

HOW TO INTEGRATE

TRAUMA INFORMED YOGA

INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

"Yoga is the journey of the self, through the self, to the self."
– The Bhagavad Gita.

Components of a "yoga" educator

*flexibility
cultural humility
effective
communication
sensitive*

*self-compassion
authenticity
curiosity
awareness
empathy*

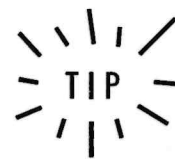
1 in 4

school-age children have been exposed to a traumatic event that impacts learning and/or behavior.

01

JOURNAL PROMPT

What were you taught in your family of origin to do with your emotions or your impulses? Consider both explicit messages and implicit messages? What happened when you were really upset or really happy? What was the general message that was sent?



Use mindful minutes and grounding to bring students back to the present.

17%

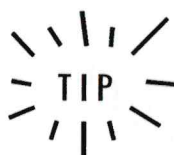
of teachers quit every year due to negative emotions and feelings of inefficacy. Remedy? Self-compassion.



Self-Care and Self-Compassion

What do I need right now?

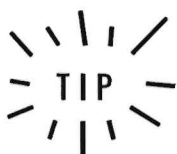
Resources: The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook
Kristin Neff, PhD



Sustaining empathy for others begins with compassion for ourselves.

Trauma

Trauma Informed yoga provides somatic-based therapy practices to help address symptoms of trauma in children.



Mirroring benefits students who have experienced developmental trauma.

02

Components of Self-Care

- Relationship with yourself: Be connected to your own body and sensations. Notice signs of stress, fatigue, and burnout.
- Community: Find other teachers to connect with that are doing this work that you can connect with
- Boundaries: Cultivate the courage to say no.
- Downtime: Set aside time for hobbies and relaxation.
- Significant relationships: Do you have relationships where you feel supported?

Informal Practice: What Would You Say to a Friend?

1. Cue: Think of a time when a friend was having a hard time. What did you say to them, to cheer them up or help them feel better?
2. Cue: Write down a struggle you have had today or this week. Write down how you responded to this physically or emotionally.
3. Think- was it different than how you responded to your friend and their struggle?
4. What would you say to a close friend who had the same struggle as you? Say that to yourself now internally.

- The younger a child experiences trauma, the more likely they are to be affected by it.
- Shock traumas can vary from person to person (unexpected terrorizing or horrifying event)
- Developmental trauma occurs when there is an ongoing or chronic misattunement between caretaker and child.
- There are many risk factors for childhood traumas (See ACES)

Sympathetic nervous system= "Fight, flight, or freeze" vs. Parasympathetic nervous system= "rest and digest"

Statement: I'm pissed off today. I don't want to do yoga.

Mirroring reflection: I hear that you're angry and you really don't want to do yoga.



Mind Body Resources

Breathing Techniques

Balloon breath: Students can either breathe lying down in a resting position on their back, or sitting up. Have students practice breathing in deeply and at the same time “fill up a balloon” in their bellies. You may have students place one hand on their stomachs to feel for the balloon. Students will breathe out and “deflate the balloon”.

Benefits: Relieve symptoms of stress, trigger the relaxation response

Ocean Breath: Students will breathe in through their nose and then exhale, opening their mouth and making a “haaaaa” sound, like an ocean wave. Students may be in any seated, standing, or resting pose to do this. Students may also if they choose, put their palms together in front of them and then raise them to the sky as they breathe out and then lower them as they breathe out. *Some parents might think this is some kind of prayer pose so just use your best judgement on the movement.

Benefits: Calms the mind, relaxes the neck and lower face

Lion’s Breath: this technique can help discharge extra energy that a student may have or when they are feeling angry, this will help discharge the build up of energy in their body.

1. Breathe in through nose, open mouth, stick out tongue and breathe out forcefully through mouth, making a face like a lion.
2. Good for all ages. Some students may not feel comfortable making the face or noise unless this is modeled by the teacher, and they feel safe.

Benefits: Relieves excess energy, relieves tension in the jaw, neck, and chest

Mindfulness, Grounding, and Breathing Exercise

Close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so, or you can choose to gaze upon a non-living object. We’re going to start by focusing on our feet if we are sitting in a chair, or your sitz bones if you are seated on the ground. Focus on the sensation you feel as your body connects with the ground. Let go of everything that was on your mind as you came in this morning. We are focused on being present in the moment. I want you to focus next on your breathing. Breathe in through your nose for five seconds and breathe out through your mouth, taking everything inside that is distracting you out with your breath. As you breathe in, focus on your intention today. This time as you breathe out, breathe out through your nose, and try to breathe out for about 8 seconds. We are going to practice 3 more breaths like this before we begin the class.

Mind-Body activities can help students tolerate discomfort better, help teach self-regulation, reduce meltdowns, lower stress, and create focus.

Our role is not to diagnose or be a therapist. Our role is to provide a safe, consistent environment where students can feel supported.

When to use: Time-ins for individual students or as individual strategies, brain breaks or transition to another activity, throughout the day, either before or after a challenging task. These work well for adults too! Consider age appropriateness and whole group instruction or individual instruction as it suits your students’ needs.

Children who succeed seem to do so when they have people in their lives who believe they can succeed and have meaningful relationships with caring adults.

Exercises

A Self-Awareness Practice to Tune-In:

Look around the room. Move your head to take in your environment, as if you have discovered a new place and you are curious about it. Track your body. Did you take a deep breath just by looking around?

- Tune into your body and notice what is there. You may close your eyes if you wish.
- What sensations do you feel? Are there areas that feel tight? What's feeling good? Try to scan your sensations without placing judgment on them. Notice if there is a lack of sensation in any part.
- What emotions do you feel? Are you eager? Are you nervous? Try to scan your emotions without placing judgment on top of them. Just observe, notice yourself.
- Deliberately deepen your breath. Make a sound if you feel like it. Notice what happens as you do.

What we just practiced is called self-awareness.

Orienting and Grounding

Orienting: Cue students sit comfortable in their chair with both feet on the ground. Cue students to slowly turn their head side to side and scan their environment. "As you slowly check the room around you, try noticing four objects that you find pleasant to look at"

Benefit: re-orient students who might have a hypervigilant nervous system. Helps students practice mindfulness which is good for students who may be suffering from anxiety. Helps relax the body and promotes self-regulation.

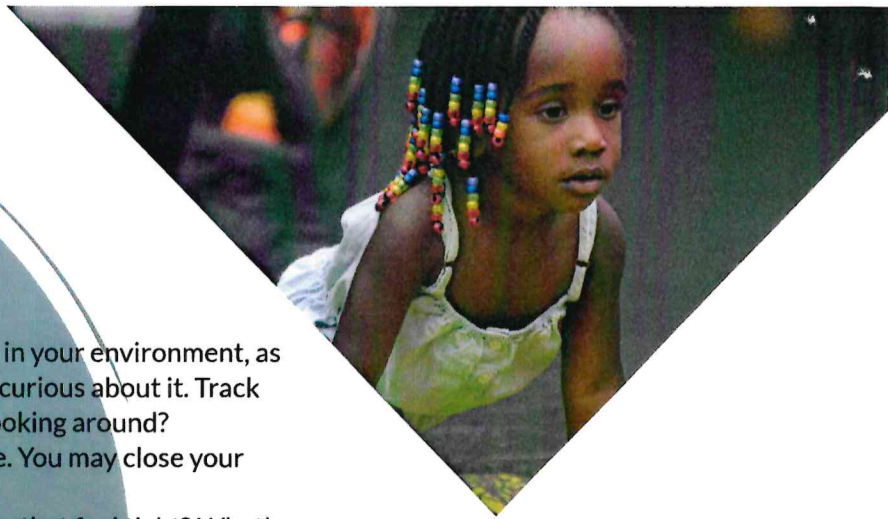
Grounding: Invite students to feel their feet on the floor or feel their legs moving or focus on energizing their legs. This can help students who dissociate to feel secure and feel empowered again. Students can also do grounding exercises while walking. Have students focus on the feeling of their feet touching the ground and the feelings in their legs as they are walking.

Benefit: diminish states of activation in the nervous system, focus the student back on where they are instead of in their headspace (helpful to children who are impacted by trauma), helps counter dissociation. Research shows that regular grounding practice can help regulate strong emotions such as anger.

Self-Compassion Exercise

Informal Practice: What Would You Say to a Friend?

1. Cue: Think of a time when a friend was having a hard time. What did you say to them, to cheer them up or help them feel better?
2. Cue: Write down a struggle you have had today or this week. Write down how you responded to this physically or emotionally.
3. Think- was it different than how you responded to your friend and their struggle?
4. What would you say to a close friend who had the same struggle as you? Say that to yourself now internally.



Strategies

Calming Strategies

When students "ruminate", their brain is unable to let go of the negative experience they are thinking of.

Ruminating comes from our body's inability to discharge energy from our freeze state. Some children may experience early adversity and/or inborn reactivity to negative events. These exaggerated responses over time can lead to a propensity to develop anxiety disorders later in life.

Distraction is one way to stop students from ruminating. Charlie Appelstein, author of *No Such Thing as a Bad Kid*, recommends the following strategies for students:

- Go for a walk
- Play sudoku
- Get a drink of water
- Read a book
- Breathing exercises
- Coloring or scribbling
- Listen to a book, or be read to
- Do a "find an object" activity like in "Where's Waldo"

TIP

Mirroring

People with developmental trauma may not have had adequate mirroring from a caretaker. Mirroring can be a reparative practice for a child when done with a safe adult. Mirroring happens when a person is able to validate or reflect the state of another person.

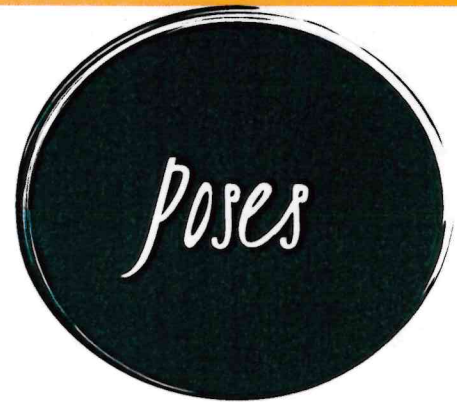
Statement: I'm pissed off today. I don't want to do yoga.

Mirroring reflection: I hear that you're angry and you really don't want to do yoga.

Legs up the wall- students lay flat on their back with their legs up the wall. Arms are out like a T to their sides.



Constructive rest- students lay on back with knees bent, feet resting on floor. Students may either cross their arms across their chest or place one hand on the heart and one hand on the stomach.



Plank: Begin in table pose. Step one leg back and then the other. Hold this pose for several breaths. Release body back into child's pose or continue sun salutation.

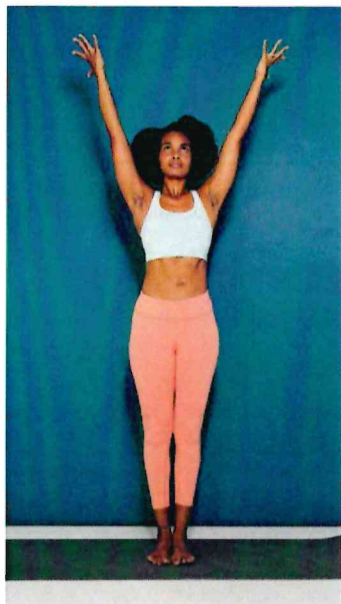


Resting pose- students lay on their back with arms out by their side or in goal position. Their eyes may be closed or find a point above them. Students may also lay on their side or belly if this feels more comfortable.



Chair pose: Begin in mountain pose. Bend your knees to sit back like you would start to sit on a chair. Focus on keeping strength in the legs and reach up with the arms. Modification: use the wall to lean back on. Only bend down as is comfortable. Focus on strengthening your legs.





Mountain pose: Cue students to stand. Inhale, step your feet as comfortably as possible next to each other. Exhale, extend your arms down, palms facing the sides of your legs. Breathe. Ask students to find a point down their nose or at a non-living object to focus on.

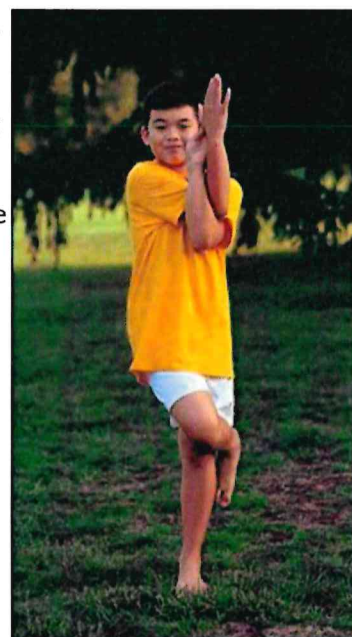
Cues:

1. Allow your shoulders to melt away from your ears (do not cue students to “relax” as this is a trigger for students who may have been sexually abused)
2. Bring your shoulder blades back to touch at your back.
3. Feel the strength of your feet and legs touch the ground like a mountain. Lift your head to touch the clouds as your feet move towards the ground.
4. You may cue students to hold the pose for a number of seconds, counting down to zero. This helps students learn to safely experience discomfort and know that it is ending.

Benefits: aligns the spine, improves posture, increases alertness, builds focus. Good to do before a test or after lunch or after students have been sitting a while.

Eagle Pose: Begin in mountain pose. Inhale, stand tall. Exhale, bend your knees slightly as you step right foot over your left leg. Place your right foot like a kickstand to the outside of the left foot. Inhale, reach your arms out to the side. Exhale, bring your right arm over your left arm. Bend your elbows as your palms press together. Raise your forearms. Breathe. When you are ready, unwind your body. Repeat again with opposite legs and arms.

Benefit: Stretches most major muscle groups, builds focus, stimulates the mind, excellent for stretching muscles that might be sore from poor posture.



Online Resources

Elementary:

- <https://www.namastekid.com/>- Poses, projects, activities, story time
- <https://www.kidsyogastories.com/>- book recommendations, blog, articles, lesson plans
- <https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>- videos and story themed lessons

Secondary:

- <https://www.kidsyogastories.com/teen-yoga/>- Trauma-informed resources, articles, book recommendations

Other Helpful Resources:

- <https://www.self.com/gallery/must-know-yoga-poses-for-beginners>
- <https://yogaed.com/>- Training, webinars, events, etc.

Glossary- From Yoga Ed

ABC Method: ANTECEDENT- BEHAVIOR- CONSEQUENCE An approach to understanding behavior patterns and preventing them from continuing in the classroom. If you can identify the antecedent, then you can proactively anticipate the behavior before it occurs and make adjustments in your teaching.

At-Risk: Someone who is likely to have experienced trauma and likely to not have had the resources to deal with their trauma.

Autonomic Nervous System: The part of the peripheral nervous system that is responsible for the involuntary regulation of internal organs and glands.

Cultural Humility: The ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is open to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the individuals one is working with.

Developmental Trauma: An ongoing misattunement between a child and its primary caregiver.

Differential Reinforcement: A behavior management strategy that decreases an undesirable behavior by substituting the behavior with an appropriate behavior alternative. This strategy helps students recognize negative behaviors and choose positive behaviors to replace them. 1. Acknowledge what the student is feeling.

2. Communicate the limit of acceptable behavior.

3. Target appropriate alternatives.

For example, a student begins to hit his head on his desk because he is frustrated. The educator acknowledges what the student is feeling and communicates the limit of acceptable behavior by saying, "I see that you are frustrated right now, but you may not hit your head on your desk." The educator follows this with appropriate alternatives. "You may either take a Time-In, draw how you are feeling on a piece of paper at your desk, or take a moment to move some of your frustrated energy out by pushing the wall and taking some deep breaths."

Dysregulation: A general lack of control over one's behavior or emotional state.

Effective Communication: A successful information sharing process through which one party expresses a clear message that is easily understood by another.

Empathy: The act of understanding and sharing the feelings of others.

Executive Function: A set of cognitive skills that allow a person to manage attention, emotions, and behavior.

Fight, Flight, Freeze Response: A sympathetic nervous response to a threat whereby energy is mobilized to either fight, flee, or freeze to get to safety. During the freeze response, the body stays still until the danger passes. These responses often occur without the awareness of the higher brain.

Limbic System: The brain structures involved in emotional processing in the brain. These structures include the amygdala, hippocampus, hypothalamus, and thalamus.

Amygdala: Integrates emotions and emotional behavior, recognizes expression and body language.

Glossary- continued

Hippocampus: Spatial memory and learning.

Hypothalamus: Coordinates all autonomic nervous system and endocrine responses.

Thalamus: Relay station for all incoming senses except smell, functions, in emotions and memory.

Marginalized Communities: Communities that are most deeply affected by economic instability, poverty, crime, institutionalized racism or oppression, and violence.

Mind-Body Resources: Yoga-based tools designed for youth who have been exposed to traumatic events or circumstances. Resources can be divided into three categories:

Centering: A physical and mental resource of getting in touch with the muscles in the abdomen and internalizing one's locus of self and control.

Grounding: A physical resource of being present with one's body, especially one's feet, legs, and the earth beneath them.

Orienting: A mental resource of being oriented in time and space.

Mirroring (External Practice): The process of validating or reflecting the state of another person back to them.

Neuroplasticity: The ability to change the way we think and behave at any point in our lives.

Parasympathetic Nervous System: The part of the autonomic nervous system for the body's "rest and digest" activities that occur in a body at rest or relaxation.

Positive Reinforcement: A behavioral modification technique that increases the likelihood of a behavior to occur.

Relaxation Response: A physical state of rest that mediates effects of stress.

Sources:

- Levy, J., Goldstein, A., & Feldman, R. (2019). The neural development of empathy is sensitive to caregiving and early trauma.
- Miller, R., Youth Development: From the Trenches, 2012 see pages 2, 122
- Yoga Ed Trauma Informed Yoga for Youth Teacher's Guide
- Yoga Ed Trauma Informed Yoga for Youth Student's Guide