

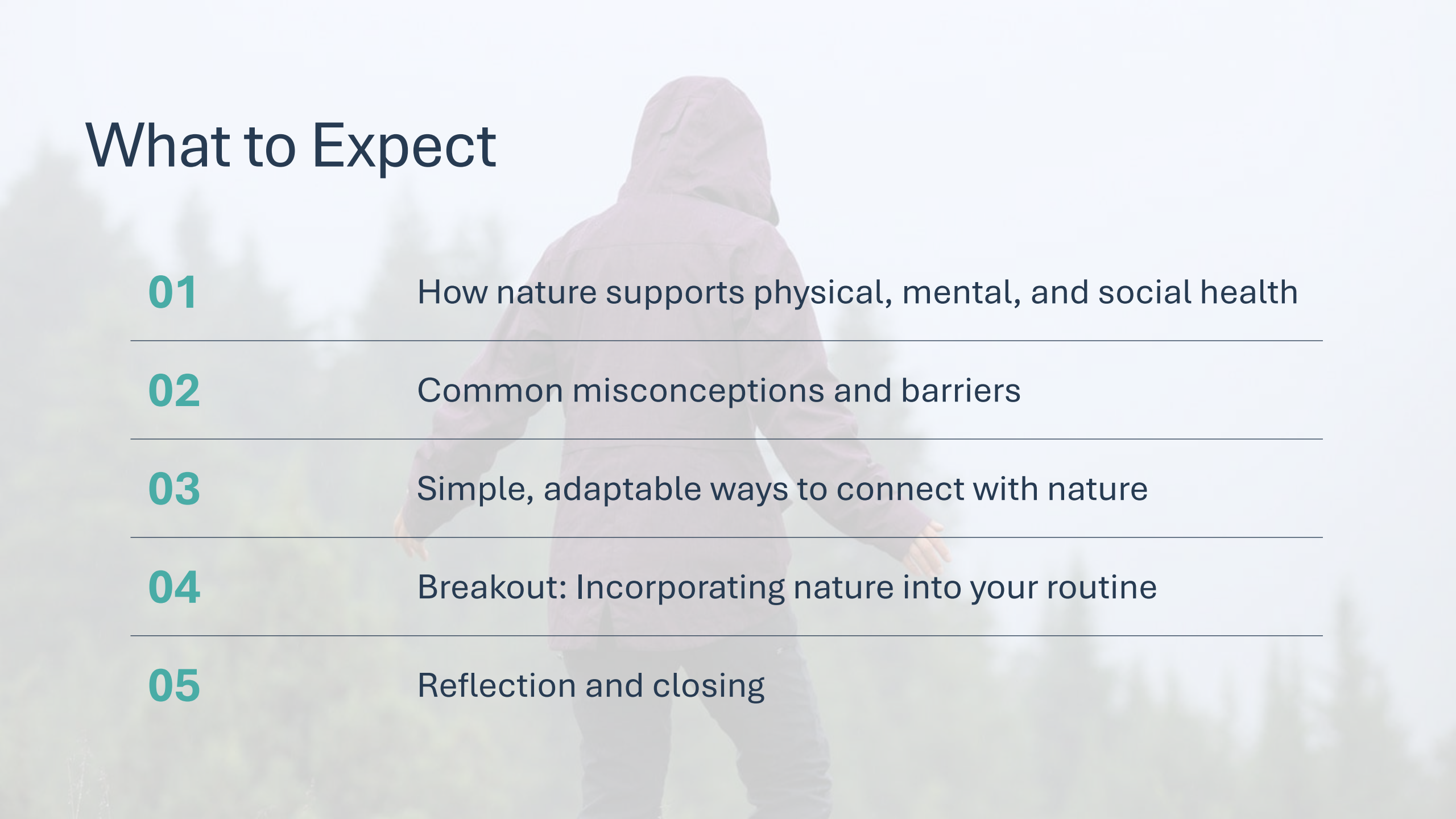
Nature and Health: What the Science Says

Evidence-based ways nature
supports our wellbeing

Diana Portner, MA, MS
Mental Health Therapist



What to Expect

- 
- 01 How nature supports physical, mental, and social health
 - 02 Common misconceptions and barriers
 - 03 Simple, adaptable ways to connect with nature
 - 04 Breakout: Incorporating nature into your routine
 - 05 Reflection and closing

A person wearing a blue hoodie is sitting on a large, weathered log on a rocky shoreline. They are looking out over a calm lake towards a range of snow-capped mountains under a blue sky with scattered clouds. The foreground is filled with dark, jagged rocks and some driftwood. The text "Health Benefits of Connecting with Nature" is overlaid in white on the center of the image.

Health Benefits of Connecting with Nature

Based on findings from multiple systematic reviews of nature and health

Physical Health



Respiratory Health

Improved lung function
Reduced risk of respiratory infection



Cardiovascular Health

Lower blood pressure
Reduced risk of heart disease and stroke



Metabolic Health

Improved blood glucose regulation
Reduced risk factors for type 2 diabetes



Nervous System & Immune Health

Reduced systemic inflammation
Improved autonomic nervous system regulation



Sleep

Better sleep quality and duration
More regular circadian rhythm

Mental Health



Stress Management

Reduced perceived stress and overwhelm
Lower physiological stress markers



Anxiety & Depression

Disrupts negative thought patterns
Improves emotional stability



Attention & Fatigue

Improved attention and working memory
Recovery from mental fatigue



Quality of Life

Increased positive affect
Stronger sense of meaning and purpose

Kasap et al. (2021) systematic review of cognitive, mental, and social benefits of nature contact.



Social Health



Sense of Belonging

Reduces feelings of loneliness

Increases connection and sense of belonging



Communication

Creates conditions for healthier interactions

Increases patience and open-mindedness



Relationship Dynamics

Reduces interpersonal tension and conflict

Improves cooperation and interpersonal skills



Prosocial Behavior

Increases empathy and mutual support

Encourages collective responsibility

Kasap et al. (2021) review: nature contact supports social cohesion, empathy, and helping behavior.

A photograph of two hikers with large backpacks walking up a steep, rocky mountain trail. The ground is covered in patches of snow and dark rocks. The scene is captured from a high angle, looking down at the hikers as they ascend. The overall tone is somewhat muted, with a blueish-grey overlay on the image.

Common Misconceptions and Limiting Beliefs

Stories that get in the way of nature's benefits

Misconception

Long wilderness expeditions are the only way to receive benefits.



Reality

Most benefits are achieved in local parks and everyday green spaces.

Large studies show that nearby nature—like city parks, neighborhood trails, and small green spaces—provide substantial health and wellbeing benefits.



Based on large population studies of neighborhood greenspace and health.

Misconception

Physical benefits require physical challenge or exertion.



Reality

Movement can be beneficial—but it's not required.

Studies show benefits from gentle walking, sitting, or simply spending time in nature, even without intense exercise.



Barton & Pretty (2010); White et al. (2019), Scientific Reports

Misconception

The amount of time it takes is too much for a busy schedule.



Reality

Small, frequent doses are often more effective than long but infrequent experiences.

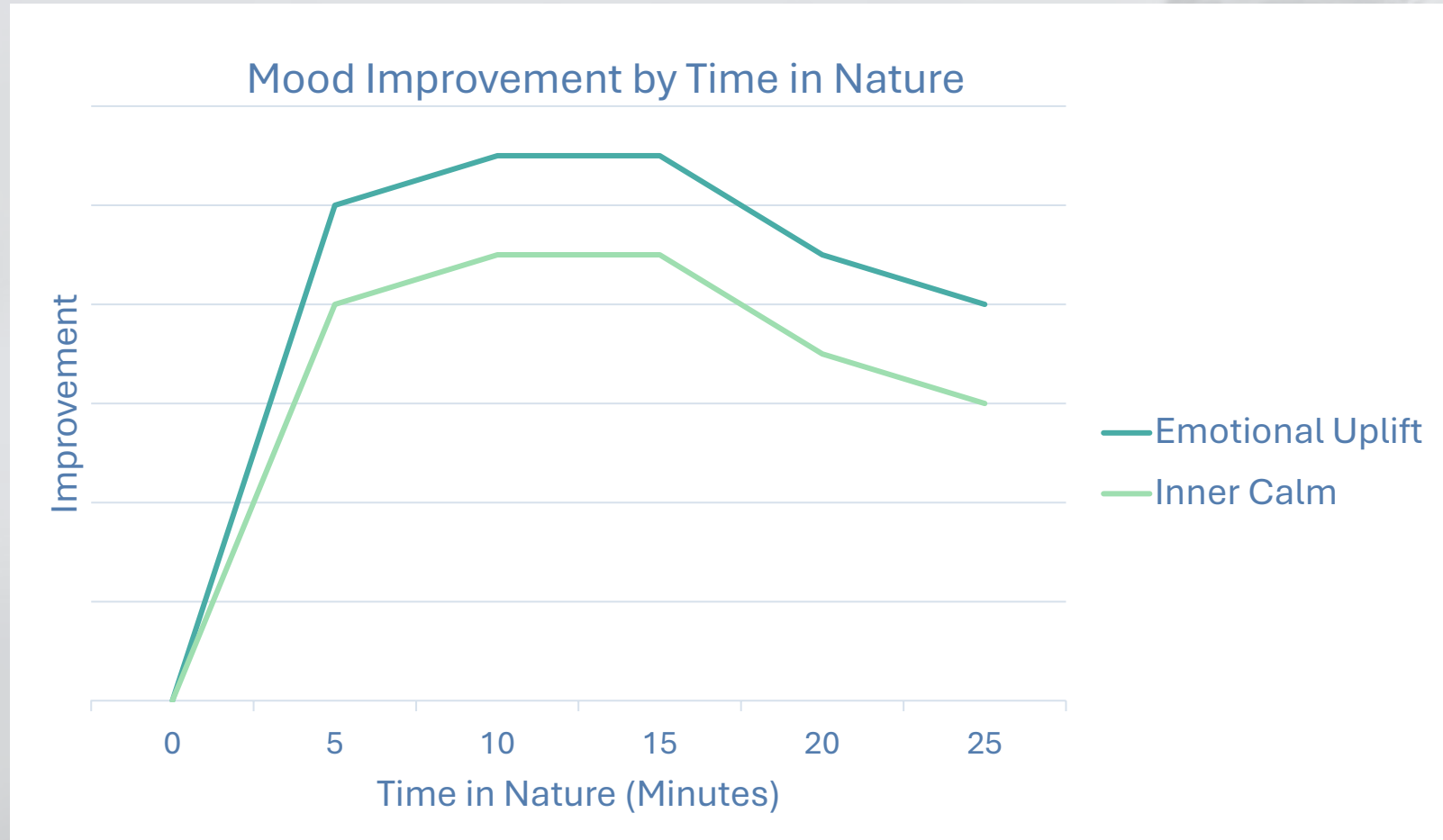
Research shows rapid mood benefits within minutes, and strong health and wellbeing gains at about 2 hours of nature contact per week.



Barton & Pretty (2010); White et al. (2019), Scientific Reports

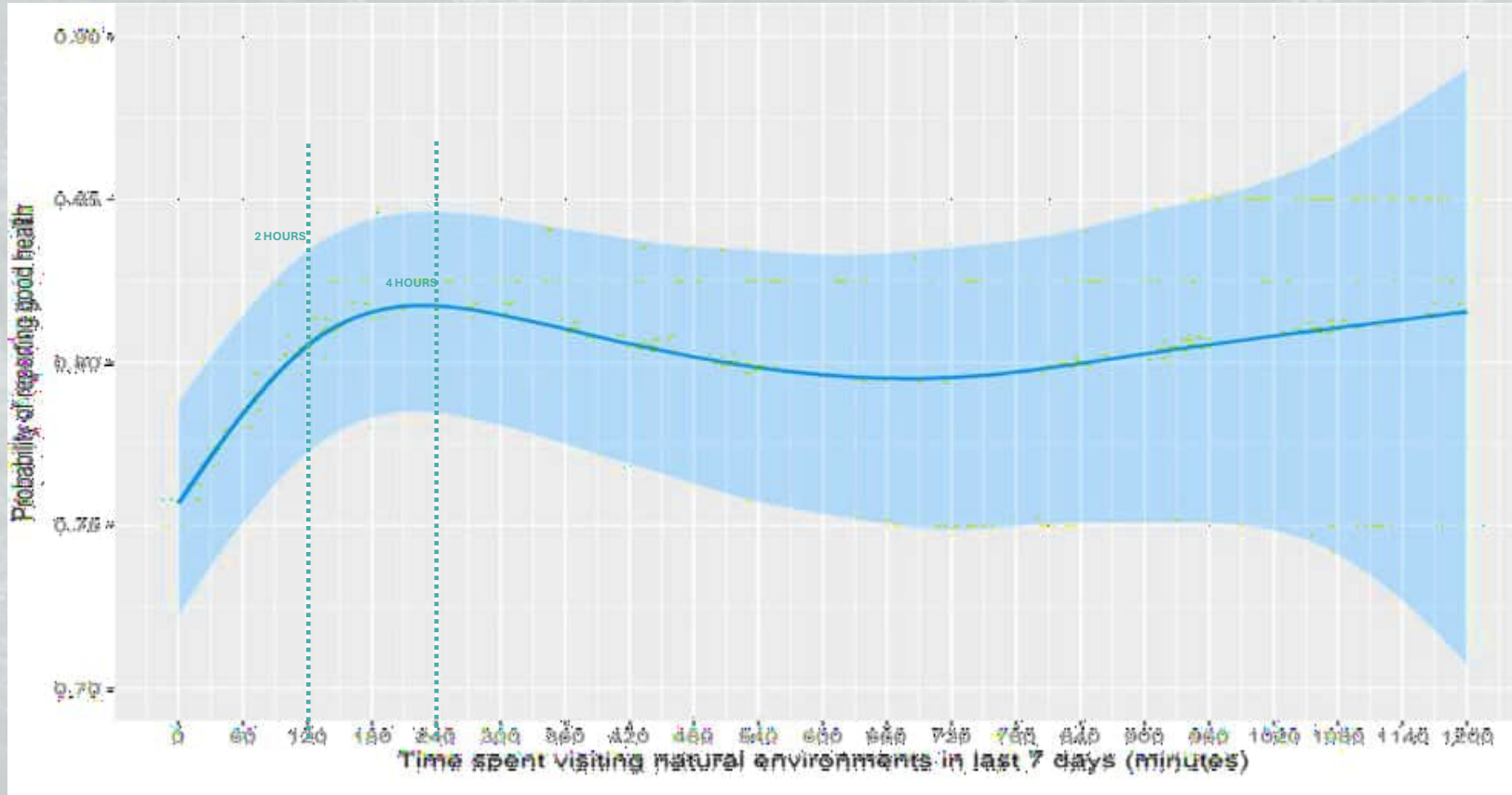
Improved Mood in Just 5 Minutes

Largest mood burst occurs in the first few minutes of time in nature.



*Adapted from Barton & Pretty (2010),
Environmental Science & Technology*

Physical Health Benefits in 2 Hours per Week

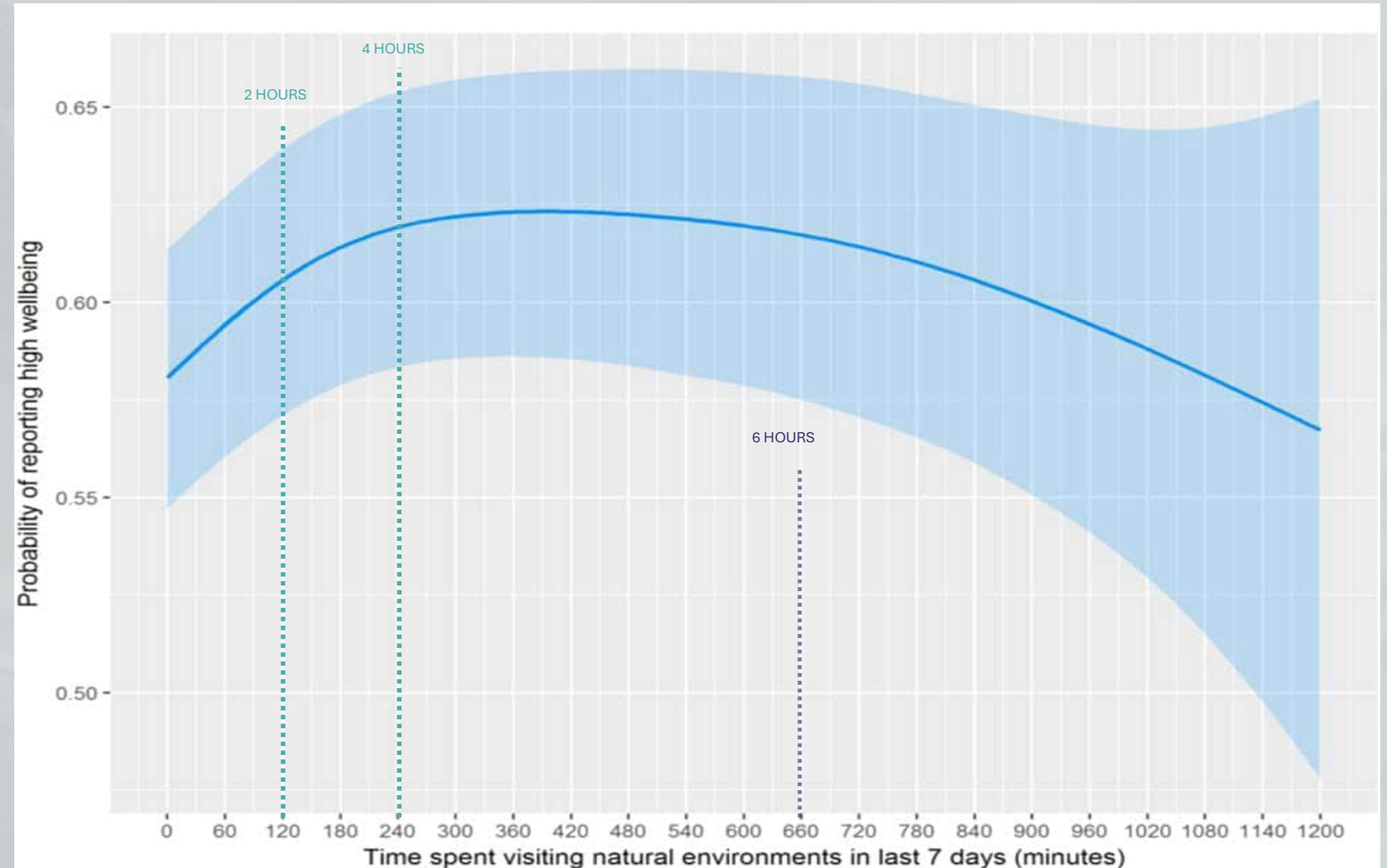


People who spend about 2 hours per week in nature are significantly more likely to report good physical health.

White et al. (2019), Scientific Reports

Improved Wellbeing in 2 Hours per Week

The same study found that about 2 hours per week in nature was linked to higher life satisfaction and wellbeing.



White et al. (2019), Scientific Reports



Misconception

*If the weather is
gross, you
should just stay
inside.*

Reality

If basic safety and comfort are managed, you can still benefit.

Even in less-than-ideal weather, brief, safe outdoor contact can support stress reduction and mood.



Misconception

*You forfeit the
benefits if you do
not go outside.*



Reality

It's possible to connect with nature indoors too.

Research shows benefits from houseplants, views of nature through windows, use of natural materials, and even nature images or sounds.

Summarized from reviews and reports on indoor nature contact and mental health.



A person with long dark hair, seen from the back, is looking out at a vast landscape. The landscape features a range of mountains under a cloudy sky, with evergreen trees in the foreground. A semi-transparent dark blue rectangular overlay covers the middle portion of the image, and the title text is centered within this overlay.

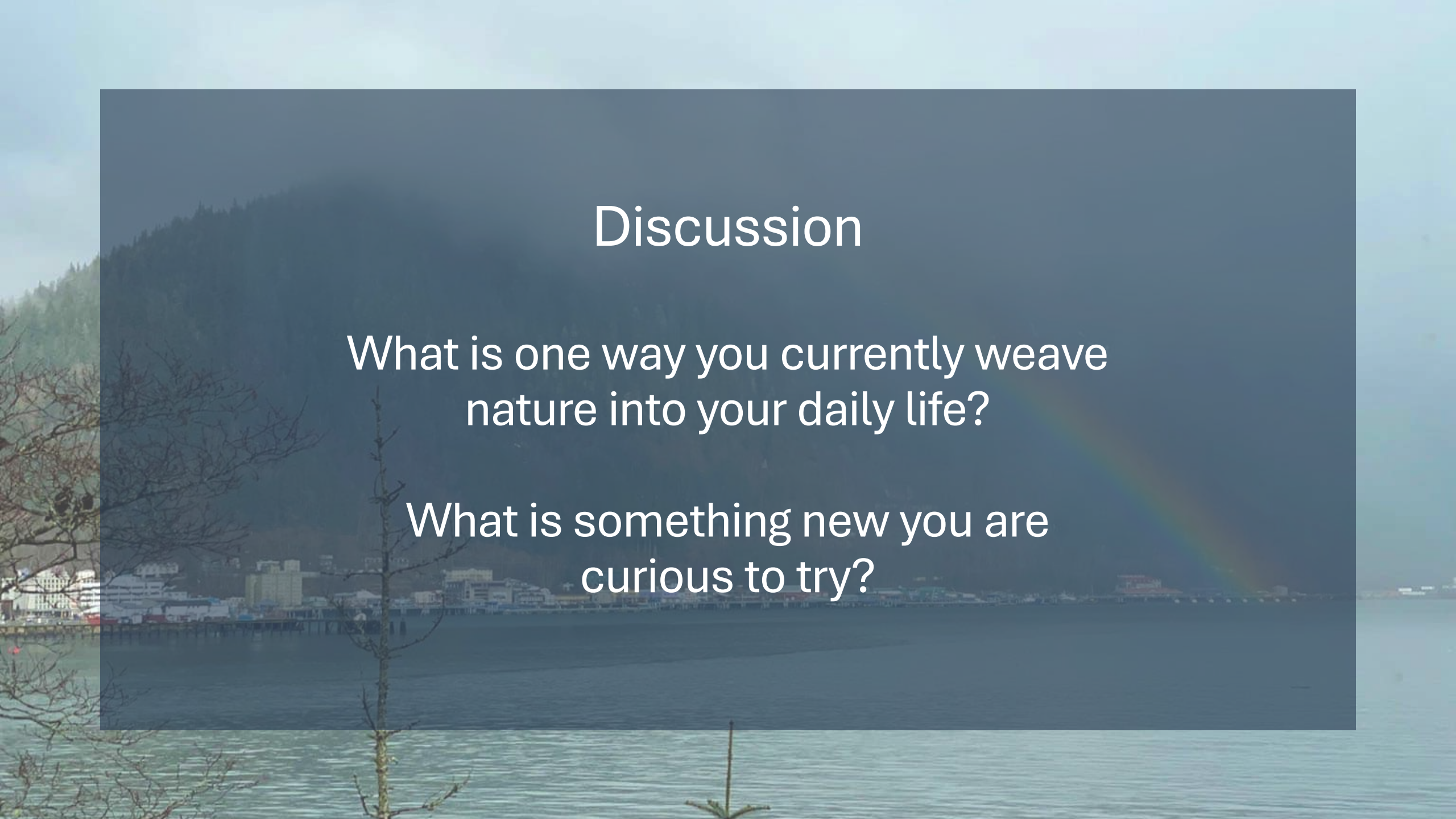
Everyday Ways to Connect with Nature



Ways to Connect with Nature

10 Everyday Activities

1. Step outside for a 5-minute break, leave your phone inside
2. Sit by the window while savoring your morning cup of coffee
3. Adopt a houseplant, repot it, care for it
4. Sit outside, take your headphones off, listen
5. Once an hour, stand up, walk to a window, take 3 deep breaths
6. Open a window—notice smells and sensations of the air
7. Find natural objects, bring them into your home or office
8. Hang nature-based artwork in your workspace
9. Create a craft or piece of artwork from natural objects
10. Find a convenient nature spot, visit often

The background image shows a coastal town with a rainbow. A large, dark, semi-transparent rectangle is overlaid on the image, containing the text. The town is visible in the distance, with buildings and a pier. A rainbow is visible in the sky on the right side. The water is in the foreground, and there are some trees and branches in the lower left and center.

Discussion

What is one way you currently weave nature into your daily life?

What is something new you are curious to try?

Let's Connect!



naturalconnections.org

Diana Portner

907.419.0191

diana@naturalconnections.org

In Network Provider

