

Teaching Yoga for Children

Yoga for children can be both a group and individual activity, and in both cases, it involves non-competitive exercise. This alone may be one of the reasons that yoga helps reduce stress for youth populations. Yoga gets children moving and helps them build self efficacy, trust and compassion using physical movement and breathing and relaxation techniques.

More and more, yoga is being integrated into youth education in recreation centers, schools, after school programs or in yoga studios. There are many types of yoga taught to children, including energizing, therapeutic and restorative. Combining or choosing just one type of yoga to teach children in a group facilitates social and personal growth, learning and information processing. For example, a study indicated that children experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety benefited from more vigorous and active yoga classes perhaps because this style of yoga helped them dissipate built up restlessness. Children with attention disorders benefited most from a mixed yoga class of poses, breathing and meditation techniques (Kaley-Isley et al. 2010).

As a yoga instructor working with children you can spread the word that yoga is an ancient practice developed to integrate the body, mind and breath. In the ancient yoga texts, yoga is practiced individually or with a guru. Today, yoga classes in a group setting offer children a supportive environment where the instructor can individually provide modifications and options for the various poses, breath work and meditations.

For children, practicing in a group setting, similar to other group activities, can be healing when practiced in a non-competitive and non-judgmental atmosphere. A group class can be very therapeutic but also offer a sense of community and belonging to a child participating in class, especially if she/he participates regularly. However, in the short-run, just like trying anything new, children new to yoga may not get all the poses, or breath and relaxation techniques on the first try. The most beneficial and successful class for children is one that offers open learning and encourages children to have fun trying out the different movements and practices.