Let's go outside! Environmental restoration amongst adolescents and the impact of friends and phones

# Details

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## Sample

120 16 to 18 year olds in the UK

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

# Abstract

Adolescents are experiencing an increasing number of psychological difficulties due to mental fatigue and stress. Natural environments have been found to be beneficial to psychological wellbeing by reducing stress and improving mood and concentration for most people. However, a number of studies have suggested that this may not be the case for adolescents perhaps because they have different social and emotional needs (to be with friends, not to be bored), although evidence is lacking. In a field experiment with 120 16e18 year olds in the UK we tested restoration of stress and mental fatigue in an outdoor or indoor environment, alone, with a friend or while playing a game on a mobile phone. The findings showed greater restoration amongst adolescents who had been in an outdoor setting containing natural elements, compared with those who had been in an indoor one. Moreover, being with a friend considerably increased positive affect in nature for this age group. The findings indicated that spending short school breaks in a natural environment with a friend can have a significant positive impact on the psychological wellbeing of teenagers.

# Outcome

Playing a game on your phone when outside reduces the positive effects of being in an outdoor environment. "The only differences, however, found in the ‘with a phone’ context were negative
ones, where playing a game on a mobile phone had a negative
impact on concentration and on positive affect compared with
being with a friend in both environments, and a marginal negative
impact on a selfereport measure of attentiveness, although only
when inside with a phone. This study did not produce any evidence
to suggest that ‘doing something’ in nature might counter the
negative appraisal sometimes made by teenagers of nature as
‘boring’. However, it may be that our choice of ‘activity’ was not an
appropriate one for a number of reasons. Firstly, it represented an
activity which teenagers may have found similar to the cognitive
stressor tasks, and consequently reduced the likelihood of any effects.
In addition, concentrating on a small mobile phone screen
may have reduced the impact of both environments, with participants
focusing on the screen and therefore not as cognizant of their
surroundings. In particular, looking at the screen may have
distracted the teenagers' attention away from the soft fascinating
features of the natural environment. Unfortunately, we did not
know what games the participants were playing; it is likely that the
type of game as well as the extent to which the game demands
attention will have influenced the findings." (Greenwood and Gatersleben, 2016: 138).