

A Guide to Teaching Yoga to Children



Practical yoga tips, poses and sample class structure for engaging children from 2 – 12 years old.

Benefits of Yoga

Physical Benefits

Yoga helps improve flexibility, balance, and coordination. It helps build strength in a low-impact, non-competitive way and supports healthy posture and body mechanics. Yoga can help with improving gross and fine motor skills. Yoga helps improve body awareness and improve energy levels through movement and breathing exercises that boosts vitality. Relaxation techniques can help with sleep.

Mental & Emotional Benefits

Yoga helps with emotional regulation as it teaches children to recognise and manage their feelings. It helps reduce stress and manage anxiety through breathing techniques and relaxation. Yoga helps improve focus and concentration through mindful movements and balancing poses. It encourages self-expression and creativity and helps build self-confidence and resilience.

Social Benefits

Yoga fosters cooperation and empathy. It creates a safe, inclusive space for all abilities and helps build community and a sense of belonging.

Yoga for Different Ages

Ages 2-5 (Pre-school)

At this age, children have a short attention span. They learn through play, songs and stories. Use class themes based on animals, the weather, adventures, superheroes, popular children movies, songs and books. If teaching at kindergartens / daycares, use books that the educators read with the children to help align the class with the curriculum.

Focus on imagination, movement exploration (involve children in coming up with creative movements), incorporate songs, dancing and lots of repetition. Avoid long holds or complex sequences. Teach basic breathing techniques that uses visual cues and props such as the hoberman sphere.

Keep sessions short (20 minutes for under 3yr olds, 30 minutes for over 3yr olds). Class length will depend on time of day, the children's activities beforehand and their energy.

Ages 6-8 (Lower Primary School / Elementary / Prep to Grade 2)

Sessions can last 30-40 minutes. Children can follow simple instructions and enjoy imaginative scenarios. At this age, simple partner poses (such as the partner boat pose) and group poses can be introduced. Keep sequences simple using child friendly instructions. Use themes based on popular books, songs and movies enjoyed by children at this age. Use games like "Simon Says" using yoga poses and passing balls using yoga poses. Some children may enjoy dancing. Teach breathing techniques that uses yoga props such as the hoberman sphere. Teach other breathing techniques such as the lion's breath and snake breath.

Ages 9-12 (Upper Primary School / Elementary / Grade 3 - 6)

Sessions can last 45-60 minutes. Introduce creative and fun Sun Salutation and other sequences such as a surfing flow using warrior yoga poses. Teach mindfulness and guided relaxation. Allow creative input - let kids design their own sequences. Discuss how yoga connects to daily life (focus and calming

for school, tests, sports competition / tournaments and performances).

Explore other types of breathing techniques such as Nadi Shodana. Explore deeper mindfulness topics and concepts such as friendship, kindness and love. Other themes to explore includes chakras, moon cycles, popular movies etc. Introduce more complex (and safe) partner and group yoga poses and sequences.

Sample Class Structure

A typical 30 - 45 minute session could look like this:

Welcome, Centering and Connection (5 mins)

- Ring a bell or chime to signal the start of class.
- Check in with the children: “How are you feeling today?”.
- Reflect on previous class if necessary and set an intention or theme for current session.
- Simple breathing exercise to help centre the children
 - “Smell the flowers, blow out the candles” (inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth).
 - Incorporate some gentle stretching with the breath – have arms by the side and sweep up towards the sky as you breathe in, palms together overhead, bring palms to the heart centre as you breathe out.
 - Pretend to draw rainbows with arms (sweeping arms across) while breathing.

Warm-Up (5-10 mins)

- Gentle stretches, body shakes, or a movement game. Build energy gradually.
- Do a child friendly version of the sun salutation. For example:
 - Stretch up to sweep the clouds side to side and say hello to the sun
 - Bend down, bend your knees and feel the grass with your hands
 - Step one leg back, and the other to downward dog, imagine you’re a dog playing in the park

- Come down to your tummy, feel how soft the ground is underneath your body
- Stretch your chest to cobra and let the beautiful warm sun shine on your heart
- Step one leg forward and another
- Stretch your arms up towards the sun, feel the sun energize your body.
- Include playful elements such as “Let’s wake up our bodies like a lion stretching in the sun!”

Main Poses & Activities (15-25 mins)

- Teach 5-8 poses connected by a story or theme. Include standing, balancing, and floor poses. Add partner or group activities for variety. Complexity of poses introduced should depend on the age of the children.
- Use imaginative names / stories:
 - Downward dog – “Stretch like a dog”. To help children hold the pose – “Bark like an angry dog, a friendly dog, a sad dog etc”
 - Cat / cow – “Stretch like a scared / spooked cat”, “Rub shoulders with the cat next to you”
 - Giraffe pose (mountain pose with arms stretched up) – “stand tall, go on your tippy toes, be as tall as a giraffe and reach for the leaves on the trees, stretch to the left to reach for more leaves and don’t forget the other side”
 - Tree pose – “Stand tall like a tree reaching for the sky”, “Open the branches of your tree (open arms out wide).
- Link to popular children’s books for example “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” by Eric Carle
 - Egg on a leaf – child’s pose
 - Caterpillar – cobra pose
 - Butterfly – cobbler pose
 - Tree – tree pose
- Encourage co-creation and creativity.
 - Ask children how a butterfly moves in cobbler pose.
 - Ask children what other kinds of food a caterpillar eats.
- Encourage working together by including partner poses such as back to back twists.

Breathing Practice (2-5 mins or as needed throughout the class)

- Incorporate simple breathing practices throughout the class to calm children's energy.
- Use the deep belly breathing technique with a hoberman sphere. "Breathing in deep, feel the belly rise / expand, breathing out slow feel the belly fall / contract".

Cool-Down / Transition to Relaxation (2-5 mins or more depending on energy)

- Slower and gentle stretches, forward folds and twists. Do while seated or lying down. Transition the energy down.

Relaxation (5-10 mins)

- Guided relaxation (savasana) with a story or visualisation. "Imagine lying on a soft cloud as you relax your body. Breathe in – invite relaxation into your mind and body. Breathe out – let go and relax. Relax your body from your head to your toes." Guide children to relax each part of their body.
- Remind children why relaxation is important for the mind and body. Connect it to their daily life.

Closing (2 - 3 mins)

- End with connection. Close the group with "Namaste", or "Thank You" or encourage sharing "How do you feel?", "What did you like the most about today's session?"

Tips for Success

Create a Safe and Inviting Space

- Establish clear expectations at the start of the class.
- Remind children to listen to their body. Emphasize that yoga is non-competitive.
- Avoid extreme stretches and inversions unless yoga teacher and students are experienced and children can be closely supervised.
- Never force a pose – allow children to modify or skip poses as needed, respect children’s comfort and flexibility.
- Don’t force children who don’t want to participate to do yoga. Respect their choice.
- Celebrate effort over perfection. Continue to encourage children throughout the class.
- Maintain a calm, patient and supportive attitude.
- Use soft mats and ensure there is enough space for movement.
- Avoid distractions (toys etc). Have yoga props available and easy to reach, but keep them out of sight until needed to avoid distractions.

Language

- Keep language simple, positive, encouraging and inclusive.
- Use storytelling, animal noises and other sound effects. Be animated with your voice, face and body.
- Focus on effort and fun, not flawless execution.
- Give clear, short, age-appropriate instructions (one action at a time)
- Use songs or rhymes to reinforce sequences. Use popular songs that children already enjoy and incorporate yoga poses.
- Make poses accessible by adapting for children with different abilities.

Use Themes & Stories

- Build classes around adventures (jungle safari, ocean exploration, space travel, visiting a zoo, swimming at the beach, going to the park). Themes give structure and spark imagination.

- Build sequences around popular movies and topics that children already enjoy.
- Align sequences with themes and topics that the children are currently exploring / learning in childcare or school.

Keep It Playful

- Incorporate games, music and props (scarves, stuffed animals, yoga cards). Laughter is welcome - it means kids are engaged.
- Use basic breathing techniques to calm children's energy if needed (use hoberman sphere or singing bowl to assist in settling the energy in the room).

Model Calm Energy

- Your tone and energy sets the room. Speak clearly and with animation to engage children during the main part of the yoga class. Use a calm, slow and steady voice during breathing exercises, mindfulness exercise and relaxation.

Be Flexible and Adapt

- Read the room. If energy is high, add movement. If kids are tired, slow down. Be prepared to change your yoga plans / sequences to adapt to the children's needs. The best classes adapt to what children need in the moment.