



Importance of Yoga

Children with Autism often do not naturally know how to behave in relation to the world around them, they can often feel or be made to feel as though they are doing something wrong. Yoga offers a structured, focused activity with no right or wrongs.

Looking at how Yoga directly influences the characteristics of Autism in children

Social Communication and Interaction – the relaxation and calming techniques, yoga can be a useful tool to help them self-regulate in social situations. This helps to build their self-esteem and confidence, which in turn helps them with interacting with other children and adults.

The child is likely to form a bond of trust and friendship with the teacher, which may also aid in shaping relationships with other adults or children

Delayed Motor Skills – Practicing asana helps in increasing muscle tone, develops balance and stability and improves overall body awareness and self-regulation. Sequences and transitions between poses could also help with coordination and the development of motor skills.

Hyperactivity – The breathing techniques and deep relaxation that a child learns in yoga can help to bring calm. Children can use the techniques to calm themselves and self-regulate in situations outside of the yoga class.

Again, relaxation and deep breathing directly help with anxiety issues, which may in turn allow for improved sleep.

For children that respond to routines, Yoga offers an orderly and consistent activity, which can become part of their weekly schedule. Repeating postures in the same order every week will increase confidence as they grow to know the sequence and what is coming next.

Preparing for yoga

As every child is different and will have different needs it is important to start slowly and for the teacher to get to know and connect with the child and their needs. They will need to form a bond and trust with them before even learning asana.

Children with high energy may need to only practice seated and grounding postures to begin with to soothe the nervous system.

In a group class, it is important to have assistance and ideally one teacher or assistant per child.

Generally, children with ASD tend to learn visually so as well as demonstrating and moving with students, the teacher may like to use Yoga cards or other visual tools.

Example class designed for children with ASD

Simple warm ups – counting fingers, side stretching, seated twists, tapping the body all over to awaken awareness of the body.

Sun Salutations – These should be introduced only when the child is ready and after they have learnt the standing asana.

Standing Poses – Warrior 2 and Utthita Trikonasana are great for strengthening the legs and ankles and making a child feel strong and grounded.

Forward Bends – Seated forward bend (pashimotanasana), Standing forward bend (uttanasana) or child's pose (balasana) – forward bends help to quiet the system and are calming. Particularly good for calming the nervous system of a hyperactive child and for anxiety.

Backbends – Cobra (bhujangasana) and Bow Pose (dhanurasana) can be very accessible and fun. Backbends open the heart centre, increase positive moods and open the lungs help increase lung capacity. The teacher can support the child in these postures as they may not initially have the strength to come up themselves and will they feel safer and help to build the feeling of trust.

Balancing – tree pose, excellent for helping the child to find balance and to increase concentration. If in a group class, the students can be encouraged to stand in a circle and hold hands adding an element of working together.

Savasana – deep relaxation, may be good to include massage and soothing music.



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