

Yoga to empower your children grow ethically balanced

Annapurna Singh *

Today, with many families where both parents go to work, taking care of children has become a big challenge. Here is some guidance for such parents in particular and for all parents in general to take care of their children's physical and emotional health in the growing age - Editor

Yoga nurtures, regulates and enables one to realize the self. Besides it helps to find balance between body and mind to keep in perfect tune. Originated from India and perfected by ancient Rishis in scientific format the art of yoga is being practiced by millions around the globe today as a means to stay fit and to cope with modern day stress. These days there is an increasing interest in the use of yoga for children to calm the mind and enhance wellbeing.

Yoga when taught and presented at the level of a child's comprehension provides innumerable benefits relieving the child of school pressures, ceaseless lessons, video games, malls and competitive sports. Yoga at an early age encourages self-esteem and body

awareness with a physical activity that's noncompetitive, uplifting and wholesome. It aids in fostering cooperation, compassion, love and generosity as opposed to resentment, violence and hatred. It is undoubtedly one of the greatest gifts to give our children. They can navigate through life's challenges with ease; remain rational and dispassionate through the practice of yoga. Anecdotal reports from parents, caretakers and teachers, suggest that children, who learn yoga early on, are physically healthier and mentally balanced.

Published research has shown that children as young as seven years of age can improve in attention, concentration and coordination after learning yoga. Evidence suggests that yoga is associated with improved

* The author is a scientific writer, fitness enthusiast and a yoga teacher. Email: anasingh.12@gmail.com

cardiovascular status, physical functioning, and behaviour in children. Yoga plays a role in the management of chronic illness. In a study of 25 participants aged 11 to 18 years (20 girls and 5 boys) with irritable bowel syndrome, practicing yoga daily for four weeks, the subjects reported less functional disability, decreased emotion-focused avoidance, and decreased anxiety compared to children who don't practice yoga. (Kuttner et al., 2006).

Yoga affects the functioning of the pre-frontal cortex, including the ability to plan and execute complex functions. After one month of 75 minutes of daily yoga, breathing, internal cleansing practices, meditation, devotional songs, and relaxation, 10 to 13 year-old girls decreased the time required to execute a mental test (Manjunath & Telles, 2001). The authors suggested that yoga increased blood flow to the frontal lobe, which resulted in the rapid realization and correction of errors. Children derive myriad benefits from yoga. Physically, it enhances their flexibility, strength, coordination and body awareness. In addition, their concentration, range of motion, flexibility and postural stability improves with tranquility and emotional control being natural concomitants. Yoga helps children exercise, play, connect more deeply with the inner self, and develop an intimate relationship with the natural world that surrounds them. It enables them to discover their latent potencies.

One of the hallmarks of yoga is that the practice has been continuously adapted to the culture and the individual needs of the practitioner. Yoga with children offers many possibilities to exchange wisdom, share good times, and lay the foundation for a lifelong

practice that will continue to deepen. Yoga instructors for kids need to be facilitators and not demanding teachers by structuring classes on an inter-disciplinary approach to co-create methods of learning. Sessions for kids may integrate storytelling, games, music, language, and other arts into a complete curriculum that engages the "whole child." All that's needed is a little flexibility on the teacher's part to customize their approach and method of instruction. Common components necessary when teaching yoga to children or young adolescents include the environment and atmosphere, parts of a yoga session, and recommended length of the class. When children imitate the movements and sounds of nature, they have a chance to get inside another being and imagine taking on its qualities. When they assume the pose of the lion (Simhasana) for example, they experience not only the power and behaviour of the lion, but also their own sense of power: when to be aggressive, when to retreat. The physical movements introduce kids to yoga's true meaning: union, expression, and honour for oneself and one's role in the circle of life.

Special objects may be used to symbolize a special time for relaxation. This may be a yoga mat, pillow used exclusively for yoga and relaxation, special clothing or a blanket. The postures (asanas) may be classified as standing, seated, balance, twists, supine, forward bends, backbends, and inversions. The inversions include postures in which the legs are above the level of the heart. For example, a shoulder stand involves balancing on the upper shoulders while the legs and back are raised in the air. The postures may be held to

the count of 10, but the individual's body response needs to be the guide, and children need to be reminded that they should not force a position or be in pain. During the postures, children need to be reminded to inhale and exhale the breath in relation to movement. Each posture should be followed by one to two deep breaths. After postures that are more strenuous or difficult, a short relaxation period of approximately 15 seconds on the floor is recommended.

Some programs for children provide pictures of the object for the child to imitate. For example, the mountain pose emphasizes feeling strong and steady. The tree encourages balance. Younger children may need to look at the pictures and try to make their bodies look like the pose in the pictures while following the teacher's instructions.

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During the movements, the child needs to breathe slowly and deeply through the nose. The breath should not be forced or held. The postures may be in any order, but there needs to be a concentration on balance. For example, if the child bends forward, the next posture should involve bending backward. The postures should not hurt, and children need to be reminded to feel their body during a posture and only go as far as the body feels comfortable.

The relaxation or meditation period occurs after the completion of the postures. This may include laying on the floor supine

with the eyes shut and concentrating on breathing, a sound, or the repetition of a phrase. A sound or phrase may be repeated to help children increase their concentration on breathing. Children may be encouraged to visualize a picture and hold it in their mind.

There may also be a guided visualization, such as imagining lying on a cloud and floating through the sky. After the relaxation period, there is a slow reawakening to normal activity by stretching or wiggling fingers and toes.

If they are lying down, they will be instructed to roll over to one side before slowly arising. This may last under three minutes for children between 3 and 6 years of age, and longer in older children. As children get older, this period will increase, but this depends on the individual child.

The frequency of practice is ideally four to six times a week to best enjoy the cumulative benefits of yoga, but at least once a week is recommended. The length of a yoga class depends on the attention span and growing age of the students.

There are many reports highlighting the therapeutic benefits of yoga for children with Down syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder/Pervasive Developmental Delay, Cerebral Palsy, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Sensory Processing Disorders. With correct instruction, yoga supplements traditional therapeutic interventions to improve fine and gross motor strength, breath and communication skills.

Potential benefits of yoga encourage parents to consider it for their children and if parents are yoga teachers or yoga practitioners

themselves, it aids in nurturing their child spiritually. Besides it strengthens the parent-child relationship by experiencing the salubrious way of life. When children learn spiritual values at an age when they are impressionable and naive, yoga steers them in the right direction. They grow up to be strong and competent individuals with a higher purpose, meandering through all odds of life.

For children, yoga should be a fun way to learn how to relax their minds and exercise their bodies. It instills balance, stillness, flexibility, focus, peace, grace, connection,

health and wellbeing. Most importantly, a yoga class that provides a loving, responsive and creative environment allows children to uncover their own truths.

SPECIAL NOTE TO PARENTS: Initiate your child under a practicing yoga master before starting home practice that can be guided by the parents, who at least for the sake of the child may attend the training under the yoga master to get a firsthand knowledge of the subject in practice

– Editor.

