



Letters to Nature Kids

September, 2024 ∞ Number 20



Late afternoon, LBJ National Grasslands

Dear Nature Kids,

I've been thinking of kids who are feeling fear; what they can do about it, and what all of us must do about it.

The kids who are bullied, and those who worry about others' frightening behavior.

Those of you who wonder if the future will be OK. What are we doing to the natural systems that keep us going, like the climate, air, and water? The places that make us feel good when we are there?

I think about kids who have experienced a school shooting, and the great many others who hear about shootings and do drills in school to practice how they might get through it. The girl who said that no matter if police are present, now there is no place that feels safe.

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That's a lot to talk about, isn't it? Some adults, because they care about you, would say it's too much to talk about (should I write about these things in this letter?). They are afraid that putting it into words, out in the open, might make you – and them – think about it even more. They would take the fear away if they could.

I would take it away, too, if I could. But I think that if you are worried about things, keeping quiet about them doesn't make the fear go away. I'd like for you to think positively and hopefully, but there are helpful as well as unhelpful ways to think positively. More about that later.

This is a letter to nature kids, by someone who writes about *nature*, right? Isn't this a little – or even a lot – off-topic? Well, anything that concerns any kids is a concern for me, and nature offers some things that can help with fear. And before I retired, I worked as a psychological associate, so there's that as well.

How can nature help? When researchers studied people spending time in nature, they found that trees, water, and places in nature often help with worry, anxiety, and the negative thoughts that can get stuck in our heads. Our bodies usually tend to relax and can work better when surrounded by nature.

One thing about nature is that it may be a good, safe place to talk with someone. That might be a friend, a sibling, or a parent, someone who knows how to listen to whatever you have to say. For many people it is easier to say it on a walk in the woods.



A checkered setwing dragonfly at Tandy Hills Natural Area

Also, it is good to have a refuge from worry. I'm thinking about the girl who said that no place felt safe – is that how it is for you, a little bit? You might plan to spend some time at a creek or in the woods and decide beforehand that it will be a place that is "off-limits" to worry.

Once you are there, those worry thoughts might try to get in. That's just what worry thoughts do, but try not to get "stuck" in those thoughts and just come back to noticing trees, birds, water, or the other things that are around you.

Sometimes people say you should look on the positive side and be strong. They tell you, "You'll be alright." I think that being strong is a good thing to be, but even strong people sometimes do not feel strong. Not at all. And they should not have to hide that.

There will be a time when that person can feel strong again (or even feel it for the first time). Being able to honestly say how we feel helps us get there.



Prairie grasses, meadow pink (flowers), greenbrier, and other plants, LBJ National Grasslands

The sort of person I want to be around is the one who can recognize that right now I'm not alright, especially if they are willing to sit there with me while I'm not alright. Together maybe we can figure out what would make it a little better. Maybe just being together makes it a little better.

Meanwhile, I hope you know that lots of adults are working on trying to make things better. They don't make the news every day, but they are there. We do what we can to create communities in which we can take care of each other better. A world in which we do better at taking care of the planet.

You can help, too. You do that through kindness, understanding, and paying attention to the good things around you and within you.

✍ Michael



Caddo Lake

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