Client:	Vodafone	**Date:**	06 Mar 2021
Campaign:	Digital Parenting – Tech and nature	**Author:**	Róisín Lonergan

Article copy:

How tech can help you reconnect with nature

Before the pandemic, our disconnection from the natural world was at an unprecedented high – with many of us working in offices, commuting through urban areas, and having little time to explore local green spots. But the lockdowns changed that. By July 2020*, 46% of people surveyed by Natural England said they were spending more time outside than ever before, turning to nature for comfort and solace – and something to do.

Now that the world is opening up again, it's the perfect time to build on this newfound appreciation and knowledge of nature. And technology can help you do just that.

Nature's proven health benefits

[Pull quote]

"People who walked for 90 minutes in nature, as opposed to in an urban setting, had lower activity in the prefrontal cortex."

Connecting and feeling engaged with nature has countless proven physical and mental health benefits. Data collected in a Pennsylvania hospital between 1972 and 1981ˆ showed how recovery from gallbladder surgery was faster when patients could see trees and greenery from their beds. And a 2015 study** found that people who walked for 90 minutes in nature, as opposed to in an urban setting, had lower activity in the prefrontal cortex, the brain region that's active during rumination – the process of repetitively thinking about negative emotions.

[Pull quote]

“If a child is introduced to the natural world before the age of 12, the chances are they’ll continue the relationship and its benefits through life.”

Lucy Jones, the author of ‘Losing Eden: Why Our Minds Need the Wild’, noted how important nature is for children in our Digital Parenting Magazine:

“As children are enclosed indoors and given fewer opportunities to know the living world, their chances for stress recovery, restoration, cognitive development and simply experiencing the awe of the earth are also constrained.” So although staying indoors can be tempting, especially when the weather isn’t great or you’re having a tough day, experiencing some wildlife together might be just what your family needs.

The author also highlighted that a connection with nature in childhood leads to a connection with nature in adulthood: “If a child is introduced to the natural world before the age of 12, the chances are they’ll continue the relationship and its benefits through life.” So that park walk could benefit your children far longer than you imagined.

Nature knowledge loss

[Pull quote]
“Almost 4 out of 5 children can’t recognize a bumblebee or an oak leaf.”

Jones shared the shocking fact that almost 4 out of 5 children can’t recognize a bumblebee or an oak leaf, naming this unfamiliarity with the natural world ‘nature knowledge loss’ – the phenomenon of nature knowledge decreasing from one generation to the next. It’s more than likely that our parents know more about the natural world than we do, and, if things carry on as they are, our children will know even less.

So how will this trend impact future generations? On top of nature knowledge loss, we’re also living in a climate emergency – “If our children don’t know or can’t name the living beings around us – the plants that sustain us, the processes that form our living support systems – how will they protect and restore the natural world?” asks Jones. Reversing nature knowledge loss will not only benefit our children’s physical and mental health, but it could even help them save the planet.

[Pull quote]

Reversing nature knowledge loss will not only benefit our children's physical and mental health, but it could even help them save the planet.

It's never too late

Ready for some good news? It's never too late to get out for a walk and help your children deepen their relationship with nature. It's free, there's no need for any equipment, and the more you look, the more you'll find.

Here are some ways tech can help reverse nature knowledge loss and keep your family connected to nature, even once the lockdown is over:

Leafsnap UK
Name plant types at the click of your camera – and get key info on each species.

Tree app
Great for older children and teens, this app lets you plant a tree, for free, every day in less than a minute.

Smart bird ID (Europe)
Record a bird cooing, cawing, or singing and this app will tell you its species.

Seek by iNaturalist
Great for younger children – identify any plant or animal and earn badges for your observations.

Go Jauntly
Discover the greenest, quietest, least polluted walks in your local area.

Although it's been a difficult year for many, reconnecting with nature has been an unexpected gift – we'd do well to hold onto that once the world opens up again.

To read Lucy Jones' original article, 'Can't tell a hemlock from an oak?' check out page 20 of our latest Digital Parenting Magazine.

*According to the Office of National Statistics
^Scientific American
**At the Harvard-affiliated Cambridge Health Alliance