

# The Benefits of Nature Based Mental Health Education

At the Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation we have strong commitment to creating positive mental health outcomes for young people to help them thrive beyond the impacts of mental illness. Recently, we have expanded our current program offering based on research demonstrating the importance of nature-based interventions in improving the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

## WELLBEING

Our programs are based on the breadth of peer-reviewed journal articles that support the implementation of nature-based interventions to improve mental health and wellbeing in young people.

### BENEFITS OF NATURE BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR WELLBEING INCLUDE:

Reduce  
Stress

Lowers risk of  
mental illness

Reduces  
loneliness

Promotes  
calmness

Improves  
focus and  
attention

Improves  
emotional  
regulation

Improves  
recall of  
information

Improves  
connection  
with nature

### WHAT RESEARCH SUPPORTS THIS?

- Decreased levels of cortisol (stress hormone) and alpha amylase which is implicated in the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system which promotes rest and rejuvenation in the body (e.g., promotes digestion) (Hunter et al., 2019; van den Berg et al., 2015).
- Reduces stress and improves their ability to cope with external stressors (Chawla et al., 2014; Feng & Astell-Burt, 2017).
- Improves self-perceptions of connectedness with nature and results in lower self-reports of internalising symptoms (associated with anxiety, depression, stomach-aches, ruminative patterns of thinking) and externalising symptoms (associated with aggression, hyperactivity, risk-taking) (Beyer et al., 2014; Haider et al., 2021; Lesser & Nienhuis, 2020; Piccininni et al., 2018).
- Improves engagement, concentration, working memory and recall of learning (Avci & Gumus, 2020; Bateman et al., 2015; Marchant et al., 2019).

# CONNECTION

Our programs are based on the breadth of peer-reviewed journal articles that support the implementation of nature-based interventions to improve the strength of relationships between young people.

## **BENEFITS OF NATURE BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR CONNECTION INCLUDE:**

**Encourages  
play**

**Encourages  
socialisation**

**Supports  
neurodiversity**

**Promotes  
calmness**

**Improves  
focus and  
attention**

**Improves  
problem-  
solving**

**Improves  
emotional  
regulation**

**Improves  
collaborative  
play**

## **WHAT RESEARCH SUPPORTS THIS?**

- Improve pro-social behaviours and the capacity to engage in problem solving when faced with social disagreements (Amoly et al., 2014; Bikomeye et al., 2021)
- Improves peer-relationships by supporting young people to regulate their emotions more effectively when distressed, improving their ability to connect with and relate to others (Tillman et al., 2018).
- Improves self-directed collaborative play between young people without the need for rigid structure (Bravender & Bravender, 2020)
- Supports sensory processing in neurodiverse young people, which reduces overstimulation, promotes grounding and enables them to more effectively regulate their emotional and behavioural responses (Benarous et al., 2020; Byström et al., 2019).

# RECONCILIATION

We recognise the importance of reconciliation as a practice for strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples, for the benefits of all Australians. In alignment with the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's Peoples Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), nature-based interventions can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on mental health and wellbeing.

## **BENEFITS OF NATURE BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR RECONCILIATION INCLUDE:**

**Recognising the holistic framework of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing, including physical, social, emotional, mental, environmental and spiritual wellbeing.**

**Supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parenting practices, which cite the importance of children having the opportunity to be outdoors, engage in play outside and engage in less sedentary behaviours to improve mental health and wellbeing (Miller et al., 2020).**