

LICENSING CONSIDERATIONS FOR GUIDES

It is essential to check the specific laws and requirements of the jurisdictions where you plan to conduct Nature Therapy Walks. Please contact a licensed attorney and/or your state's relevant licensing bodies to determine whether or not your services require any forms of licensing. The information provided in this document does not constitute legal advice.

WHAT GUIDES DO

The central role of a Nature Therapy Guide is to use their skills and knowledge to cultivate safe, enjoyable, and mutually respectful nature experiences for participants. In doing so, Guides may share information on local natural history and interpret natural features. Guides may support participants in processing spiritual experiences by contextualizing relationships to nature through the lens of participants' own faith and spiritual beliefs. Guides may instruct participants in general meditations or activities for the purposes of pleasure and recreation only.

If a participant asks for advice regarding a medical or mental health concern, the Guide should refer the participant to a licensed health professional or, in case of emergencies, the Guide should immediately contact emergency services. If a participant desires to venture in hazardous or potentially hazardous or remote or backcountry areas, or if a participant desires an intensive or length or multi-day hiking trip, the Guide should refer the participant to a qualified and (if applicable) licensed outfitter or outdoor guide.

Guides may summarize current research on nature therapy so long as specific wellness claims are avoided. Guides should emphasize that any positive outcomes a participant experiences as a result of the Guide's services is an ancillary side effect of spending time in nature and is not due to any specific action or recommendation by the Guide.

Key competencies for Nature Therapy Walks Guides are listed in the program syllabus.

WHAT GUIDES DO NOT

Guides do not address or claim to address specific wellness concerns and do not provide or claim to provide diagnosis, treatment, or advice regarding medical, health, mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders. Guides do not make specific wellness claims, nor should they suggest that any specific wellness outcomes are likely to occur in an individual.

LICENSING FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

All U.S. states require individuals to obtain licensure before providing diagnosis or treatment of mental, emotional, behavioral, or medical disorders. The Nature Therapy Walks Guide program does not provide any training in such clinical skills, nor does it meet the licensing requirements thereof for any jurisdiction.

To protect themselves and their participants, unless otherwise appropriately licensed, Guides should never offer to diagnose, prescribe, or treat any medical or mental health concern.

Nature therapy, in its accepted definition, simply involves safe and enjoyable contact with nature. The incorporation of the word “therapy” in “nature therapy” is a non-clinical sense as seen in colloquial terms like “beach therapy.” Guides should never in any way suggest to participants that nature therapy involves any clinical practice or specific wellness goals or outcomes.

To protect themselves and their participants, Guides should ensure that the ways they advertise their services does not use protected titles (unless authorized by the relevant licensing bodies). Protected titles in many states include Professional Counsellor, Mental Health Counselor, Marriage and Family Therapist, Psychologist, Psychotherapist, and Social Worker, among others.

At the time of writing, to the author’s knowledge, no U.S. state specifically regulates the terms “nature therapy” or “nature therapist,” but some jurisdictions may regulate the usage of the title “therapist” either by itself or in combination with other terms.

Guides should refer individuals seeking care for medical or mental disorders or concerns to qualified and appropriately licensed healthcare professionals.

LICENSING FOR OUTDOOR GUIDES

While many jurisdictions do not regulate nature guides, several jurisdictions do regulate “outdoor guides” to include those who lead others on hiking excursions. States that regulate outdoor guides include New York, Oregon, Idaho, and Maine and may include others.

The typical Nature Therapy Walk as presented in this course consists of relatively short and physically nonintensive walks on reasonably safe and well-traveled front country trails, but jurisdictions that regulate outdoor guides may interpret such an activity as requiring licensure.

This Nature Therapy Walks Guide program is not designed to provide training in the more intensive and hazardous outdoor recreational activities (such as backpacking) traditionally associated with outdoor guides, nor is it designed to meet the licensing requirements thereof for any jurisdiction.

Guides should refer individuals interested in potentially hazardous outdoor recreational activities to qualified and (if applicable) licensed professionals.

BUSINESS LICENSE OR REGISTRATION

Some jurisdictions may require a business license or registration if you accept compensation for your services.

PARK PERMITS

Certain parks require a permit for guiding activities that occur within their properties. Guides should always confirm with properties beforehand on whether or not special permission or permitting is required.