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Stressed? Anxious? This Just Might Be The Cure You Need



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Travel



The average American spends 11 hours a day on a screen and 90% of their time indoors. Getting out in ... [\[+\]](#) GETTY

It's no secret that Americans are more stressed out and anxious than ever before. It may come as no surprise that certain places, like New York, boasts one of the highest burn-out rates in the world. Enter [Cindy By Nature](#) a New York-based company started by Cindy Olsen, a former high-

power finance executive who turned to nature to overcome her own anxiety and stress. Olsen runs award-winning mindful awareness programs in Westchester County, New York, for schools, nature centers, land conservations, organizations and private clients. For the general public, she leads a series of nature walks year round that involve meditation, mindfulness and the art of decompressing.

We talked to her about how her company—and nature—truly does get us back to baseline.



Our stress hormone, cortisol, decreases when we're in nature. GETTY

What exactly is your business and why did you start it?

Cindy By Nature offers mindful outdoor experiences and nature education. I started this business because I am seeing that people are

disconnected from nature. The average American spends 11 hours a day on a screen and 90% of their time indoors. Since we have moved from living in the forest to living in urban environments we have seen a decline in our mental health. My programs are designed to reconnect humans with nature through education and mindful experiences, so that they feel a greater sense of well-being.



When we are in nature we are connected to a sense of wonder, beauty and being a part of something ... [+] GETTY

Talk about the rise in stress and anxiety levels in both kids and adults.

Of the 7 million years we've been on this planet, less than .01% of our time has been spent in urban society. We have not evolved to the incredible speed which our lives are moving. Our bodies and minds are struggling to

keep up. While we're more connected by technology than ever before, we feel more alone and divided. The rising levels of anxiety and depression are the result.

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The smell of dirt activates serotonin in the brain making us feel happier. GETTY

How can nature help?

Recent research is providing evidence of the positive impact that being in nature can have on our minds, bodies and spirits. When we spend time outside we see improvements in our cognitive functions, problem solving and **memory skills**. Our bodies get an immune boost, we have **better growth** and sleep patterns and our blood pressure goes down. The smell of **dirt** activates serotonin in the brain making us feel happier. Our stress hormone, cortisol, decreases when we're in nature. We are connected to a sense of wonder, beauty and being a part of something bigger. It is incredibly healing on a level that you can't get in a bottle. **Nature gets us back to our baseline.**

Approaching nature in a mindful way can magnify all these positive benefits. When we clear our minds, slow down and open our senses to the natural world, we can take in so much more. The more we do this, the more we can navigate our everyday lives with ease.

Who can benefit from nature walks

If I could, I would take all 7 billion people on the planet for a walk in a forest. I can't, so Cindy By Nature is my way of contributing. Our community is rather diverse by design. I want to offer programs for all demographics and capture as large of an audience as I can.

The monthly mindful walks bring a community that includes young artists seeking a mental refresh, suburban mothers looking to hit pause, retirees looking to savor the next chapter, teenagers and college students seeking a way to destress, and many who are healing from trauma and loss. I also offer individual forest therapy programs to kids to help alleviate anxiety by connecting with nature. My indoor programs tend to draw a community of curious mindful individuals who are looking to learn more

about this in the comfort of an indoor space. Although, they usually end up at my outdoor walks after feeling the power of connection! I even enjoy hosting private groups for special events with a mindful walk and forest picnic.



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What can people expect from a program with you?

They can expect that we'll get outside no matter the weather. Dangerous conditions aside, being out in nature when you can actually feel it (when it's cold, wet, hot) just adds to the connecting experience. Each participant is introduced to their individual backpack, which includes a blanket and seat cushion to be used for their seated time in the forest. After a few deep guided breaths, we move into some gentle yogic stretches to unwind our tension and clear our minds. Then we do a walking meditation, which is

done in social silence so we can take in the natural world with all our senses. We then regroup and each individual is invited to find their own spot to sit with a tree for about 10 minutes. This time can be used to meditate or simply observe the natural world around you. The sound of a chime queues the group to gather in a circle where we share tea and hold council. Council is a time when each person has an opportunity to share a thought, observation or moment of silence with the group. We hold a brief closing ceremony before walking back to our starting point.

What is your goal during each session/program?

My goal is for people to feel connected. Connected to nature, connected to each other, and connected to themselves. I want them to feel safe and held by nature. I want them to feel like they are a part of something spectacular that we just miss when we're moving too fast. I want them to take that feeling back into their everyday life and keep fostering a deeper connection with the natural world.

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