

5 KEYS TO HELPING KIDS FIND CALM & JOY

Presented by the *Yoga Life Center, Youth Yoga Division*

Give Them Foundation For Lifelong Health

1. Give Them Tools

Stability that lasts a lifetime takes work, personal internal work. Instead of doing more for them, help them find tools and a mindset that will stay with them always.

2. Foster Gratefulness

A tangible gratefulness practice, when structured well can foster a positive outlook.

3. Encourage Reflection

True resiliency means we can let go and move forward. Active time to reflect can help them move past the past and into the present, where living really occurs.

4. Let Go a Little

Mistakes are often our biggest teacher. Within reason, allowing exploration, even if it results in failure, helps growth.

5. Be An Example

You want them to take care of themselves and know how to put their own health first. Teach them by example, and find a structured proactive health program for yourself.



Empowerment Through Yoga

As parents we all have at least one thing in common. We want our children to be happy and healthy, now and throughout their lifetime. From doctors visits to school programs to extracurricular activities we try to find ways for them to stay focused and learn more so they can maintain physical and mental health. But we often overlook that the best gift we can give is one that can become their own tool to use when needed. Yoga is a discipline specifically designed to improve both physical and mental health. Science has shown that it reduces stress and improves focus. Almost any yoga practitioner would tell you that they wish they would have started a practice earlier because it would have helped them through so many ups and downs in their lives. Understanding and embodying a practice at an early age can give our kids their own tools to start strengthening their resiliency and stability through all of their life challenges. Knowing you have the inner stability and strength to face major life challenges empowers you with a sense of focus and calm, and also reduces stress. While we suggest a child join a class led by a yoga teacher in a supportive community to learn a yoga practice, there are several mindfulness practices that can be maintained off the mat that will also help foster calm and focus. Here we've given you 5 key routines you can start at home.

5 Ways to Help Them Find Calm and Joy

It's easy to say we would like our children to approach life with a calm confidence and an ability to find joy in their every day. Helping them accomplish this, however, is quite another task. In yoga belief, true happiness doesn't occur in an instant or because of an event or happening. It is cultivated with consistent work over time that creates a positive outlook and a resilient physical and mental state. Here are some yoga-based ways to help foster a lifelong foundation of calm and joy:

1. **Give Them Tools:** There is so much information in today's world. You can find anything online, we are bombarded by it everywhere we look. It's easy to read, to think, to absorb words that come from somewhere else. But our biggest teacher is experiential learning. You can read about how to roller skate all day long, but until you put your feet inside the skates and start rolling you really don't start understanding how to navigate your path. We will learn best how to face challenges by being in a place of challenge. We will learn best how to calm our bodies and minds by practicing physical calming techniques, and we will learn how to calm and focus by setting aside time dedicated to finding calm and focus. These are the methods of a traditional, structured yoga practice. Find a class for them that focuses on a regimented yoga routine and not just arts and crafts. Allow them to feel challenged in a safe environment on their mat. Let them get instruction on how to breathe, and allow them to experience how their breath can overcome their thoughts in a meditation practice. You can find classes at your local yoga studio or even online. Look for a truly rich program that focuses on traditional yoga methods, especially if your child is 8 years or older. Until you are ready for a full class you can start with some basic postures at home. We've given you a bonus page of 3 postures for better sleep and 3 postures for mental focus so your child has a place to begin.
2. **Foster Gratefulness:** Gratefulness creates positivity. Positivity reduces stress and increases confidence. Keeping a gratefulness journal is more than an exercise in being thankful. It is a project that becomes a catalyst for a shift to a more positive underlying mindset, and the steps are very simple. Find a small journal for your child. Each night have them date it and write down three things they are grateful for that day. It is important that the items be particular to the day. Stay away from things like "my health" that are too general. Focusing on concrete items from the day means that during the next day they will be more likely to notice positive actions. Over time this positive awareness grows in a powerful way. We've added a bonus simple weekly chart for both gratefulness practice and reflection journaling at the end of this article so you can help your child get started.
3. **Encourage Reflection:** Simple consistent written reflection helps us stay present during more of our time because we have a set aside time to reflect. Staying present means to be focused on what is happening at that time and not thinking about the past or the future, and is also where we find true calm. If we take time to reflect on our day at the end of the day it is less likely to stay with us the next day and the day after. And consistent reflection tends to put our mind at ease even before we journal because we know that we will have time to revisit what we need to at the end of the day, just as we have each day. Before your child completes his gratefulness list for the day have him write a couple sentences about his day. If he doesn't know what to write start with some prompts like: what happened that made you happy today, what happened that made you sad today, what is the thing you remember most about the day, did anything make you worried today, did anything make you excited today. The writing does not have to be long. Just a sentence or two will be enough if done consistently.
4. **Let Go A Little:** Okay, so here's one that might just be a little more work for you than for your child. Especially in today's society, we all want to see our children succeed. We want to brag about how they scored the most

soccer goals or got the best part in the play. If they are playing a sport or an instrument we want them to have the best instruction so they can be a top-notch player. And we always try to see any obstacles in the way and remove them so that the path to success is easiest and cleanest. But it's important to remember that choice is one of the biggest responsibility teachers and failure is one of the biggest general teachers. To the extent possible for your family, let go of having to lead them in every way. The idea isn't to find failure, the idea is for them to understand the consequences of their actions, to get real feedback about what works and what does not, and to use that feedback to inform them about their next action. When failure truly belongs to them they will reflect on it, and when success truly belongs to them they will also rejoice in it. There is a fine line between guidance and giving responsibility that only you can know for your child, but the more aware you are of that line, where you are creating it, and its impact, the more you can make choices to slowly allow more responsibility and feedback for them. And, when it comes to long-term impact, understanding how to learn independently and approach challenge with determined acceptance is a much more beneficial tool than the ability to just try to rack up as much success as possible.

5. **Be An Example:** Without a doubt our children learn by watching. If you want them to put their health first, to dedicate to finding calmness in their lives, to really believe in themselves for the long-term, then you have to do the same. Show them that finding a structure to take care of yourself is valuable by doing it also. Many of these same practices are part of an adult yoga practice and any of them will work in the same way for you. You may also have other items on your list that help you take care of yourself both physically and mentally and taking the time to complete them will set an example. As adults it's usually consistency and dedication that hinder us from a routine proactive health approach, because we have so many other people to take care of, so many tasks to complete. But if you don't take care of your health it's others who will eventually have to help you, you won't have the energy or ability to play with your kids on the playground or you may be too stressed to take the time to sit down and play a board game with them. In the end, having a physical and mental health routine for yourself provides years of lasting benefit to you, your family, and society in general, because you will be able to give your time and energy in a focused, calm way more often and for longer.

Remember, you're planting seeds. Seeds take time and love to grow. Yoga practices and concepts are not meant to be a quick fix (although you can often see some results fairly quickly). These tools are lifetime tools that will keep you and your children focused and resilient. All of us will face challenges, all of us will have good and bad days, all of us will struggle at times and all of us will find freedom at times. Resiliency is the ability to flow through these ups and downs in life knowing that they will always come and go, and that you are strong and stable enough to weather all of them with confidence and humility. These are the tools yoga can give to your children over time that will stay

with them throughout their life. If you want to learn more about the traditional forms of yoga, it's underlying intentions, and how to actually begin the practice, please visit our Yoga Life Center Online Institute or join us for a class or workshop to experience our in-studio learning program.



Some references for you regarding yoga benefits for children:

1. Imagine if Your Younger Self Had This Explainer on Feeling Your Feels, Yoga Journal, Mallika Chopra, 12/1/2019, www.yogajournal.com/poses/kids-breathing-practice-emotional-

health/

2. The Benefits of Yoga for Kids, Parents, Visi Tilak, 8/5/2014, <https://www.parents.com/fun/sports/exercise/the-benefits-of-yoga-for-kids/>
3. The Benefits of Yoga in Children, Journal of Integrative Medicine, Chandra Nanthakumar, January 2018, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2095496417300171>
4. Yoga for Children and Young People's Mental Health and Well-Being: Research Review and Reflections on the Mental Health Potentials of Yoga, Front Psychiatry, Ingunn Hagan and Usha S. Nayar, April 2, 2014, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3980104/>

At Yoga Life Center we believe that our children can practice yoga according to traditional yoga principals sometime around 8 years of age (depending upon the child). Our Youth Yoga Program is structured and progressive to teach postures, breathing and focus in a structure similar to that of our adult classes but in a youth community. For children under 8 or those who aren't quite ready for this structure, we have monthly workshops for kids that incorporate aspects like creative movement and music listening to build some similar skills. Teenagers 15 and older are welcome to join in any of our regularly scheduled classes.



Bonus Content - Weekly Journaling Page

Reflection & Gratefulness

Day	Daily Reflection Journaling	Gratefulness
Monday		1. 2. 3.
Tuesday		1. 2. 3.
Wednesday		1. 2. 3.
Thursday		1. 2. 3.
Friday		1. 2. 3.
Saturday		1. 2. 3.
Sunday		1. 2. 3.

Bonus Content - Yoga Practice Page

Asanas for Better Sleep

Upside-Down Relaxation (Legs Up the Wall) (1-2 mins)

1. Sit facing a wall with your hips about 6 inches away.
2. Lie back and extend your legs up the wall.
3. If this is too intense a stretch for the back of your legs, slide your hips farther away from the wall. If it's not enough, scoot closer.
4. Let your arms rest by your sides, palms facing up, and breathe gently, feeling the stretch in the backs of your legs.

Childs Pose (5-7 mins)

1. Sit up comfortably on your heels.
2. Roll your torso forward, bringing your forehead to rest on the floor in front of you.
3. Lower your chest as close to your knees as you comfortably can, extending your arms in front or at your sides.
4. Hold the pose and breathe.

Corpse Pose (5-7 mins)

1. Lie down on your back.
2. Let your feet naturally fall out to either side.
3. Bring your arms alongside your body, but slightly separated from your body, and turn your palms to face upwards.
4. Relax your whole body, including your face. Let your body feel heavy.
5. Let your breath occur naturally.
6. To come out, first begin to deepen your breath. Then move your fingers and toes, awakening your body.
7. Bring your knees into your chest and roll over to one side.
8. Slowly rise up out of the pose.



Legs Up Wall



Child's Pose



Corpse Pose



Forward Fold



Triangle Pose



Downward Dog

Asanas for Mental Strength

Forward Fold

1. Begin standing straight, feet under hips.
2. Inhale and raise your arms overhead.
3. Exhale, bend at your hips, bring your arms forward and down until you touch the floor. It's okay to bend your knees.
4. Either grasp your ankles or just leave your hands on the floor and breathe several times.
5. Repeat 3-5 times. On your last bend, hold the position for 5 or 10 breaths.
6. To come out of the pose, curl upward as if pulling yourself up one vertebrae at a time, leaving the head hanging down until last.

Triangle Pose

1. Start with your feet apart. Turn your left foot 90 degrees to the left and your right foot about 45 degrees inward.
2. Inhale and raise both arms so they are parallel to the ground. Turn your head to the left to look over your left arm toward your fingers.
3. Take a deep breath out and stretch outward to the left, tilting the left hip down and the right hip up. Let your left hand reach down to rest against the inside of your calf, while your right arm points straight up.
4. Turn and look up at you right hand. Breathe deeply for several breaths.
5. Inhale and straighten up. Exhale, lowering your arms. Repeat on other side.

Downward Dog

1. Start on your hands and knees.
2. Your middle fingers should be parallel and pointing straight ahead. Roll your elbows so that your inner elbow is facing forward.
3. Inhale and curl your toes under, as if getting ready to stand on your toes.
4. Exhale and straighten your legs. Push upward with your arms and tuck your chin. It's okay to bend your knees and to keep your heels raised. Your weight should be evenly distributed between your hands and feet.
5. Hold the position for a few breaths. Slowly come down and exhale.
6. Repeat several times, synchronizing with your breath - up on an exhale, and down on an inhale.