A Sensory Walk in Nature  
Experiencing the world in new ways  
By Lisa Scanlon

Imagine a hike with your family at Robert Treman State Park. Listen to the hum of the bees in the tree next as you walk up the hill along the gorge trail. Bask in the smell of the pines. Gaze at the clear, blue water rushing through the gorge. Turn toward the feel of the sunshine as it peeks through the trees. Enjoy the taste of your picnic lunch, well-rewarded as you sit in the mist near Lucifer Falls, talking about all the steps you just climbed. A family hike at Treman State Park is full of exciting events for each of your five senses.

Robert Treman is one of many places in Ithaca where you can revel in the outdoors with your family. Ithaca’s natural parks give us many options to go outside and play. Whether it’s enjoying the Ithaca Farmer’s Market on a busy Saturday or heading out for a swim at Buttermilk Falls on a hot summer day, there is somewhere outside for every family to enjoy. There are also ways to play together in the urban areas of town, simply by walking in your own neighborhood.

Getting outdoors and enjoying your natural surroundings is more than just fun; it’s beneficial. Walking through the woods can elevate your mood and alleviate symptoms of depression or anxiety. Being in nature areas can also help clear your mind to reflect on new ideas, solutions, and more. Enjoying the outdoors together can increase your family bond and provide you with many memorable experiences. Being outside in any area, whether an urban park or a remote hiking space, allows all of us to take a breath, let go of stress, and allow our senses to take over.

If you’re looking for ways to enjoy nature and engage all your senses, check out the options listed here. These activities are virtually free and most are in your neighborhood.

Look at That! Take a “color walk” by looking for all the colors of the rainbow in nature.

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Ithaca Child  Finger Lakes Family Fun 2018
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Point out the colors to each other, and see who can complete the rainbow first. Which color do you see the most, or the least of? If the sky is clear, or the sky (especially on a sunset walk), you’ll be amazed at all the colors that nature has created just for you.

Try an “alphabet hike.” Spot something that starts with each letter of the alphabet on your walk—perhaps on the way in which nature creates each letter—the curl of roots making a lovely S curve on the forest floor. What’s That Smell?
Who makes the best small detective? Test it out using different herbs from your garden, or from local farmers’ markets.

Do you notice any smells in the woods? The sweet smell of springtime blooms; pine needles, the wet earth after a summer rain? See who can recognize the most scents.
Take a walk downtown and see if you can figure out which restaurants are baking bread or cooking with garlic. Perhaps you’ll be drawn in by the scent of pastries and cooling bread by you.

Mmm...Tasty!
Who in your family has the sharpest taste buds? Set up a blind taste test. Try different spices and seasonings—what flavor can you guess them all? Try it with other natural foods, too—honey, apples, and so many more.

Get cooking! Create a recipe together. Pack a picnic basket when you go to the zoo or the farmers’ market, or even the woods. Think about what you eat. Here’s a great way to get children interested in eating more vegetables and fruits, and less junk food.

Explore More!
For more information about the benefits of getting outside, and more ideas on how to engage your senses, check out Weathering, www.lissacunda-

leis.04.wixsite.com/outdoor-senses. Explore the idea pages. Check out the ideas and the sense camp ideas. You’ll find outdoor games, family challenges, and a lot of fun activities for daily, night-time or each seasonal.

Map Making—important go-outside! We live in a region with beautiful trees and shrubs nearby, as well as a very green “town.” Have fun exploring together!

Ithaca Child is pleased to welcome this contribution by Lisa Scalan.

Depression
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- Loss of interest or pleasure in all or most activities
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Feelings of fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, with or without a plan or attempt

Types of depression
There are a number of classifications, or types, of depression. The following are some of the more common:

- Major depressive disorder
- Seasonal affective disorder
- Premenstrual dysphoric disorder
- Bipolar disorder

The precise cause of depression is unknown. However, there are a number of factors known to likely contribute to the condition. According to the Mayo Clinic, those with depression experience physical changes in their brains. Studying these changes may eventually help researchers determine the exact cause of the illness.

Depression is known to be genetic yet higher incidence among blood relatives.

Two different chemicals called neurotransmitters also play a role: they affect the neurotransmitters involved in both depression and happiness, and play a significant role in both the cause and treatment of depression.

Hormonal changes can also play a role in depression, particularly for women. During pregnancy and for several months after childbirth, women are especially vulnerable. Changes during menstrual cycles and menopause can also trigger depression.

Treatments
In some cases, depression results from an underlying medical condition, such as diabetes, heart disease, or low vitamin B levels. For this reason, it’s essential to visit your primary care physician for blood work to rule out other causes. If an underlying medical condition is diagnosed, treatment for that condition is likely all that’s needed to cure the depression.

If medical causes have been ruled out, then it’s best to consult with a psychiatrist. Although primary care physicians can treat depression, they don’t have the specialized training in diagnosing the various forms of depression, and experience in treating depression. Psychiatrists can help identify which medications will work best for a particular patient, based on a variety of factors. In fact, depending on the type of depression and the specific set of symptoms, some people may benefit from antidepressants, mood stabilizers, or anxiety medications, while others may benefit from talk therapy with a psychologist or psychiatrist.

In addition to medication, many psychiatrists recommend cognitive therapy with a psychologist or behavioral therapist. This can be helpful both in coping with the symptoms of depression and addressing any underlying trauma.

For those with SAD, sitting under a light therapy box is often recommended. Light therapy boxes are usually safe and effective. Contact your doctor or your pharmacist for more information about your depression management.

Kimberly Blaker is the author of the STEM book, Horoscopes: Reality or Trickery? She has suffered from, and been in treatment for various forms of depression for the past 22 years.