



Photo courtesy of Julia Bobrov.

Yoga For Kids

You're Never Too Old Or Too Young

by Andrea Cirignano

Many local yoga studios have added yoga for children to their regular schedules, and while some might ask why kids should do yoga, others might ask, "Why not?" There is an endless list of reasons why adults practice the discipline, but most of the reasons can also apply to children. Douglas Ridings, a local Seattle yoga instructor for adults and children, says, "[Yoga] tends to build [children's] confidence, helps them to feel more comfortable with their bodies and to calm down and relax; essentially the same reasons it benefits adults." As with adults, the benefits of yoga can extend beyond the physical. Dana Hein-Skaggs, owner and creator of Kid Yoga notes, "I think that the value of yoga for kids lies in the coping skills that they can incorporate into their lives. Whether you are a child or an adult, getting to know yourself on an

intimate level, letting your true nature unfold or even understanding what that means is an extremely powerful tool in living a life of happiness and health." Like most adults, children tend to start yoga as a physical, dynamic practice,

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but Ridings says that he is surprised by how open children are to expanding into more of a still practice where they can experience the philosophical side of yoga. Most kids yoga classes are similar to a typical adult yoga class in

that they include movement and stillness, stretching, balancing, strengthening and breathwork. Popular kids' poses include those that simulate animals and many variations of tree. Children tend to have fun with inversions (upside-down poses, such as handstand) because they have not yet learned to be afraid of change and of hurting themselves. Like adults, children need to expend some energy before they are ready for rest and to turn the focus inward. How open novices are to new ideas in yoga, whether they're adults or children, usually correlates with how comfortable they are with the group, observes Hein-Skaggs: "In the beginning, sometimes there are those that are reluctant to participate in an activity, but after coming a few times, they become at ease and are willing to try everything. Knowing that it is totally up to them to make those decisions helps



Kid Yoga fun in the park. Photo courtesy of Julia Bobrov.

to hold the safe container for them to feel respectful and confident of themselves and each other, which is also the practice of yoga." The trend appears not to be limited

only to pioneering cities like Seattle. According to a 2009 CNN report, at least 150 U.S. schools follow lesson plans designed by YogaKids, a company started in 1991 by yoga instructor Marsha Wenig. Other yoga programs for children include Yoga 4 Kids, Yoga for the Special Child and Yoga Calm. Many of them host teacher training certification programs and sell board games, books, classroom kits, DVDs, flashcards and handbooks.

More than a trend, teaching yoga to children has shown promise for improving student behavior, physical and emotional health, self-esteem and academic performance, especially for children with special needs, according to studies done by California State University and Leipzig University.

Hein-Skaggs explains that as long

as children have a place to practice that is safe emotionally, physically and mentally, introducing them to yoga isn't usually a challenge because they

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love to move and are uninhibited. "We can learn a lot from kids. As adults, we have suppressed our spontaneity, our imaginations and our natural ability to connect."

Douglas Ridings teaches Kid Yoga at 8 Limbs Yoga

Centers, in Seattle, and Dana Hein-Skaggs teaches Kid Yoga at Flow Yoga Redmond and at Laughing Buddha Yoga Studio, in Mill Creek. Writer Andrea Blair Cirignano is a local yoga instructor with a journalism background. She believes yoga is for everyone and that each member of the community could benefit from the practice in some way, shape or form. Her articles highlight the unique pairing of this ancient practice with a modern Pacific Northwest lifestyle. Find out more about Andrea at yogagone.net.

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