

Yoga For Children: Benefits Beyond the Body

Yetmir is nine-years-old. He enthusiastically approaches his yoga teacher before class and asks, “Will we put our feet behind our head today?” Fourteen-year-old Nishta asks during class if the pose she is holding is “good for stomachs.” Isabelle, aged six, requests “spaghetti legs”. This is part of relaxation at the end of class. Children lie still, then the teacher picks up their toes and gently wiggles their legs to be sure they are very relaxed, like cooked noodles.

Kids love yoga. They love the movement and creative expression associated with the asanas, they appreciate the benefits and they cherish the opportunity to “rest” at the end of each class.

As the number of adults practicing yoga in the world today reaches into the millions, the number of children introduced to the practice also increases. Yoga and children go together naturally. The organic movements along with interesting animals and nature features make the practice engaging for children when presented in a dynamic way.

A dynamic class for adults may include vigorous vinyasa while a dynamic class for kids involves stories, games, animal sounds, and laughter. This all adds up to fun –the most important element. Instead of just stretching into Downward Facing Dog, kids love to bark, wag their tails and stretch their paws. Stories come easily with characters such as lions, snakes and warriors along with natural elements such as rivers, trees, mountains and the moon. Poses learned in class translate into games such as human obstacle course where children in yoga poses are the obstacles and freeze tag - kids freeze into a yoga pose.

One aspect that remains the same through out all classes is the rest at the end. Savasana. It may not be as long or as quiet as in adult classes but children love it just the same. Children will often roll up from Savasana saying, “I feel so relaxed, that was great.” During this time of rest, they learn to cultivate a sense of quiet and inner calm.

There are many benefits. People may think, “Kids are so flexible already, why do they need yoga?” Interestingly enough, many kids as young as seven-years-old can be heard making the same grunts and groans adults do as they reach for their toes. Even for children who are naturally flexible, yoga offers benefits beyond the body.

In addition to increased flexibility, coordination and strength of both body and mind, children who practice yoga often experience increased self-esteem and are better able to handle stress in their lives. Many studies have shown a decrease in disruptive behavior and an increase in concentration when school children practice yoga regularly.

There is also the more profound benefit of a greater sense of peace and contentment. Anyone who has practiced yoga for some time has probably experienced this loosening of attachment to something more or something better and has found a deep sense of ease in simply being.

Children practicing yoga feel good about who they are, know how to relax, can think clearly and have fostered healthy habits. These qualities are carried into adulthood, as they become heads of business, political leaders, teachers and parents. Sharing yoga with children then may go a long way towards cultivating a culture of peace throughout our world.

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