

## ACCESSIBILITY AND NATURE CONNECTION

The aim here is to support Accessible Forest Practitioners to reflect and consider different accessibility challenges when thinking and designing meaningful nature connection experiences.

Nature connection should be a birthright for everyone but unfortunately, it is not. People with disabilities, elders, refugees, children raised in tech-saturated environments and people with other accessibility challenges often experience physical, emotional, cultural, or systemic barriers that prevent them from cultivating a relationship with the natural world.

Facilitating connection for these groups requires more than presence in nature. It involves taking into consideration important factors like framing the experiences from the lens of an accessibility mindset, cultivating deep listening and an attitude of flexibility and adaptation to diverse ways of sensing, feeling, and relating. Also very important is to create spaces that offer a sense of feeling welcome, belonging and agency.

### CHECK LIST OF ACCESSIBILITY KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS TO CULTIVATE:

Basic understanding of disabilities – visible and invisible disabilities

**Trauma-informed facilitation** – awareness of potential triggers, skilled in facilitating grounding techniques, and fluency in building a container that provides emotional safety

**Sensory accessibility** – Be present to the needs of participants with respect to adjustments to sound, light, textures, and pacing



**Mobility-inclusive choice of trails** – Make sure that the trails and spaces you are choosing for the experiences are adequate for the population you will be guiding

**Cultural humility** – Recognizing land, language, and nature may carry complex meanings for different cultures and for people with different lived experiences to yours.

**Flexible communication** – Be open and creative about using different forms of communication like gesture, visual and simplified language.

**Co-regulation skills** – Cultivate your own practice of staying calm and attuned in emotionally intense situations.

**Collaborating** – being open to listen and respectfully take council from caregivers, translators or support people for the population you will be guiding.

**Permission-based guiding** – Cultivate an attitude of openness where nothing is required and everything is optional.



## IMPORTANT CRITERIA DO REFLECT ON:

The role of the Accessible Forest Practitioner is to hold space where all participants feel invited, respected, and capable of connecting on their own terms.

- Who might feel unsafe, unwelcome, or uncertain here and why?
- Are my invitations accessible across language, literacy, culture, and ability?
- How do I hold silence, sound, and stillness in ways that support regulation and not overwhelm?
- Am I creating agency and choice, or unintentional pressure to conform or share?
- How do I make room for slowness, repetition, and nonverbal experience?



## SOME PRACTICAL TIPS:

- Offer seated, shaded, or sheltered options
- Use multisensory invitations: smell, sound, texture, temperature, movement
- Begin with simple noticing or gentle interaction with the natural environment
- Always ask: "Is this comfortable for you?" "Would you like to try another way?"
- Allow use of assistive devices, support persons, or rest pauses without judgment
- Use invitation language: "If you'd like...", "You're welcome to..."
- Avoid metaphors that may be confusing or culturally specific
- Frame nature as an ally



## REFLECT

- Who do I unconsciously design for when I guide?
- What assumptions do I carry about how nature connection "should" look like?
- How do I respond when someone needs something I hadn't anticipated?
- What does true inclusion feel like in my own body?
- Am I allowing enough spaciousness for each participant's unique way of relating?
- How does my own access to nature inform or limit my empathy and the spaciousness that I am able to offer participants in the containers that I am building?

