

Breathe Kids Children's Yoga

By Amy Bevan

Returning home from a yoga class, a young mother is greeted by her seven-year-old son. He asks her what poses she did in class, to which she responds, "Warrior pose. Do you know what that is?" The boy replies, "Warrior I, II or III?"

As yoga becomes more popular around the world, perhaps the fastest-growing group of yogis are children. Thanks to the yoga community, as well as parents, teachers, child care providers, health care professionals, and youth program leaders, many children are learning skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Yoga develops a healthy mind and body, promoting the use of all the senses, fuels the body with energy, and releases tension so that children feel good. Improvements in strength, confidence, self-awareness, concentration, balance, creativity, respect, self-control and relaxation may all be attributed to the regular practice of yoga.

A 2003 California State University study showed a link between yoga and better learning, improved behaviors and higher self-esteem. Since then, dozens of additional studies have shown that children who practice yoga and mindfulness are better able to regulate their emotions, manage stress and calm themselves. They may also choose better foods to eat and engage in more physical activity than children who do not practice yoga. The studies also illustrate that centered, calm and focused children learn more easily, have better social skills and, in general, are much happier kids.

Of course, children's yoga looks a little different than adult yoga. To keep children engaged, the presentation of yoga is made playful, fun and age-appropriate, often including music and song combined with movement, as well as an imitation of nature, animals and objects familiar to them. Because children are naturally playful and imaginative, yoga comes easy, and is a lot of fun!

ChildLight Yoga is a nationwide children's yoga program that started right here in Southern Maine. After seeing her own kids' interest in their mom's yoga practice, founder Lisa Flynn learned all she could about children's yoga, and began offering the area's first yoga instruction for kids.

As studio classes took off, Flynn expanded her program, developing the ChildLight Yoga Teacher Training, now offered nationwide to anyone with a passion for yoga and a love of kids.

"Our company's goal has always been to spread the gift of yoga with as many children as possible," said Flynn.



ChildLight Yoga's Yoga4Classrooms™ and mobile enrichment programs were both designed with this goal in mind. Many support and understand the benefits of yoga for a child, but it is not always easy for parents to take advantage of studio class offerings, and some children don't feel comfortable in a group setting away from familiar faces. While mobile enrichment offers on-site yoga classes for pre-schools, child care and activity centers, Yoga4Classrooms™ is a low-cost, fun and effective tool for teachers to use with their students for a peaceful and productive classroom.

More and more schools are recognizing the effectiveness of taking a few minutes here and there throughout the day for yoga breaks — right in the classroom. A few deep breaths, physical movement or stretching to reconnect the body and mind, and moments for quiet introspection, are often a quick and easy way to 'reset' the nervous system to calm and focus. Children are brought into the present moment, a place where they can pause, truly hear and feel, reflect and *learn*.

Though many teachers recognize yoga's potential benefits in the classroom, many are not practicing yogis and therefore may initially feel uncomfortable leading yoga breaks. That is where a trained yoga instructor with a child focused skill-set can become quite valuable. As children's yoga programs become increasingly popular in schools and throughout communities nationwide, the marketplace is filled with programs, products and publications, created by knowledgeable and passionate people who share a love of yoga and children. Kids are the ultimate beneficiaries of the networking and support which has connected many of these businesses and individuals, as each program offers something unique to share with the community. "The connection is inspiring," says Flynn. "It's what yoga is all about."

If you'd like to learn more about ChildLight Yoga's classes or teacher trainings, or to speak to someone about bringing yoga to your school or center, please call 603-781-3323, or visit www.childlightyoga.com. Additional inspiration and information may be found on www.thekidsyogaresource.com.

Amy Bevan is a freelance writer specializing in wellness topics, particularly those related to yoga, children and parenting, as well as customer relations, marketing, and current events. Her current role as a correspondent covering local people, politics and events for the region's largest daily newspaper, *The Portsmouth Herald*, provides her community with timely and informative articles both in print and online. Amy resides in South Berwick, ME with her husband and two young children.



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