



SPREADING JOY One Child at a Time

by Lani Rosen-Gallagher

"I wish we could do yoga every day."

Those are words uttered by many of the children I teach weekly. Having taught kids yoga for over 10 years, that is precisely why I do it. Yoga's benefits include: flexibility; strength; breath awareness; and, stress reduction. The list goes on and on.

Some parents have told me their children chant "Om Shanti Shanti Peace" during potty training. Teachers have mentioned how yoga students will show friends how to do tree pose. One parent said his six year-old stretched him out with sun salutations before he ran a race. All of this amazes me. Kids are sponges, soaking up information. Let's teach them how to help themselves and others feel empowered, strong, confident, and kind.

Consider introducing yoga at birth.

Yoga helps stimulate natural reflexes, basic motor skills, and vision. As children grow, yoga classes work with their natural developmental stages.

For example:

Newborn to nearly crawling: Classes enhance parent-baby bonding and improve sleep. Babies can do yoga on their tummies, backs, or in a caregiver's arms.

Crawling to 2 years: These children explore physically and do sitting, standing, walking, and jumping poses.

2 to 3 year-olds: Kids love trying new things with their bodies, such as standing on one foot. They are naturally curious and appreciate stories, games,

and using their imagination.

4 to 5 year-olds: Children have more developed motor skills. They enjoy running and hopping on one foot. Pretend-play becomes more involved and descriptive.

6 to 7 year-olds: They tend to like inventing games with simple rules. More advanced poses can be taught, like crow and challenging balance poses.

8 year-olds: This age group bounces between child-like and adult yoga classes.

Among yoga's benefits?

YOGA ENHANCES CREATIVITY/ IMAGINATION WHILE CREATING DEEPER MIND-BODY CONNECTION.

Children love to use their imaginations, and when given opportunities, take ideas and run with them. For example, we take trips to beaches, zoos, or jungles using only our minds. Various yoga poses emulate making lunch, riding bikes or cars, and seeing sights. At the beach, warrior two becomes surfing; backs are strengthened by swimming, and bodies are massaged while applying sun block. Children learn to make the mind-body connection by envisioning these activities and doing what feels good.

YOGA ENABLES CHILDREN TO DEAL WITH PRESSURES.

Breathing exercises and relaxation techniques can enable children to feel powerful. They are tools to increase calm and self-soothe in stressful situations. Learning proper yoga breathing is a life-long gift. Yoga students learn to find their breath and use it in interactions, such as dealing with sibling rivalry, coping with homework anxiety, or in daily social situations. There might be teachers talking loudly, kids screaming outside, bright lights, or other distractions, but once relaxation routine starts, children melt onto their mats and let these go.

YOGA ENCOURAGES CHILDREN TO DEVELOP SELF-ESTEEM AND BODY AWARENESS.

Yoga can establish youngsters on a path of self-awareness, helping them move through adolescence, teen years, and into adulthood. It promotes greater consciousness about their bodies. Once they make a connection with what they eat and how their bodies feel, they realize the value of treating their bodies with respect and nurturance. Yoga principles such as metta (loving-kindness) and ahimsa (non-harming) then begin to make sense in how they care for themselves and approach their world.

YOGA CAN SET CHILDREN ON A PATH OF HOLISTIC WELL-BEING FOR YEARS.

Yoga asanas help children enhance flexibility, strength, and coordination. In cat pose, we become feline, stretching, meowing, hissing, arching backs, and sinking bellies. Moving like animals/nature, children learn greater awareness of the world and how to use their bodies to understand and experience good feelings, such as stretching like a cobra, ostrich, or tree. They develop balance using a drishti, steady gaze, which helps build focus and concentration. Yoga can propel kids toward joy and conscientiousness. My students have learned to sit for longer periods of time and shared that they felt strong in warrior pose and more relaxed after lion's breath.



To find classes, try: yoga studios; fitness centers/playspaces; libraries; YMCA's; recreation centers; after-school programs; preschools; yoga videos; or, get certified yourself! (NOTE: my next teacher training is at Fitness Haven August 21 and 22).

Lani founded Full of Joy Yoga in California in 2004 and relocated to Connecticut in 2007. Her classes combine music, games, props, and stories to give children the benefits of yoga while having a great time. She also leads Kids Yoga Teacher Trainings for parents, teachers, and yogis. Contact Lani through <http://fullofjoyyoga.com>.

Yoga Exercise to Try at Home

Simhasana: Lion's Breath

For all you Leos out there!

Translation: The Sanskrit word simha, which literally means "the powerful one," is the word for "lion." This is known as the lion posture, and when performing it can be said to resemble a roaring lion about to attack.

This posture is a good one to try when feeling angry or frustrated. It dispels tension and helps you relax.

- You and your child face each other, sitting up on your heels with knees pressed together.
- Scrunch up your face and hands as tightly as possible, keeping hands in closed fists by your head.
- Inhale, and on the count of three, open your eyes as wide as you can, release your hands to look like the open paws of a lion, and breathe out forcefully, as if you were roaring, while sticking out your tongue as far as possible.

Do this exercise three times. We like to do a loud daddy and mommy and then a very quiet baby-lion roar.

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