



# Wonder Series

## The Science of Awe



## What is awe?

Awe is an emotion. You have most likely felt it, but you might have a hard time describing the experience. Awe can give us pause with its beauty, inspiration, or mystery. Researchers Keltner & Haidt describe awe as a “feeling of being in the presence of something vast and greater than the self or that exceeds the self’s ordinary experiences and knowledge structures” (2003). It might even give you goosebumps (like when you listen to an amazing piece of music)! Think about that moment when you see the first lightning bug of the season. Despite knowing the science behind their glow (special chemicals in their abdomens and precise oxygen control), it never loses its magic. It’s a reminder that summer is on its way, evoking memories of carefree days spent playing outside with friends (maybe even catching a lightning bug or two)! As summer begins to wind down what activities or events give you a sense of wonder?



## Why is awe important?

Awe is good for us. Research suggests that experiencing awe can make us happier, healthier, more humble, and more connected to those around us (Allen, 2018).

In this new Wonder Series from Rock Island County’s 4-H Metro Youth Development Educator, Elaine Kaple, we will explore the science of awe and how it benefits youth and families. Ideas for hands on activities that can help inspire moments of awe will be included! With topics on mindfulness, travel, music, art, science, nature, and more. This is a great way to tend to your social emotional health this summer and beyond!



**Illinois Extension**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES  
University of Illinois/U.S. Department of agriculture/Local Extension  
Councils Cooperating University of Illinois Extension provides equal  
opportunities in programs and employment

#### References:

- Allen, S. (2018, September 26). *Eight Reasons Why Awe Makes Your Life Better*. Greater Good Science Center. [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/eight\\_reasons\\_why\\_awe\\_makes\\_your\\_life\\_better](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/eight_reasons_why_awe_makes_your_life_better).
- Keltner, D., & Haidt, J. (2003). Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion. *Cognition and Emotion*, 17(2), 297–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930302297>