

Yoga for Children

Overview

Yoga is for every... body! It's often assumed that one must already be flexible and physically fit to participate in yoga. One of the many great aspects of yoga is that it can be modified to support any age, goal and ability level. Its inclusive nature and ability to be practiced almost anywhere and with very little equipment makes it a great fit for classrooms, play spaces, recess, before and after school programs, and even at home.



But, what exactly is yoga? Yoga is an activity that includes breathing techniques, yoga poses and mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of focusing your attention on the present moment. In yoga, participants often use breathing and yoga poses to help the mind calm. Yoga has the ability to help kids *and* adults be more active, flexible and mindful for an increase on overall well-being!

Take Action

Yoga creates a safe, modifiable and inclusive environment for creative, physical movement allowing all participants to be successful. Here are some simple take action steps to get started!

- **Share the benefits.** Yoga and mindfulness practices have a positive impact on kids and learning. Did you know that yoga can help to increase academic

readiness? The physical movement and mindful exercises associated with yoga can help to prepare the brain for learning!

- Yoga has shown to enhance focus, concentration, comprehension and memory.
- The poses help to improve physical fitness by improving posture, balance, coordination, and body awareness.
- Yoga can also help to create an atmosphere of confidence, enthusiasm and non-competitiveness where everyone can succeed.
- It provides opportunities for reflection, patience and insight, reducing impulsivity and supports social and emotional learning.
- **Create space and choose a time.** Designate a predetermined time for a practice and prepare the classroom environment.
 - Yoga can be incorporated at any time during the school day. To make it easier, consider the goals of the practice and then pick a specific time of the day to incorporate the routines on a regular basis.
 - Start with a short 3-5 minute session. Keeping the session short helps the students to stay actively engaged and ready to learn. Add more time as the students become comfortable with a more advanced practice.
 - Consider turning the lights down, moving items off of desks and tables, playing music, and rearranging any classroom furniture.
- **Use helpful tools!** Facilitators do not need to create yoga-based lessons and activities on their own. There are many amazing and useful tools, books and resources to help you along your journey.
 - Consider introducing students and staff to yoga through age-appropriate books and stories. When participants know what to expect, the transition to new activities can be less confusing while creating an element of excitement.
 - Consider using music, yoga deck cards, books and stories, coloring pages, and yoga props.
- **Plan your lessons with intention.** When creating a yoga-based lesson plan, teachers may want to consider the following:
 - **The learning objective of the activity.** What do you want the students to know and be able to do? For students to be calmed down,

energized, or focused? Let the postures you choose reflect the goals and flow of the lesson plan.

- **Visualization and mindfulness activities.** Through visualization, we invite students to use their imagination. This can help students to release tension and become calmer.
 - Dedicating a few minutes of your yoga lesson to breath work. You may have heard the saying 'Take a deep breath.' While this is wonderful suggestion based on simple wisdom, it can be harder than you think when you are feeling a little challenged – it's one of the main reasons why we practice it in yoga!
- **Appropriate yoga postures.** Consider the age and developmental level of students as well as other constraints and opportunities.
- **Peer-peer relationship building opportunities.** Brain boosting and creative, community-building games. Yoga doesn't have to always be an individual practice. Consider partner activities, small and larger group games and team-building exercises.

Yoga Poses

While there are many yoga postures to choose from, here are six simple postures that are appropriate for any age or ability level and can be performed without any special equipment or props. Pair these poses with a positive affirmation to help children build confidence and resiliency. Use these in the classroom or at home as a quick and easy practice to stay centered and inspired. Remember to breathe deeply and hold each pose for 3-6 full breaths.

| *I am strong.*

Mountain Pose: Stand with your arms relaxed at your sides with your palms faced outward in a gesture of openness. Stand tall, like a balloon is lifting you up.

| *I am brave.*

Warrior Pose: From mountain pose, step one foot back, slightly angling it outwards, bend your front knee, and bring your arms straight up towards the sky, and look up. Switch sides.

| *I am graceful.*

Tree Pose: From mountain pose, transfer your weight to one side. Place the bottom of your left foot on the inside of your right thigh or shin (not the knee) and hold with your palms together at your chest. Switch sides.

| *I am confident.*

Cobra Pose: Lie on your tummy, lift your head and shoulders off ground, place palms flat next to your shoulders, and open your chest.

| *I am proud of who I am.*

Cat-Cow Pose: On your hands and knees, tuck your chin into your chest and round your back. Then look up, open your chest, and arch your back. Repeat the Cat-Cow sequence a few times.

| *I appreciate myself.*

Bridge Pose: Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the ground. Rest your arms down alongside your body, tuck your chin into your chest, and lift up your hips to create a bridge.

Social Emotional Health Highlights

Activities such as these help children explore...

Self-Management and Self-Awareness: Practicing yoga and mindfulness with children supports them in identifying feelings and emotions while learning to manage

their reactions and behaviors in healthy ways that work best for them. Stretching or practicing yoga, helps children to re-center attention on the present moment and begin to build capacity and self-regulation within themselves.

Tips



Practice and model the movements. As with any activity, the facilitator should practice the movements and activities ahead of time. Remember that we are all “learners” and that there is no perfect yoga pose. When appropriate, teachers are also encouraged to share their own limitations with students as a way to demonstrate the inclusive nature of yoga!



Keep it simple - when starting, choose 2-3 beginner postures or activities that allow students to feel successful with a new activity.



Emphasize breathing. When starting, remind everyone to breathe comfortably throughout the practice.



Empower students. Be the captain of the ship but offer choices and modification. Get involved and be part of the fun.



Encourage students to explore how their body moves and to only move their body in a way that feels good and comfortable. Try to find various modifications to determine the right variation of the pose to fit his or her body. If the pose invokes any sensations of pain or significant discomfort, encourage the student to stop the pose entirely.



Appreciate that different students have different capabilities and needs. Be patient, provide encouragement, and offer modifications for all movements so that every student can be successful.



Have fun! The intention is the keep it simple and enjoyable. Use your imagination. Encourage the students to explore their body movements and to connect with the joyful feelings associated with physical activity and breathe awareness.

For more activities and ideas like this one, be sure to [sign up for our news and updates](#). And if you like what you see, please [donate to support our work](#) creating more ways to help build a healthier future for kids.

Resources

[Wellness and Social Emotional Health Resources \(Breathe for Change\)](#)

[Distance Learning Yoga Sequence \(Michelle Auld: Brooklyn Center Community Schools\)](#)

[Yoga Ed Library - YouTube \(Yoga Ed\)](#)

[Cosmic Kids Yoga - YouTube \(Cosmic Kids\)](#)

[imHealthy Mental Health Lessons \(Michael Phelps Foundation\)](#)

Related Activities

Exploring Imagination: Play Based Yoga

Use the imagination to soar off on new adventures while stretching the body and calming the mind!

Stepping Into the Wild: Creative Outdoor Learning

Creating an outdoor classroom is a fun and imaginative way to engage students in learning about nature and the world around us.

Classroom Physical Activity Breaks

Physical activity doesn't have to be in a recess or PE setting to be effective.

Mindfulness: Journaling, Breathing and More!

Practicing mindfulness helps us to reset, refocus and energize for what's ahead!