

## Mental Health During the Holidays



This is the season when many of us get together with family and friends to celebrate the holidays, and is something we look forward to, or at least think we should look forward to. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness ([NAMI](#)), for some of us the holidays can be the most difficult time of year for our mental health. According to a survey conducted by NAMI in 2014, 64% of people with mental illness say the holidays make their conditions worse. A 2021 survey showed that 3 in 5 Americans feel their mental health is negatively impacted by the holidays, and dissatisfaction and loneliness are the most common symptoms of holiday blues.

Many studies have demonstrated improvement in mental health symptoms when people spend time outdoors. For instance, [Coventry et al.](#) conducted a systematic review and found that gardening, green exercise and nature-based therapy improved mental health outcomes in adults, including those with pre-

existing mental health problems. [Beyer et al.](#) examined data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey from 2009-2012 and found that time spent outdoors was associated with fewer depressive symptoms, although the benefits varied by race and ethnicity. [Haider et al.](#) evaluated adults in Austria during COVID-19 and demonstrated a positive relationship between physical activity, time spent outdoors and mental well-being during social restrictions.

This is a reminder that even in cold weather, spending time outdoors can help ourselves and our patients feel better. And patients who you might be "most reluctant" to add on to their "to do list" because of stress are those who might need it the most!

## Provider Spotlight



**Marissa Brun,**

*LMFT and Ecotherapist*

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My counseling practice, [WildSense Therapy](#), is dedicated to helping people reconnect with nature and with themselves by bringing therapy outdoors. I use nature in my work as a way to help resource and ground my clients as well as help them to reconnect with the wild and authentic self. I specialize in working with adults struggling through trauma, anxiety, and low self esteem and have found that bringing nature into my work has provided a calming and safe space to release emotions and feel connected to something bigger than ourselves. No matter what is bringing a client to therapy, we can find a sense of belonging and connection through the fact that we are a part of this greater landscape.

Nature has always been a place of deep healing for me and has been where I feel most connected to myself and my emotional experience. It was a dream of mine to use nature in my work with clients after so many healing outdoor

experiences of my own and I have found that when trauma therapy is brought outdoors it gives us a nurturing guide to assist in turning within without judgement or distraction. I have always held a belief that we live in relationship not just with other people, but with the landscape that surrounds our lives.

Nature-based work within my practice does not require clients to be outdoorsy, or to meet any specific level of physical activity. Each session can look different depending on what my client's body and mind need in the moment. We may meet on a trail, at a park, or open space and from there we will either walk and talk or find a sit spot in nature to deepen our curiosity and guide our journey of exploration. Building relationship with the nature that surrounds us, even our backyards, is such an important aspect of mental health overall and I feel so grateful to share this perspective with my clients.

## Winter Blues

*By Brenda Arledge*

Cold bitter wind  
blowing upon my face  
the sky grey and dim,  
not ready for this winter  
to set in.

My bones ache in pain  
with each temperature drop,  
my mood becomes disgruntled  
counting the days for Spring  
before winter has shown her ugly face.

How I long for days of sunshine  
where birds gently chirp,  
a warm, gentle breeze  
with a scent of flowers adorning my senses  
waking me from my peaceful slumber.

# Tips for Getting Outside in Winter

- \* Dress in Layers
- \* Wear warm socks, shoes and gloves
- \* Choose days without too much wind and stay inside if it is too cold or dangerously windy
- \* Find an activity that warms you up - this can even be walking at a fast pace
- \* Find an activity you actually like to do or try a new one
- \* If possible, try to go during the warmest part of day
- \* If you aren't used to being out in cold weather, ease into it. Start for a few minutes the first day and add a few minutes each time you go out until you reach your goal
- \* Consider a walking partner
- \* Establish a routine so it's part of your day

*Keeping in mind the secondary trauma of caring for others, please take the time you need to recover and consider a dose of nature for yourself.*

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