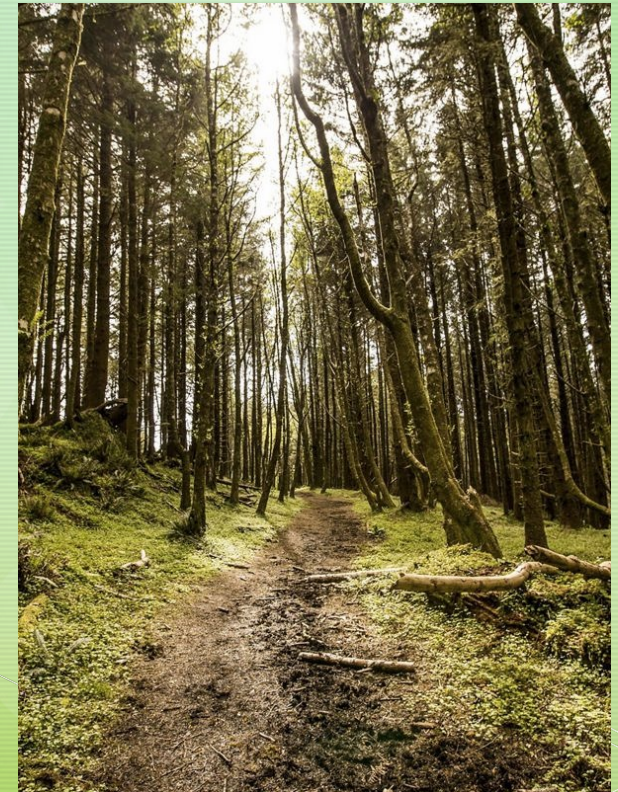
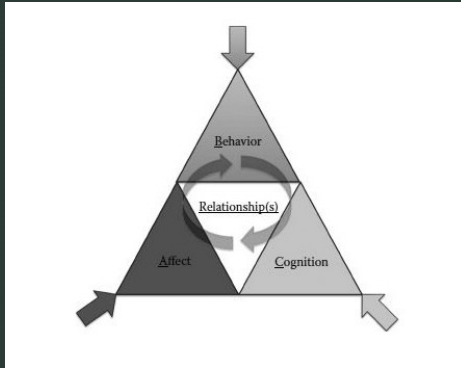


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Adventure Therapy with
Veterans: Building
Resilience and
Connection Outdoors





Defining Adventure Therapy

- AT is the prescriptive use of outdoor experiences by licensed mental health professionals that kinesthetically engages clients on affective, behavioral, cognitive levels within the context of safe relationships (See: ABC-R model in Gass, Gillis, & Russell, 2020).



Why Adventure Therapy with Veterans?



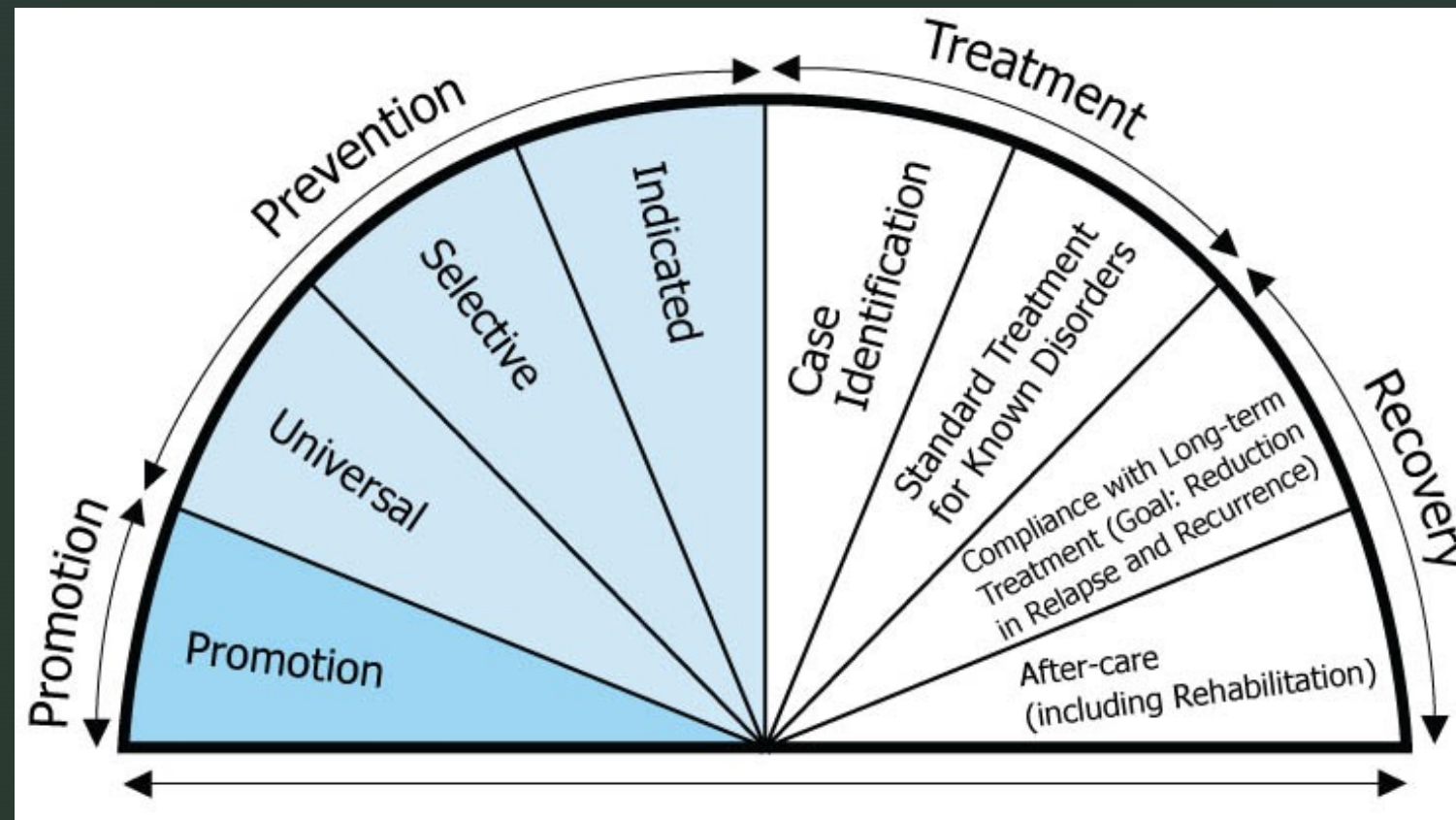
- AT with veterans can lead to resilience, wellbeing, peer support, enhanced help-seeking behaviors and can aid in the trauma recovery process.

Therapeutic Components of the Intervention

- Nature
- Camaraderie
- Story-telling and story making to reframe the mission
- Psychoeducation
- Personal skills training
- Mindfulness activities



Continuum of Care Approach



Two Types of AT: Being and Doing

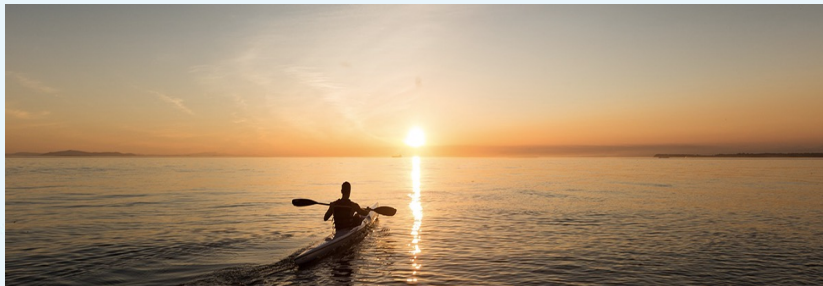


Being in Nature



Doing in Nature

INTEGRATING DOING AND BEING IN NATURE



Russell, K. C., Gillis, H. L. L., & Heppner, W. (2016). An examination of mindfulness-based experiences through adventure in substance use disorder treatment for young adult males: A pilot study. *Mindfulness*, 7(2), 320–328. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0441-4>



3 Primary Sources of Data: Theory, Research and Practice

- Client wisdom
- Practitioner wisdom
- Empirical data





Blake's Story: Part I

- Joining
- Deployment
- War
- Coming home from war
- Addiction and Mental Health challenges



- One simple exposure to nature changed my life for the better



Blake's Story, Part II: Starting Over-- Nature Heals



VetRecOutdoors

- Local 501c3 that focuses on our work in Hays and soon Travis county.
- Consistently getting in nature through hikes, fly fishing outings, and campouts on both public and private land.
- We will also begin training outdoor leaders this fall to expand operations.



Practitioner Wisdom



Empirical Data

- Enhances wellbeing and peer support: Bird's (2015) program evaluation and scoping review of the literature (2015).
- Short-term psychosocial improvements in depression, PTSD, stress, and quality of life for veterans with PTSD: Greer & Vin-Raviv's (2019) systematic review.
- Improvements in psychological wellbeing and decreases in PTSD symptoms with veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder: Wheeler, et al's (2020) RCT.
- Clinically meaningful improvement in PTSD symptom severity (PTSD Checklist—Military Version, Wilcoxon signed rank $Z = 5.25$, $p = .01$) and in depressive symptoms ((Major Depression Inventory, Wilcoxon signed rank $Z = 5.205$, $p = .04$): Rogers, et al (2021) feasibility study.

Implications for Practice

- Promote equity, access, and safety in nature for veterans in nearby nature and parklands.
- Public land-management agencies to expand their role as institutional leaders in support of veterans' health by facilitating the use of public lands as therapeutic landscapes.
- Enhance new and existing relations with outdoor program for veterans providers, health providers, and other government agencies.
- Public land agencies should expand benefits to veterans and spur broader societal benefits.



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Want to get involved?

