

We often think of children as carefree with very few worries, and forget that they go through stress just like any adult.

In today's society of peer pressure, consumerism and sibling rivalry, children need time for their own space and to be able to find a safe place to release their worries and concerns.

As a yoga teacher and a single mum with two very strong-minded girls, I felt the necessity to begin teaching classes to children. As with most things, the younger you begin the easier it becomes; and as I spend a great deal of my time around children between the ages of four and fourteen I have begun to notice how seriously conditioned by society children can be. There is so much stimulation around that it is hard for them to enjoy the simpler aspects of life. So I began my mission to help children naturally access the tools from within so they could understand their true selves and true personalities. It is important to start by developing a positive relationship with the children, giving them structure so that they are able to have a good relationship with themselves and those who share their lives. They need to learn to be happy with who they really are in peace and harmony, enjoy their own company, and most of all love themselves.

My mission to achieve this succeeded when I began to teach a group of adolescent ten- to thirteen-year-olds. I say "adolescent" primarily because children are naturally growing up and developing quicker than ever before. It is a challenging age group to teach – however, it has proved to be a positive experience. These children are of an age which gains great benefit from the yoga teachings. They absorb all they learn with pleasure and enthusiasm. Which is truly heart-warming.

Our practice is kundalini yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan: it is a very balanced, positive practice which works on the process of uncoiling our energy so that we are able to know and understand our true potential.

Children love the use of colour so I try to incorporate colour into a visual meditation which encourages each child to use their imagination. One of the many examples of this is for them to sit cross-legged



Everything's

"There are three values: feel good, be good and do good" – Yogi Bhajan, the master of Kundalini yoga.

in easy pose and focus their minds on the space between the eyes, becoming aware of a blank white screen in front of the eyes. In time begin to see a house appear on the white screen, see its chimneys and its doors and windows, notice the colours and the activity around the house.

This practice is done without force and should flow naturally. The visualisation takes around 5 minutes, enough time to keep the children's attention. Once the meditation is complete I encourage the

children to draw what appeared to them; we then formed a display of their interpretations of a home, with encouraging results. This is a simple practice that can be performed by any parent and their child, a wonderful practice before sleep.

To end our practice we tune out with "the sunshine song" – a positive prayer to the world – and we chant "sat nam" three times. Sat nam means true identity which encourages us to be who we really are and proud of it.

Our class structure consists of the following:

- Tuning in – we tune in with a particular kundalini yoga chant "ong namo guru dev namo" – this means "I greet the wise teacher within me and outside of me." We are all true teachers inside ourselves and being

aware of this is of great importance.

- Warm up – we warm up our bodies with gentle stretches.
- We then begin a set of positions which are known as a "kriya" which means action. Kriyas come in a particular structured format, not to be changed unless the timings are

Good



reduced for each position. Each kriya stimulates a certain area of the body to produce optimum health; within class a different kriya is chosen every week to work a particular area of the body.

- When we have completed our kriya we relax and meditate.

How does yoga really benefit children?

- Yoga has many aspects, one of these being the physical: this includes the practice of kriyas in kundalini yoga or what can also be known as asana, meaning a position or a movement held in yoga practice. The physical side of yoga is only part of a bigger picture, and the benefits include helping children to gain mental and physical flexibility through movement, focus and concentration on the body. When yoga postures are performed they put pressure on a certain part of the body which helps to stimulate activity in the cells of the body and brain, making a healthier happier child.
- Yoga gives children the ability to be able to handle stress from within. One of the main practices we teach a beginner is how to breathe correctly using the practice of breath awareness or pranayama in Sanskrit. Unfortunately the majority of people are unable to breathe correctly, and instead of using

the full capacity of the lungs only use a small percentage and breathe from the upper chest instead of the abdomen. Yoga focuses on learning to deepen the breath and encourages the use of different breathing techniques.

Some examples are:

- o Breath of fire – this is a strong abdominal breath which brings energy and vitality to the body.
- o Alternate nostril breathing – this has the opposite effect and is a calming and balancing breath.

When we are stressed it is important to breathe deeply. With the correct breathing techniques handling stress becomes easier.

- Meditation and relaxation calm the body and mind. They help put confused thoughts in order and give children the knowledge of how to gain a positive mental perspective on all aspects of their life. Meditation combined with chanting creates focus, positivity and a centred child.

Relax at home

To help encourage your own positive peaceful child who can learn to be totally in tune with who they really are I have included two simple practice sessions for you to do together at home.

Basic breathing technique (full yoga breath)

Lie comfortably on your back and become aware of the movement of the breath flowing through the nostrils. Place your hands on top of your abdomen with the middle fingers touching at the navel. As you breathe in pull the abdomen out like a large balloon: this will naturally create a space between the middle fingers. Use the full capacity of the lungs. After 5 minutes you will feel totally calm and relaxed.

Candle gazing (tratakam)

Choose a candle that is special to you specifically for this practice. Sit comfortably on the floor; ideally with the legs crossed and the hands resting on the knees. If it is possible place the candle at eye level and begin to stare at the centre of the flame. When you feel the need to blink bring the palms together and rub the palms as fast as you can until they are warm, then rest them over the eyes, relaxing the eyes behind the warm palms. When you are ready place the hands back on the knees and repeat the whole process. Resist the temptation to blink and let the eyes water and cleanse. This beautiful practice has many benefits, it strengthens the eye muscles, brings focus and clarity to the mind and helps with symptoms of insomnia. When practising this technique always be aware of the breath as it moves in and out of the body.