experiences and be at peace with who she truly was. This deep connection drove her to pursue an opportunity with a summer camp where she realized that children seemed more able and willing to talk

about the difficult things in their lives when present in the comfort of nature. Longing to help more people explore this nature/healing journey, she went on to study social work. Her career path brought her to a group called the Outdoor Afro Leadership Team, whose mission is to inspire and uplift Black leaders and connect them to nature. This became a pivotal point in her life because her passion for social work and nature coincided with thinking about how culture and history strongly influence a person's relationship to nature.

Simmons's presentation explains the concepts of ecotherapy and mindfulness, provides an overview of the health benefits that nature can provide, and shares some ideas for creating ecotherapy experiences for groups. Her presentation also introduces audiences to the cultural aspect of thinking about the human connection to nature. She illustrates that healing practices involving nature have always been a part of human culture, but that societal pressures have disrupted this human/nature connection in marginalized communities. Ecotherapy, she asserts, can be a powerful tool for collective healing because it can help people reconnect and rebuild relationships with nature, which in turn helps them rebuild their relationships with each other. This is what true collective healing is all about.

Painted stones from Snake Woman's Garden at Caddo Mounds State Historic Site in Alto, Texas.

## STARLA SIMMONS

Starla Simmons, LCSW-S is a Clinical Assistant Professor and Director of the Earl Maxwell Scholar Program at the UT Steve Hicks School of Social Work. She is strongly rooted in racial justice and liberation, with a passion for supporting the vitality, resilience, and collectivism of Black, Indigenous, and communities of color. Starla has over a decade of experience as a school social worker, providing a range of direct care services to students, families, and staff. Starla is a skilled and experienced facilitator around racial equity, social justice and holistic practices such as mindfulness and eco-therapy. In 2016, Starla served as Austin leader for the national non-profit Outdoor Afro, which celebrates and inspires Black leadership in nature. Currently, she sits on the Board of UT Elementary School. She is the faculty liaison for the Environmental Justice & Ecotherapy (EJET) student organization and Black Student and Scholars Network at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work.



# DISCUSSION GUIDE

*Talk with others within your organization about ecotherapy and mindfulness as ways of addressing trauma.*

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Using the facilitation tips below, set aside time to engage members of your organization in discussion about trauma, trauma reactions, and how the organization plays a role.

## FACILITATION TIPS

*Create a safe space for productive group discussions.*

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- Create a set of agreed-upon guidelines for group discussions.
- Clearly articulate the discussion goal(s).
- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Listen actively and with understanding.  
(Don't just think about what you are going to say while someone else is talking.)
- Avoid criticizing.
- Avoid blame, speculation, and inflammatory language.
- Allow everyone the chance to speak.
- Avoid assumptions or generalizations about groups.  
Do not ask individuals to speak for their (perceived) social group.
- A brief check-in and check-out is often helpful to include.
- Ensure accountability for words and their impact.
- Personal information should be kept confidential.

\*Facilitation tips based upon information from MIT's Discussion Guidelines webpage.

## PROMPT

How would you describe your relationship with nature?

How has your family history influenced your relationship with nature?

How has nature helped you?

Are there ways you are formally involved in ecotherapy practices?

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What are the physical and mental health benefits of ecotherapy, and how could they help heal trauma?

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What are the ways that you could incorporate eco-therapeutic activities into your work?

What would be the benefits?

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What history should you consider when introducing ecotherapy activities to your community?

How many historical traumas, such as colonization, slavery, and racism, affected your community's connection to land?

What is the connection between ecotherapy and social justice?

How can ecotherapy facilitate collective healing?

What cultural practices have you experienced or witnessed that demonstrate a connection to nature?

# FROM A SURVIVOR

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“A walk in nature walks the soul back home.” —Mary Davis

My earliest connections in nature began in my backyard as a four year old child with my “horse tree”, a twisted live oak that grew low enough to the ground for me to scramble up on the trunk and hold on tightly as I imagined galloping through time with the wind in my hair. Over the course of my life, it is my adventures in the natural world where I have found solace, comfort, healing, and great joy.

Several weeks after the 2019 tornado at Caddo Mounds Historic Site I returned to the site in an attempt to make peace with the shattering effects of the experience. I walked around the concrete pad that remained after the debris had been cleared away from the destroyed museum and wandered through Snake Woman’s Garden, a place that had miraculously survived and become a symbol of resilience. Turning in a slow circle to face each of the Mounds it was clear that, in spite of the destructive force of shahó (the Caddo word for the tornado experience), the sacred nature of the land remained intact. My time in the garden and on the land here at Caddo Mounds has been hugely important for my personal healing from trauma. Other tornado survivors have also expressed comfort and renewal from being on the land at the site. Both time alone in natural settings and time enjoying nature with others are greatly helpful with recovering a sense of well-being.

In my current position as a part-time contract educator at the site, I have the opportunity to share outdoor experiences and connections through garden programs, school tours, nature hikes, foraging programs, and most recently the Rebuild of the Grass House to replace the previous house that was blown away in the tornado. As an outdoor educator I observe first-hand how connecting people with nature challenges them to adapt to their environment, learn new skills, acquire knowledge, work together with others, and develop intuitive wisdom from their experiences

Historic sites are often set in the midst of natural environments that reflect the history of people and their connections to the land, plants, and animals of the area. The land holds the history of the site and provides a focal point to enter more deeply into that cultural history. Providing visitors with programs and experiences that bring them in contact with the natural world should be utilized as much as possible. The research supports that direct contact with nature is significantly beneficial as a wellness tool. There are numerous possibilities ranging from educational programs to nature immersion experiences such as seed collection and sorting. Time outside as well as moments of reflection and sharing stories of past and present nature influences are important ways to connect with ourselves and others.

My small four year old self riding on the back of imagination knew the wonderful sense of awe and possibility that a friendship with nature offers us.



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## KERRY LEMON

Kerry Lemon has been an educator most of her adult life with environmental education as her focus over the past 20 years. During her employment as Assistant Education Coordinator at SFA Gardens she was certified in a variety of environmental education curricula and later in Permaculture Design, incorporating this knowledge in outdoor educational programming. With her husband and two children, Kerry helped build the off-the-grid home where she has lived and gardened for over 30 years. She is a naturalist at heart and understands there is always more to learn from the natural world. A lover of adventure, Kerry studied Spanish at California State University Sacramento and spent a year studying abroad in Madrid, Spain. She has traveled across the United States (as well as to Mexico and Southern Europe) camping, backpacking, canoeing, and hiking. Being present at Caddo Mounds during the 2019 Sha’ho tornado has deepened Kerry’s connection to the site and fellow survivors. She currently works as a contract educator in Snake Woman’s Garden and other educational projects for the site. Kerry is committed to sharing meaningful, respectful connections in nature with children and adults.

# TIPS FOR PROVIDING SUPPORT

*Training and programming to enable organizations to provide support.*

## TRAINING

Training for staff can ensure they are ready to respond to the community as well as care for their own well-being in the face of a traumatic event.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Create ecotherapy opportunities for staff. Survey staff to see what might work at your site. Some examples include creating a garden, allowing staff to have plants in their workspaces, and encouraging walking breaks and outdoor meetings.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Educate staff about the nature surrounding your cultural organization and how to connect with it. Even if your organization does not have a lot of natural space, think of how nature is still present (weather, insects, birds, plants, etc.) and what these can help us understand. Staff can then translate these concepts into programming for visitors.

## PROGRAMMING

Creating opportunities for communities and staff to engage in programming can take many forms. Here are a few ideas for implementing programming within your organization.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Acknowledge environment-related trauma that may be associated with your organization's site. Some examples of environment-related trauma include hurricanes, tornados, the presence of historical traumas like hanging-trees, or the misuse of natural resources. Consider how this trauma has impacted the people connected to the site. How might you be able to acknowledge and mitigate the effects of these traumatic events associated

**RECOMMENDATION:** Create activity packets and adventure backpacks that encourage people to interact with nature. This can be done as a "passport" program in conjunction with other sites for a variety of natural experiences in the area, especially when sites are small or limited.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Conduct a group activity focused on mindfulness and nature such as the Mindfulness 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 activity described in Simmon's presentation.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Lead a group walk around your site to find interesting nature objects such as leaves, sticks, rocks and then create art projects from them.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Create opportunities to observe nature. Consider a bug hotel, reflecting pool, viewing tubes, etc.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Create programs that invite local community members who work with nature (for example, farmers, ranchers, bee keepers) to give demonstrations or talks.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Create programs that remind people of their connection to nature that do not necessarily need to be outdoors. For example, facilitate discussions, art projects, writing opportunities where participants are encouraged to think about a special moment they've had in nature.

**RECOMMENDATION:** For school groups, consider allowing students to plant seeds which they can then "visit" virtually.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Create programs that bring communities together in nature and foster use of natural areas at sites. For example, encourage community members to take a walk together on site grounds. Focus on activities that bring diverse groups together around a central experience, creating connection. When marketing events or programs such as these, remember to market to a wide and diverse audience.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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## BOOKS:

Buzzell, Linda. (2009) *Ecotherapy: Healing with Nature in Mind*.

Dungy, Camille. (2009) *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African-American Nature Poetry*.

Fisher, Cheryl. (2019) *Mindfulness & Nature-Based Therapeutic Techniques for Children: Creative Activities for Emotion Regulation, Resilience and Connectedness*.

Fries, Hannah. (2018) *Forest Bathing Retreat: Find Wholeness in the Company of Trees*.

Hanh, Thich Nhat. (2015) *Planting Seeds with Song: Practicing Mindfulness with Children*.

Harris, Melanie L. (2017) *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*.

Hinds, Joe and Martin Jordan. (2016) *Ecotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*.

Mischke-Reeds, Manuela. (2018) *Somatic Psychotherapy Toolbox: 125 Worksheets and Exercises to Treat Trauma & Stress*.

Nahmad, Claire. (1993) *Earth Magic: A Wisewoman's Guide to Herbal, Astrological, and Other Folk Wisdom*.

Roszak, Theodore. (1995) *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth/Healing the Mind*.

Sawatsky, Jarem. (2018) *Healing Justice: Stories of Wisdom and Love*.

Sweeney Ph.D., Theresa. (2013) *Eco-Art Therapy: Creative Activities that let Earth Teach*.

Timber Press. (2018) *Among Trees: A Guided Journal for Forest Bathing*.

## ONLINE RESOURCES:

Children and Nature Network.

<https://www.childrenandnature.org/>

The Earthbody Institute.

<https://www.theearthbodyinstitute.com/>

Equity Outdoors ATX.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/512091742617225/>

Latino Outdoors.

<https://latinooutdoors.org/>

Outdoor Afro.

<https://outdoorafro.com/>

Parks Rx.

<https://parkrxamerica.org/>

People of the Global Majority in the Outdoors, Nature, and Environment.

<https://www.pgmone.org/>

Texas Ecotherapy Collective.

<https://texasecotherapycollective.org/>

7 FRIENDS OF THE TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION/IMLS

Visitors enjoy the garden at Magoffin Home State Historic Site in El Paso, Texas.



ARTICLES:

Berman, M.G. (2015) "Editorial: Nature and its Environment: The psychology of its benefits and its protections. *Frontiers in Psychology*."  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01804>

Berman MG, Kross E, et al. (2012) "Interacting with nature improves cognition and affect for individuals with depression."  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3393816/>

Beyer KM, Kaltenebach A, et al. (2014) "Exposure to neighborhood green space and mental health: evidence from the survey of the health of Wisconsin."  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3987044/>

Chaudhury, P., Banerjee, D., (2020). "Recovering with nature: A review of ecotherapy and implications for the COVID-19 pandemic."  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.604440>

Ideno, Y., Hayashi, K., et al. (2017) "Blood pressure-lowering effect of Shinrin-yoku (Forest bathing): a systematic review and meta-analysis."  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12906-017-1912-z>

McQuade, Joseph. (2019) "Earth Day: Colonialism's role in the overexploitation of natural resources."  
<https://theconversation.com/earth-day-colonialisms-role-in-the-over-exploitation-of-natural-resources-113995>

White, M.P., Alcock, I., et al. (2019) "Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing."  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3>

Young DR, Hong BD, et al. (2022) "The longitudinal associations of physical activity, time spent outdoors in nature and symptoms of depression and anxiety during COVID-19 quarantine and social distancing in the United States."  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743521004369>

