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Abstract

Ecotherapy, like most nature-based mental health techniques, is typically conducted outdoors. A large part of trauma therapy centers on how to reduce client stress and promote healing unbounded by trauma. Ecotherapy has been shown to significantly reduce stress, as demonstrated by lower levels of heart rate, blood pressure, and cortisol. Incorporating ecotherapy techniques into trauma therapy can be an effective way to facilitate the reduction of client stress and promote future healing and self-care. However, many receiving trauma therapy may not feel comfortable in the outdoor environment. Rather than disregarding these clients, the present manuscript focuses on how to bring the natural benefits of the "outside" into an indoor environment where clients with trauma can practice ecotherapy while maintaining a sense of safety. Additionally, this paper includes several specific nature-based techniques that can be applied indoors in the treatment of trauma.

***Keywords*:** ecotherapy, nature-based, trauma, counseling, indoor

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When visualizing the counseling process, many people might imagine the traditional setting: a cheerily painted room, contained within an office complex, neutral furnishings softened with cozy pillows and maybe a throw to add texture, complete with two people nested in cozy chairs, looking at one another as they talk. While different from traditional talk therapy, incorporating nature into the therapeutic environment has great potential regarding the counseling process. Ecotherapy provides an opportunity to integrate the natural world into mental health work. Given its availability and style, ecotherapy has the potential to be especially useful in trauma focused therapy (Summers & Vivian, 2018). Counselors may leverage ecotherapy to integrate other established techniques of trauma therapy, including bottom-up processing via sensory integration or providing the setting of visualized safe-spaces (Fisher, 2019). The presence of nature has been shown to aid in reducing signs of a stressed nervous system, reducing blood pressure, pulse, and cortisol levels (Harper et. al., 2019). Many trauma therapy techniques require practice and preparation to obtain desired results. Ecotherapy is a way to integrate those elements at a quicker rate, by providing sensations and images that are

more often already familiar and easier for the client to recall.

Much of the present research on utilizing ecotherapy has been set outdoors (Hunter et al., 2019; Lewis et al., 2022;; Olszewska-Guizzo et al., 2022). However, some clients may have a desire for connection to the natural world but resist outdoor engagement for a variety of reasons, ranging from poor weather conditions to trauma associated with the outdoors (Chang & Netzer, 2019; Harper et al., 2019). While some researchers have acknowledged that not all clients may be willing to work outdoors, the conversation often stops there (Harper et al., 2019). These clients may miss out on the benefits associated with ecotherapy since its established setting has been rendered unavailable. Alternatively, their counselor can find ways to bring the outdoors, and related benefits, to them.

There is limited research focusing on how to provide indoor ecotherapy for clients with trauma. This article, therefore, expands on how trauma focused counseling may be improved with ecotherapy techniques. Furthermore, we suggest specific techniques that can be applied with clients to bring the natural world indoors. These indoor techniques can be applied in such settings as a traditional four walled office space, a school, a hospital, or even a telehealth session.

Ecotherapy as a Practice

Ecotherapy is defined as "the ability of interaction with nature to enhance healing and growth" (Summers & Vivian, 2018, p. 1). Nature, thereby, provides the essential materials needed to facilitate the ecotherapy process. Harper et al. (2019), discuss the term "nature" with respect to its use in ecotherapy. The *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* regards nature as the "components of the physical world besides humans;" meaning that mountains, beaches, plants, animals, etc. are considered a part of nature (Knowles, 2006). We as humans are made of the same organic material as the items previously listed, indicating that we are also a part of nature. In this sense, the counseling process is inherently ecotherapy: one naturally created human (counselor) providing a means of healing to another (client). Furthermore, humankind, through cultural and spiritual tradition, has utilized the natural environment for therapeutic benefit (Summers & Vivian, 2018). Yet, the viewpoint implied by the *Oxford* suggests that nature and humans are separate entities, a position that possibly further minimizes humans' connection to the therapeutic forces of nature. On the contrary, ecotherapy functions to offer people the natural world in a way that activates a knowingness that they are connected to their environment in meaningful ways (Harper et al., 2019).

It is important to highlight that ecotherapy is not merely about humans experiencing the outdoors. The practice of ecotherapy requires an intention to incorporate nature into therapeutic practices to encourage positive internal growth within a person and to promote a greater sense of connection with the natural world (Harper et al., 2019). In other words, a person can stand or sit outside all day but if there is no reflecting, processing, or interacting with nature, it does not represent an intentional therapeutic intervention (Harper et al., 2019).

The Need for Ecotherapy Intervention

Humans appear to be trending towards a more sedentary lifestyle and, as such, spend a significantly less amount of time outdoors than in previous years (Delaney, 2020). Shepard (1998) explored a shift in thinking regarding human attitude towards nature, which he attributed to changes in culture. Additional scholars agree that with the increased use of technology and screen time, humans are stuck in a time of general

dissociation from the natural world around them (Harper et al., 2019). This dissociation deepens the wedge between humans and nature as it blocks the natural tendency for humans to crave connection with nature; otherwise known as *biophilia* (Swank et al., 2020). Research also notes a decline in humans' natural tendency to investigate things due to fascination in favor of instant gratification provided through technological advancements such as smartphones, social media, and consumer culture (van der Kolk, 2015). This new craving to be on a device all day may be seen as a cry for help and a desire for temporary breaks from reality. However, it is not as much of a vacation as it is an off switch. A true escape is one where all responsibilities and obligations of a person disappear, and they can connect with the world around them; a theme well explored by van der Kolk (2015).

Vvan der Kolk (2015) focuses on the impact of trauma on the nervous system, and the study of neuroscience surrounding Posttraumatic Stress disorder. In this book, van der Kolk describes in detail how trauma alters neural pathways within the brain, puts the amygdala on high alert, and holds the body in a near constant state of fight, flight, or freeze mode (2015). Top-down, or cognitive approaches alone are generally not sufficient to heal significant trauma. Ecotherapy, as a bottom-up approach (Fisher, 2019; Li, 2018; Roberts, 2022; Van der Kolk, 2015), can incorporate both somatic awareness and safe space visualization and is thereby well-suited to address the symptoms of trauma that are often held in the body as well as the mind.

Interpretations of existential theories, such as logotherapy, purport that the whole of human experience is about meaning making through connections and reflections (Bushkin et al., 2021). Yet, to make connections and reflect on one's own experiences, people need to first be able to simply exist in the present and undistracted, for periods of time. If a person is unable to focus on the world around them then it makes things like decision making, behavior management, and reflecting on life experiences significantly harder to process (Harper et al., 2019).

Nature provides more benefits than just the restoration of attention in a person or society but can also quickly aide in relaxation. Research suggests that natural sights such as bodies of water or greenspace provide "an instant calming effect to the nervous system (Udler, 2023, p. 42). Other research utilizing salivary cortisol has found that after 30 minutes spent outside, participants decreased their salivary biomarker by 20-30 percent (Hunter et al., 2019). When focusing on immersion in therapeutic gardens, researchers have found via EEGs that participants' mood improves rapidly from exposure (Olszewska-Guizzo et al., 2022).

Common Trends in Ecotherapy

Traditional talk therapy employs conversation to help clients identify such things as troubling thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). These therapeutic interactions typically occur one-on-one between a counselor and a client or within a group in a professional indoor setting (Chiboola, 2020) Though not as extensively researched as talk therapy, study into nature based interventions has found significant benefit amongst participants (Hunter et al., 2019, Olszewska-Guizzo et al., 2022, Summers & Vivian, 2018). Ecotherapy can act as an alternative therapeutic tool in times when traditional counseling alone has not been enough to help clients meet their goals, studied calming effects of nature have aided more rapidly in the production of positive emotion, which in turn can help not only with coping of mental health symptoms, but the processing of stressors (Summers & Vivian, 2018). Moving counseling

outside, and in some cases to a less structured therapeutic environment, can allow clients more rapid processing than if they were just between four walls in traditional counseling.

Bringing Ecotherapy Indoors

Many of the current techniques for ecotherapy are done outdoors, such as horticulture therapy, adventure therapy, or walk-and-talk therapy (Lewis et al., 2022; Harper et al., 2019; Udler, 2023). This makes nature integration much easier, as there are no walls to hold the client and counselor back from experiencing the natural environment. There are several challenges related to conducting therapy outdoors including the extension of counseling boundaries and potential confidentiality concerns (ACA, 2014, A.6.b, B.1.c), weather constraints, and client mobility concerns (ACA, 2014; Klimstra et al., 2011; Harper et al., 2019). As such, despite its potential benefits, it is not always feasible to take clients outside for counseling sessions.

Weather conditions in particular not only can impact the ability to go outside, but it can also affect the individual mood of each client (Klimstra et al., 2011). Some counselors may argue that any type of weather can be useful, citing that temperature or precipitation offers extra moments for clients to engage their senses and turn their focus to the current moment (Udler, 2023). On the contrary some clients may find inclement weather to be distracting, or especially uncomfortable (Harper et al., 2019, Klimstra et al., 2011). This is not limited to simply precipitation but can include hot or sunny days as well (Klimstra et al., 2011). Annoyance at physical conditions can then bring forward negative dispositions in clients, impacting the possibility of therapeutic progress (Klimstra et al., 2011). On the other hand, it may give a counselor a unique perspective that can be generalized the initial reactions. It is important that counselors who utilize ecotherapy techniques effectively gauge each client's comfortability with nature and take opportunities to explore any resistance that can impact clients' treatment goals.

Client Views on Nature

Regardless of the weather, just being outside with the counselor may be enough for the client to feel uncomfortable. Some clients may have a history of being harmed in the green spaces closest to them; for example, if a client was attacked in a forest, spending time in the woods may cause them immense fear and distress (Harper et al., 2019). Similarly, if a client has been swept underwater at the beach or carried away by a riptide, even being on the sand may alert their trauma responses. Furthermore, the use of green space in urban environments can feel foreign or intimidating if set in an area where that space is sparse. Other facilities, such as schools or agencies, may not possess much natural space and/or may not allow clients and counselors to leave the indoor premises (Chang & Netzer, 2019). Lack of familiarity with nature, or lack of positive experience with it may lead to clients feeling more nature averse (Harper et al., 2019). In any therapy, but especially trauma-focused, ensuring the client feels safe is vital; if a client does not feel safe, they likely will not open themselves up to the challenges of therapy (Kiyimba, 2020). Clients may still hold a desire to connect with nature or desire to benefit from it, but the act of being outside for therapy may be a step too far. For these cases, bringing the outside in is a useful tool.

Ecotherapy in the Treatment of Trauma

Those struggling with trauma-related disorders such as PTSD, C-PTSD, adjustment disorder, and dissociative identity disorder, may be particularly positioned to benefit from ecotherapy, given its overarching benefits to stress and rapid providing of calm (Hunter et al., 2019; Olszewska-Guizzo et al., 2022). Many trauma work techniques involve teaching the client methods for self-regulation, before beginning further treatment (Roberts, 2022; Van der Kolk, 2015). Given the capacity for rapid calm and sensory integration, the blend of traditional treatment with ecotherapy offers great aid in somatic symptoms, and overall adjustment to environment.

Impacts of Trauma

Trauma-related disorders originate in the mind and body's response to an adverse past event or events where individuals saw threat to themselves or another (American Psychiatric Association, 2022; Saakvitne, et al, 2000). In the present, this can manifest in the development of altered neural pathways in the brain (van Der Kolk, 2015). This leads to an overactive nervous system, dominated by a heightened alarm response and a narrowed window of tolerance (a decrease in emotional regulation). Essentially, the individual who has suffered trauma may end up with an overactive alarm system. They are stuck in fight, flight, freeze, or fawn mode as their amygdala constantly assesses for threats (van Der Kolk, 2015; Zingela et al, 2022). What began as a survival response turns into an entrenched reaction that makes daily life both anxiety-producing and exhausting. Dissociation, or "spacing out" is also common, as is reduced concentration (Summers & Vivian, 2018). Overwhelmed by their symptoms, individuals suffering from trauma-related disorders often withdraw from or alienate their support networks, leading to increased feelings of isolation (Roberts, 2022). How then, can ecotherapy help something seemingly so complex?

A Bottom-Up Approach

In the past, top-down approaches, involving only the use of talk therapy and cognitive methodologies were attempted in the treatment of trauma. This approach ignores the fact that trauma is held and remembered in the body as well as the mind (van Der Kolk, 2015). More recent research has shown that the most effective trauma treatments involve the addition of "bottom-up" methodologies (Fisher, 2019; Li, 2018; Roberts, 2022; van der Kolk, 2015). These bottom-up approaches incorporate a more holistic, multisensory and multisystem approach to healing. (Fisher, 2019). They address hypervigilance in both the mind and body, soothing the nervous system and giving the individual a calmer base from which to undertake the cognitive tasks of therapy. Ecotherapy is one such bottom-up approach given its use of sensory integration (Harper et al., 2019; Udler, 2023). Though the use of ecotherapy for treating trauma is not as well documented as some other mainstream modalities, it is hardly a new concept.

Interaction with nature has been used to improve health throughout most of human history. Horticultural therapy, for example, was established during World War I and offered to soldiers suffering mentally from their experiences in combat and is still used today with cardiac patients due to the benefits of moderate exercise and relaxation (Poulsen et al., 2016; Summers & Vivian, 2018). Shinrin Yoku, or forest bathing, has been prescribed for many years by medical doctors in Japan as a means of improving mental and physical health (Li, 2018). Adventure, or wilderness therapy, has been found to aid in the recovery process for PTSD, given the reported relaxation of being outdoors and confidence increase that comes from the completion of novel experiences (Summer &

Vivian, 2018). Equine therapy has been found to aid not only a variety of mental health conditions, but can be done across a spectrum of activity, such as ground work in watching, horses completing full rides (Ward et al., 2022). Benefits of ecotherapy have also been found across a variety of populations, with benefits being seen in children, adolescents, and adults alike (Delaney, 2020). This manuscript serves to advocate for the use of ecotherapy as an adjacent treatment for trauma, suggesting that for this purpose, ecotherapy works best when used in conjunction with proven trauma treatment methodologies (i.e. eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, cognitive processing therapy, somatic sensing, or internal family systems parts therapy).

The Natural World as a Co-Counselor and Safe Space

Counselors aiming to implement ecotherapy techniques with clients who have experienced trauma may look at the natural world as a co-counselor; thereby providing missing pieces that clients need in order to move toward healing. Ecotherapy can provide clients with several therapeutic supplements and advantages including: a safe space which incorporates natural imagery/pieces to rapidly engage with calming, mindfulness and grounding, a facilitator for connection with one's own body, and a catalyst for reconnection with the world around them by embracing the natural beauty of it (Hunter et al., 2019). When we use the term "safe space" in the physical sense, we acknowledge that human beings are inherently connected to nature. Increasing our time inside, we separate ourselves from that space; in North America, it is estimated that the average adult spends roughly 90% of their time indoors, with another 5% spent in their car (Harper et. al., 2019). Furthermore, time spent in a natural environment has been shown to reduce cortisol levels, pulse rate and blood pressure, as well as nervous system overactivity (Harper et. al., 2019; Hunter et al., 2019). When the body is calm, the body feels safe, and the mind is more likely to follow. This provides the ideal environment for productive trauma work in techniques such as grounding and mindfulness. Coupling time spent outside with exercise such as walk-and-talk practices (another activity that lowers cortisol) could prove especially helpful for connecting to the senses.

Reconnecting with the Body

Since we know that trauma manifests in the brain as well as the body, somatic awareness is an important concept to cultivate in clients. Practice and research discuss the concept that teaching clients to pay close attention to elements in nature can improve a client's ability to tune into their own body's signals (Lewis et al., 2022; Whitaker 2010). Harper et. al. (2019) describe this concept best:

> We have found that, by first tuning into the "outer landscape" (i.e. natural surroundings) and building rich sensory awareness of the smells, textures, colors, and animate shapes of the natural environment, we can assist clients to build the foundational skill necessary to observe their internal environment (i.e. thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations). (p.89)

Applying the Outdoors Inside

To apply ecotherapy indoors, practitioners may find elements of art therapy helpful (Chang & Netzer, 2019; McGeeney, 2016; Swank et al., 2020; Swank & Swank, 2013; Whitaker, 2010). Such techniques include the blending of natural materials and client creativity. Art therapist Pamela Whitaker suggests that nature offers sensory experiences that increase a desire to investigate one's surroundings, leading to further client interest in searching for "the spirit of the natural world," and the emergence of new life

perspectives (Whitaker, 2010, p. 128). Using natural elements for sensory experiences during this search means more opportunity to embrace somatic awareness (Harper et. al., 2019). While Whitaker utilizes the outdoors more often than indoors with her clients, she brings the outdoors in by designing her studio with a variety of artwork, textures, and abstract images that inspire thoughts of nature. Although Witaker's indoor approach requires a level of intentionality and awareness, she offers counselors a relatively simple technique to increase clients' natural engagement from the moment they set foot into a clinical space, wasting no time in starting the ecotherapy process (Whitaker, 2010).

The Intersection of Art and Ecotherapy

Ecotherapists, or counselors and other mental health professionals who utilize elements of ecology in practice (Harper et al., 2019), may utilize images and textures of nature. This may range from gazing at plant filled areas as a catalyst for conversation, to using physical materials to create artwork which pertains to the client's goals (Swank et al., 2020). Although it may seem intimidating to some clients to create "art," creations can be devised as an exercise like any other. One study reported that clients who were tasked with representing their work life found it significantly easier and less stressful to do with natural materials rather than conventional ones (Chang & Netzer, 2019). Their task was not framed simply as an art project, but rather as a technique to explain their points of view (Lewis et al., 2022). Art in ecotherapy is a tool to further a client's connection with the natural world.

Natural Art and Crafts

Some clients may prefer physical materials to connect with nature. To meet this preference, counselors should keep a variety of tactile pieces that clients can use to for this purpose. Materials are limited to only what the counselor believes are appropriate to have in their office, but recommended materials include: beeswax, pinecones, feathers, dirt trays, leaves, rice, flowers, seashells, berries, branches, stones, and cinnamon sticks (Chang & Netzer, 2019; Swank et al., 2020;). Counselors may also consider gathering pieces alongside clients during sessions, or asking them to bring meaningful materials from home, such as flowers from their gardens or seashells from their favorite beach. Including clients in the material process, aids in opportunity for personal connection to individual pieces and appreciation for nature at large as well as added independence in completed projects (Carlson et al., 2020; Summers & Vivian, 2018;).

This physical connection may be shown through using pieces to create a representative artwork, as mentioned prior, or can simply be utilized as a conversation piece (Swank et al., 2020). Clients may utilize the materials to demonstrate how they feel that day (e.g., selecting, small rocks for a hard day, or a feather for days feeling light and joyful). Clients who find it hard to describe their feelings in speech, including children, may find the objects particularly helpful.

Counselors can also blend tactile creations with sightseeing. In one such idea, clients may create a craft from materials they collect outdoors such as a pinecone bird feeder, made of pinecones rolled in peanut butter and bird seed. When completed, the bird feeder may be placed outside, perhaps at a viewing window in the client's home or at the counselor's office. Placing the craft in a spot visible allows for a cycle of continuous engagement, as watching animals in their habitat over time may lend itself to related metaphors, reflection, and/or conversation throughout the counseling process (Swank & Swank, 2013). Watching the effects of the pinecone also creates an outlet for mindfulness, as now the client can find time to just be present in their creation and approach it without judgment. Mindfulness has been shown to aid in the treatment of trauma in a

number of ways, including increasing self-regulation, and self-compassion (Kiyimba, 2020). The pinecone itself may be brought near a window where it can be viewed during session, or merely reflected upon to refence the mindful opportunity client granted themselves via the project.

Growth in Plants Reflecting Growth in Clients

Just as clients can take their creations to be placed out in the world for broader use, they can also take materials in to view up close. Counselors may opt to utilize horticulture therapy, in which gardening becomes a central aspect to the counseling process (Lewis et al., 2022). Clients engaged in horticulture therapy use their time digging in dirt, planting seeds, and watching their work produce growing plants (Lewis et al., 2022). Most commonly horticulture therapy is done outdoors in a garden plot where clients may have collaborative space, such as at school grounds (Swank et al., 2020). When the season ends, clients may choose to bring plants indoors to continue caring for them independently or allow them to wilt alongside the end of the season (Swank et al., 2020). Some may go a step further and harvest seeds from those plants to continue use for the following season.

Caring for seedlings is a useful technique with many applications. For young children, it offers a way to demonstrate cause-and-effect. After planting, the child may forget about their seeds in the next session, meaning the counselor may choose to also 'forget' through the week and not care for the seeds. Likewise, the child may water them expectantly at each session, signaling for the counselor to do the same while the child is not present (Swank et al., 2020). This is one method for sparking conversation about the needs of others, not limited to just water and sunlight, but also respect, and even freedom (Hogan & Delaney, 2019). To adults, seedling care may inspire discussion around personal choice, purposefulness, and autonomy (Carlson et al., 2020). Giving the clients choice in trauma counseling is generally regarded as paramount, as it encourages clients to take control of their own healing, as well as take back power that may have been lost in prior traumas (Kiyimba, 2020). As small as seedlings may be, using them allows clients the choice to show care for another creature, and in turn, themselves.

As they grow, plants can be a physical representation of the progress a client makes as they work through their trauma and increase their own window of tolerance. For example, counselors can use the plant to inquire about the client's bugs/triggers. Asking the client, for instance, "what kinds of things do you imagine would keep this plant from flourishing?" (e.g., pests, too much heat, lack of water, disease, etc.) and then, based on the client's response, extend those limiting factors to conditions the client may be experiencing in their own life (e.g., toxic relationships, consuming unhealthy food/ beverages, etc.). While a plant needs someone to water it, the client may also long for nourishment and care. Another example of the plant-client metaphor could involve asking the client about conditions that support the plant by posing a question such as, "what would keep this plant thriving through bad storms?" (e.g., a strong root system, a sturdy stalk, plenty of leaves, etc.). This vein of discussion can effortlessly lead to conversation about adversity and resilience which may prompt the client to share what keeps them steady through tough times (e.g., self-care, healthy boundaries, supportive relationships) (Swank & Swank, 2013). These resilience factors are helpful to clients regardless of type of trauma or challenge they have experienced and allow them to bloom, like plants, not only in spite of hardship, but often because of it. This phenomenon is known in horticulture as *extremophytes* or in trauma work as *post-traumatic wisdom* (Perry & Winfrey, 2021).

Focusing on the growth from traumatic experiences, or the fruits or blossoms of life, can be further extended through flower arranging.

Flower arranging allows clients time to celebrate beauty they can create alongside nature itself. It can be especially useful in the winter months, when flowers are not as commonly seen outdoors, and the world itself may be getting grayer. This is another way for clients to exercise personal choice and freedom, as well as express what beauty means to them (Carlson et al., 2020). Flowers and other materials may come from plants the client has grown alongside the counselor, ones the counselor purchased, or from the client's foraging (Carlson et al., 2020; McGeeney, 2016). Clients may also choose to preserve flowers as a reminder of beauty in dark times. This can be done by pressing or by drying (McGeeney, 2016).

Even if a client and counselor choose not to bring plants indoors, the therapeutic benefits of plants are still accessible. For example, counselors may utilize art pieces that inspire thoughts of nature, such as Whitaker, who fills her practice with abstract images that hint at textures and pieces found in nature to inspire her clients' imaginations (Whitaker, 2010). Just the notion of the natural world is enough of a catalyst for some clients to envision or engage with nature without even looking anywhere but within themselves.

Visualizations and Technology

Visualization is a technique commonly used by counselors, especially in the treatment of trauma. It allows the client freedom to travel to whatever location they feel helps them most, all while staying safely in one place (McGeeney, 2016). Many counselors implement visualizations like a calming paint-by-number, using trigger phrases like "can you imagine" or "picture a-" to guide clients to add elements to their imagined landscape (McGeeney, 2016). Visualizations set in nature are useful for imaginative minds that seek to use all their senses and can be tools for encouraging natural exploration as well as relaxation (McGeeney, 2016).

Not all clients may be inclined in using their imagination, but still desire to sense nature while remaining within the comfort of four walls. For these clients, technology becomes a useful tool. Some may benefit from recorded sounds that mimic the outdoors and remind them of positive experiences in nature, or they can utilize the exposure to build up their comfort for going outdoors, if so desired (McGeeney, 2016). Other clients might benefit from nature videos or virtual landscapes. Suppakittpaisrm et al. (2023) suggested both mediums may be beneficial to reducing symptoms of stress and increasing feelings of safety.

Ensuring that nature's therapeutic benefits are felt is essential in ecotherapy. This is second only to ensuring clients feel safe, thereby reducing any potential harm in the therapeutic process. Providing a safe atmosphere is especially vital for populations working through trauma, as it ensures clients can freely express and process their emotions (Kiyimba, 2020). Working inside, in a location the client knows is secure, while engaging with the benefits of nature, has the potential to greatly encourage client recovery.

Potential of Ecotherapy

Methods of indoor ecotherapy can be defined, expanded, and limited by the collaboration between the client and the counselor throughout treatment. Ecotherapy can be useful across many populations but may be particularly beneficial to those who are struggling with trauma-related symptoms. Ecotherapy, as a bottom-up approach, may be combined with somatic techniques to help soothe the nervous system (Hunter et al., 2019;

Olszewska-Guizzo et al., 2022; van der Kolk, 2015).

The natural world can provide the safe-space needed for healing, whether that space is outdoors, or an intricately imagined setting within the individual's own mind. Some clients may be hesitant to engage physically with nature and prefer to admire it from afar. Admiring the beauty of nature through office windows or looking at images of the natural world can suffice. Clients may use these images as metaphors or springboards to elaborate upon their feelings.

Other clients may desire a more tactile approach to engage their senses with what the world has to offer. Crafting with natural materials such as shells, berries, and plant matter allows these clients to physically display their emotions when words escape them otherwise. Still others may want to take part of the natural world while remaining inside four walls by tending to plants. In this way, clients observe the natural process of growth, and process through the challenges that come with it, mirroring the growth they experience with their own trials.

Conclusion

Although many counselors and clients have found ecotherapy to provide a helpful approach to meaningful change, future research is needed to further examine empirical outcomes. Such research may include clients' qualitative experiences with indoor ecotherapy, ecotherapy's connections to one's ability to identify and move through emotions, and the integration of ecotherapy as a support in helping clients to behaviorally regulate. Researchers might also explore the benefits of ecotherapy as a treatment modality utilized in combination with other theoretical approaches. This manuscript offers suggestions for the integration of ecotherapeutic interventions that can be conducted indoors. This aids in a greater reach of ecotherapy, as it expands the clientele able to participate. These methods include creative ways to help clients maintain connection to the natural world and enjoy the calming benefits of nature all within the walls of a more traditional therapeutic setting.

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