

# Yoga Helps Kids Find Balance in Their Lives

By Lisa Orkin

Children today are under a lot of stress. Homework, pressure to compete with other children, endless after-school activities, over-scheduling -- it all adds up. And just like their parents, kids today are turning to Yoga to help them relax.

Teaching Yoga to children, I've seen how Yoga helps them develop better body **awareness**, self-control, flexibility and coordination. I've also seen how they can carry these skills beyond class and into their daily routines.

Yoga has also been shown to help the **hyperactive and attention-deficit** child. These children crave movement and sensory/motor stimulus. Yoga helps channel these impulses in a positive way. Yoga poses that seem to work especially well are the warrior pose and tree pose. They help instill calm, **confidence and balance**. The trick is to get beyond just "doing" the posture. I try to get them to think about what the postures mean, to become like the postures -- strong and confident like a warrior.

I use partner poses to develop **trust**. Working with each other on poses, the children develop **team skills**. It also fosters bonding.

When it comes to **relaxation**, some children have a difficult time closing their eyes while others can't get enough. I once had a 10-year-old boy ask me if we could have an extra long relaxation session as he wanted more time to relax. One technique that encourages relaxation is visualization. At first I may have them focus on belly breathing and listening to relaxing music. Then I may ask them to imagine that they are at the beach, playing their favorite sport, or doing some other activity that they like. At the end of the relaxation exercise, I encourage the children to share their own experiences.

Another approach is to create a guided visualization or story with a calming theme of some kind. For example, I may ask them to imagine themselves walking in a green pasture. "Notice the beautiful trees and the butterflies flying over head," I may say. "Smell the fresh air. Listen to the bluejays calling for their mates." The idea is to instill a **sense of peace** and feeling of **oneness with nature**.

It is our dharma to teach children the meaning of union of **mind, body and spirit**. There is such a wealth of knowledge we can offer our children with the practice of Yoga. The simple chanting of OM makes their faces light up and **smile**.

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