

KIDS YOGA



How to teach trauma-informed yoga to children

Interreg
Baltic Sea Region



Co-funded by
the European Union



RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

KidsLikeUs

CREATED BY MAYA LINDVALL, 2024

WHY YOGA?

the EU-project KidsLikeUs

In early 2022 the full-scale war broke out in Ukraine, leading to many refugees fleeing to the countries nearby. How can we help these families, especially the children, to feel a little bit better in their tough situations?

Beata Fabisiak, Poznan University, created the Interreg EU-project KidsLikeUs, aiming to improve the wellbeing of children in need through solutions, activities and products. All of the countries which are partners in the project work on different solutions and tasks, and here in Sweden, association YogaYou has developed trauma-informed yoga for refugee children as a method.

During a year, the yoga teacher and project leader Maya Lindvall, has met regularly with a focus group of Ukrainian refugees in the ages of 6-12. Together with them she has tested and developed a method - which is presented in this guide. In the pictures some of the children are modeling the positions as well.





Katya & Marianna from Ukraine

ABOUT YOGA

trauma-informed yoga for children

Yoga is a mind/body practice consisting of physical positions, breathing techniques and mindfulness. Trauma-informed yoga is based on neuroscience research, where the focus is nervous system regulation and releasing physical, mental and emotional tension. The yoga sessions are designed to make the students experience the parasympathetic and sympathetic branches of their nervous systems – and to allow and be with whatever physical sensations, thoughts and emotions that arise when they're going through these stages. Through regular practice one can increase the window of tolerance regarding the nervous system, meaning that for example one does not immediately have a fight or flight reaction when an unpleasant emotion arises. This can be a great tool for children with migration trauma.

"We just did a study on yoga for people with PTSD. We found that yoga was more effective than any medicine that people have studied up to now. That doesn't mean that yoga cures it, but yoga makes a substantial difference in the right direction."

Bessel van der Kolk



TEACHING YOGA

steps for how to teach a yoga class to children

Welcoming: Help the children find their space (mat) and make sure everyone knows each other's names. Introduce the class and explain what is about to happen.

Grounding: Guide the children into a calmer state through a few minutes of relaxation. This could be through a breathing technique or listening to relaxing music/simple guided meditation.

Warming Up: It's important to warm up the joints and muscles before exploring yoga positions. Start with gentle movements and then increase with for example sun salutations to bring energy into the body.

Sequencing: Explore movements by putting a series of yoga positions and transitions together. Yoga position cards can be used here. The children can pick out their own position and demonstrate to the rest of the class for a more empowering and fun workshop style. This part of the class will take the longest and allows time for the children to explore and express themselves. Mix relaxing sequences with more challenging ones (to work with the nervous system).

Winding Down: Start to slow down again by introducing some deeper stretches which can be held for longer. Incorporate the breath if possible.

Relaxing: End the class with a few minutes of pure relaxation. The children can lay down and just listen to the music or the teacher's voice.

Let's begin...



HOLDING SPACE



YOGA MAT



BLOCKS & BELT



POSITION CARDS

Set up the yoga space in a place with as few distractions as possible. Candles/soft lights and calm music can be used to set the mood. The most important tool is the yoga mat – one for every child. If no yoga mats are available, other type of mats can be used. What matters is that the child has their own personal space. Other tools (optional) are blocks and belts which can assist in different positions. Yoga position cards are great to add a more playful workshop style to the class, as well as to overcome a potential language barrier.

Of course, the most important part is that the session feels like a safe space for the children to relax, express themselves and for them to just be children – to play and feel a sense of community and connection with the others. This is the yoga teacher's job and can be achieved through a calm, secure and grounding voice, energy and presence. Simply holding space for them and making everyone feel seen (can for example be done by asking questions).



Wheel

INHALE EXHALE



BALLOON BREATH

Place the hands on the stomach. Inhale deeply and fill the stomach with air and feel how it expands like a balloon. Exhale slowly.

CANDLE BREATH

Pretend that the fingers are a candle and hold them near the mouth. Inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth, blowing out the candle (the fingers).



ELEPHANT BREATH

Stand up and reach the arms over the head. Inhale. Then release everything – exhale loudly through the mouth and quickly fold forward at the same time.

Breathing techniques are a mindfulness practice which helps to find focus and concentration. The breath is the door, the portal, to the nervous system and the quickest way to regulate it. The first two exercises are relaxing while the elephant breath gives more energy. Try to incorporate some deep breaths or just breath awareness throughout the whole class.



GENTLE MOVEMENT



CALM



WARMTH



FEEL



Above are suggestions for movements and positions that can be used for warming up the body. These positions will warm up the spine and gently open up the hips in preparation for deeper movements.



Low lunge

YOGA TRANSITIONS



DOWNWARD FACING DOG



MOUNTAIN POSE



PLANK POSE



WARRIOR II

These positions are very common and can occur many times during a yoga class. They are often used as transitions between different positions to make the class more smooth. For example, from plank pose one can transition to downward facing dog.



FINDING BALANCE



TRUST



CONCENTRATE



EXPLORE



Balancing positions are perfect for a children's yoga class. It opens up an opportunity for the children to play around and express themselves, as well as finding focus. This part of the class is not about completing the perfect position, but to explore balance.



Bow



WORKING TOGETHER



COOPERATE



TOUCH



PLAY



Partner exercises can be fun to incorporate during a yoga session as the cooperation promotes a sense of connection and friendship. A simple moment of eye contact and presence can be powerful. It's all about exploration and gentleness.



SLOWING DOWN



STRETCH



RELAX



BREATHE



Allow some time in the end of the class for slowing down. Now that the body is warmed up it is a good moment to hold some deeper stretches for a bit longer. The last few minutes can be spent in shavasana (top picture) by lying down and just relaxing.



Seated twist

"As traumatic events can be defined as when something happens to a person where the person's power is taken away from them (mentally, physically and/or emotionally), being more aware and feeling more in control of one's body, emotions and thoughts can be healing."

Jeanine Talento

PHOTOGRAPHER: MARTIN REIVALL
DESIGN: MAYA LINDVALL



Manuel

Enya

Aaron

Katya

Marianna