

Kids learn confidence, coordination, concentration and self esteem at

PRANA POWER YOGA

By Taylor Wells

I just finished my yoga practice and, already, the day seems brighter, happier and easier. Fitting in my practice is a priority for me because of this fact: I effort less throughout my day after I practice, and I am more focused, efficient, and just generally more joyful. So for me, it is never a question of “Do I have time for my practice?” because I know that I don’t have time to not practice.

I only wish I had begun practicing earlier in life—before my early thirties. If only I had had been introduced to yoga when I was a child!

Both of my daughters practice yoga. My six and a half year old woke my husband and I up the other morning with the sound of Krishna Das blaring from her room. We peeked in, and were so pleased to see that she had rolled out her mat and was doing her “morning practice,” donning her most glittery leotard, of course. Madison chose to practice yoga. I never forced it on her. That wouldn’t be yoga, then, after all.

Our other daughter, Sage, is six weeks old. She practices as well. She practiced the whole time she was in the womb, as I made it to my mat every single day of my pregnancy. And since her birth, she loves to lie next to my husband or me while we practice and watch intently, while she does her own practice by waving her arms and legs around. Her disposition is so incredibly calm and peaceful that we call her “Buddha baby.” We don’t think it is a coincidence.

Is there a child in your life to whom you can give the gift of yoga? Yoga is clearly not just for adults. Children actually begin doing yoga as infants, and as they continue to grow, they spontaneously do poses without any knowledge that it is “yoga” per se—poses that adults use great effort to get themselves into. In fact, one of the poses I include in all of my classes is called “happy baby” because it emulates what little babies frequently do in their cribs—grabbing the insides of the soles of their feet and drawing their knees downward toward the crib.

What are the benefits for kids who practice yoga? Yoga will increase a child’s flexibility and strength, aid with

coordination, and help the child learn to relax and be quiet and still. But this is only the beginning. Yoga will build a child’s self-esteem, focus, concentration and body confidence. It is a non-competitive form of exercise that children of all ages and physical levels can enjoy. And parents take it from a former figure skating Olympic hopeful: non-competitive is the way to go.

But what do the students themselves have to say about yoga? Emily and Sophia said, “I just love it!” Alexander said, “I feel hot inside and calm.” Emily said she used *ujjayi* breathing one time in the car, explaining, “I did it once in the car when my little sister was annoying me, and then I did not get mad.” Emily is describing the ancient wisdom of yoga. She was able to use *ujjayi* breath, a simple breathing technique she learned in yoga class, to keep her self calm in a difficult moment.

What do the parents of these young yogis have to say about their children’s practice? Apparently, their children look forward to yoga class all week long, and they don’t want to miss it. And if you have ever experienced the frustration of having to rally your child to hop in the car to go to a lesson that you signed her/him up for because they “really really wanted to take (insert name of lesson here)...,” this will be music to your ears. Children also express interest in taking a yoga class with their parents, wondering if their mommy and/or daddy’s yoga class is different than their class. Noah told his mom it’s too bad that she doesn’t “get to play yoga games, because they are really fun!”

Children naturally have a short concentration span, so time spent learning yoga must be fun. Kids yoga at Prana Power Yoga is filled with fun activities that teach the children about yoga, breath, and focus, while building self-awareness. Each class begins with a warm up, and then moves on to a series of Sun Salutations, which are modified to meet the needs of the children. The kids call this part of the practice “sunflower.” Next come the action poses, like the Warrior series, Shoulder Stand and Bridge.

The kids kick, jump and hop, while using *ujjayi* breathing and *drishti* (Sanskrit for a focused gaze). Sometimes during the action poses, Jennifer, the kids' yoga teacher at Prana, tells a story, incorporating poses. After action poses, the kids play a non-competitive "yoga game." Yoga games hone listening skills and the ability to take turns and follow directions. Finally, the kids return to their mats, or "personal space" as they call it, and participate in a guided meditation. After seated meditation, there is *Savasana*, the final relaxation pose, where Jennifer tells a story to help the children stay completely still. After *Savasana*, the children count backward from 20 and then roll over on to one side, sit up and chant om together and then say *namaste*.

Prana Power Yoga's kids' yoga teacher, Jennifer Cohen, is a special educator, and so teaching children yoga was a natural progression for her. The opportunity to slow down and take time to just simply be with children is an exciting opportunity for her—without curriculum demands, and/or expectation of behaviors or composition. She enjoys simply coming together with the children to breath, focus, play, laugh and relax.

Taylor Wells and her husband, Philippe Wells, are co-owners of Prana Power Yoga, located in Newton Corner, MA. She has experienced the transformational effects of yoga in her own life, and applies the knowledge she has gained to her own engaging teaching style. (www.pranapoweryoga.com)



Photos by Jamie Wasserman



Prana Power Yoga students, Sophia, Madison, and Lilly in Sarvangasana (Shoulder Stand).

Madison practices her Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Dog).

Sophia, Madison, and Lilly neutralize their spines in Table Top.

Teacher Jennifer adjusts Madison in Urdhva Dhanurasana (Wheel Pose).

Four year old Lauren has yoga classes twice a week at the Hands On Montessori School in Mansfield, MA