

Sharing Yoga with Children

As adults, we may view Yoga in many different ways. Some may see it as a set of challenging body movements done in a hot room. Some may see it as movements done in co-ordination with breathing patterns. And still others may see Yoga as a way to find inner peace through meditating on sound. Yoga is all of these things, none of these things and more than these things.

Children are naturals at Yoga. Not just at asana, although watching babies in cobra, toddlers in downward dog and school children in handstands, it is clear that is surely the case too. What is natural for children is their ability to be so focused, so present to what they are doing at that moment. We see this when a child is building a tower of blocks, or drawing a picture, or climbing a tree.

There is no specific set of techniques called children's Yoga – it is more how we apply what we already know about Yoga to what we know about children. What we know about Yoga, is that it is a way of explaining a wonderful set of practices, including ways of breathing, moving and being, that have evolved over thousands of years due to direct experience, as well as the result of those practices. What we know about children is that breathing, moving and being are second nature to them. Not all children express in the same way, but the impetus, the spark within them, is to express through breath, body, mind and soul.

So knowing this, how do we apply the practices of Yoga to children? Children come in a variety of ages, and each age is more receptive to different ways of sharing Yoga. Toddlers are very instinctual – they've just learned to function mechanically in their bodies and they don't weigh up the pro's and cons of their actions. Playing is how they learn and they need lots of repetition. Toddlers enjoy participating in Yoga with their parents, crawling through the tunnel of their mother's Downward Dog, or relaxing in the lap of their father's meditation. Preschoolers are in the height of their imagination. They are very social and like to play at Yoga with their friends. An adventure, story or song with lots of animals is a perfect way of engaging them. School-aged children like a little more sophistication and complexity in their Yoga. They like to move their bodies in order to feel confident and strong, and they enjoy a few minutes of guided relaxation. They may like being challenged with a complicated asana, are enthusiastic about Yoga games, and show

great perception of the relationship between their thoughts, their emotions and their breath. Pre-teens want to be taken seriously so songs and adventures do not hold great appeal. They love partner Yoga, and are very receptive to understanding themselves a little more through meditation. Teenagers are open to the same practices that we would see within a regular Yoga class, but even though they may have well developed bodies, they are still developing emotionally and hormonally, and require consideration and sensitivity in their Yoga teaching.

This great umbrella of children's Yoga is complex indeed. There are many resources available such as books, cds, dvds and teacher training courses. It is wise to research carefully to ensure you are getting more than entertainment value as Yoga has great potential to become a set of tools to deal with the demands of school and home, and shared with children from a young age, they will carry those tools with them for life.

As a children's Yoga teacher, I've shared Yoga with hundreds of children in a variety of circumstances. From schools to Yoga studios, kindergartens to after-school and holiday programmes, and from individual therapy with children with special needs to groups of 40 or more Girl Guides, all of these children have taught me about being present and focused. Being present comes from stopping what I am doing so I can fully hear when a child shares their day with me, respecting their courage in trying a challenging asana and admiring their unique expression of a tree or a downward dog without looking for perfect alignment, and being flexible about my teaching plans when it's clear that they don't match the needs or abilities of the children in front of me – nothing like chucking it all out the window and starting again!

These learnings have come together in the Samadhi Family Yoga 200+hr training focused entirely on the life of a child. Including teaching Yoga prenatal and postnatal women who nurture a child from the womb to infancy, and teaching Yoga to children from toddlers to teens, this training is unique in it's approach to Yoga. For the first time, this Yoga Alliance RYT200 training is coming to Hong Kong as an intensive. Held from 23 May 2011 to 23 June 2011 at Amico Studio, it will provide an opportunity for both those wishing to become Yoga teachers, and those who are already teaching Yoga, to delve deeply into the theory, practice and methodology of Yoga for children and make sharing Yoga with children their passion and career.

Amanda Reid discovered the joy and immense benefits of Yoga in 1992 and has experienced a wide range of styles, finding her path in teaching in 2000 after working in the corporate sector. Blessed to have studied with Yogis and Yoginis dedicated to the holistic and integrative middle path of Yoga, she has teaching qualifications in Integral Hatha, Satyananda and Kundalini Yoga, Basic Certification and Advanced Levels 1 and 2 of Yoga for the Special Child programme, Radiant Child Yoga (RCYP1-3 and international facilitator training), and a Diploma of Yoga Therapy. Amanda is an RYT-500/E-RYT200 Yoga Alliance teacher and member of the International Association of Yoga Therapists. She is also a Certified Infant Massage Instructor, massage therapist and naturopath, utilising complementary therapies, body therapies and Yoga to support infants and children with special needs, pregnant women in conscious birthing and parenting, and adults with chronic health conditions. Amanda teaches RCYP workshops and Yoga teacher trainings, and leads Yoga and Ayurveda retreats in New Zealand, Australia, Europe, and Asia.