



AGES 11–23

**Supporting staff to:**

# REFLECT ON OUTDOOR EXPLORATION

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Reflect on Outdoor Exploration is a young person's experience with an adult who takes time to create attentive, critical, and exploratory thoughts about spending time in the outdoors.

Reflecting on outdoor exploration with young people involves connecting what they learn in the outdoors with their daily lives, identifying the process that leads to outdoors achievements, and raising awareness on their impact on their environment. This is a Focused Experience for young people, one that specifically bolsters Outdoors SEL.



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# WHAT

## DOES REFLECT ON OUTDOOR EXPLORATION LOOK LIKE AS A PART OF OUR PROGRAM?

The more time young people spend actively reflecting on what they see, feel, and do in your program, the easier it will be for you to promote SEL.

### RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICES

#### \* [ONE]

**Create opportunities for young people to reflect on what they see, hear, and feel in the outdoors.**

Create moments of individual and group reflection. Vary the ways you reflect. Ask young people to discuss, write, or even create art about their experiences in the outdoors.

#### \* [TWO]

**Help young people connect what they learn outdoors with their everyday life.** Ask them what they learned during an outdoor experience. Then help them to identify areas in their life where they could apply their learning. Point out that they can transfer what they learn about the outdoors to different situations.

#### \* [THREE]

**Create opportunities for young people to think about what they achieved and what was challenging during their outdoor experiences.** Ask young people to identify achievements and challenges during the outdoor experience. Then ask them to describe the reasons behind their achievements and challenges, focusing on decision-making and steps. The goal is to identify how you get to a result and what strategies you could use in the future instead of rewarding individual talent.

#### \* [FOUR]

**Encourage young people to reflect on how their actions impact the environment.** Reflect with young people on how their actions impact nature, their community, and the world around them. Help them identify actions that protect their outdoor spaces or positively impact the environment in other ways.

# WHY

## IS REFLECT ON OUTDOOR EXPLORATION IMPORTANT?

Intentional opportunities for reflection in outdoor programs can increase young people's learning, awareness of their own emotions, empathy, and self-worth ([Children to the Nature, 2018](#)). Outdoor programs best promote these outcomes when they integrate reflection opportunities into activities and provide opportunities to transfer their outdoors-focused learning to other contexts. Such opportunities are a strong signal to young people. They communicate that their time in the outdoors is a moment for intentional growth of their SEL capacities.

### DISCOVERIES FROM HELLO INSIGHT

Young people are dynamic and full of promise, with many different pathways to success. We continually mine our growing HI Outdoors dataset, made up of thousands of young people. This lets us continue to learn what works for every young person.

In 2022, we looked at our dataset of more than 6,000 young people, participating in more than 70 programs across more than 20 states. We found that Reflect on Outdoor Exploration is highly predictive of Outdoors SEL development, especially for young men.

# HOW

## HAVE OTHER PROGRAMS INCORPORATED REFLECT ON OUTDOOR EXPLORATION?

You can incorporate Reflect on Outdoor Experiences in a wide variety of interventions and programs. Here is how some Hello Insight members have integrated this practice into their programs.

### PROGRAM EXAMPLES



**At GOALS Youth River Expeditions, young people reflect individually and collectively at the end of each day.**

The program uses appreciation circles, rose-bud-thorn retrospectives, and journaling. The journals include inspiring readings that counselors introduce during meal circles and campfires.



**Inward Discovery Grows Outdoors staff uses a variety of strategies for reflection.**


They help young people share their thoughts and feelings through art projects, closing circles, share-out after activities, and silent independent contemplation in nature.

# HOW

## CAN OUR PROGRAM BEST SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE TO REFLECT ON OUTDOOR EXPLORATION?

Use this table to explore how your program incorporates the research-based practices and how you might integrate them in the future. We recommend you complete this activity with other staff members!

PRACTICES	BRIGHT SPOTS	ACCELERATORS	CHALLENGES
Ways to support young people	Examples of what the program already does	Ways you could easily incorporate this practice	What might make this practice difficult to do
Create opportunities for young people to reflect on what they see, hear, and feel in the outdoors.			
Help young people connect what they learn outdoors with their everyday life.			
Create opportunities for young people to think about what they achieved and what was challenging during their outdoor experiences.			
Encourage young people to reflect on how their actions impact the environment.			



This guide is part of a set meant to help youth-serving programs incorporate research-based experiences. Visit [www.ins.gt/pyd-exp](http://www.ins.gt/pyd-exp) to learn more.

■ View a full list of citations at [www.ins.gt/citations](http://www.ins.gt/citations)



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The logo for Hello Insight, featuring a stylized 'H' made of four colored squares (yellow, green, blue, and red) followed by the text 'hello insight' in a white sans-serif font.

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