

...PROTECT NATURE (12)

CONNECT

Exposure to nature and observation of human impacts helps people to develop environmental sensitivity. This empathetic perspective towards the natural environment is difficult to develop in a classroom, but is one of the best predictors of responsible environmental behaviors.

Therefore, EE programs cannot afford to ignore the importance of environmental sensitivity and protecting nature. They must purposefully help their clients to connect with nature through deliberately designed curricula and pedagogies. Here are several tactics to aid with this effort.

ATTITUDE

Avoid language that positions nature as an adversary to be overcome (e.g. conquer a peak). Instead, promote nature as a place that is home and that we can come to know as a friend. Help clients to appreciate the natural history and cultural heritage of the particular place where each activity is based so nature is not simply a “backdrop” for their experience.

PROTECTION

When active in natural or urban areas, consider present and future human visitors, as well as wildlife. **Leave No Trace** (LNT) provides general guidelines and specific practices of “minimum impact” camping and travel for a variety of settings and activities. When teaching LNT, avoid exacerbating the human-nature divide by making clients feel like “visitors” who don’t belong in nature. Facilitate dialogue that helps them connect LNT principles and practices with larger questions about modifying behaviors to suit the needs of specific places.

EXPAND AWARENESS

The LNT curriculum, as written, does not help us protect the environment beyond the specific areas we visit. We should also work to protect the planet. Consider the **ecological footprint** and **carbon footprint** of food, gear, and travel choices. Involve clients in discussions about these choices, and help them make connections to their actions as consumers and citizens.

- Instead of buying new **gear**, practice the **5Rs**: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, and Repair. If new purchase is unavoidable, then look for certifications of sustainability (see list in the supplementary materials).
- Consider growing your own **food** or buying it from local farmers. Source in bulk to reduce packaging. Choose reusable food bags, not single-use plastic ones. Fine-tune menu quantities to avoid waste. Compost food scraps. Choose plant-based proteins, rather than animal-based ones.
- Opt for **travel** destinations that are closer to home. Explore ways to travel with lower carbon intensity (human-powered or public transportation where possible).
- Track your progress in the above with **As Sustainable As Possible** apps (see ASAP list).

SERVICE

Work with land managers to arrange service projects for your groups. Clients can develop an appreciation for areas through service like trail or campsite maintenance, trash removal, control of invasive species, and citizen science projects. **Offset** your carbon impacts by planting trees, investing in renewable energy technologies, donating to climate research, and contributing to poverty eliminating social justice (which reduces a major threat to sustainability).

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