

FAMILY YOGA – WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?

In the last few years Yoga has blossomed to become increasingly popular not only for adults, but for children and families as well. Most Americans, especially those in metropolitan areas, have a firm grasp on the benefits, importance and basic components of a Yoga practice. There is however still some mystery about what kid’s Yoga looks like. As a children’s Yoga teacher I often get asked questions like, “can kids really do Yoga?”, or assumptions such as “children can’t really focus or sit still long enough to practice yoga, right?”. These statements are reasonable, but give a glimpse into the way some folks view children in our society – little people without the potential to focus, calm, or engage in activities such as asana (yoga poses), pranayama (breathing exercises), dharana (concentration) or dhyana (meditation). Kids can participate in these practices, many times more easily than grown-ups, but not without the support, modeling and encouragement from adults in their lives. Family Yoga is the perfect activity to begin these practices and instill these concepts at an early age.

So what exactly does a Yoga class for kids or families look like and why are people so enthralled by these types of programs?

As we know the benefits of Yoga for adults are endless and we are quickly learning that Yoga is a great alternative to other competitive physical activities offered to children. By bringing kids together with their parents and other adult family members, through conscious movement we not only create an amazing bonding experience for the family but also increase the chances of making Yoga a lifelong practice. Among the long list of Yoga benefits included are increased concentration, better sleep habits, stronger ability to self soothe, and a greater sense of calm; all things that parents seek and appreciate.

The intention of family yoga is to create the space for families to have fun together. Family Yoga is taught as a child centered class and gives families the unique opportunity to explore, stretch, move, laugh and relax together. Included in a typical Family Yoga class are partner poses, games, breathing exercises, stories, relaxation and also a designated time for adults to practice poses on their own. All activities are modified for the specific group and Yoga is always offered as a “choice”. It is my philosophy that if a child is forced into doing Yoga they could potentially be turned off to the practice altogether. A resistant child will often begin the class by saying that they don’t want to participate, but half way through they eagerly are joyfully engage.

Family Yoga gives parents time to connect with their children. The classes encourage healthy attachment by using eye contact, touch, praise, soothing strategies and transitions techniques. As a practitioner of Family Yoga, I create a safe environment that fosters compassion, communication, lightheartedness and most of all FUN!

Whether you are a parent, grandparent, aunt, cousin, big brother or friend of a child, you can participate in Family Yoga. The beautiful thing about Yoga is that it doesn’t discriminate. Yoga is for everyone and anyone. While adults are given a chance to become kids again, children in a Family Yoga class are learning how to calm their bodies, relax their minds and more clearly communicate with their parents, who can’t see the benefits in that?

To quote one of my dear 3-year-old students who was learning the ritual of saying “Namaste” at the end of each of our classes, he turned to me and said, “*You mean NO MISTAKE!*” Yes, there are “no mistakes” about it; Family Yoga is a lighthearted spiritual activity and a joyful lifelong practice and that’s what it’s all about.