

## VULNERABLE GROUPS

The aim here is to support Accessible Forest Practitioners to reflect on what to consider when working with vulnerable groups in a natural environment and how to bring humility, safety, and inclusion into nature connection work.

Below you will find a set of reflective questions designed to support Accessible Forest Practitioners in cultivating greater awareness, empathy, and responsibility when facilitating for vulnerable groups in outdoor, nature-based settings.



### Understanding Vulnerability

What makes someone vulnerable in this context? Physically, emotionally, culturally, socially?

Do I understand that vulnerability can be visible or invisible, temporary or long-term?

Am I approaching participants as whole, capable beings, not as broken or fragile?

### Power, Privilege and Perspective

What privileges or assumptions do I carry into this space? About nature, health, safety, or healing?

Am I unconsciously guiding from my own lived experience, or making room for others' own lived experiences?

Who am I centering in my invitations and who might be left out or overwhelmed by them?

### Safety and Trauma Awareness

What does safety mean for each participant and

am I making room for multiple definitions of safety?

Could my language, pacing, or presence unintentionally trigger distress or discomfort?

Do I have the skills and support in place if someone becomes dysregulated, overwhelmed, or emotionally activated?

### Consent, Choice and Autonomy

Am I truly offering invitations, or are my words and tone subtly prescriptive or performative?

How do I honor a "no" or a non-response as a valid form of participation?

Am I prepared to follow the participant's lead, even if it changes my plan?

### Cultural Humility and Belonging

How might a participant's cultural background, language, or spiritual beliefs influence how they relate to nature?

Do I assume nature is inherently healing or safe for everyone or do I hold space for complex and painful histories with land or displacement?

Have I asked: "What would it take for you to feel welcome here?"

### Accessibility in Practice

Is my understanding of accessibility only physical, or does it include communication, emotional pacing, sensory needs, and social inclusion?

How might someone express connection without words, stillness, or eye contact and am I open to that?

Have I checked that basic needs are met (toilet access, hydration, rest spots, clear instructions)?

### Self-Awareness & Support

Am I grounded enough today to co-regulate, hold space, and be flexible?

Who supports me in this work? Where do I process my own emotions, fatigue, or doubts?

Am I open to feedback? Especially when it challenges my assumptions or intentions?

## 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?

