

When I watch my child at play, I experience a warm feeling coming from deep inside, that makes me want to just laugh out loud and join in with all the worries left behind, appreciating the moment. We are all longing for this sense of pure joy. Yoga with our kids can help us find that harmony and peace in our hearts, nourishing the sparkle of a child shining deep in each of us.

As a parent and a person I often see children already showing signs of not-positive-world; all those side-effects of technology and economy progress. I knew it was inevitable but I also felt I somehow had to protect my little one from these side effects, and provide a good foundation that would keep us grounded and centered regardless of the speed of the roller coaster of today's life.

As I was looking for optimal, organic solutions and healthy surroundings for my child and my family, I have found a sort of validation of what my husband and I were already conscious about and undertaking. By raising our child in an old fashion, unhurried kind of way, it all occurred to us just as natural as to breastfeed the baby far beyond the recommended 6 months, play yoga, grow a small garden, or make fun music together. Even in such relaxed environment we felt oftentimes out of balance, irritated by lack of sleep, boredom tasks, carpets of toys and occasional toddler's tantrums. Later on I have conducted a few years of research, taking a deeper look at the early childhood development publications and recent child health reports. I spent hours at the local libraries reading about child development disorders, case studies and naturopathic approaches toward children. I visited and took part in a few kids' yoga classes offered at the local studios - besides conducting my own family yoga since 2008. I have been a community member of Tacoma Waldorf School since 2007, all to gain more understanding of the children and their physical, mental and spiritual growth. I am dedicated to researching and offering the readers the outcomes of my "healthy, safe and happy child alternatives for parents in correlation with yoga". These are my inquiries and observations that I would like try to share with you, dear parents and teachers, in this essay.

As a healthy lifestyle enthusiast and a yoga practitioner I especially wanted to capture the connection between children's yoga regular playtime and their holistic development. When looking at most positive environment for a child to grow, we can observe a few general, yet critical patterns. Grounded in my own experience with yoga for children, I transferred and compared these patterns with the patterns utilized exclusively during yoga playtime; this I believe will give a better understanding of the foundation of the benefits our children obtain from a well – designed yoga class.

The Importance of Play

Play is the work of childhood and a vital part of a child's life. Through play, kids develop physically, learn to get along with others, hone specific skills, and explore the world around them. Play is also a great way for children to develop their imagination. Play is one of the primary ways in which children learn about the world around them, and part of that learning is

acquired through imaginative play. This type of play helps a child work through various emotions and types of behavior. Learning to cooperate is another vital aspect of play. In order to make and maintain friendships, children must learn how to play with others, and that often means following the rules of the group.

Do children play during yoga class?

Oh yes, they do! Yoga playtime easily inspires our little yogis with a fun game of yoga. Children are busy playing by listening, touching/feeling, smelling, singing, retelling stories and moving their bodies. All of the senses are engaged. They have an opportunity to use their imagination and create new tales, participate in games with or without use of yoga props such as blocks, cushions, straps, blankets, mats and balls. They get to pretend to be different kinds of animals, plants, and other interesting things. They go on a make-believe adventure to a faraway land. They learn about world's cultures, ceremonies, foreign languages and the Nature's cycles. They are occupied with using their own bodies and minds to move from one posture to another without even knowing they are stretching the muscles and improving their balance and coordination. Children develop social skills and learn about sharing and respecting others while playing together. They have lots of fun paying yoga.

Importance of Physical Activity

Play is vital to physical development. When children dance, jump, crawl, or catch a ball, they are enjoying themselves while developing gross motor skills (control the muscles used moving around). A child who enjoys physical activity is likely to be an active and physically fit adult. By contrast, a child who prefers sedentary pastimes like reading and watching television is less likely to place a priority on physical activity later on. As has been well documented, the consequences of being out of shape include weight problems, high blood pressure, and heart disease. If you can instill in your child a love for a sport or another type of physical activity, it will serve him well in the future.

Are children physically active during yoga class?

Oh yes, they are! Within about 30-45 minutes of entire yoga class there is approximately 5-10 minutes of still bodily position, to focus, center, calm down, and relax. The remaining time is filled with movement and toning of all major muscles including the smaller ones we usually don't think about.

Some children are loose muscles and are more naturally flexible than others. However, experience shows that flexibility fades past the age of three in most children who do not bend and stretch regularly. It is amazing how many children cannot touch their toes with their legs straight. But don't worry, flexibility can be learned at any age through practice.

Even kids who aren't athletic enjoy yoga. Because yoga is a gentle, noncompetitive form of exercise, they can practice, do well, and build confidence in a nonthreatening environment. You

probably know from your own experience that team sports aren't for everyone. Yoga offers a fun, stress free alternative for physical activity. Many kids are turned off by screaming coaches and the pressure to win in team sports, which can sour their view of exercising altogether. Girls in particular often abandon sports when the emphasis shifts from camaraderie to competition. Just as we try to practice yoga in an atmosphere and environment that is conducive to inner peace, we should approach yoga with an attitude that encourages inner peace. Competitiveness causes stress. There are enough sources of stress in our lives and we don't need another one. We need refuge from stress and yoga is supposed to be that refuge.

Yoga has stood test of time. It has also being evaluated thoroughly and scientifically studied by professionals, who now use yoga for varies purposes. Physical therapists, for example developed programs for their little and bigger patients, made up of exercises which rather they know it or not are yoga asanas or variations of them. In athletic circles yoga stretches are essential part of any exercise program. Stretching before and after a rigorous workout from any sport is recommended.

Yoga poses utilized during kids' yoga class develop the strength, flexibility, and coordination skills that help to prevent injury during sports or other physical activities.

Dr. Rita Khanna is a well-known name in the field of Yoga and Naturopathy. She believes firmly that Yoga is a scientific process, which helps us to lead a healthy and disease-free life. Over 25 years, she has been successfully practicing these therapies and providing succor to several chronic and terminally ill patients through Yoga, Diet and Naturopathy. In her case study "Yoga for Special Children", Dr. Khanna described therapeutic process, based on yoga asanas, relaxation and meditation and how Jayashree, a 20 years old, sweet young girl, who has a case of mild spasticity, with borderline intelligence since the age of four has benefited from it. Dr. Khanna concluded: "Yoga is a stimulating way to reach children, especially those with Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Attention Deficit Disorder, Learning Disabilities, and other developmental delays. Anyone can maximize his or her potential from consistent practice of Yoga, and these children are no exception. In her book "Yoga for the Special Child - a therapeutic approach for infants and children with Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and learning disabilities" Yoga therapist, Sonia Sumar introduces us to her work and remarkable aids yoga practice provides: "At our Yoga center, we begin working with the special child on an individual basis. In general, the younger the child, the greater the restorative effects of Yoga will be. When the special student reaches a certain degree of development, he or she is encouraged to join a children's Yoga class. As progress continues, the student may enter an adult class. The majority of my special students have Down Syndrome; however, I have also used Yoga as a therapy for children with Cerebral Palsy, Microcephaly, Prader Willi Syndrome, Cat's Cry Syndrome, learning disabilities, and Attention Deficit Disorder."

"[This is] An excellent therapeutic program. It is clear, comprehensive, and compassionate. I was particularly impressed by the profound transformation in Sonia's Students, which came as

a direct result of their practicing Yoga." – Dean Ornish, M.D., author of Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease.

Note to parents: Every child has different needs and capabilities. A pose that is beneficial for one child, may be harmful to another. Please do not attempt any of the exercises, or poses without first consulting your pediatrician and scheduling an evaluation of your child with a certified Yoga Practitioner for the Special Child.

Unlike other exercises, yoga practice is interpreted as a method that will achieve the maximum results by the minimum expenditure of energy. It gives young students time to listen to their own body's need, by tuning in and learning which parts need direct attention for healing or strengthening. Instead of exerting energy to the point where his or her body feels exhausted, in doing yoga they will feel increased energy as they focus inward on proper alignment of the body while holding a pose.

Daily activities such as walking to school, physical education classes, after-school activities, chores, and general playing have been replaced with a sedentary lifestyle in front of the TV, computer, or video games. A recent Kaiser Foundation Report concluded that kids spend on average 8 ½ hours a day exposed to media such as television, computers, and video games. Obesity is emerging as one of the nation's leading health problem. Overweight children are more than twice as likely to get high blood pressure and/or heart disease in adulthood as other kids of a normal weight. Over 200,000 Americans under the age of twenty have diabetes, while greater than one of three children born in the years 2000 are expected to develop diabetes during their lifetime. ADHD is one of the most common mental disorders among children. It affects 3% to 5% of all children, perhaps as many as 2 million American children. Children who suffer from obesity have more adult health issues as children. They can lose their innate ability to make creative choices. They can develop language skill issues, lose their energy, hence their vitality.

Yoga is fun, healthy alternative to television and computers games that gets little bodies moving. If kids see exercise as boring or as a chore, they are more likely to become inactive adults. Yoga is an ongoing learning experience that kids can continue to practice throughout their adulthood.

And yoga is for the entire family. Multi-generational activities that get moms, dads, teens, kids, and grandmas all exercising together are a growing trend because they create an atmosphere of real togetherness.

“Suppose your children were asked what one thing they really wish they could change about your family. That very question was asked of eighty-four thousand students in grades six through twelve who recently completed a USA Weekend survey. What do you think most of the kids said? It turns out that almost two-third of kids surveyed said they wished they could spend more time with their parents. In fact, more than two in five kids feel, that time with their moms is rushed. What the kids said they wanted was not just more time, but more relaxed time. The

kind of time a kid would consider as just plain “fun”. No expectations; No stress; No frantic pace; just relaxed good ol’ fun. It’s the kind of time that creates family togetherness. That relaxed, carefree time is also what our kids crave and need.”- Michele Borba, Ed.D in “12 Simple Secrets Real moms Know”.

It is a well-known fact that children are more likely to imitate the behavior of people they consider admirable, powerful, or similar to them, and as a result, they are most likely to imitate parents, teachers, and other adult who are part of their lives. And although children’s yoga practice is a bit different in its kinesiology and methodology than adult’s one, the benefits of yoga are the same for all of us, regardless of our age. The easiest way to teach kids a new pose or a yoga game is to show them how it’s done, played, and to what it can relate to. You don’t need to be a yoga teacher and you can always use a good ‘Yoga for Kids’ DVD that you may watch and practice together with your family and friends.

On a deeper physical level, the poses regulate and balance the production of hormones, which is especially important as children approach and pass through puberty. Teenagers practicing yoga posture, relaxation and meditation feel more peaceful, self-confident. They trust themselves during the period of rapid change and are able to engage the world with a more positive outlook. Teenagers especially appreciate benefits of yoga, because not only it clears energy blocks that may cause headaches, sinus problems, irritability or digestive problems. It regulates overstimulated (by stress) adrenal glands, balances energy channels along the spine, develops breast by back muscles strengthening, builds strong bones, relieves tension of tight muscles and helps ease menstrual cramps. What more, yoga improves the digestion, nutrient absorption, and elimination while helping to strengthen the immune system. Fun yoga routine uses time-tested postures not just to burn off calories, toxins, and fat. Maybe, the most attractive part in yoga benefits subject for the adolescent is that practicing asanas will strengthen and reshape the body, giving your teen an aerobic workout without the wear and tear.

Worldwide yoga projects, such as “Yoga4Youth” or “yoga in the classroom” are recently gaining new popularity. An MP in India is lobbying for a law that will make yoga compulsory in the country’s junior schools, where he says it will help with discipline, fitness and dealing with “computer-related stress”. Satpal Maharaj, 59, from the ruling Congress party in India, said a recent trip to China had inspired him to push for the law, which would take yoga into India’s 217,000 junior schools where children begin their education at around five. “We saw school children practicing Tai Chi Chuan (martial art) with great discipline in China and I thought, ‘We gave yoga to the world but we are ignoring it in India and we must bring it into our schools’”, Mr. Maharaj said.

Yoga asanas are safe and effective for people of all ages. It is a healthy way to build your kids’ strength. Although injuries in yoga are very uncommon, they do occur. If you try to push yourself too quickly or imitate or compete with someone, this greatly increases the likelihood of injury. Children and yoga practitioners should always be reminded to pay attention to how their body is feeling. We continually tell children, “if it hurts, don’t do it. If you find a pose difficult,

don't stretch too far. And hold the pose for just a little bit, like a count of 3: 1,2,3, and come out of the pose."

Importance of setting limits throughout the child-rearing process

Every child needs to be given limits. Children need limits to keep them safe and to prevent them from hurting others. As children grow older they gradually develop empathy and can understand that mean or aggressive behavior might hurt others, but they often lose their trait when they get angry. Anger has to come out on some way, and it's important for children to have safe outlets for their unpleasant emotions. Helping your child learn to manage anger is one of the most loving things you can do. This learning starts at birth and happens every day.

Is there any set of limits during kids' yoga class?

Oh yes, only a few, though, just as it would be in a grown-up yoga class. We all enter into a yoga session with different emotions, attitude and state of mind. We all know that children love to get physical, move, lough and get wild. In teaching yoga it is important to put safety foremost during class or in the home, all the while introducing challenging and fun positions. The rules are set at the beginning of each session or class. The teacher makes sure the children understand the rules. Patience, calm presence and a soft voice is a key, as kids can sense the adult's energy level.

The general rules excluding self-directed play and games are: - no talking unless the teacher calls on the child with a raised hand; - no moving until the teacher says so; - after two warnings, if a child is still excessively unruly, fidgety, talkative, he or she has to sit out; - if it is not a "mommy and me" or "family yoga" class, parents are asked not to stay during the class, as their presence would create a conflict of authority roles, with the parent winning by default. It is also distracting for the children, who may feel self-conscious or drawn to the parent. There are opportunities for the parents to watch and/or participate during special sessions or special workshops held on occasion. Children are also asked to not start a new pose until the teacher is finished demonstrating.

After a few classes children know the routine, feel good about participating and have a confidence in their poses. They are able to quiet themselves, pat attention and follow instructions.

Importance of establishing schedules and rhythm

Establishing outer order helps to create an inner order and this predictability and repetition are profoundly soothing to the young child. The changing of the seasons provides theme and connect to stories, songs, craft, art and the celebration of festivals.

When I visited Tacoma Waldorf School for the first time to spend four morning hours with the teacher and the children ages three to four, I was really amazed how effortless it was for the Waldorf teacher to manage this wild yet happy group of children. They played just like the kids

that age play - having sometimes rough encounters, but when asked, they cleaned up playthings smoothly, helped prepare healthy snack, were ready on the carpet and quietly sitting throughout the story time, then they gathered for the circle time and sweetly sang a goodbye song. "How magical and how dreamlike" I thought ... I soon learned, that that magic was well-designed around natural cycles, schedules and routines that help create one of a kind enchanted, charming environment. Life in the Waldorf kindergarten follows a predictable rhythm – Monday is always baking day, Tuesday is soup day, Wednesday is painting day, and so on...

Does yoga with children class have a rhythm?

Oh yes it does! Yoga is interconnected with a breath, and breath is the wave, the flow and the rhythm. In addition to this, I've enthusiastically implemented the Waldorf kind of rhythm in my yoga playtime: Our session opens with free-play, to warm us up for a couple of minutes. After a bell sound or on my sign we say Namaste greeting. A few breathing exercises like Balloon Belly, Volcano, blowing made of tissue paper butterflies or Gouranga breathing follow up. After which we begin our asana session - We stand up and have a welcome song in a circle. It is followed by a series of 2-4 asanas, a game (or a song relating to the next asana), another series of 2-4 asanas and another few minutes of a game (such as building a pyramid of yoga props or a silly song). I ask if anybody needs to go to use the bathroom or drink some water. I set a story scene (here the older children may help). I tell the story, which theme depends on the season or a behavioral trait that I want to discuss with the class; it lasts up to 8 or 10 minutes). I cover the story settings with a nice cloth and move it aside. We stand up and retell the story with a few asanas. When we are done we lay down and it is relax time. After the relaxation we have a song sang in a circle or we dance to the music. We say Namaste to one another. This is usually the end of session. Depending on the length of the class children are given craft to make onsite or at home. They have a fruit or a healthy snack provided as they leave.

I see children feeling secure and supported by that rhythm, that allows them fully participate in our yoga adventure.

Importance of being consistent and firm but having realistic expectations

We should always consider our child's age and abilities as well as what we're expecting of him. We shall adjust the limits as necessary, and change the rules as the child gets older.

Does yoga class for children provide accepting yet consistent atmosphere?

Yes, it does....During class, children are reminded to breathe and be aware of their bodies. They are asked how it feels in their toes, their hands, their arms, and their head. They are reminded to keep their mind focused on the mat, body and breath.

Every child has different needs and capabilities. As it was said before, pose that is beneficial for one child, may be harmful to another. Also there is a different manner to teach preschool children, elementary age children and teenage age children. Three-year olds will not be able to

hold their attention long without physical and verbal cues. They may be allowed to wander around or not participate as long as they are not disrupting the class, because they still take in what they hear.

General idea is not to worry about the children doing the pose exactly, or putting their complete attention into it. As yoga teachers and parents we are helping them put their minds into their bodies, achieve coordination and develop their imagination.

Importance of teaching children problem-solving skills

Kids often respond impulsively and emotionally to problems. We can teach them to slow down and think about the choices they make and plan on analyzing consequences.

Does yoga with children teach them problem-solving skills?

Yes, it does. During yoga session a teacher creates an environment in which children will laugh and cry; where they can explore and experiment; where they can create and destroy; where they can achieve; where they can feel excited and elated; where they may sometimes be bored and frustrated, and may sometimes hurt themselves; where they can get help, support, and encouragement from others when they require it.

In addition to such creative play, that teaches them problem-solving skills, each student is provided with two or three techniques they may use throughout the school day for their specific needs; i.e.: before an exam, the beginning of the day, every time they feel threatened and anxious. Students may do a technique silently, when under stress, and no one else needs to know they are doing it.

A student's inability to execute a specific asana (as it is presented by an instructor), due to the student's lack of flexibility, bodily ailment or simply lack of a prop can be an example of a situation where problem-solving skills are taught. Therefore the student names the problem as an inability to perform a posture, then he is looking for possible choices, analyzing positive consequences and negative consequences, which could result from choosing that particular option: modification, variation, or yoga prop substitution. The student chooses the solution (asana variation, different prop or just skipping the asana), tries the solution and evaluates the solution – does it work for him or not, does it feel safe, and can he achieve the benefit from this asana variation as close to the benefit he would gain from the originally presented posture or a technique.

Yoga teaches flexibility of the mind and the body. Staying flexible mentally by opening the mind fosters positive thinking and motivation to learn new things.

Importance of advocating empathy

Empathy involves having a genuine regard for the feeling of another living being – being able to put yourself in that person's shoes, so to speak. It is very valuable social skill, because an empathetic person understands the right and wrong things to say or do at crucial moments.

Children who are not empathetic have little patience with people and rarely consider anyone else's needs and feelings. These are the kids who are considered stuck-up or conceited, and some of them are bullies. In contrast, empathetic children are usually well liked and regarded as caring, conscientious, and nice. Children who develop empathy gain greater tolerance and acceptance of others and are better prepared to be good friends.

Is yoga advocating empathy in children?

Oh yes, it does - right from the beginning as we say Namaste to each other and learn what the Sanskrit word Namaste means. Even little children can grasp an idea of respect and no-harm (ahimsa). "I respect you and other living beings" weaves through our stories and songs about animals and the nature. Using puppets and images we can explain to children what someone else is feeling, correct unkind behavior, and point out that his or her generosity made the other child happy and any action of compassion toward others brings inner joy and feeling content inside.

Older children learn empathy by assisting with poses that are difficult for younger yogis. As a result, these children are usually successful in social situations. They feel fulfilled and in the same time they improve their competence and confidence regarding the practice. They grow up to be compassionate, warm and happy persons.

Importance of fostering independence

Every child is different and we have to respect those differences. Pushing children to undertake tasks for which they aren't ready can cause problems. Instead we look for a compromise. Together of just a teacher or a parent themselves, we can come up with the solution that provides a comfortable and secure atmosphere, and the child will naturally come to need you less and less - fostering their independence.

Can a teacher foster independence in children though yoga?

I believe he can! Once, one of the teenage students expressed enthusiastically his thoughts after a yoga class with one of the Yoga for Youth Instructors. He said: "these yoga people, at the class, they don't tell what's wrong with you, they try to help you out, so you can find out what's wrong with yourself". (Yoga4Youth.com provides incarcerated youth in Los Angeles County Detention Center camps with a yoga and meditation program conducted by accomplished yoga instructors.)

It is important to set aside critical judgment and encourage students to pretty much create their own practice from the simple tools the teacher gives them. Self-empowerment leads to self-regulation.

“We look for ways to have students express what’s happening in their yoga experience; i.e. open class discussion, journaling, leading other classmates, revolving leadership, writing and essay about the experience, singing, drawing, painting, sculpting or staging a play. Students are allowed to discover the benefits of the practice for themselves. We do not set up goals in their minds or expectations.” - Gail Bentley Walsh, Director of the Yoga Mountain Teacher certification 200, 500-hour and Professional Yoga Therapy Certification, author of “Yoga in the Classroom” book.

There also comes the questioning time and the craving for true knowledge and true happiness: How to achieve union between the body and the mind; where can we find the real source of happiness and harmony in this land, on this planet? Most of us find that these kinds of questions arise at different occasions either consciously or subconsciously and at different age. Sometimes it can be as early as five, or nine year old.

Importance of nurturing responsibility

As children grow older, they begin to do things on their own, which means taking on more responsibility. Toddlers want to be responsible for feeding themselves, preschoolers want to get dressed alone, and Elementary school kids want to make their own meals or take care of a pet. Teenagers generally seek greater freedom which also requires greater responsibility. Parent and teachers shall remain patient and encouraging during learning phase. They should try to not get upset and take over. Instead we shall praise the child for a job well done, and focus just on specific part or the job to praise, or compliment her on her effort.

Does yoga with children nurture responsibility?

Oh yes, it does because abundant yoga benefits build strong foundation preparing the child physically and psychically for the lifetime journey. What are the better benefits of yoga than bringing the wholeness and the real happiness to a child, to a person, to a soul?

Practicing yoga builds a strong base for children to grow in order to become self-assured, clear-thinking, responsible people in the world. Every new and challenging asana must be done with responsibility or they may cause an injury. The balance poses enhance concentration skills, which require focus and clarity of the mind. These mental skills enable children to learn more easily both in school and outside of school.

Importance of increasing child’s competence by careful teaching

We don’t expect our children to learn how to do things by simply watching them. For a child every new skill might be a complex task, even it seems to be an easy one to a peer or a parent. By careful teaching we increase the child’s competence.

Is child's competence increased during a yoga class?

Oh yes it is, by our careful teaching and assisting. First we provide appropriate and safe environment (equipment if necessary) for the task. It may be a sticky mat, a strap, cushion, a ball, one or two blocks and/or a teacher's assistance. Next, we demonstrate the task. Immediately after which, we let the child practice, making it as risk-free as possible. We restrain ourselves from giving an unwanted advice, rather we wait for the child to ask for help, and when she does, the teacher might say: "you are doing fine". We praise the child for whatever she did right. We tell the child how to improve her performance, and have her practice again. As we work together, we point out that adults make mistakes and we can provide how an adult would modify the pose to still receive great benefits from it. The continual practice will help him or her master the skill, and having an official role in yoga session will instill pride.

Children can gain competence by doing things on their own, so try to resist doing things for them.

Importance of developing creativity

Creativity, the ability to innovate or discover new ways of doing things, is a wonderful quality in a child. It ranks neck-and-neck with intelligence in terms of helping a person create a life for herself. Like intelligence, creativity can be influenced by the environment in which a child is raised, because the child has been encouraged and provided with necessary resources. By developing your child's creativity you are simply trying to instill the ability in him to see that life is filled with many possibilities, not just right and wrong answers.

Is yoga a creative type of activity for children?

It is a sure thing! Yoga for children, which involves creative play, gets kids off their seats and on the yoga mat. Their brain develops more rapidly. Learning coordination in movement increases brain power, according to a recent issue of the New England Journal of Medicine. Movement and creative play stimulates brain derived neurotrophic factor, which stimulates healthy bone growth.

Children who are creative have four basic qualities according to G. Cornelius and J. Casler in an issue of "Early Child Development and Care":

1. A sense of wonder about the world. It encourages, when for example, the teacher himself express his own joy when seeing or hearing something wonderful – a glorious sunset, beautiful music, or by taking children to park and explore nature wonders (butterfly, rainbows, trees, animals, body and mind amazing qualities, etc.) and appreciate the world. "The science of yoga teaches that sound has a tremendous impact on one's physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Although children are bored by silent meditation, they love to perform yoga sound meditation - especially if it's accompanied by lively music, clapping, and dancing. Kids take to it like fish to water, so parents love it! And yoga meditation provides a pleasant solution to the stress that so often fills our lives. The music by itself is so beautiful

and powerful; it creates a relaxed and spiritually inspiring atmosphere. When accompanied by yoga sound, the music becomes truly transcendental in its effect. Just by listening to the yoga sound, a person can enter a state of true spiritual meditation. And it's effortless"- Wai Lana's Introduction to Yoga DVD Series.

2. Openness to feelings and emotions. By being open about how we feel we convey an important message to our child. Often parents think that boys have to be little tough guys who don't express their feelings. Fortunately this attitude is slowly changing and today's parents see the benefits of encouraging both boys and girls to be in touch with their feelings. While doing yoga we focus on the body's feelings and sensations. Children become more aware of the mind and body correlation, by practicing specific asanas that are helpful in regulating the energy flow (chakras). By performing different postures such as Cobra, Cat, Downward Dog, Fish, Camel or Plow, their emotions are in balance. The breath definitely controls certain aspects of the nervous system, the activity of the brain, and emotional and intellectual expression. Therefore, the simple practice of Pranayama (Balloon Belly or Gauranga Breathing: by slowly saying Gaur-Ra-Anga mantra) gives us voluntary control over our intellectual and emotional activities. Growing evidence shows that children's yoga, with an emphasis on relaxation, breathing, and balancing right- and left-brain activity, can help with behavioral problems such as autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
3. Curiosity. We encourage the child to ask questions and express his own curiosity. We point out to the children how they can use all their sensing when exploring, share the fun of investigating something. If it is outdoor yoga, we meet at the park or a beach, we talk about how the beach looks, what you hear, how the sand and wind, soft breeze feel, and even how the air tastes. We make sounds while doing Warrior Pose and play with squishy balls or small balloons trying to grab them with little toes. Child's curiosity is encouraged by introducing him to the idea of moving like a snake or roaring like a lion and transforming him into a little explorer of the plant and animal world, we live as part of.
4. Imagination: Make up stories, fairy tales told together are fun. You can start one and let children finish it, next time let them start the story and you finish. Not only it is fun, it also gets very healthy. During yoga class children explore and experiment from the very beginning. The whole time provided for the yoga session is dedicated to creative search. As beginner yogis we wander and search with our minds outwards. With time and practice our search redirects to inward. When we spend more time with the child we can see what things interest her. Kids can make their own yoga related craft. They are producing games with provided yoga props and accessories. Not only it brings in more fun to the class but most importantly allows creative thinking. Interactive Yoga Story Telling, such as for example Storytime Yoga or KindaYoga, introduces yoga in a fun, entertaining and interactive way simultaneously developing full body strength, improving coordination, teaching proper breathing, aiding focus, memory and concentration, introducing stillness and calm,

improving listening skills, developing self-confidence and autonomy, stimulating imagination and balance. Yoga creative play encourages positive relationships between adults and children, the development of trust, ability to creatively visualize, and recall skills. Helping develop your child's creativity is one of the greatest gifts you can give, and in the process, you may find some wonderfully imaginative parts of yourself, too.

Importance of rest and deep relaxation

How to unwind, recharge and distress? How to keep up with the world, without losing track of my real identity? We learn to focus and relax. Attention Deficit Disorder, insomnia, anxiety, depression, aggressive and violent behavior, bipolar disorder, anorexia, bulimia, hyperactivity, dyslexia, obsessive – compulsive – almost any disorder you find among young people today may be helped by yoga practice. Often those with “syndromes” and “disorders” are full of creative energy.

Is it possible to teach children to relax and rest their mind with yoga?

Yes it is, and it is not a challenge! For example singing sweet songs with or to children, using a simple, mellow tune, is very soothing for their bodies and minds. Yoga Nidra, head to toe relaxation, visualization techniques are great for rest-, nap- and going to bed -time. Certain postures, such as Lord of the Dance, breathing techniques (Dan Tian) and meditative techniques (Ancient Yoga sounds/mantras) are beneficial for everyone. If we are hyper, they calm us down; if we are lethargic, they get us energized. Since the entire practice is based on self-awareness, breath, gentle persistence, and self-exploration, there is no forcing, no hurry, and no failure! OM meditation, as well as loud chanting of longer mantras, gives very good effect in these children. These are useful in maintaining their concentration and improving their alertness with rest and relaxation. It helps in strengthening the nervous system and calms the mind. The practice of yoga gives them courage – the courage to be less than perfect, to fumble, to sometimes be clumsy, to take the risk of failing, and then to try again. It teaches us emotional stamina, self-forgiveness, compassion for ourselves and others. Even the most conscientious, hard-working individuals sometimes go into states of anxious denial or dismissive states of passivity before exams and tests.

Just after a few weeks of regular yoga practice (including relaxation and meditation) parents notice in their children more zestfulness and enthusiasm, absence of irritability, better clarity in speech and engaging in longer conversations spontaneously. Yoga playtime feedback from caregivers points out most often how the children are more friendly and cooperative, much calmer. There are lots of improvements in his or her behavior.

Our parents, our grandparents, and the parents we have become, all share one common goal: Bringing out the best in our children so that they can live happy and fulfilling lives. Every child is an individual spirit that comes to this world with luggage of experience, obtained in previous activities and as we grow we gain more experience and knowledge about ourselves. Although, the accumulated karmic tendencies, inherited in the course of previous lives, at times

play a far greater role than the hereditary parental cells and genes in the formation of both physical and mental characteristics, it's our responsibility to create optimal environment for our children, where they can grow to be independent and self-reliant; where they can learn—in the widest possible sense—about themselves, about others, and about the world.

And lastly, Yoga is a holistic approach. It gives a child the wholeness and a healthy foundation for the upcoming life as a grown-up.

While children gain more physical strength and flexibility during well designed yoga playtime, their responsibility is nurtured simultaneously, altogether with fostering their problem-solving skills, independence and empathy. Their imagination blossoms in such peaceful and adventurous environment. There may be contemporary rules, schedules and routines yet children feel secure and soothed by the natural rhythm and sound. Each and every one becomes more open to feelings and emotions, allowing joy and sorrow to speak out. Mutual healing sensations and miracles are part of a yoga session. We are all on an individual treasure hunt, where the secret lies within. Yoga engages all the senses, creates a loving learning atmosphere so children can relax, be more receptive, allow confidence, curiosity and comfort in relating to other living beings. Relaxed, receptive body produces a relaxed, receptive brain, willing and most importantly, able to learn, and to go deeper into exploration of the self. With the curiosity of a child, pure hearts glow. Spiritual world unlocks and a happy soul flourishes.

In her interview, with Energy Magazine (Canada), March/April 2003, Wai Lana, one of the most watched yoga teachers in the world today, said: “The physical benefits are well known. Mentally, of course, there is a benefit of stress relief. These are very important benefits. But the most important benefit of yoga is spiritual happiness”.

I wish every parent and a teacher many magical sensations and joy on a path of playing yoga with your children! Namaste.

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