Yoga Just For Kids

"The elastic heart of youth cannot be compressed into one constrained shape long at a time." - Mark Twain - The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

The best way to keep young is to remain mindful of your youth. The best way to keep youth mindful is to share yoga with them.

This page is intended to give you some ideas how to share yoga with your kids. I think the best way to get your kid started is to increase your home practice with them. Buy them their own mat, roll it out next to yours and invite them to join you each time you practice. Yoga provides a great opportunity for parents and children to connect and bond on an energetic (nonverbal, yet intimate) level. Your yoga practice with them will also model self-respect and self-love, two very important qualities for happy and healthy beings.

Beside the physical benefits of yoga ... it can help improve a child's ability to focus, concentrate, listen. It enhances their self-confidence and is a gentle introduction to self-discipline. Yoga, when practiced regularly, helps children growth in new and positive directions. As children moo and meow enthusiastically while flexing their spines in cat and cow pose, all that observe just can't help but regain an appreciation for the enjoyment that comes from a playful yoga practice. Children can be our greatest gurus.

Children ... Let us Begin

Begin by closing your eyes, and taking a few deep "ahh" breaths (inhaling through the nose, exhaling through the mouth saying the word "ahh"). Smile and now start with sitting.

A Gentle Sitting Pose

Sit with your legs crossed, "chris-cross apple sauced", and rest your hands anywhere it is comfortable on your legs. Please listen to the rhythm of your breath allowing it to sing to your inner body sweet songs of peace. Try to be still.



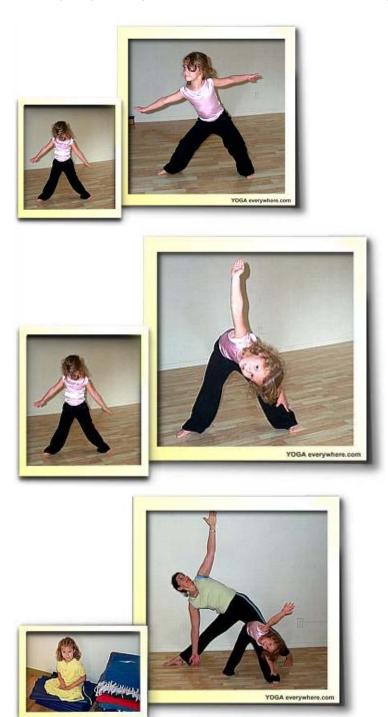
Tree Pose

Start standing tall with both feet hip width. Invite you child to feel like a tree, tall and deeply rooted. Ask them to rest one foot on the inside of their opposite thigh. Kids love this pose! Hold this position for a few seconds.



Triangle Pose

All standing poses are balance poses too. Stand with your feet wide. Try to turn one foot out towards ninety degrees and slide the other foot back a bit. Feel balanced on your legs. Spread your arms wide away from your heart. Reach your hand down over the leg that is a a ninety degree angle. The other arm reaches to the sky. Then do the other side.



Cat Pose

Start on all fours, with your knees aligned under your hips and your hands flat on the floor underneath your shoulders. Inhale deeply. As you exhale, round your back and gently tuck your chin toward your chest rotating your hips towards your belly. Hold this position for a few seconds. The mantra is meow.



Cow Pose

Next, inhale as you raise your head up toward the ceiling and curve your spine down toward the floor rotating your hips away from your belly. The mantra is moo. Alternate between rounding and curving five times.

Start on all fours, with your knees aligned under your hips and your hands flat on the floor underneath your shoulders. Inhale deeply. As you exhale, press your hips up and away from your hands. At the same time press your heels down. Stretch your back and the back of your legs like a dog.



Cobra Pose

Lie on your jelly belly and put your hands slightly in front of your shoulders. Reaching your legs back, reach your chest forward and away from the floor. As you exhale, let our your "great hiss" for the world to hear. Hold this position for a few seconds. Repeat 3 times.



Childs Pose

Child's pose can instill a sense of tranquility in youthful yoga practitioners and assist the wandering mind to be quiet. Come to your hands and knees and lower your bum to your heels resting your fore head on the floor.



Relaxation Pose - StarFish Pose

Gently relax lying on a yoga mat, blanket or even the carpet, stretch out on your back as if you were a Starfish. Close your eyes, let your body go limp as a starfish laying on the beach.

Imagine you are lying on the beach. The warm sand feels so comfortable on your back. Feel the sun warming up your whole body.

As you breathe in, listen! It sounds like the waves coming up to the shore. As you breathe out, imagine the waves going back out to sea. Keep breathing with the waves for another moment or two.

Enjoy the relaxed feeling in your own body that is lying so limply and undisturbed. Feel whole and comfortable in your resting body.

A Quick Word on Teaching Yoga to Children

Yoga practice is a way of life. Do not get attached or expect you kid to have the same relationship with yoga as you do. Start simply, and build gradually. Each child begins at their current level of fitness, ability and curiosity which can be remarkably different from one year to the next. By making yoga "fun" ... each child progresses at their own pace. Select exercises that are gentle and let children make any adaptations needed to to avoid pain or discomfort.



It's real important practicing yoga at this age to keep the instruction short and playful. How many five year old know there left from right foot? For preschoolers, no more than ten to fifteen minutes is a good start. Add more time as they get used to it and develop their ability to stay focused. For

elementary-age children ... twenty minutes of yoga is plenty of time including a few minutes of deep relaxation.

And when the postures are done and deep relaxation is called for ... as adults we can too often get frustrated with children that get antsy or fidget after only two or three minutes of a resting pose. Forgetting that children anticipate every moment ... ready to get on with the next adventure and excited on what is yet to come. Sure it's great to stay in the moment, but I think one of the things we learn from children is a great law of physics ... objects in motion tend to stay in motion. Motion, movement and energy ... the youth in us all.

Caution on Advanced Postures for Children

Guidelines when teaching children yoga: As children progress in their study of yoga they will naturally explore more difficult postures that their parents or older children attempt. Rather that a strict "no" or a chastisement that often saps the spontaneity and fun right out of any endeavor - stay close - providing a "safety net" of sorts - ready to assist, protect or catch them as they learn to develop balance. Remember, falling out of poses is a great sign of enthusiasm just not so hard as to hurt yourself or others practicing nearby.

