I had many ideas in my mind to write about, but I decided to pick a topic that I feel very connected to, which is “Nature.” The natural environment helps us to connect with others and with ourselves, and it is a great resource to help heal physical and mental illness (Schweitzer, Gilpin, and Frampton, 2004).

According to Florence Nightingale, the developer of the Environmental Theory (Petiprin, 2016 and Stichler, 2001), individuals recover sooner if they are exposed to the environmental benefits of natural light, fresh air, pure water, environmental diversity, etc. Home visitors and supervisors have the ability to expose our home visiting participants to a healing environment. As home visiting providers, we should encourage outdoor activities and even conduct visits in different outdoor locations. For instance, a visit can be conducted at the park, where the parents/caregivers not only would interact with their children, but also receive the benefits of being outdoors. The following are examples of fun outdoor activities to do with families:

- **Hide and seek hiking (peekaboo):** The hiders (adults and children) run ahead on the trail and find a tree, rock, or object to hide behind. The rest of the group can be the “seekers”, and then switch roles so everyone gets a chance being both.
- **Picnic:** Prepare a nutritious and simple meal while learning about colors, shapes and new flavors that can be eating outdoors.
- **Bubble Party:** Make your own bubble recipe with straws, cups, and a fly swatter. You might have a competition to see who makes the biggest bubble and/or the weirdest shape.

Being exposed to nature for only three to five minutes is enough to receive abundant positive effects, such as increased positive feelings and calmness, positive changes in blood pressure,
heart rate, heart activity, muscle tension, and brain electrical activity. Nature mobilizes healing resources of the body, mind, and spirit that help us respond to illness or difficult situations (Leibrock & Harris, 2011).

Stichler (2001) emphasizes, "Healing environments help to stimulate a positive awareness of one's self and enhance one's connections with nature, culture, and people. A healing environment allows for privacy and does not harm the patient with toxic materials, lighting, noise, or temperatures." Nature encourages relaxation through peaceful sounds, pleasant aromas, soothing colors, and a sense of harmony. It also nurtures relationships by enhancing compassion, empathy, and social support (Stichler, 2001).

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection…

- Have you ever experienced the healing power of nature within yourself and/or with the families you serve?
- Think of an example of when you provided an outdoor visit. What did you experience that was different from a regular indoor home visit?
- What are the limitations in conducting outdoor visits? What can you do different to integrate the healing environment into your home visits?

References/Additional Resources


