



IN BLOOM
·Y·O·G·A·



What Students Want & Need

Lesson



Lesson Overview

In this lesson, we explore desires and needs common among new students.

Objective

Be prepared to balance students' desires to be seen and included, a teacher's need to promote safety, and the need for students to explore without feeling excessively "corrected."

Description

Describe some universal desires and needs among students. Consider the ways in which your personal attention to each student is critical while also balancing students' needs for space and independence. Some students may feel awkward or uncomfortable, or carry inherent shame, and experience that as wanting to "be left alone." Explain how you can respect such experiences, and reconcile needs for inclusion and space. Provide ways that you can be particularly thoughtful and supportive with new students. Explain considerations related to demonstration with new students. There's a risk related to singling out students for support. Explain the risk and how to address it.

What Students Want & Need



Your personal attention to each student, particularly new students, is critical. While the following applies to all students, it's particularly important with new students.

- Students **want** to be seen, to be acknowledged, and to feel included. At the same time, there is a need to balance students' needs for space and independence.
- Students **need** to be observed, to be attended to, and to practice safely.

Balancing Acknowledgement & Space

Some students may feel awkward or uncomfortable, or carry inherent shame, which is experienced as nervousness or bravado or wanting to “be left alone.” How might you respect such experiences while reconciling other needs for safety and inclusion?

- One way is to begin with empathy. You might think about the desire we all have to feel safe, and how new situations may invoke anything from slight worry to strong anxiety.
- A new undertaking of any sort may invoke fear, and yoga in particular is likely to expose a student's weaknesses and may trigger unresolved issues.
- When such fears arise, some students will react by seeking more attention while others will want to “blend into the woodwork” and be left to their own devices.
- No matter their triggered reactions, the fundamental need for all students is to feel safe and included. Thus, **how** you acknowledge and include each student while respectfully giving them the space they need will help to make them more comfortable as they adapt to the situation.
- Of course, teachers don't know what's going on inside every student. To know who needs more space and what types of attention they are comfortable with requires observation and wisdom plus some experimentation.
- Wise teachers do their best to remember the vast array of potential experiences and to stay grounded in order to observe carefully and respond mindfully.

Be Thoughtful & Supportive



1. Arrive early in order to be fully prepared and present, and have time to talk individually with each student.
2. Personally, welcome each student.
3. Introduce yourself and ask the student's name. Hold respectful eye contact and smile.
4. Help them set up their mat and props.
5. Speak softly or pull the student aside in order to have a moment of private conversation. Ask questions regarding experience in yoga and other physical activities: Are you under the care of a healthcare provider? Have you had any surgeries? Do you have any current injuries or conditions?
6. Say something reassuring that the student can focus on, such as thinking about the process of moving the body toward a posture vs. attaining a particular form, or prioritizing breath awareness.

INITIAL GREETING AND MEETING OF NEW STUDENTS

All new students deserve an individualized welcome from their teacher. Along with asking about prior experience, injuries, and intentions, this initial contact is essential in helping new students feel more comfortable in class. It is important to tell them explicitly that in yoga we are interested in how we go, not how far we go; that it is a process of consciously connecting breath-body-mind while exploring the development of strength, flexibility, and balance as part of a long-term sustainable practice of holistic integration... If possible, group new students close to one another so you can more easily give demonstrations and more specific guidance to them while remaining attentive to the larger class. – **Mark Stephens**

Demonstrating



In all teaching situations, it's ideal to challenge yourself to offer clear verbal cues that do not require seeing a demonstration. But of course, new students will tend to constantly watch the teacher.

- Make it easier for students to see you demonstrate poses by moving around the room.
- Moving around the room will also enable you to observe each student and to provide discreet one-on-one attention, as needed.
- Demonstrate an accessible version of the pose, only showing more challenging variations as appropriate for the group.
- As appropriate, show exactly how to use props and speak to the purpose or benefit of the props so as to invite students to feel the effects and thereby correcting any presumptions that props are “cheating” or are signs of inadequacy.

Limit How Much You Single Out a Student



Thinking of teaching as providing guidance vs. correction can set a tone of support and growing self-reliance among students.

1. There is a risk that students who are singled out for support may feel that they are “not good at yoga” or they may simply be uncomfortable with such attention. Thus, when you are considering attending one-on-one to promote safety or comfort, you may wish to carefully consider how often you single out a particular student.
2. One option, if the number of students is small enough, is to assist each student individually so no particular student feels like she is getting more “correction.”
3. Be sure to teach some safe pose versions that students can do “right enough” without your individualized teaching.