Trauma-Sensitive Yoga for Children & Adolescents

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Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Teacher

An Experience of Trauma-Sensitive Yoga

"Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience."

-Judith Lewis Herman, Trauma & Recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror, 1992

"Yoga attempts to create a state in which we are always present—really present—in every action, in every moment."

-T.K.V. Desikachar, The Heart of Yoga. 1999

"The goal of treatment of PTSD is to help people live in the present, without feeling or behaving according to irrelevant demands belonging to the past."

-Bessel van der Kolk

Notes

- This is an introduction to this material
  - There is much more to learn
- Take what works for you and leave the rest
- Agree to disagree
  - Yoga philosophy ~5,000 years old
  - Plethora of clinical theories and orientations
- Take care of yourself now and as you do trauma work

Trauma Overview

One Definition of Trauma

Trauma is an overwhelm to the system from

1. Too much too soon (i.e. car accident)
2. Too much for too long (i.e. ongoing sexual abuse)
3. Not enough for too long (i.e. chronic neglect)

-Laurie Leitch, Trauma Resiliency Model

Broad view of what can be traumatic

- Car accidents
- Natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.)
- Fires
- School violence
- Community & gang violence
- War
- Torture
- Political oppression
- Domestic violence/intimate partner violence
- Child abuse
- Neglect
- Emotional abuse & manipulation
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual assault/rape
- Homicide
- Suicide
- Grief & loss
- Divorce
- Medical trauma
- Traumatic brain injury (This is a whole other field.)
- Environmental trauma
- Intergenerational trauma (Trauma tends to repeat itself across generations.)
- Historical form of oppression (racism, heterosexism)
- Class issues (poverty & homelessness)
- Microaggressions
- Insidious trauma

Common Reactions to Trauma

- Fear and anxiety
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Increased arousal
- Impatience
- Irritability
- Avoidance
- Numbness
- Guilt
- Shame
- Depression
- Changes in self-image
- Changes in views of the world
- Impact on sexual relationships
- Drug and alcohol use

Statistics

Sexual abuse & sexual assault

- One in every 3-4 girls is sexually abused or assaulted before the age of 18.
- One in every 5-6 boys is sexually abused or assaulted before the age of 18.
- More than 90% of abusers are people children know, love, or trust.

Statistics

- There are more than 39 million survivors of sexual abuse in America.
- More than 60% of pregnant teens have been sexually abused. 20% of child sexual abuse survivors are under the age of 8.

Sources for all these statistics: Department of Health & Human Services, Darkness to Light - End Child Sexual Abuse

Yoga & Trauma-Sensitive Yoga

- How yoga and trauma-sensitive yoga (TSY) are different
- Theoretical underpinnings of TSY
- Domains of TSY
- Themes of TSY (therapeutic goals)

Yoga

There are many different types of yoga

- Hatha - *Most yoga in the U.S. is some form of Hatha yoga*
- Kundalini
- Iyengar
- Vinyasa/Vinyasa Flow
- Power Yoga
- Kripalu
- Hot Yoga/Bikram
- Yoga Therapy
- Viniyoga
- And many more!

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY)

TSY creates a safe, non-judgmental, and predictable space in which trauma survivors can learn to reconnect with and reclaim their bodies on their path to healing.

-Alissa Catlis & Eileen Rosete, January 2013

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY)

- TSY is yoga that focuses on creating safety so that your students can practice: interoception, choice, and action.
- TSY is non-prescriptive and invitational.
- TSY is a shared, authentic experience.
- You are standing in for your student's interoceptive pathways as they reclaim them.

-Dave Emerson, September 2013

Interoception

- A body-based experience
- Present moment feelings and sensations
- Noticing body-based internal states
- Feel-able things
  - Muscle activation/deactivation
  - Feeling a warmth or cooling sensation
- NOT feeling is okay too!

Theoretical Underpinnings of TSY

1. Neurophysiology
2. Trauma theory (Judith Herman - safety, stabilization, reconnection)
3. Attachment theory (i.e Blaustein & Kinniburgh, ARC Model - Attachment, Regulation, Competence)
4. Relational theory

Domains of a TSY Class

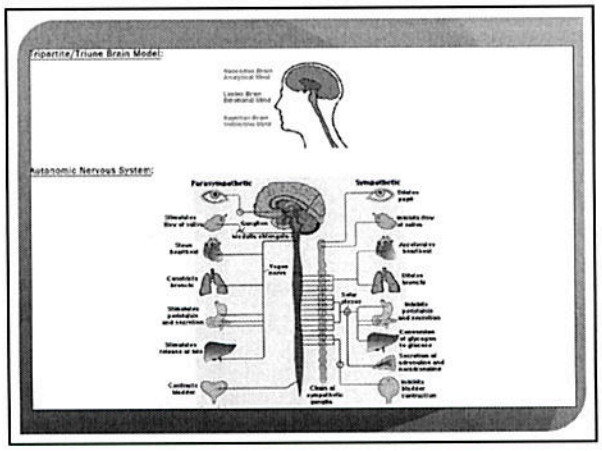
- Language
- Assists
- Teacher qualities
- Environment
- Exercises
  - Pacing
  - Choice
  - Timing

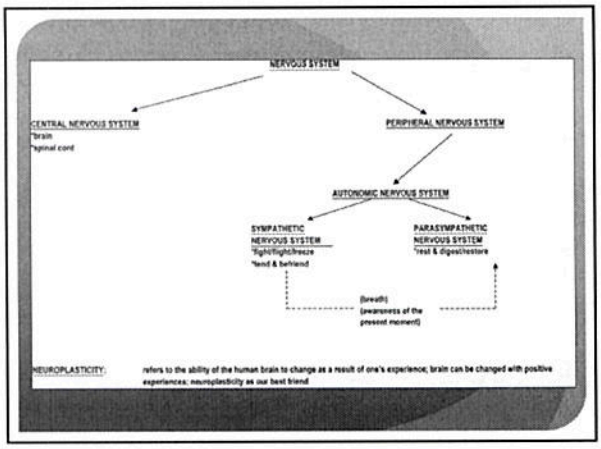
Themes of TSY (Therapeutic Goals)

- Practice making choices
- Present moment experience
- Taking effective action
- Creating rhythms
- Spatial orientation
- Sensing dynamics

Neurobiology

- 3-part brain schema, nervous system, stress response
- Theories on how/why yoga works
- Theories on how/why trauma-sensitive yoga works





How can trauma affect these systems?

- Trauma survivors are often stuck in the body / breath / mind that is related to the traumatic event
- Trauma survivors may deal with unpredictable stressors
- Trauma survivors may no longer be able to cope with stressors in the same way (adrenal fatigue)
- Trauma teaches people to disconnect from their bodies (body "betrayed" them, froze, could not get out/away)
- Body memories - memory of the trauma or abuse without descriptive narrative
- Somatization of pain

Theories on how/why Yoga Works

- Neuroplasticity
- Balances the nervous system
  - Modulates the stress response, also reduces cortisol
  - Vagus nerve effects
    - Ex: 1:2 breath stimulates the vagus nerve - slows the heart, relaxation response, relieves anxiety
- Effects of breathing exercises (pranayama)
- Develops present-moment awareness
  - Calling attention to what is happening right here, right now
- Develops self-regulation skills
- Trauma is immobilization - yoga helps feel power in the body

Theories on how/why Yoga Works (cont.)

- Balances chemicals→ dopamine, serotonin, cortisol
- Increases calming neurotransmitters
  - Ex: increased GABA (gamma aminobutyric acid) levels
- Builds a connection and an awareness of body
- Releases chronic tension patterns
- Builds physical strength→ may feel less vulnerable to threats
- Move together with others→ may build a sense of community

Theories on how/why TSY Works

All of the theories on how/why yoga works AND:

- Growth in interoceptive parts of brain
- Practice making choices
- Practice feeling/sensing into your body (interoception)
  - Becoming embodied and creating safety with/in the body
- Practice taking effective action based on those feelings/what you sense in your body
- PTSD symptom reduction

TSY is now an evidence-based treatment

"Yoga as an adjunctive treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder: A randomized control trial"

van der Kolk, Stone, West, Rhodes, Emerson, Suvak, Spinazzola, *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 75(6), e559-e565, 2014.

"A goal of yoga is non-attachment. A goal of trauma treatment is HEALTHY attachment."

-Dave Emerson

- We are getting involved in a relationship with our students and these relationships really matter
  - Attachment is a HUGE part of this process because the trauma after the trauma is more often than not a break in attachment/relationship on some level

5 Important Things to Consider Before Sharing Yoga with Clients

1. I believe that it goes better if you have had an embodied experience of the technique in your own body.
2. When working with other people's bodies, you need to have the utmost care and respect.
3. One of the tenets of TSY is choice. That means it is ultimately the client's choice if he/she wants to try any of these techniques.
4. Say, "We can stop at anytime" and mean it.
5. If it does not go well, let clients know that they can talk about the experience if they want, or they do not have to talk about it. (opportunity for relational repair)

- Alissa Catlis

Tools for Therapists

- Trauma-sensitive yoga techniques with children & adolescents
- Other tools from yoga include:
  - Breathing exercises
  - Meditations
  - Self-inquiry exercises
  - Mudras (hand gestures)
  - Mantras (sounds, words, or groups of words)

TSY with Children & Adolescents

1. TSY with children must always be a choice (like with adults). That means it is an <u>option to participate.</u>
2. "This is the way we do yoga here."
3. "This is 10 minutes where you are in charge of your own body. You choose what you do with your body."
4. Use a yoga deck or cards. Have child or teen choose the cards.

-Dave Emerson

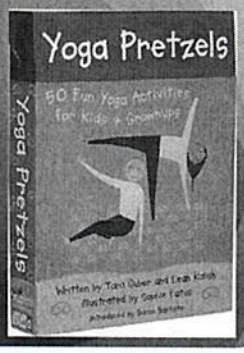
TSY with Children & Adolescents

5. Consider the age group, developmental level, and clinical needs of whoever you are working with.
6. Consider whether you will work one-on-one or in groups. You know your clients best.
7. If something does not work, then try something else. Be creative and flexible.

Sample Formula for Doing TSY with Children & Adolescents

- Choose a yoga deck/cards, yoga book for children, yoga coloring book/pages, or other resources.
- Have children or teens choose what activity and what forms they want to do.
- Pair these yoga exercises with:
  - Choice
  - Invitational language
  - Interoceoptive language

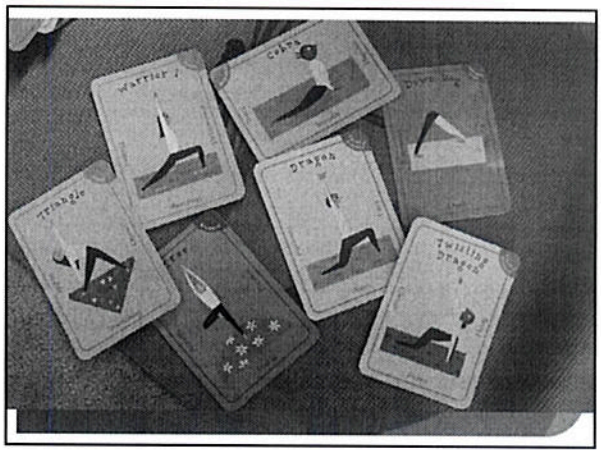
Yoga Decks or Cards

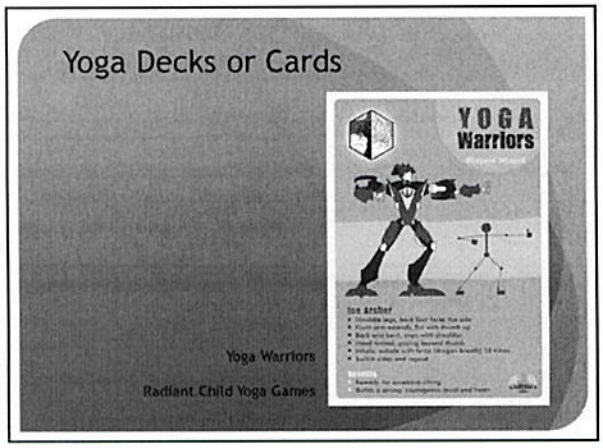


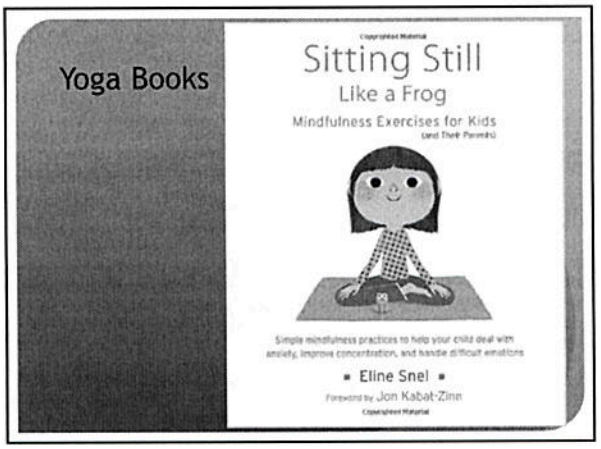
Yoga Pretzels

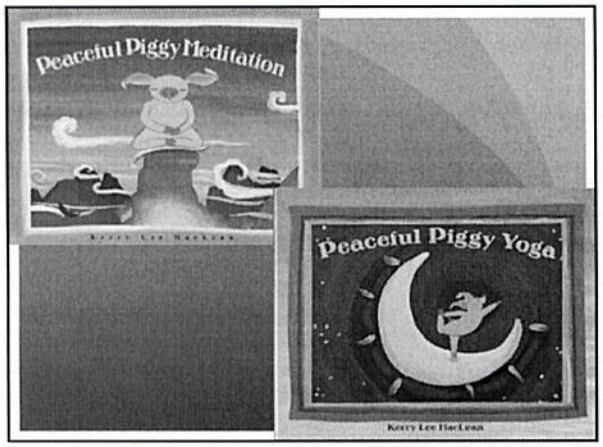
Written by Tara Gruber & Leah Kalish

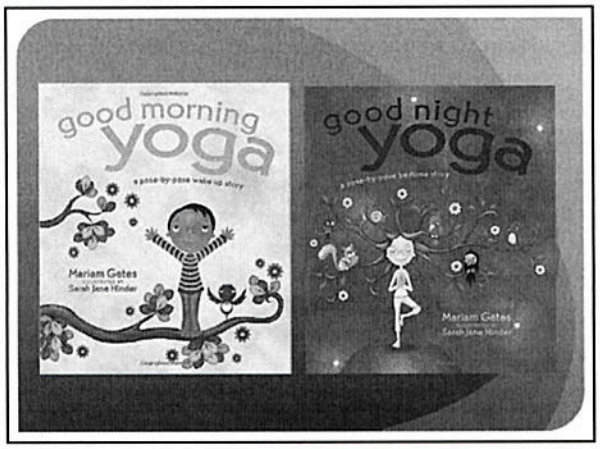
Illustrated by Sophie Fatus

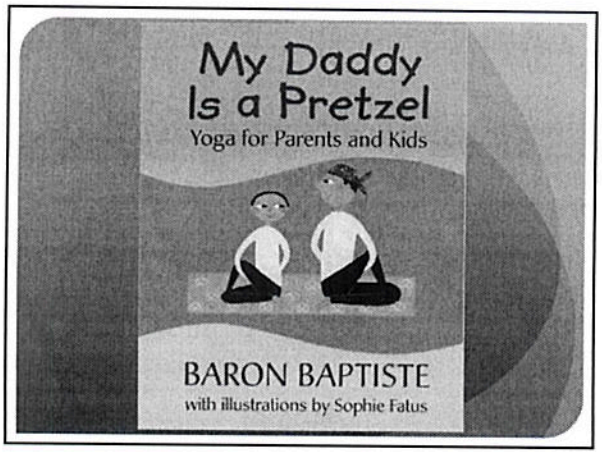


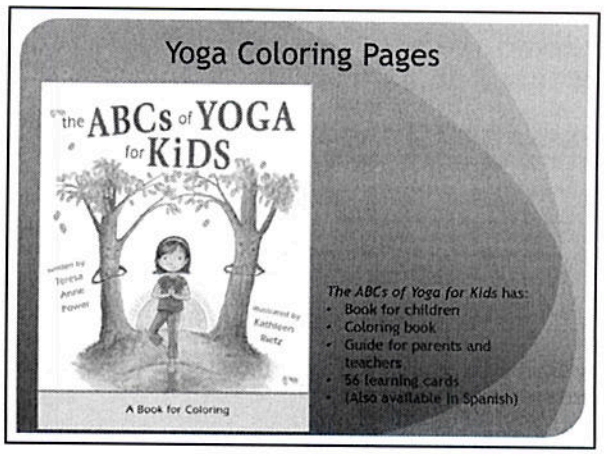

Yoga Decks or Cards
YOGA Warriors
Yoga Warriors
Radiant Child Yoga Games

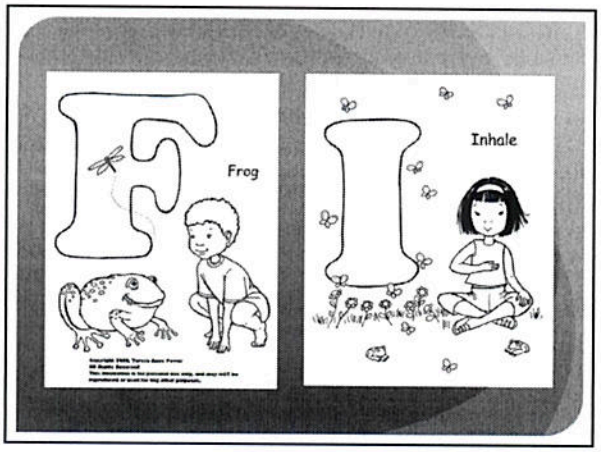

Yoga Books
Sitting Still
Like a Frog
Mindfulness Exercises for Kids
Eline Snel
Foreword by Jon Kabat-Zinn


Peaceful Piggy Meditation
Peaceful Piggy Yoga
Kerry Lee MacLean


good morning yoga
Mariam Gates
Sarah Jane Hinder
good night yoga
Mariam Gates


My Daddy Is a Pretzel
Yoga for Parents and Kids
BARON BAPTISTE
with illustrations by Sophie Fatus


Yoga Coloring Pages
the ABCs of YOGA for KiDS
A Book for Coloring
The ABCs of Yoga for Kids has:
• Book for children
• Coloring book
• Guide for parents and teachers
• 56 learning cards
• (Also available in Spanish)


F
Frog
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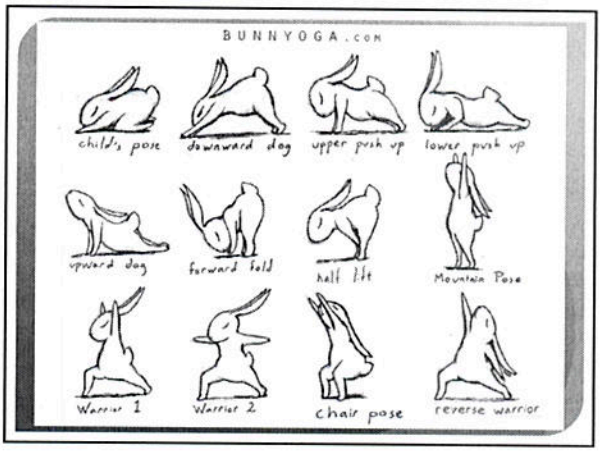
Inhale


BUNNYOGA.com
child's pose
downward dog
upper push up
lower push up
upward dog
forward fold
half lift
Mountain Pose
Warrior 1
Warrior 2
chair pose
reverse warrior

Breathing Exercises

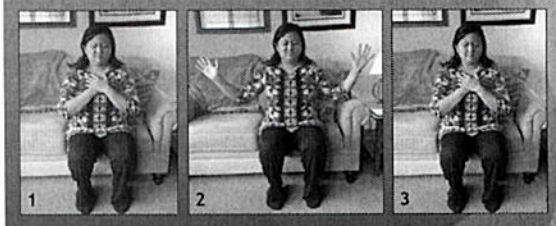
- 4 parts to breathing
  - Inhalation, retention (pause), exhalation, & suspension (pause)
- Meeting an anxious mood or high energy
  - Exhale 2x as long as you inhale (Ex: inhale for 3 counts, exhale for 6 counts)
- Meeting a depressed mood or low energy
  - Inhale 2x as long as you exhale (Ex: inhale for 6 counts, exhale for 3 counts)

Sun Breath - 1st variation

Seated, hands on quads, inhale as you raise your hands up, exhale as you bring your hands back down.

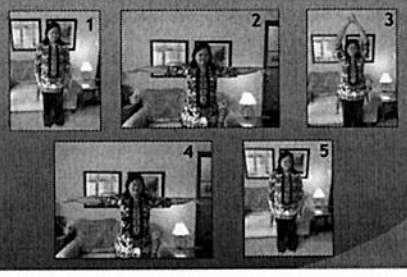
Sun Breath - 2nd variation

Seated, hands at heart, inhale as your arms go out to the sides, exhale as your hands come back to your heart.



Sun Breath - 3rd variation

Standing, hands at sides, inhale as you circle your arms up and over your head, exhale as you return your arms to your sides.



Meditations

For trauma survivors, I recommend:

- Guided meditation based on felt body sensations (i.e. progressive muscle relaxation)

Other styles/types of mediation include:

- Mindfulness-based stress reduction (Jon Kabat-Zinn)
  - Silent seated meditation
  - Walking meditation
  - Moving meditation (i.e. yoga)
- Guided imagery
- Loving kindness meditation
- Beholding (looking at a work of art)

Self-Inquiry Exercises

Developing your inner resource

- Bring to mind places, people, activities, and objects that make you feel secure, at ease, calm, happy, nourished, and safe.
- Choose one from above that feels particularly strong and write it down.
- Add as much detail as possible:
  - Visual images
  - Smells, touch, taste, sounds
  - Feelings or emotions
  - Words or phrases
  - Body sensations or energetic experiences
- Your inner resource can evolve over time.

-Integrative Restoration Institute

Mudras (Hand Gestures)

Pressing the pads of your fingers together (or pressing them onto a surface) can be calming to the nervous system.

Mantras

- Mantras are sounds, words, or groups of words
- Think of positive affirmations
- Mantras can be chanted out loud or silently to yourself
- Examples:
  - "Peace" or "Peace breathes through me"
  - "Breathe"
  - "I am happy. I am good." "I am safe here." (good for children)
- Resource:http://www.exploringwomanhood.com/mindbodysoul/cortright/writepositive.htm

Other Ideas

- Art project: Have kids make their own yoga card deck using index cards.
- Letting go box:
  - Sometimes we remember the worst things, however they do not define us, even though we let them sometimes
  - If we do not let go of these things, we may not make way for the good things or for other things to replace these negative thoughts.
  - Have students write something down they want to let go of.
  - You can collect them all an put it in a box.
  - Students can do this at home, rip up the piece of paper, and flush it down the toilet.

Vicarious Trauma & Compassion Fatigue

- Simplified definition: When the work you do changes the way you think about yourselves, your relationships, and/or the world (Jeff Levy, 2008)
- Natural consequence of doing this work
- Inevitable impact of empathic engagement

Self-Care

3 ways to sustain yourself while doing this work (self-care):

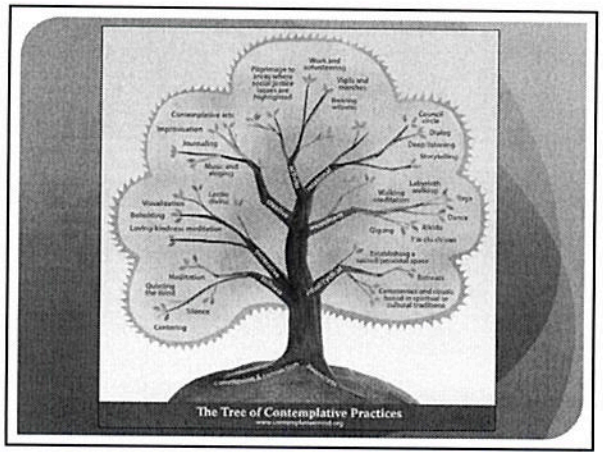
1. **Awareness**: tracking thoughts, body sensations, social awareness (consultation and support)
2. **Balance**: work/life balance
3. *Community*: do not do this work alone or in isolation, seek consultation and support

Trauma Stewardship

A daily practice through which individuals, organizations, and societies tend to the hardship, pain, or trauma experienced by humans, other living beings, or our planet itself.

By developing the deep sense of awareness needed to care for ourselves while caring for others and the world around us, we can greatly enhance our potential to work for change, ethically and with integrity, for generations to come.

-Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009



Recommended Resources

1. Mindful Practices Yoga
Chicago-based, Carla Tantillohttp://www.mindfulpracticesyoga.com
-Uses math, relaxation exercises, group exercises, and yoga poses to foster peaceful classroom management and social/emotional learning
"Cooling Down Your Classroom" by Carla Tantillo with Erin Crowley

2. Radiant Child Yoga Program
Shakta Kaur Khalsa
childrensyoga.com
-Uses kundalini and hatha yoga, singing, movement, and mediation to engage children & teens in a yoga practice
-Many resources on her web site

More Resources

3. Global Family Yoga
Chicago-based, Mira Binzenhttp://www.mindfulpracticesyoga.com
-Online courses, webinars, & resource lists

4. Storytime Yoga
Florida, Colorado, Sydney Solis
http://www.storytimeyoga.com/
-Teaching kids yoga through fairy tales, multicultural wisdom, and stories; online courses available

5. kidsyogastories.com
-Yoga books for children & other resources

Questions? Comments?

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