

Going to Camp

By Kathleen Swift, *Family and Lifespan Ministry Director*



Recently, I spent a few days with some of my colleagues at de Benneville Pines, the Pacific Southwest District UU camp, located in the San Bernardino Mountains. During our three-day retreat, we laughed and talked, relaxed before a lovely fire, hiked in the beautiful mountain air, and rejuvenated ourselves. One of our topics was the value of getting away from the city and partaking in nature. Nature truly impacts our well-being.

The research is clear: Being in nature not only increases pleasant feelings, it reduces stress and other negative emotions such as anger and fear. Along with increasing positive emotional health, exposure to nature contributes to physical well-being—it can reduce blood pressure and muscle tension, for example. And, being in nature can help you cope with pain.

This was demonstrated in one research study by Dr. Robert Ulrich. A group of patients all underwent the same surgery. During their recovery, half of the patients had a view of trees and the rest had a view of a wall. The results? The patients with the view of trees had fewer negative effects, tolerated pain better, and spent less time in the hospital. And this was just a view of trees—imagine the positive effects that can come with spending several days in the mountains. According to a 2019 study by White, Alcock, et al, spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature strongly contributes to better physical health and well-being.



The benefits for children are even more striking. Playing outdoors in nature benefits children intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically. Outdoor activities, such as exploring rocks and bugs, build brains as well as bodies with numerous long-term benefits. The natural world is a giant learning laboratory, providing opportunities for discovery, creativity, and problem solving.

Children in nature explore, make noise, and run about in ways that can't be done inside. Sometimes, nature even brings out nurturing qualities in children. In addition, several studies have found that exposure to nature can reduce symptoms of anxiety and ADHD. It can even help brain functioning. For example, a 2009 study by Nancy Wells looked at children who moved to new environments.

Those whose move provided the most improvement in exposure to nature showed the most improvement on cognitive functioning.

Our annual First UU Church camp this year is Friday, May 29th, to Sunday, May 31st. Camp gives us all the opportunity to unwind, partake in new adventures, and associate with like-minded people. Imagine leaving the city behind, as you drive into a mountain retreat. There are cabins to stay in, with bunkbeds for everyone and bathrooms with showers. You'll need to bring your own blankets or sleeping bags, but all the cooking and dishes are done for you, leaving you with ample opportunities to swim, participate in workshops, do archery, explore and hike, or just relax in the mountain air. I hope you consider attending this year.