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## Yoga: It's Not Just for Adults Anymore

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SOUTH BERWICK — Lisa Flynn, founder of ChildLight Yoga, knew that she had found what she is supposed to be doing when her kids joined in on her personal yoga routine one day.

"My kids would crawl in and started copying what I was doing," she said in an interview last Friday.

Realizing not only how much they enjoyed it, but that it seemed to improve their mood and focus as well, she began to look for classes taught for children. When she didn't find any, she went into training herself. Now, a year later, Flynn, a former marketing director, teaches classes to kids of all ages.

But yoga, for children?

"There is a ton of research done on the benefits of yoga for children," Flynn said. "I am very grateful for the community support I have received. The open-mindedness has been refreshing."

"I was really nervous about doing it," Carrie Tyler, owner of the yoga studio where Flynn holds her classes, said when asked about beginning children's yoga classes.

"We had tried it before in the past, and it was so new people weren't receptive," Tyler said. "But Lisa brought so much enthusiasm I couldn't say no."

"The proof of the benefits is that the parents keep signing their kids up."

Those benefits, recognized by child development experts, include such things as developing strength and flexibility; improved balance and coordination; boost confidence and self-esteem.

"It's not competitive," Flynn said. "You can be side-by-side with other kids, but it's about focusing on yourself and doing the best you can do."

Yoga can also alleviate sleep difficulties. Flynn gave the example of certain "magic poses," one of which have been known to calm colicky babies instantly.

Yoga can improve mental concentration, focus and attention – notably effective for attention deficit hyperactive disorder or ADHD.

"I've found that the kids who need it the most are the ones who take to it the fastest. It's like someone telling them it's okay to slow down," Flynn said.

It also encourages creative expression and imagination, aids digestion, and helps children learn respect for self and others.

"It's not just about poses and breathing," Flynn explained. "It's about the yoga philosophy – being good to yourself."

Children can also develop personal tools for managing anxiety and stress.

"One of my students told me the other day that she couldn't sleep so she did her ocean breath and then she couldn't even remember falling asleep," Flynn said. Parents have also told her that their children have slept better through the night, without nightmares, since beginning the classes.

Third time class attendant Amy DeAngelis, has already noticed a change in her 12-week-old daughter, Ella.

"She's already calmer, and she falls asleep easier," DeAngelis said after an Itsy Bitsy Yoga class Tuesday morning, with Ella fast asleep in her arms.

Improved body image and self-acceptance, and promotion of a healthy, physically fit lifestyle are other benefits of children's yoga.

From babies to teens, there is a program for kids of all ages. "There isn't an age group that isn't covered by one of our classes," Flynn said.

Baby Itsy Bitsy Yoga is a calming and nurturing practice full of ways to enhance bonding and make babies happier and more comfortable. It's for babies three weeks old to almost crawling with a parent.

Tot Itsy Bitsy Yoga is for babies that are crawling to 24 months old and is a fun-loving supportive and active yoga practice filled with dozens of itsy bitsy yoga poses just for tots.

Family yoga classes invite one or more children age two to five with a parent to play with balance, flexibility and motion through stories, games and music.

Four to six year olds can take Kids Yoga I, and Kids Yoga II is for seven to nine year olds.

Flynn has also visited schools to show teachers the benefits of yoga in the classroom.

ChildLight Yoga programs are currently in session at preschools, elementary and middle school after-school programs, and as part of education enrichment programs around the Maine and New Hampshire Seacoast area.

A 2003 California State University study shows a link between yoga and better learning, improved behaviors, and higher self-esteem. Students quickly learn to use yoga as a tool, not just to increase physical fitness, but also to manage their feelings and behaviors, and to create a mental state ready for learning and taking tests.

"Many teachers say that they don't have time to teach yoga in their class," Flynn said. "But when they incorporate yoga regularly they've found that it balances out because they spend less time disciplining and have more time for academics because the kids are calmer. When you're calm you can concentrate and learn more easily."

One school that has embraced Flynn's teachings is Central School in South Berwick. The school will implement a tri-fold yoga program in September, including: a tools for teachers workshop; a 38-week physical education curriculum for all first graders; and on-site before and after school yoga classes for the teachers.

Flynn will also teach the tools workshop in October for all school teachers who want to use yoga in their dealings with children.

Flynn teaches classes mainly from the Dover Yoga Studio, in Dover, New Hampshire.

ChildLight Yoga also offers summer camps for four-and-a-half year olds beginning July 10 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.; and seven to nine year olds beginning July 24 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

"The feedback has been amazing," Flynn said. "The things we do are so simple, but I'm always so amazed at how much they take from it."

"I just want to reach and spread the gifts of yoga to as many children as possible."

For more information about the ChildLight Yoga, visit the web site at [www.childlightyoga.com](http://www.childlightyoga.com)