



Walk In Nature (WIN)

An In-Person Alternative to the Indoor Therapy Room

In these unprecedented times of a global pandemic **Walk In Nature (WIN)** is an in-person alternative to Indoor Therapy Room sessions that enables us to continue to meet in-person but with significantly reduced risks of contracting or passing on COVID-19.

Although cleaning routines, through-ventilation of the therapy room and visors may reduce the risk somewhat, they are not effective at preventing transmission of COVID-19 when in the same room for more than a few minutes with someone who has the virus and is contagious.

Reducing the number of in-person Indoor Therapy Room appointments is a measure being taken to protect all of us, and all the people we know and love, some of whom may have long-term conditions or otherwise may desperately need to avoid exposure to the virus.

For those who want in-person sessions, the first appointment offered will be online via Zoom to talk through any issues or concerns about **WIN** in more detail. Indoor Therapy Room sessions will be restricted and available only in exceptional circumstances. If you are an existing client and have concerns about moving to **WIN**, please contact me at info@louhillier.co.uk

There are significant benefits from having WIN sessions:



Being out in nature, under the expanse of the open sky can **reduce a sense of isolation**, it can **increase self-confidence** and a sense of **being part of** and **connected** to the wider world. It is also a much more natural and true-to-life way of interacting than traditional Indoor Therapy Room sessions.



Walking and talking at the same time naturally punctuates speech as **breathing, talking and walking become synchronized**. It assists in developing **a more relaxed rhythm and flow** that soothes the nervous system and making it less likely that speech will become 'ruminative', 'rushed' or 'pressured'.



Light House Psychology

Lou Hillier Chartered Psychologist



The **sights, sounds and smells** from being in the natural living world outdoors all **soothe and calm the mind and body**, making it feel **easier and safer to be open** and to share things that can be difficult to talk about in other more confined and artificial circumstances.



We get a **natural improvement to mood** from the release of **endorphins** just from being outside in nature, in the fresh air and under the expanse of the open sky. We all are innately attracted to, and want to interact with, other living things, whether plants or animals. This is partly why **being in nature is powerfully therapeutic all by itself**, as it meets a deep-rooted and most basic instinctive need in all of us. Research has shown that people recover faster and require less medication if they are able to experience and interact with nature regularly.



Stress and distress reduction is achieved through the beneficial effects of walking, which reduces stimulation levels and calms the sympathetic nervous system, helping us to, amongst other things, **think more clearly**. Walking calms us in two main ways, the movement assists with regulating and deepening breathing and the soothing rhythmic pattern of walking **promotes feelings of contentment and relaxation**, in a similar way to how rocking a crying baby back-and-forth soothes them.



Not being continuously in the eye-line but instead **being side-by-side** with your therapist, can make it feel more natural and **less threatening** than sitting in a room opposite them. Being side-by-side on neutral ground **reduces the power imbalance** and fosters a **sense of real equality** which is great for **self-esteem**. Additionally, less intense eye contact can assist you in **accessing information that is usually outside conscious awareness**, often called 'free associating', which can lead to **deeper insights**.



Walking in nature gives the opportunity to **practice mindfulness experientially** in the presence of your therapist who can guide you to understand more deeply and experience the **real-time benefits of being in the present moment** as you interact with the real world. This can be **the most valuable learning for improving psychological and emotional wellbeing**.



It is **more Covid-19 secure**, enabling meetings to take place in-person but with vastly **reduced risks**.



It is an accidental benefit but, none-the-less, **WIN** sessions count towards your **weekly exercise requirements** and will make a contribution **to improving your fitness and emotional wellbeing** as a result. For those who don't exercise as often as they would like to, **WIN** sessions give a significant **boost to your motivation** to exercise more.



Main concerns about WIN sessions:

Isn't a Therapist's Office the only safe place?



It can initially feel too unusual and not safe-enough to consider talking about and sharing personal material whilst walking outside.

This is an understandable concern because we have been conditioned to believe (incorrectly) that therapy should only take place in the confined space of a therapist's office. It may take some time and experience to undo this conditioning, but the reality is that being outside is just as safe; it is the quality of the therapeutic relationship with your therapist that makes you feel safe, not whether you are indoors or outdoors.

What if people overhear us or see me upset?



Fears about being overheard or seen to be upset are also understandable. To alleviate these concerns, the primary walking route is the North Dorset Trailway in Spetisbury, see images at the end of this document. It is secluded, it is not overlooked by, nor in hearing distance of, any houses or gardens and it is quiet in terms of there being few other people on the Trailway.

On occasions when another person is encountered, I will generally pause talking and you can either pause or continue talking, it is up to you. I would recommend pausing if the material is sensitive until the person is beyond hearing distance.

It should be remembered that other people have their minds on what is going on in their own lives, they will be on their way somewhere with their own plans and issues to think about. Not only are they very unlikely to get close enough, or for long enough, to be able to notice our emotions, they are even less likely to draw any conclusions if they do - they will be absorbed in their own life and focusing on their own concerns. Similarly, if they were to hear a few words as we pass by, these will be meaningless to them with no context or reference points from only a tiny snippet of conversation, combined with the fact their attention will be on themselves, so your privacy and confidentiality will not be compromised during **WIN** sessions.

If you have any other concerns, please send me an email to: info@louhillier.co.uk



Preparation for each WIN session



Check the weather the day before and be prepared by wearing/bringing suitable clothes: an extra layer you can take off, rain coat, hat, walking shoes/boots, sunglasses – whatever you will need to feel comfortable.



Bring a soft drink, a small snack and a fully charged mobile phone with, preferably, the “what3words” GPS location App installed in case of emergencies, see below.



Bring any medications or health-care preparations you might need, e.g. inhalers, sunscreen, EpiPen etc.



Bring a bag to put all your bits and pieces in and include something waterproof to sit on should we choose to take a break from walking.



The route along the North Dorset Trailway is flat, apart from the steps and assisted wheelchair access points, and there is parking availability indicated on the images at the end of this document.



The Trailway is a wide, secluded path, which is used by local people for walking, jogging, exercising dogs and sometimes cycling. It is etiquette to acknowledge people as you pass with a “hello” or similar greeting.



If you have any concerns about dogs, please discuss this with me in advance. As a precaution, I take a walking stick just in case there is a need to shoo away any animals.



It is unlikely, but always possible, that we may see someone during the walk that either you know or I know. In such a situation, it is recommended to give the standard “hello” acknowledgment without slowing down. If the person looks like they might want to ‘chat’, we continue to walk past without slowing down and either you or I would give a short explanation such as: “We are on a tight time schedule so can’t stop!”



Bring some tissues in case you become upset. If you are concerned about others seeing you upset, remember that if we do pass anyone on the walk, this will be fleeting and they will not be close-enough or for long enough to ‘read’ our emotions. Additionally, as already mentioned, people are too busy thinking about their own concerns and plans for the day so they will be very unlikely to even notice, let alone draw any conclusions.



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As far as possible, we will abide by the UK Government's social distancing guidelines. It will still be necessary to observe periods of isolation if experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and/or a positive test and sessions would need to be moved to online.



The appointments will be made via Outlook email in the same way they are for all other appointments.



It will remain your decision whether we have a **WIN** session outdoors. If you want to change to an online Zoom session, please give at least one hour's notice by email in advance to info@louhillier.co.uk. See Treatment Agreement for full details about changing appointments and cancellations.



I am happy to walk in all but the most extreme weather. If you think there is a risk from some extreme weather condition (or if I do), this should be raised via email with enough time to make alternative arrangements for an online session instead. See the Treatment Agreement for full details about changing appointments and cancellations.



We will walk at your pace, or we may sit on the ground for a while or on a bench at Spetisbury Station Project or any combination, depending on what feels right for you on the day. The entire session can be spent sitting down or none of it, it is entirely up to you.



We will never be far away from the rest room facilities at Rosemead Cottage, if they are required.



For safety reasons, **WIN** is usually only available after sunrise and before sunset as the Trailway is unlit. After heavy rain the assisted wheelchair access incline may be too slippery to safely navigate.



Finally, in the extremely unlikely event of either of us requiring urgent assistance, the "what3words" GPS location App mentioned above will enable us to give precise location details to emergency services. Each of us should also carry in writing the name and telephone number of the person to inform in the event of an emergency.

If you have any questions that are not answered in this document, please let me know by emailing me at: info@louhillier.co.uk



