YOGA IN THE CLASSROOM

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My name is Leslie Burgess and I am an Education and Behaviour Consultant for the Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders. I am also a Certified Yoga Instructor and have been practicing yoga for about 4 years.

Thinking about students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), I felt that yoga could possibly have a significant impact on the sensory and behavioural aspects of their disorder. I have had the privilege of implementing yoga programs in a few classrooms with students with a diagnosis of ASD and have found that yoga helped the students to calm and focus their bodies and increase their balance and strength.

This booklet provides a simple guide for teachers and teaching assistants wishing to help their ASD students by using yoga.

If you have any questions, or would like to share your experiences using this program, I can be reached by email to lb Burgess@deltasd.bc.ca.

Namaste,

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What is Yoga

• Yoga means “union”, a journey of the physical, mental and spiritual elements of life.
• Yoga poses or asana were developed in India centuries ago.
• Yoga poses are gentle, non performance oriented and are non-competitive.
• Yoga is not about attaining perfect poses—it is about doing it right for your body.
• Every individual can succeed because every individual can improve.

Some history of Yoga

• Sivananda system of yoga was founded by Swami Sivananda (a spiritual leader born in 1887).
• Swami Sivananda provides five main principles we can use to take responsibility for tending our garden bearing in mind we are always a “work in progress”

5 Principles of Yoga

1. Proper breathing (Pranayama)
2. Proper relaxation (Savasana).
3. Proper diet
4. Positive thinking
5. Meditation (Stillness)
Why Yoga

• Balance, stability and poise.
• Coordination and rhythm. As the individual moves from posture to posture, these are developed.
• A healthy toned body. Practicing yoga will help to achieve good posture, a straight spine, supple muscles, strong bones and healthy lungs, with relaxed free breathing.
• Flexibility and Strength
• Encourages concentration, positive thinking, confidence, self-esteem and self expression.
• Gives free run to student’s imagination and enhances creativity.
• Allows their energy to be let out in a safe and health promoting way.
• Empowers individuals with tools to handle stress, moods, and anxieties.
• Provides “time out” to cultivate self-awareness, and self-regulation.
• Provides confidence and calm amid the “moving sea of chaos”.
• Increased mental activity (engaging both the mind and the body).
• Emotional and creative understanding. Exploring self-expression and practicing with others will develop communication skills and respect for others’ ideas.
Rules of a Yoga Class

1. Stay on your own mat.

2. No Talking.

3. Listen to the instructions

4. Focus on yourself.

5. No laughing at others.

6. Think about your breathing.

7. Try your BEST!

8. Have FUN!!
Yoga—Basic Principles

• Do not practice yoga on a full stomach. It is best to wait 2-3 hours before doing a program.

• Warm-up first

• Working in a group is the best way to learn the basic principles.

• Positions in yoga should not be held too long—a couple of breaths for small children; older children can stay a little longer, provided they continue to stretch comfortably.

• You should not freeze in an uncomfortable position. If the position or your body feels uncomfortable in a pose withdraw from the pose. It is important not to push your body beyond its limits when practicing yoga.

• Hold poses for an equal time on both sides.

• Yoga sessions should last as long as everyone is enjoying it, but at most for 45 minutes—last 10 minutes should be spent on doing something quiet.
Basic Program

1. **Warm-up:** something that earths you to the floor, feel that you are completely grounded and straight.

2. **Action:** more challenging poses, stretching body in different ways.

3. **Winding Down:** learn to quiet the body after stretching, use a quiet pose that stretches the body in the other way.

4. **Being quiet:** Be silent for a few minutes, either sitting or lying.

5. **Lying Flat:** Always end with Dead man’s Pose. This experience of total quiet is the cornerstone of yoga practice. (Mary Stewart, Kathy Phillips, 1992)
Breathing Activities For All Ages

• Learning about breathing is useful at any age. Even young children can be taught to breathe evenly.
• Yoga teaches you to breathe deeply and steadily.
• Using the breath helps to release tension.
• Breathing in restful poses can teach students invaluable lessons in how to relax.

Breathing Activity

• Yantra breathing: yantra is a pattern, often geometrical, that helps the mind concentrate and focus during breathing and meditative sessions.
• Having a tangible symbol, a square or circle, we can help to connect with the invisible essence of the breath.
• This calming and centering exercise concentrates the mind.
Breathing with a square:

1. Tape a square on the wall, sit cross legged, spine straight and gaze at the square.
2. Look at the bottom left corner, inhale, and trace the line with your eye to the top-left corner.
3. Exhale, follow the line with your eyes and breathe from the top left corner to the top right corner.
4. Inhale, following the line with your eyes and breathe from the top right corner to the bottom right corner.
5. Exhale, following the line with your eyes and breathe from the bottom right corner to the bottom left corner.
6. Repeat 5 times
Getting Started with Yoga

• Find a space (simple, clear of furniture, carpet or hard wood floors ideal).
• Wear comfortable clothes-stretchy not tight.
• Practice in bare feet. Take shoes and socks off.
• Each individual should have their own yoga mat.
• Roll out your own mat.
• Make sure you can’t touch the person beside you.
• Sit cross legged on your mat quietly.
• Wait for the teacher to give you instructions.

End of the Yoga Class

• Roll up your mat and put it away.
• Shoes and socks on.
• Listen for instructions from the teacher.
Seated Position:

1. Begin by sitting cross legged, hands are on your knees.
2. Imagine there is a string at the top of your head, gently pulling up.
3. Close your eyes, or you can keep them open.
4. Begin to think about your breathing. Inhale slowly, exhale slowly.
5. Inhale and bring your shoulders up towards your ears.
6. Exhale and lower your shoulders. (repeat 5-6, 3-4 times).
Cat Pose:

1. Come onto all fours.
2. Place your hands under your shoulders, knees under your hips.
3. Breathe in to arch your back and raise your head—look towards the ceiling.
4. Breathe out and round your back, and look at your belly button.
5. Repeat the cycle 3-5 times.
6. Lean back on your shins and stretch your arms forward.
Shoulder Opener with Strap:

1. Begin sitting cross legged, tall in your spine. Imagine someone pulling a string from the top of your head towards the ceiling.

2. Take your strap/tie in your hands about shoulder width apart.

3. Inhale and slowly raise your arms holding the strap towards the ceiling. Stretch, reaching your straight arms up toward the ceiling.

4. Exhale, slowly lower your straight arms back to the floor. (Repeat 3-4, 3 times).

5. Inhale raise your hands up towards the ceiling, pause at the top, stretching towards the ceiling. Exhale and allow your straight arms to lower down over your head, lowering your arms and strap behind you.

6. Inhale raise your hands up towards the ceiling, pause at the top, stretching towards the ceiling. Exhale and allow your straight arms to lower in front of you. (Repeat steps 5-6, 3 times).
**Body circles:**

1. Sitting crossed legged with hands on your knees.

2. Inhale and lean your upper body forward. Begin to start to move (upper torso) in a circle moving through your hips.

3. Exhale, hands are on your knees, lean your upper body back. Continue making circles with your torso. Inhale, lean forward, and exhale lean back. Go in one direction for about 5 circles.

4. Come back to center and repeat going in the opposite direction.
Child Pose:

1. Kneel down and sit on your feet with your heels pointing outward. Tap the top of your feet against your mat.
2. Your knees should be separated about the width of your hips.
3. Stretch your arms out in front of you. Place your forehead on your mat. Walking your finger tips along the mat. Stretch here for a couple of breaths.
4. Bring your arms back along your body with your palms facing up towards the ceiling. Breathe in this pose for a few breaths.
5. Come out of child pose and gently make your way up into mountain pose.
Mountain Pose:

1. Stand at the front of your mat. Either bring your feet together with big toes touching or have your feet slightly apart.
2. Have your arms relaxed at your side.
3. Imagine someone has a string at the top of your head and is gently moving your head towards the ceiling. Encouraging your spine to become long.
4. Keep your shoulders relaxed and rolled down your back.
5. Inhale and feel your belly expand like a balloon. Exhale and feel your belly deflate like a balloon. (Inhale/exhale 3-5 times).
6. If you like close your eyes too bring energy into your body with each inhale your take.

When you are finished this pose relax your body.
Warrior Pose:

1. Spread your feet apart. Your wrist should be over your ankles.
2. Turn your left foot in and your right foot to about 90 degrees. Slightly bend your right knee to about 90 degrees. If you feel unsteady don’t bend your knee as much.
3. Float your arms up to shoulder height.
4. Turn your head towards your right hand and look at your right finger tips. Stay in this pose for 3-5 inhales and exhales.
5. Lower your arms and turn your feet to go in the opposite direction.
6. Repeat cycle with left leg.
7. Come back into mountain pose.
Airplane:

1. Stand with feet parallel and under your hips.
2. Place your weight onto your left foot. Lift your right foot slightly off your mat and balance. Breathe, focus and slowly stretch right foot and leg back. If you feel unbalanced lower your right foot back onto your mat.
3. Tip forward slightly or until you are parallel with the floor. Keep your balance, if you lose balance bring your right foot closer to the floor.
5. Slowly lower your right foot back to your floor.
6. Repeat the above with the left foot.
7. When finished come back into mountain pose.
**Dragon:**

1. Stand on your knees arms at your side.
2. Lunge your right foot forward, hands are on your thighs. Your right knee is about 90 degrees. (If you feel unsteady come back onto both knees).
3. Inhale and raise your arms over head and bring your hands together. Gently look up at your thumbs.
4. Exhale and lower your arms to your side. Repeat 3-5 times.
5. Come back onto both knees and now lunge the left foot out in front.
6. Repeat steps 2-5 using your left leg.
7. When finished this pose you can go into child’s pose.
**Rolling on your mat:**

1. From mountain pose, slowly lower yourself towards your mat into a squatting position. Bring your hands together in front of your heart, and inhale and exhale 3-5 times.

2. Gently lower your bottom onto your mat. Knees are bent and hands are holding onto your knees.

3. Gently release your hands and stretch them out in front of your.

4. Slowly lower yourself onto your mat one vertebra at a time. Your head should touch the mat last.

5. Lying flat on your mat. Raise your arms over your head. Stretch your finger tips and your toes in opposite directions. Stretch, stretch. Exhale with a big haaaaall!. Repeat 2 times.
Moving onto your back:

1. Sit tall and hug your knees. Keep your feet on the ground.

2. Slowly lean back, put your arms straight out in front of you.

3. Slowly lower yourself onto your mat one vertebra at a time.

4. Your head should be the last thing to lie on your mat.
Relaxing pose:

1. Lay on your back with your arms by your side. Your arms should be slightly out from the side of your body. Your palms can be open towards the ceiling.

2. Your legs are outstretched and relaxed. Your feet slightly open to the side.

3. Take in a few nice deep breaths. Think about your breathing.

4. Squeeze your toes, relax; squeeze your knees, relax; squeeze your legs, relax; squeeze your bottom, relax, squeeze your fist, relax; squeeze your shoulders to your ears, relax; make a funny face, relax; squeeze your eyes closed, relax; squeeze your forehead relax.

Moving into sitting position:

1. Gently begin to wiggle your toes.
2. Gently begin to wiggle your fingers.
3. Gently move your head side to side.
4. Slowly stretch your arms over your head and point your toes. Inhale and stretch. Exhale with a BIG HAAAAAA!
5. Slowly and when you are ready come back up into cross legged position.
6. Take a few breaths here.
7. Bring your hands together and rub them back and forth quickly-feeling heat in-between your hands.
8. Bring your hands towards your heart. Thumbs touching your heart center. Breathe, 2-3 times.
References


http://www.yogasite.com/postures.html