

# Nature in Integrative Psychotherapy and Supervision

Maruša Zaletel Tekavc

## Abstract

The author describes how nature can be integrated into relational integrative psychotherapy and supervision. A proposal for an expanded self-in-relationship model is provided along with a discussion of the integration of nature into different relational methods. The author explores different ways of working outdoors, including mindfulness, metaphors, and equine-assisted supervision. Possible consideration and difficulties when working therapeutically outdoors are discussed, and ecological and spiritual topics in outdoor therapy are considered.

## Keywords

Ecotherapy, ecosupervision, relational methods, outdoor integrative psychotherapy, metaphors, equine-assisted supervision, ecological topics

We are all part of nature, but in psychotherapy and supervision, we often forget this. Including nature in psychotherapy is usually referred to as “ecotherapy.” Ecotherapy represents a new form of psychotherapy that acknowledges the vital role of nature and addresses the human-nature relationship (Buzzel & Chalquist, 2009). My definition of supervision that integrates nature is that ecosupervision uses natural settings, activities, and processes and sometimes also focuses on ecological aspects of supervisees or clients because these topics tend to naturally come up in supervision done outdoors. In this article, I consider how we can include nature in psychotherapy and supervision while still working in a relational and integrative way. I will mostly use the terms “client” and “therapist,” but nearly all of what is written here also applies to supervision.

## Nature in the Self-in-Relationship Model

The basic theory of relational integrative psychotherapy is the self-in-relationship model (Erskine & Trautmann, 1997). I suggest that we add the dimension of a natural system as shown in Figure 1.

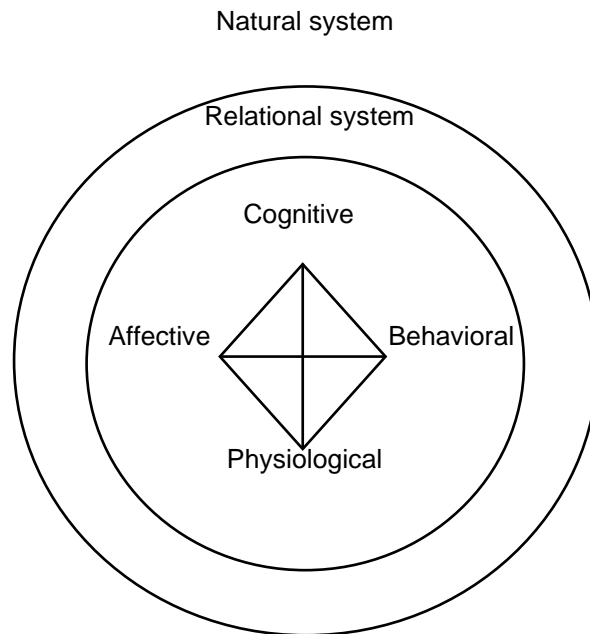


Figure 1. Expanded Self-in-Relationship Model (adapted from Erskine & Trautmann, 1997, p. 81).

This natural system includes all of our dimensions (physiological, affective, cognitive, behavioral) and our relationships with other human beings because we are all natural beings. Conn and Conn (2009) wrote, “Healthy human functioning in an eco-psychological context includes sustainable and mutually-enhancing relations not just at the intrapersonal level or the interpersonal level but also at the level of ‘interbeing’ (between humans and the non-human world” (p. 112). Psychological health also includes good contact with the natural world. The inclusion of the natural system in the self-in-relationship model expands our inquiry and interventions in therapy to the client’s relationship with the other and more-than-human beings. The other-than-human beings are plants and animals, and the more-than-human beings are different natural phenomena and ecosystems, such as the wind, sun, mountains, and rivers (Totton, 2011).

When we connect with nature, our ecological self develops. The ecological self (Naess, 1973, as cited in Jordan, 2015, p. 100) is a sense of self that is beyond the human-to-human world. It enables a reciprocal relationship with nature. Evans and Gilbert (2005) wrote about an “I-Thou” relationship with nature and that the self is regarded as a part of a larger interconnected entity. Personal fulfillment depends not just on the enhancement of our self but more on the contribution of something greater and on the interconnection with the other and more-than-human beings. Siegel (2023) called this “intraconnection.”

In psychotherapy, we mostly focus on the exploration of the client’s different dimensions and their relationships. The therapy process can be enriched when we also include the natural dimension. For some clients, it is easier to build full contact with the therapist outdoors or when the therapist includes in indoor therapy inquiry about their relationship and experiences with nature. Jordan (2015) described how, for such clients, nature often represents a resource in childhood and usually also in the present. Perhaps contact with other humans was not safe, so nature represented the only safe contact for them. In such cases, nature can act as an intermediary between therapist and client and serve as a nonthreatening and available other. Jordan described how outdoors “the client becomes more able to negotiate difficult feelings and

tolerate greater intensity of intimacy with the therapist” (p. 55).

Ulrich’s (1983, as cited in Marshall, 2016) psychophysiological stress recovery theory reveals that we can recover faster from the flight-or-fight response in nature. “Involving the limbic system of the brain, natural settings, or even pictures or sounds from nature have been shown to lower heart rate, reduce blood pressure, lower anxiety and increase feelings of well-being” (p. 157). People who were shown nature scenery recovered more quickly from stress, were less aggressive, and their happiness increased (Ulrich, 1979, as cited in Hallberg, 2018). Nature offers us and our clients better emotional regulation and the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system or, as Porges (2017) called it, the ventral vagal system. For example, one of my clients felt anxious indoors. He was afraid that I would be critical of him because he had poor self-esteem and strong internal criticism. In the outdoor setting, his anxiety decreased, he felt calmer and more regulated, and he could more easily connect with me. The same is true in supervision if supervisees have fears about being not good enough or that we as supervisors will assess them in a negative way.

If the therapist can meet the client in the nature dimension, the client will slowly build trust and contact with the therapist. A good example of such work is offered by D’Amico (2022), who described how the therapy relationship changed in a positive way when she moved outdoors with her client. In my opinion, the inclusion of the natural dimension in any kind of integrative therapy is valuable, not just for clients who have problems with trust in relationships.

I think one of our basic needs as humans is the need for contact with nature. Wilson (1984, as cited in Williams, 2017, p. 21) created the *biophilia hypothesis*, which suggests that we as human beings have an emotional affiliation with other living organisms. Various research (Williams, 2017) confirms that being in nature, or sometimes just looking at nature pictures, reduces stress, depression, and anxiety; improves our immune system; and helps with grief and trauma. Of course, the same is true for the opposite. If we are deprived of contact with nature, our well-being decreases, and we are more likely to feel anxious or depressed. Sometimes, clients are closed off from contact on the natural dimension, for example, they are not spending time in nature or even feel resentful toward nature. In such cases, we can slowly invite them to explore their relationship with nature, the origins of it, and to build a different kind of contact with nature. In general, nature can increase the benefits of therapy and support the therapy process if this way of working is also appropriate for the client.

## **Relational Methods and Nature**

We can include nature in relational methods and in the *keyhole model* (Erskine et al., 1999). I suggest that other and more-than-human beings have an important place in inquiry, attunement, and involvement. When using inquiry, we can inquire about the client’s phenomenological experience in nature. If we are outdoors, the client can experience the other and more-than-human beings with different senses, for example, listening to birds or the wind, seeing the sea or a squirrel, touching a tree, feeling the wind on the skin, and similar experiences. Indoors, the client may imagine a natural place, or we can use items that we collect from nature such as stones, shells, sticks, feathers, dried leaves, and so on. We can use indoor and outdoor mindfulness exercises so that the client fully experiences the natural being, and then we can explore the experience with phenomenological inquiry. The benefit of such an exploration is better contact with the body; clients usually feel more grounded, present, and regulated.

With historical inquiry, we can explore the client’s relationship with nature in the past, for example, “Was there a favorite place you loved as a child or an animal?” or “What role did nature play in your parents’ lives?” (Buzzel, 2009, p. 49). We can also inquire about the person’s present relationship with nature, for example, about relationships with animals, special places, how much

time the person spends outdoors, and so on. This information can give us valuable insights into the client's possible resources from the past and in the present and also about missing contact with nature, which can, as previously described, cause many psychological problems. We can also inquire about the client's ecoanxiety and ecogrief if they are present (Buzzel, 2009).

It is important to use relational inquiry if we work outdoors. The client may perceive us differently than when we are indoors. As many authors mention (Jordan, 2015; Marshall, 2016), the therapeutic relationship is usually a more democratic one when experienced outdoors: We walk side by side and usually do not sit opposite each other. The client can experience us more fully, for example, our physical condition, way of moving, preferred natural spaces, animals, how we react to different weather conditions, obstacles, and so on. For some clients, this is relaxing and enhances genuine contact with the therapist. However, for others, it may provoke stress and unpleasant feelings, so it is important to relationally inquire and adapt the therapy according to the client's needs and feelings.

The therapist's attunement is always present outdoors as well as indoors. We use all kinds of attunement. In particular, rhythmic and physiological attunement (Žvelc & Žvelc, 2021) are even more visible while working outdoors. We need to attune to the client's rhythms while walking or the client's need for a rest. Marshall (2016) wrote about physiological attunement outdoors, which is often deeper than when indoors. We can experience the client's way of moving and being in the body, and this usually also evokes some feelings (countertransference) in us, which we can use to attune back to the client's physiological rhythms and processes.

If we are developmentally attuned, we can choose with the client different places according to their developmental age. For example, one ego state (Erskine & Moursund, 1988) may feel better in a hidden spot among trees in the forest; another may like to spend more time observing water; and so on. When the client knows which ego state feels better in which spot, we can make a contract with the client to visit such a specific place together to work with the connected ego state.

Attunement is also present in the relationship with nature. We can view nature as a third in the therapy relationship or as a cotherapist (Jordan, 2015). We (therapist/supervisor and client/supervisee) are attuning to nature, and nature is attuning to us. We become attuned to nature's different rhythms, such as seasonal and weather changes. Every weather condition or season can evoke in the client a different perception, and different topics for therapy emerge. Also, nature attunes to us. This is especially visible in animal-assisted therapy/supervision, in which the animals immediately respond back to the client's/supervisee's process.

Rust (2020) wrote about synchronicity as a crucial part of ecotherapy. This means that we experience that everything and everyone is in a continuous dynamic relationship within a unified reality. For example, while a client was talking about her strong self-critical thoughts, a crow started to make such loud noises that we could barely hear each other. The client noticed how, likewise, her noisy thoughts prevented her from fully hearing herself and also others. Nature is constantly offering attunement and mirroring. If we and our clients are open and in contact with nature, we can gain many new insights.

The other and more-than-human beings are offering involvement too: acknowledgment, validation, normalization, and presence. We can use interventions in which nature is included as a metaphor. In that way, nature acknowledges and validates the client's processes. For example, I encouraged one client to find an other or more-than-human being that resonated with her inner child. She chose a small bird sitting on a nearby bush, and we observed the bird together. The client noticed how small the bird was but also how fast, powerful, and on guard at all times it was. She could then acknowledge that the same was true for her inner child and how important those qualities were for her survival.

All beings in nature are accepting of the client and me; nature never judges, so normalization outside is always present. For example, while observing a broken tree, a client can experience

normalization for his hurts (every living being can be hurt and is not bad because of this). At the same time, the client can notice that the tree is healing itself and growing further. He receives the message that healing takes time and is a natural process, which we cannot speed up. He can trust this process because it is working so well in nature. Clients who are carrying a good deal of shame for their body image can, for example, easily connect with a horse because animals do not judge people by their appearance.

Clients and I are usually easily present in the natural environment. I notice that in nature I use fewer interventions, but the therapy/supervision process often goes even deeper because I can remain present, hold the space, and the process flows with the help of nature. At the same time, nature and all natural beings are constantly present and modeling for us this process of just being in the here and now. The relational methods I use outdoors are the same ones I use indoors. The difference is that these methods are embedded in the natural environment, and the more and other-than-human beings usually amplify their effects. At the same time, nature adds and offers another way of relationship, which is full of presence, connection, synchronicity, mirroring, and acceptance.

### **Different Ways of Working Outdoors**

Different possibilities for working exist in ecotherapy and ecosupervision. We can work indoors with various items from nature, but here I will describe my way of working outdoors. There are many other ways of working, so you can find the way that is best suited to you. When outdoors we can use all the usual inter- and intrapersonal techniques we use indoors, so the natural environment is a container and regulator of the therapy process. For example, a client was talking about his difficult relationship with his father, and we were sitting in a spot in the forest that he had chosen. From time to time, I slowed him down so that he would come more in contact with his body and feelings and so that he would stay in the window of tolerance (Ogden et al., 2006). When he slowed down, he noticed the natural environment, the sounds, and similar elements. This helped him even more to ground, to stay present, and in the window of tolerance. We can do outdoors different mindfulness and sensory exercises, which can also have the effect of regulation, grounding, and better contact with oneself and the surroundings. This can be helpful also for us as therapists/supervisors if the therapy/supervision process is evoking in us difficult, strong feelings or if we dissociate.

The concept of *soft fascination* developed by Kaplan and Kaplan (1983, as cited in Marshall, 2016) is important.

The natural environment is found to offer the optimum conditions for attentional recovery within the brain (occurring in the frontal cortex) and also for clearing the mind, thus providing increased internal space for absorption of and reflection upon emerging experience. (p. 158)

This is valuable in supervision. My observation is that the supervisee sees the therapy process with the client more clearly while outdoors and can more easily reflect on it. Usually the supervisee can also notice different angles and views on the presented problem and, specifically, has a better metaperspective. Of course, clients also benefit from this effect.

I usually leave up to the client the choice of where they want to stay in nature, that is, at which spot they want to stop or to walk and go farther. With this, I become attuned to the client's relational needs (Erskine et al., 1999), especially for self-definition and having an impact. In this way, I support the client's autonomy. If the client has difficulty with the choice and has a stronger need for our initiation and guidance, we can, of course, also take over the choice, at least in the beginning sessions.

Another way of working outdoors is that we encourage the client/supervisee to find symbols and metaphors in the natural surroundings that resonate with their internal process or presenting problem. Jordan (2015) wrote that the natural space is used “projectively,” and the client can work with their inner world at a safe distance. The client/supervisee interacts with this other/more-than-human being and is mindful of what is happening inside their body. The client/supervisee usually gains new insights about the process or problem.

I will describe an example of using symbols and metaphors in a regular ecosupervision group that I lead. We usually meet outside, including in winter. On a cold day, a supervisee presented a client, whom we already knew, and she wanted to explore how to work with feelings of shame that the client brought to therapy. The supervisee felt quite uncertain. We stepped into the forest, and I encouraged her to find a plant, animal, or item from nature that would represent her client. She chose a thin tree (the client had an eating disorder). Then I encouraged her to choose some being that would represent herself. First, she looked at a small tree on the ground, which was already broken and rotten, and said, “That is me.” She added that this represented her Child ego state (Erskine & Moursund, 1988). I also proposed that she choose some tree or natural treasure that represented her as an adult or therapist. She chose a large, stable tree, a bit behind the client tree.

I led her to choose an other/more-than-human being that represented the client’s shame. She picked up a cold, heavy stone, which she held in her hands while she was standing next to her tree (which represented her as a therapist). The stone became warmer and lighter, and she felt she could deal with it. Her fear and uncertainty disappeared. When we stepped back to the client’s tree, she felt trust in the client and the therapy process. At the same time, she was more aware that the client needed a lot of time to make the next step, to grow (like slowly growing trees), so she needed to be more rhythmically attuned (Erskine et al., 1999). She put the stone between the trees so that both could be with the shame, carry it together, and process it in a safe and attuned therapeutic relationship.

In the end, I mentioned the tree lying on the ground, which represented her inner child. I assumed that the fear at the beginning came maybe from that part. When she stepped to the tree, she was deeply touched, because it was broken, already a bit rotten and alone. I proposed that we all together could carry it to the big tree (her adult). She liked the idea and became aware of how difficult it is for her to accept help or to ask others for help. When both trees were together, she felt calm and fulfilled, so that her Adult ego state could take care of her Child ego state.

With the help of my inquiry, the supervisee made connections to her work with the client and her personal issues and how she could use the insights in her work and in her personal development. She noticed how nature helped her to regulate and stay present and in contact with herself and others. After the process, we were all in peaceful silence and present so we could feel the integration and connection to the other-than-human beings. I encouraged all of us at the end of each supervision process to show in our own way some gratitude to the other/more-than-human beings that had helped us so profoundly, and then to say good-bye.

Another way to work outdoors is while walking. Walking stimulates our brain bilaterally, so it enables me and my clients to process information more holistically and to gain new insights. If a client feels stuck, walking can help us to free the process and observe this. We can explore each step and what is helping the client to move forward. Of course, we and our clients are also improving our physical health while walking. Walking vitalizes us, which is great if the client is more in hypoactivation. Walking is usually at least partly present in all outdoor therapy/supervision—for example, to arrive at a chosen spot—but it can also be the main way of working. Brazier (2018) wrote about different aims of using walking in therapy: We can walk consciously and tune into our sensory experience and ground, we can walk to reflect and assimilate work that has been done, we can share experiences during walking, we can walk fast

to warm up, and so on.

### **Animal-Assisted Therapy/Supervision**

One possibility of working outdoors is animal-assisted therapy/supervision. Through interactions with animals, humans can experience an oxytocin boost, and this is also transferred to interactions with other people (Steward, 2017, in Hallberg, 2018). Research shows that being with a horse evokes greater embodiment (Hallberg, 2018). Horses are sensitive and responsive to body language: “The horse acts as an embodied non-talking ‘catalyst’ and ‘metaphor’, which allows a deeper level of relating” (Hinds & Ranger, 2016, p. 191). Porter-Wenzlaff (2007, in Hallberg, 2018, p.16) also wrote that the horse’s sensitivity extends to the human being with whom they interact. The horse’s response to us reflects what our presence tells it. In equine-assisted supervision, nonverbal contact with the horse is important. Horses are “truth sensors” (Totton, 2011); they respond congruently, immediately, clearly, and nonverbally (Karol, 2007, in Hinds & Ranger, 2016, p. 191). In equine-assisted supervision, I observe that the horse can be used as a metaphor for the client, the therapist, their relationship, or the presented problem. However, the horse is mostly associated with the presented client and responds according to that person. The supervisee thus experiences the client from a different perspective and gains new insights into how to continue the therapy with that person.

My husband and I have an ecological farm. Occasionally, I host supervision marathons on the farm during which students of integrative psychotherapy can experience supervision in nature. In such a supervision marathon, one supervisee wished to have supervision with the help of our horses. She presented a client who wanted to finish therapy, but she was not sure if he was ready to do so. He came to therapy because of problems with cheating on his partner. Since he had started therapy, he had been loyal to her. While talking, one male horse came closer into our space, and the supervisee could connect the horse with her client because the horse was quite dominant. The horse then went to eat beside a mare, and the supervisee could see how her client was now peaceful beside his partner. She observed the horse, his peacefulness, and started to feel the vulnerable part of her client, his inner child, and his traumas. She remembered the story of their therapy, the whole process, and how he improved during sessions. With the help of this insight, my supervisee observed how she and her client needed to go through the story of their therapy process so that they could then say good-bye.

After this insight, the male horse turned away and left. The supervisee came in contact with her feelings of separation and grieving because her client was leaving therapy, but she also felt that this was the right way to go. After some time, the horse came back and went directly to the supervisee (not to anyone else in the group nor to me). He stopped in front of the supervisee nearly touching her with his nose. They made deep and touching contact in silence. After some time passed in silence, she felt how deep the contact between her and her client was. She had not been aware of this before. She realized that she also needed to address this contact in the separation process. At the same time, she felt greater trust in the therapy process and in her client and that it was acceptable to finish therapy.

It is interesting how horses behave in different ways according to the presented supervision topic and the supervisee’s process. In one supervision session, a horse may be interactive and seeking contact with the supervisee, whereas in the next supervision, the horse might be fearful and withdrawn. In my experience, horses are sensitive beings, which is why they can be such good cotherapists/cosupervisors and so attuned.

In all the ways of working outdoors, I think that presence is the most important factor. Clients/supervisees usually slow down, find their natural rhythm, become more embodied, and are often just present in silence. Other and more-than-human beings model this to us and teach

us how to be present without performing actions and without many words. With this presence, we all come into better contact with ourselves and with other human and nonhuman beings. Clients/supervisees can then find new insights and answers to their questions, and they better trust their own process and the wisdom of nature, of which we, of course, are parts. My main task as therapist or supervisor is to hold the space and process, remain present and embodied, and invite the other and more-than-human being to interact with us.

### **Important Considerations in Outdoor Therapy and Supervision**

Outdoor therapy/supervision is not appropriate for all clients/supervisees. For example, one client, who had many past traumas, felt insecure and uncontained when outdoors. She could not relax, and we needed to move back indoors for therapy, where she felt secure and contained. Outdoors, the therapeutic container is anchored in the therapist's presence and in the natural environment (Brazier, 2018). My experience is the same. If I am present, grounded, and embodied, my clients and supervisees usually feel safe and are also more present, grounded, and embodied in the natural setting. However, for some clients/supervisees, that is not enough, and they also need a contained, stable place indoors. Some clients may feel overly intimate with the therapist while outdoors, which can be threatening and uncomfortable for them, or it may provoke fantasies and feed into transference issues (Brazier, 2018). Some people may feel anxiety when outdoors; they may not be used to spending time outdoors, or they may have experienced some trauma connected to nature or in nature, so natural settings may be triggering for them. We need to be attuned to the client's/supervisee's needs and use inquiry to find what way of working is best for them.

Our own contact with nature is crucial. We cannot guide others into contact with nature if we do not have this contact ourselves. It is crucial to incorporate regular nature practice into our routine, just as we prioritize having our own supervision. It is also important that we know the place to which we go for outdoor therapy/supervision, that we walk there regularly, and that we feel comfortable there. This ensures that we avoid getting lost and are aware of any potential dangers. We may need to also gain some additional knowledge about working outdoors because there are some differences from working indoors. When we work outdoors, we need to have the capacity to be with the uncertain and to be flexible, because we never know what will happen and how the process may go (e.g., there can be rapid changes in the weather).

We also need to be conscious about some possible difficulties when working outdoors (Brazier, 2018; Jordan, 2015):

- Confidentiality: We talk in advance with our clients/supervisees about the possibility of meeting other people outside. We agree on a way to respond in that situation, for example, we will step back from the main path and wait for other people to pass.
- Possible injuries and accidents: Before going outside, it is important to investigate potential hazards in the area, such as snakes, ticks, bears, falling trees, and slippery paths. Some clients/supervisees may have allergies and may need to bring medication. We talk with them in advance about these possible risks and how they can take care of themselves (clothes, shoes, protection against sun, ticks, medicine, etc.). We need to adapt the route according to our and our client's/supervisee's medical and physical conditions.
- Looser boundaries: Being together outdoors may feel informal, so it is important that we are in charge of boundaries. For example, timing outdoors is more difficult. It is important to be mindful of the time when selecting a route for the session, ensuring that we can return without being too late.
- The weather: Some clients/supervisees are open to going outdoors in cold or rainy weather, but



some are not, so it is good to talk about such issues in advance. My outdoor supervision group meets outdoors even in winter, but we walk a bit more than in summer and, of course, adapt our clothing according to the weather. Some clients/supervisees are not willing to go outdoors in more challenging weather conditions because such weather evokes anxiety in them, so at those times, we can work indoors.

### **The Ecological and Spiritual Dimension When Working With Nature**

In psychotherapy, we often forget to include ecological topics such as global warming, pollution, or the mistreatment of animals. We can inquire about the client's perception of these topics. When we, as psychotherapists, ignore these important ecological topics, we collude with the global denial of our ecological crisis. In my experience, I did not ask my clients about ecological areas because I did not know that this could be an important area of inquiry or that it is an appropriate one for therapy. However, in my ecotherapy training, I realized how important this aspect is.

Clients usually feel relieved when we open up ecological topics because they often do not dare to mention their feeling about the ecological crisis. They are perhaps afraid that we will ignore them or that we will be critical because they are used to these reactions from other people. For example, after my inquiry, a client opened up in therapy about her fears regarding the environment, pollution, the future of our planet, and social injustices. In other relationships, she experienced her fears being dismissed or labeled as exaggerations, so she was at first hesitant to talk about them in therapy. When I validated the importance of her emotions and thoughts, and also normalized them, she felt safe in our relationship to disclose and explore them wholly. She could be fully herself, and we also had genuine contact, because she did not need to hide a crucial part of herself from me.

When we work outdoors, often ecological topics come up naturally because the client connects more with nature and also with their ecological anxiety and/or grief. When we allow ourselves to fully feel the ecological crisis and open up to the pain of the world, we will feel grief, anger, and/or fear (Macy, 2009). I agree that if we want to be in full contact with ourselves and other people (which is the goal of integrative psychotherapy), we also need to be in full contact with our surroundings. This means that we feel compassion for the whole world and all beings on it. Taking responsibility for our contribution to pollution, the suffering of animals, or racism is a crucial part of maturation and full contact. Therefore, getting in touch with our ecoanxiety and ecogrief has an important part to play in the process of our integration. This full contact with our feelings can give us new energy, vitality, and ideas about how to change something and contribute to the healing of our planet. Macy and Brown (2014) beautifully described this process as "the work that reconnects" (p. 64).

Buzzell (2016) talked about ecotherapy Level 1 and Level 2, and we can use this awareness in ecosupervision as well. Level 1 means that we use nature and our connection to it to improve human mental and physical health, but we place humanity above the rest of nature. Level 2 focuses on a circle of reciprocal healing; there can be no true human health on a sick planet. Ecotherapy on Level 2 also focuses on the healing of the human-nature relationship. In integrative therapy and supervision in nature, we can work on both levels, and often they are both present in the same session. We include nature in therapy/supervision to gain new insights, and often we gain better emotional and physical health. Level 2 is also important so we are not just taking from the other/more-than-human beings. For example, we can ask for permission mentally before entering into the space of other-than-human beings. At the end of the interaction, we may express gratitude in our own way, for example, by thanking the being out loud or just silently asking the being if it needs something from us (e.g., water). One such way of giving back is collecting trash when we are outdoors (we can do it together with the client/supervisee) if we see any.

In animal-assisted therapy/supervision, we can let the animals participate if they want. For example, our horses are free during supervision, and they can come close and contact me or the supervisee or not; it is their choice. They can also withdraw and go away any time. If we include animals in therapy/supervision, it is important that we always consider how much time the animal can be included and that the animal is not becoming tired, hungry, overwhelmed, and so on.

When we work outdoors, there are many spiritual moments. In my experience in indoor therapy, spiritual moments are moments of meeting: between me and the client and inside the client when they meet themselves. In nature, these moments of meeting expand and may also include other and more-than-human beings. Being in nature enables us to understand that we are part of a process that is greater than ourselves (Jordan, 2015). We become “intraconnected” (Siegel, 2023), which means a sense of connectedness within a whole, and we let go of our individual separated self.

## Conclusion

Some authors have observed that nature has a place in relational integrative psychotherapy (Evans & Gilbert, 2005; Žvelc & Žvelc, 2021), and in this article I have presented different possibilities for integrating nature into integrative psychotherapy and supervision. Every therapist and supervisor can find their own way of integrating; there are limitless possibilities because nature offers limitless opportunities for insights and healing.

I want to end with some lines I wrote after a moment of meeting with our horse, which was quite traumatized from previous owners:

Under the moon, under the falling stars, we meet, her soul and mine.  
I open my heart and she enters into it; we are One.  
There is just Light, Love, and Sadness, because she had suffered so much.  
I apologize for the cruelty of our human race.  
Our souls connect.  
There is just Love, and we are One.

## Notes on Author

**Maruša Zaletel Tekavc** is a psychologist and certified international integrative psychotherapist, supervisor, and trainer (CIIPTS) based in Slovenia. She trained in equine-assisted therapy and ecotherapy and has worked in private practice since 2007. Maruša can be reached at [psihoterapija.mz@gmail.com](mailto:psihoterapija.mz@gmail.com).

## References

- Brazier, C. (2018). *Ecotherapy in practice: A Buddhist model*. Routledge.
- Buzzel, L. (2009). Asking different questions: Therapy for the human animal. In L. Buzzel & C. Chalquest (Eds.), *Ecotherapy: Healing with nature in mind* (pp. 46–54). Counterpoint.
- Buzzel, L. (2016). The many ecotherapies. In M. Jordan & J. Hinds (Eds.), *Ecotherapy: Theory, research & practice* (pp. 70–82). Palgrave.
- Buzzel, L., & Chalquest, C. (2009). Psyche and nature in a circle of healing. In L. Buzzel & C. Chalquest (Eds.), *Ecotherapy: Healing with nature in mind* (pp. 17–21). Counterpoint.
- Conn, L. K., & Conn, S. A. (2009). Opening to the other. In L. Buzzel & C. Chalquest (Eds.), *Ecotherapy: Healing with nature in mind* (pp. 111–115). Counterpoint.
- D’Amico, J. A. (2022, 17 June). The walking cure. *Institute for Integrative Therapy*. <http://www.integrativetherapy.com/en/articles.php?id=47>
- Erskine, R. G., & Moursund, J. P. (1988). *Integrative psychotherapy in action*. Sage.
- Erskine, R. G., Moursund, J. P., & Trautmann, R. L. (1999). *Beyond empathy. A therapy of contact-in-*

- relationship*. Brunner-Routledge.
- Erskine, R. G., & Trautmann, R. L. (1997). The process of an integrative psychotherapy. In R. G. Erskine, *Theories and methods of an integrative transactional analysis: A volume of selected articles* (pp. 79–95). TA Press.
- Evans, K. R., & Gilbert, M. C. (2005). *An introduction to integrative psychotherapy*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hallberg, L. (2018). *The clinical practice of equine-assisted therapy*. Routledge.
- Hinds, J., & Ranger, L. (2016). Equine-assisted therapy: Developing theoretical context. In M. Jordan & J. Hinds (Eds.), *Ecotherapy: Theory, research & practice* (pp. 187–198). Palgrave.
- Jordan, M. (2015). *Nature and therapy: Understanding counselling and psychotherapy in outdoor spaces*. Routledge.
- Macy, J. (2009). The greening of the self. In L. Buzzel & C. Chalquest (Eds.), *Ecotherapy: Healing with nature in mind* (pp. 238–245). Counterpoint.
- Macy, J., & Brown, M. (2014). *Coming back to life: The updated guide to the work that reconnects*. New Society Publishers.
- Marshall, H. (2016). A vital protocol-embodied-relational depth in nature-based psychotherapy. In M. Jordan & J. Hinds (Eds.), *Ecotherapy: Theory, research & practice* (pp. 148–161). Palgrave.
- Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2006). *Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy*. Norton.
- Porges, S. W. (2017). *The pocket guide to the polyvagal theory: The transformative power of feeling safe*. Norton.
- Rust, M. J. (2020). *Towards an ecopsychotherapy*. Confer Books.
- Siegel, D. J. (2023). *IntraConnected: Mwe (Me + We) as the integration of self, identity, and belonging*. Norton.
- Totton, N. (2011). *Wild therapy: Undomesticating inner and outer worlds*. PCCS Books.
- Williams, F. (2017). *The nature fix: Why nature makes us happier, healthier, and more creative*. Norton.
- Žvelc, G., & Žvelc, M. (2021). *Integrative psychotherapy: A mindfulness- and compassion-oriented approach*. Routledge.