



# YOGA TOOLKIT FOR EDUCATORS

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## INTRO TO YOGA

Yoga is a practice that incorporates meditation, breathwork, and physical poses. The words yoga actually means “to yolk” and is interpreted to mean a union or a coming together, any connection. The Mayo Clinic also defines the following:

*“The core components of hatha yoga and most general yoga classes are:*

- **Poses.** *Yoga poses, also called postures, are a series of movements designed to increase strength and flexibility. Poses range from lying on the floor while completely relaxed to difficult postures that may have you stretching your physical limits.*
- **Breathing.** *Controlling your breathing is an important part of yoga. Yoga teaches that controlling your breathing can help you control your body and quiet your mind.*
- **Meditation or relaxation.** *In yoga, you may incorporate meditation or relaxation. Meditation may help you learn to be more mindful and aware of the present moment without judgment.”<sup>1</sup>*

Yoga is an incredible tool for use with students, from elementary age to pre-teens and teens. A consistent practice helps to increase mindfulness and assist in stress management. In addition, yoga can be physically challenging, encouraging physical fitness, as well as assists students with body awareness, fosters motor function and balance, and helps students learn to listen to their bodies.<sup>2</sup> The research is just emerging as to all the potential health benefits, but a few are listed from the Mayo Clinic below.

*“The potential health benefits of yoga include:*

- **Stress reduction.** *A number of studies have shown that yoga may help reduce stress and anxiety. It can also enhance your mood and overall sense of well-being.*
- **Improved fitness.** *Practicing yoga may lead to improved balance, flexibility, range of motion and strength.*
- **Management of chronic conditions.** *Yoga can help reduce risk factors for chronic diseases, such as heart disease and high blood pressure. Yoga might also help alleviate chronic conditions, such as depression, pain, anxiety and insomnia.”<sup>1</sup>*

References:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/yoga/art-20044733>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.greenmatters.com/parenting/2017/06/14/ZhUq8R/yoga-for-kids-positions>

## POSES

Yoga poses, also called postures or *asanas* in Sanskrit, are the movement component of yoga. Poses range from lying on the floor while completely relaxed to more challenging postures that might be pushing your physical limits. It is always important to error on the side of less-is-more, unless working with an experienced teacher. Yoga isn't about twisting into the most pretzel-like shapes. It really is about combining the breath, with mindful attention and the movement. Poses do have the ability to help increase flexibility, ease pain and release built up tension and stress. Poses also help the body physically move away from distraction and into personal reflection and mindfulness.

In this section are resources such as videos and websites to build up a library for yourself, to practice with your students. If this is difficult for a participant, you may inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth." – or both!

### **Recommended videos:**

Yoga For The Classroom - [Yoga With Adriene](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Td6zFtZPkJ4>

Beginner Yoga for Kids and Teens Class - 30 Min FULL Routine - SeanVigueFitness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsfJnS79GO8>

Yoga for Kids / Tweens - [SportskoolPlus](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPG3CfY28K0>

### **Recommended Websites:**

12 Kid-Friendly Yoga Poses to Focus and Destress

<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-23064/12-kidfriendly-yoga-poses-to-focus-and-destress.html>

Benefits of Yoga for Your Teenager

[http://www.momjunction.com/articles/benefits-of-yoga-for-your-teenager\\_0094957/#gref](http://www.momjunction.com/articles/benefits-of-yoga-for-your-teenager_0094957/#gref)

Teaching Yoga to Teenagers

## BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Breath awareness is an important part of yoga. Yoga teaches that being aware of your breathing can help you control your body and quiet your mind.

Students are under a lot of pressure. Not only are there rules and limitations everywhere, there are an equal amount of expectations and responsibilities. From fulfilling their roles as a child, a team player, a student, a leader, a follower, students are susceptible to stress (physical and emotional), from various strong emotions such as worry, fear, anger and sadness. These feelings are a natural part of life, and the sooner we can give our children tools to manage the roller coaster of emotions, the better they not only cope, but thrive, in their environment.

Below are three simple breathing techniques that can be done anywhere to help relieve tension, relax the body and mind, and slow down the physical symptoms of stress. Many of these breathing techniques can be used before big presentations, when feeling frustrated or simply during a break in a busy day.

### 1.) **DOUBLE EXHALE BREATH**

Benefits: calms the nervous system, slows down racing thoughts, slows heart rate, brings focus to breath

How to do it: With eyes closed, inhale deeply and slowly for 4 breaths, and then slowly exhaling for 8 (whatever the inhale, double the number for exhales). Sometimes, it's best to start small, with 2 inhales and 4 exhales, then slowly increase the amount. Inhales and exhales are done through the nose, if possible. If this is difficult for a participant, you may inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth.

### 2.) **BALLOON BELLY BREATH**

Benefits: calms the nervous system, helps release tightness in stomach (especially related to fears and worry), helps with digestion, brings focus to breath

How to do it: While lying on the back with eyes closed, place both hands together or separately on the stomach. On the inhale, push out the belly, visualizing a balloon (ask the child for their favorite color). The "balloon" (belly) slowly fills up on the inhale, and slowly releases on the exhale. Just as you slowly blow up a balloon, you slowly blow up the belly. Slow and steady is key. Can be done standing, but the preference is lying down for all muscles to be completely relaxed.

### 3.) **LION'S ROAR BREATH**

Benefits: helps release frustration and anger, assists in reducing tension in the jaw and neck

How to do it: Take a deep inhale, puffing up the chest and raising the head (looking straight ahead). On the exhale, open the mouth as wide as possible, stick out the tongue (flat out in front) and roar (or give a hearty breath). On the exhale, release the shoulders and chest down as the breath comes out. Repeat at least 3 times. Continue if one finds it beneficial.

This is a great set of videos that introduces basic breathing exercises. (Also located Resources section)

Belly Breath videos

<http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/yoga-break.html?WT.ac=t-ra>

## MEDITATION (OR RELAXATION)

In yoga, you may incorporate meditation or relaxation. Meditation may help you learn to be more mindful and aware of the present moment without judgment. In a classroom setting, it may be more appropriate to focus on the term, relaxation, or simply mindfulness.

From the medical community to the yoga community, it is clear that meditation is beneficial.

Studies at Harvard University found that long-term meditators have increased amounts of gray matter in the insula and sensory regions, and the auditory and sensory cortex.<sup>3</sup>

Basically, this means that researchers are seeing that meditation does the following:

- reduces stress
- fosters clear thinking and
- increases our capacity for empathy and compassion<sup>3</sup>

Below are two meditation/relaxation exercises to use with your students.

### **Color (or Rainbow) Relaxation**

Sit in a comfortable position or lie on your back. Begin relaxing your muscles from the top of your head down to your toes. Starting at the top of your head, with the color violet. Taking a deep breath in, visualizing the color violet *{insert repeating color}* gently covering your body, exhaling as it flows from the top of your head down to the tips of your toes.

*Repeat with the colors in order, violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. Inhale and exhale.*

Lastly, imagine a white bubble of calm beginning to cover the top of your head as you inhale, flowing all the way down to your toes as you exhale, bringing with a blanket of relaxation.

### **Counting Down to Relaxation**

Begin counting backward from 100 to 1. Counting backward requires more concentration and will help you stay more focused simply on the task of counting. Try not to think about other things and just stay with the numbers. If you lose your count, start again from 100. If any thought comes into your mind, simply start all over again. Thoughts come in all the time, so it is truly a practice between you and yourself, so even the smallest thought requires diligence to return back to the beginning. If you reached 1, stay in silence for a few more moments.

This is a great exercise for developing concentration and helps us become more aware of our thoughts, and often how intrusive these thoughts can be without even realizing it. Sometimes

the more we try to NOT focus on something, the more it becomes the focus. So, in this exercise we are simply focused on counting while inhaling and exhaling.

*Counting Down to Relaxation Adapted from:*

10 Cool Meditations for Pre-Teens and Teens

<https://www.doyouyoga.com/10-cool-meditations-for-pre-teens-and-teens-67578/>

*References:*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.artofliving.org/us-en/meditation/meditation-for-you/benefits-of-meditation>



## RESOURCES

### Basics and Background of Yoga

A great reader-friendly resource on basic questions on yoga from Yoga Journal

<https://www.yogajournal.com/meditation/yoga-questions-answered>

7 Ways Yoga Helps Children and Teens

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/urban-survival/201505/7-ways-yoga-helps-children-and-teens>

Benefits of Yoga – Yoga Alliance

<https://www.yogaalliance.org/LearnAboutYoga/AboutYoga/Benefitsofyoga>

### Teaching Yoga

7 Insights to Make Yoga Cool for Pre-Teens

<https://www.doyouyoga.com/7-insights-to-making-yoga-cool-for-pre-teens-ages-10-12-63188/>

9 Yoga Tools to Calm Kids' Back-to-School Anxiety

<https://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/9-yoga-tools-calm-kids-back-school-anxiety>

Yoga For The Classroom - Yoga With Adriene

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Td6zFtZPkJ4>

Beginner Yoga for Kids and Teens Class - 30 Min FULL Routine - SeanVigueFitness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsfJnS79GO8>

Yoga for Kids / Tweens - SportskoolPlus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPG3Cfy28K0>

### Breathing and Breathwork

Belly Breath videos

<http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/yoga-break.html?WT.ac=t-ra>

4 Breathing Exercises for Kids

<https://move-with-me.com/self-regulation/4-breathing-exercises-for-kids-to-empower-calm-and-self-regulate/>

## **Meditation and Mindfulness**

Health Benefits of Meditating

<https://www.artofliving.org/us-en/meditation/meditation-for-you/benefits-of-meditation>

10 Cool Meditations for Pre-Teens and Teens

<https://www.doyouyoga.com/10-cool-meditations-for-pre-teens-and-teens-67578/>

Calm Classroom

<https://calmclassroom.com/>

Teaching Mindfulness to Teens: 5 Ways to Get “Buy-In”

<http://leftbrainbuddha.com/teaching-mindfulness-to-teens-5-ways-get-buy/>

Harvard neuroscientist: Meditation not only reduces stress, here’s how it changes your brain

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2015/05/26/harvard-neuroscientist-meditation-not-only-reduces-stress-it-literally-changes-your-brain/?utm\\_term=.5a96c3918427](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2015/05/26/harvard-neuroscientist-meditation-not-only-reduces-stress-it-literally-changes-your-brain/?utm_term=.5a96c3918427)