



**KARUNA YOGA VIDYA PEETHAM**

Yoga Education and Teacher Training  
Bangalore, India

## YOGA CONTRIBUTES TO PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL WELL-BEING FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



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100 Hrs – Kids & Teen Yoga  
Teacher Training Certificate Course

Globalization exposes children and young people all over the world to various new standards and options. Now children not only have new resources in their lives, but are also expected to perform well. Different institutions in children and adolescents' lives, such as family, school, and the media, constantly provide stimulation as well as expectations. This exposure to new expectations and demands has the potential to create stress in young people's lives, especially related to evaluation of their performances.

It is common knowledge that stress can have serious health consequences. If unaddressed consistently, a high stress level could become a chronic condition, which could result in a range of health problems, including anxiety, insomnia, muscle pain, high blood pressure, and a weakened immune system. Research indicates that stress can even contribute to the development of major illnesses such as heart disease, depression, and obesity or exacerbate existing health issues. When such young adults are responsible for child care, they may tend to transmit their tensions to their children; thus, the situation becomes doubly alarming and worrisome for their families. Children learn to internalize the stresses. Their self-imposed expectations to meet the standards set by their caregivers, schools, and society may cause them anxiety. Moreover, internalization of self-expectation may become non-malleable for young people.

Children are quite good at hiding their distress and emotional stress from their parents, since they do not want their parents to worry on their account. They desire to please their parents by their "appropriate" and "socially right" behaviors. Children dislike upsetting their parents and being the reason for adding to existing parental stress.

According to a constructivist approach, children actively participate in their own development process. Moreover, children and young people interact with everyday life situations with world views that could be different from those of adults.

Children function as an agency for their own well-being and have the evolving capacity to be partners of wellness with their families, friends, and society. However, children depend on the environment set by society to facilitate their potential for development.

## **CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND MENTAL HEALTH**

There are also examples of today's youth who demonstrate more serious attitudes than those of earlier generations. For instance, youngsters use less drugs than did previous generations, perform better academically, and are more active participants in society and in elections. Moreover, youth behave more decently and less criminally, and are more hardworking in school.

Children and young people also share more values with their parents than did their predecessors, and while young people "hang out" online, many from the parent generation do the same. This similarity may be one of the reasons for the decrease in drug use and breaking of norms.

However, this amicable behavior has its price as recent research also indicates that young people are more worried than their counterparts in the past. Furthermore, a greater number of youths are diagnosed with conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Increased pressure is also exerted on them to succeed in school now than in previous times. Such increased emphasis on education and self-discipline can be challenging. Thus, there are more psychological problems among young people; many worry excessively, have sleep problems, and experience hopelessness and stress.

Generally, psychological challenges intensify around puberty; due to psychological and biological changes. When growing up, children face pressures from family, school, and other social contexts to perform satisfactorily and adjust to the rapidly changing pace of development in society.

The current scenario is challenging for both teachers and parents, as well as for children, to foster a positive mental health status. The transition from early childhood to youth and adulthood can be demanding itself. In the midst of dealing with physical changes, children also have to develop their own identity, increase their autonomy from their parents, and handle changing peer relations. The pressure on young people also varies, encompassing academic, commercial/marketing, and relational issues, as well as succeeding in

school, being popular, having a fit or slim body, wearing the right brands of clothes, and owning the latest technological gadgets, etc. This set of expectations creates stress, which impacts children and young people's mental health and well-being, as well as hampers their school performance.

Children also suffer from bullying (at school and cyberbullying), behavioral issues, problems with attention and self-regulation, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), sleep disorders, obesity, computer dependency, drug abuse, and lack of school motivation, even leading to dropouts. Furthermore, schools are faced with the challenge that students (especially boys) are more attracted to the Internet, social media, and gaming than the school curriculum.

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MEDIA USE AND HEALTH CHALLENGES**

Modern society also offers innumerable distractions and undesired attractions, especially linked to modern media and communication technologies, on which we have become dependent. The massive presence of media and the time spent on media technologies by children are clear indicators of the shift in lifestyles and priorities of our new generation. Children worldwide are spending more and more time in front of television sets or computer screens and on cell phones, making media a central part of their lives. Young people today are expected to be and are often constantly online. Advertising, communications, as well as education present a brand-new social networking image to make media accessible to children.

Although media is a knowledge resource for children and adolescents' mental health, its intense use leads to questions concerning young people's capacity and interest to bring balance between physical and mental activities.

Healthcare professionals use terms such as media addiction, identifying media as a factor of mental illness, dependency, obsessive–compulsive behaviors, concentration problems, and other attention disorders.

Besides these physical and mental risks, safety concerns are being raised in media-heavy communities; issues such as cyberbullying, young children being exposed to violence, and sexually explicit material, as well as extreme or inappropriate behaviors, are being highlighted.

We understand the media generation as the youth who live in a hypermedia environment. In many countries, including India, unequal access to media is an important concern, especially, since Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are regarded as major knowledge resources for the future.

Children's everyday lives include their home situation, school, and leisure activities in order to provide a context. Cultures and norms are also contexts to consider when understanding the role of new media and ICT in children's lives. Media use is related to young people's social context, such as family, community, and friends or peer groups. The media landscape, including traditional media, is also the context for how new ICTs are appropriated. Children's use and reception will mediate the potential impact of media exposure. The consequences of media use can be extensive, and may affect how children spend their time, socialize, and even view the world. Thus, young people's media use can be a factor in how they experience themselves and their lives.

## **YOGA IN CHILDREN'S LIVES**

The ancient practice of yoga may help children and young people cope with stress and thus contribute positively to mental health. Yoga is a powerful medium for developing the personality of children and making them capable of facing the present-day challenges and problems as Yoga improves children's physical and mental well-being.

Yoga in schools helps students improve resilience, mood, and self-regulation skills pertaining to emotions and stress. Thus, yoga is an important life skill tool for children and young people to cope with stress and self-regulation in a life-long perspective.

Short-term solutions oftentimes involve pharmaceutical treatments for children with mental health problems, which could leave them to face the

immediate and long-term negative effects of medication. Thus, we must seek other solutions comprising empowerment to give children and young people the tools to develop self-reflection, self-protection, self-regulation, and holistic self-development.

Children's mental health and well-being include developing healthy relationships with peers and teachers, and being able to self-regulate emotionally, mentally, and behaviorally.

The increased global interest in yoga in recent decades is primarily due to the expectancy that yoga can calm the mind and increase overall health and well-being. Yoga consists of certain postures (asanas), regulated breathing techniques (pranayamas), hand poses (mudras), and meditation. There is experiential knowledge on which poses are appropriate for different bodily functions. Yoga's positive impact on the physical and mental health of individuals and their well-being has been an established truth in the ancient as well as contemporary yoga.

The use of yoga among children may assist their development, reduce everyday stress, facilitate weight management, and mitigate emotional and behavioral problems, aside from being a supplement to improve focus and attention. All these factors facilitate their well-being, positive social interactions, and school performance.

The evidence of yoga practice among children indicates improved benefits in concentration, stress alleviation, self-awareness, consciousness, self-regulation, behavioral and emotional maturity, and self-confidence in everyday life. There are also some proofs where yoga has worked as an adjunct to medical treatment of mental illness with positive effects. Yoga as a stand-alone therapy requires further research, although there are quite affirmative indications that Yoga may be effective as a supportive adjunct to mitigate some medical conditions, but not yet a proven stand-alone, curative treatment.

Yoga may have potential to be implemented as a beneficial supportive/adjunct treatment that is relatively cost-effective, may be practiced at least in part as self-care behavioral treatment, provides a life-long behavioral skill, enhances self-efficacy and self-confidence and is often associated with additional positive side effects.

## **POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF PRACTICING YOGA FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS**

Yoga can help foster motivation, cultivate internal locus of control, improve sleep, and generally encourage healthy and balanced living. Yoga may also aid in shifting self-awareness inward to children's own cues and emotions, and thus, counteract negative social and cultural influences, including the current media pressure to be always online and available.

Yoga has also been shown to help children with attention problems, as well as to support executive function development. A number of studies have also suggested that yoga can assist children with special needs. Yoga has been found to have physiological benefits for children through rehabilitation processes.

Additionally, yoga improves academic performance and emotional balance which often results in improved focus and concentration, regular practice is frequently accompanied by better academic performance.

The mental benefits of yoga relate to calming the heart rate, which signals the brain to activate the parasympathetic nervous system. Similarly, yoga can guide relaxation because it reduces sympathetic activity. The sympathetic nervous system is often engaged when children, similar to adults, are exposed to sensory overload. However, when the parasympathetic nervous system is activated, it increases our ability to focus and learn. Yoga is also said to reduce anxiety in kids, young people as well as in seniors. Thus, yoga may assist healthy development and life-long learning.

Yoga is often promoted as a universal good discipline, with philosophy and practice to achieve balance and human development. Still, the pedagogy of yoga needs to be context specific and adjusted to the specific audiences of practitioners. Moreover, yoga teaching should be introduced based on cultural perspective on the child development and sociology. Yoga needs to be serious and multi-disciplinary, yet based on children's needs and everyday lives, with a playful and fun approach.

Yoga can be a valuable tool for children and if it is practiced every day with perseverance, children will be able to face the turmoil of life with steadiness and maturity.

The business enterprise has recognized the value of yoga globally. Across urban areas in recent times, yoga training centers, practice centers, private agencies, and individuals for both profit and non-profit sectors have opened studios and organized sessions in various forms and approaches. Many people pay fees to use these facilities and practice yoga. However, schools, pre-schools, and the public sector of education are not keeping up with the trend, notwithstanding their prime responsibility of developing the full potentials of children and young people.

Today's children require a creative, interactive syllabus, and participatory method in the teaching–learning process. This approach is applicable for learning yoga too. Thus, if we can communicate with children and young people effectively, they can adopt yoga as a powerful tool for themselves to minimize stress, as well as develop resilience to deal with it. It is needed to focus on research to understand the ways children and teenagers can enjoy learning yoga, sustain it in practice, and use it in daily life. They may use yoga in any kind of emotional and social stress situations.

From a social perspective, yoga can also transform people to be socially sensitive; hence, it may increase the likelihood of children and teenagers engaging in civic activities and shaping a better society. They are agents who possess the evolving capacity to develop the self and society, and yoga is a means to attain holistic well-being for both.

When introducing yoga to children, we think it is important to keep in mind that children's yoga is not a simplified version of yoga for adults, it is unique practice. It is important to meet children where they are, and that they experience yoga as fun. The basic motivation of teachers should be that yoga strengthen children's self-esteem and focus through their consciousness of themselves from within.



## **YOGA AS A TOOL FOR CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS**

It is claimed that yoga leads to alignment and harmony. A recent thesis suggests that yoga is a tool to listen to your heart. Children and young people need such aid to listen inward, to their bodies, feelings, and ideas. Thus, yoga may contribute to healthy development and good mental health; health promotion for children needs to include improvement of their attention, self-esteem, empowerment, and self-regulation. Children and adolescents need to develop based on their unique personalities, and to interpret and achieve the balance between their own strengths and societal expectations. Yoga may assist them in developing in sound ways, to strengthen themselves, and be contributing social beings.

Pre-schools, schools, and community centers should offer yoga as part of the opportunities for children and young people to enjoy learning and practicing it from an early age. The results of such investment could be observed over the long-term by having future generations experience less stress. It is essential to develop policies initiating yoga in schools and training teachers to practice yoga with children as an investment in socio-economic and human resource development toward a better society.

## **HOW TO TEACH KIDS YOGA POSES**

### **Set up the space**

Find a comfortable place to be seated or to lie down. This will help kids maintain focus and concentrate on their breathing. Finding the right space will also come in handy when entertaining positions that require a good amount of movement. Then, Arrange mats (or a comfy blanket or pad). And then, set the mood by lighting candles and prepare a cold scented towel. It's important to create an environment to help keep your children focused and relaxed, even after the exercise is complete.

### **Practice the Poses**

**Happy Baby Pose:** Lie on your back and hug your knees into your chest. Grab the outer part of your feet with both hands and rock like a happy baby.



**Standing Forward Bend – Standing Sandwich:** From Mountain Pose, bend your upper body and reach for your toes. Sway your arms gently.



**Eagle Pose:** Wrap one leg around the other and bend your knees slightly. Bring your bent arms out in front of you and wrap them together in opposite directions



**Butterfly Pose:** From a sitting position, bend your legs together so that the soles of your feet touch together. Place your hands at your heart. Gently flutter your legs.



**Downward Facing Dog Pose:** Starting on your hands and knees, press your hands into the ground and straighten your legs as you lift your hips into the air. Relax your head and neck. This is a great way to strengthen your wrists and forearms.



**Upward Facing Dog Pose:** Lie on your tummy and press your outstretched legs into the ground. Place your palms flat under your shoulders and draw your shoulder blades together.



**Tree Pose:** Standing on one leg, bend the opposite knee and place the sole of your foot on your inner ankle or thigh (never on your knee).



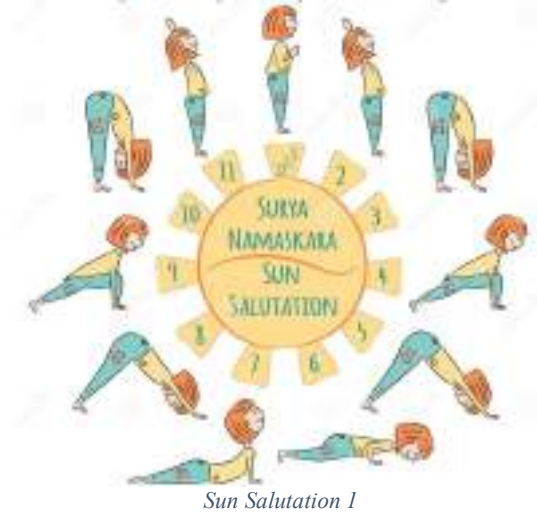
**Table Top Pose:** Rest comfortably on your hands and knees, with your arms under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. Your back and neck should be in a straight neutral position.



**Child's Pose:** From a kneeling position, sit back on your heels and gently drop your forehead down to rest.



**Sun Salutation:** Stand tall. Bring your arms up over your head and place your palms together. Arch your back and then bend to the front until your palms touch the mat. Walk back into a plank, then, knees to the floor and slide into a cobra. Switched to downward facing dog, walk your feet to the front, stay down in standing sandwich and then stand tall, hands up, arch your back and then, place your palms together next to your heart.



### ***Make Yoga a Tradition***

It's important to maintain an exercise routine. Yoga provides a low-impact way of strengthening our bodies, which makes it a great practice. But it also revolves around breathing patterns, meditative techniques, positive thinking and other procedures that are important to pepper into everyday life.

### ***Have Fun***

Giving kids a familiarity with yoga now is a wonderful way to encourage interest in a healthy lifestyle.

### ***Namasté***

End the practice by putting palms together near the heart (Anjali Mudra) and bowing their head. The gesture is meant to help you communicate respect and connect to those around you.