

Changing the World One Pose at a Time

BY THERESA ANNE POWER

"The second annual International Kids Yoga Day is set for April 7, and all 50 states are represented, as well as two dozen countries."

CHILDREN are overstimulated as they strive to keep up with the fast-paced demands of our society. As the tempo of modern life continues to accelerate due to breakthroughs in technology and new economic conditions imposed by our global economy, children are losing touch with their natural environment. Many want to slow down, but they do not know how. Kids need to learn tools to calm down, relax, and simply stop and breathe.

Stress produces a state of physical and mental tension, and levels have risen dramatically for children and teenagers in recent years. Just enough can keep you on your toes, ready to rise to the challenge, but too much can have debilitating effects on your health, contributing to—and agitating—many problems, including heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, depression, and sleep disorders.

Children need a wholesome outlet to balance their lives, and practicing simple yoga poses is the ideal way for them to unwind naturally while getting physical activity at the same time. Indeed, yoga nourishes the mind, body, and spirit and paves the way for a lifelong tradition of health and fitness.

Yoga and mindfulness provide children with skills to navigate challenges and build a core foundation that benefits mind and body well beyond their formative years. As a society, we have a responsibility to look into what means we can provide children to handle their increasingly high-paced lives; yoga is one such resource.

Yoga is an ancient science of the mind, body, and spirit. Developed in India nearly 5,000 years ago, it includes stretching exercises, meditation, and breathing techniques. Yoga keeps muscles and joints running smoothly and internal organs toned, while increasing circulation, quieting the mind, warding off disease, and helping manage pain. A secularized form of yoga that emphasizes fitness and stress-reduction has emerged in Western countries, and most U.S. cities either have either yoga studios and/or offer yoga at many of their schools.

Yoga has become one of the most widely practiced exercise systems in the world, with 200,000,000 people practicing this art form. In the U.S., according to a 2016 Yoga in America Study conducted by Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance, there are 36,700,000 yoga practitioners; 37% of whom have children under the age of 18 who also practice yoga. This number is up from 20,400,000 in 2012.

As for youngsters, "Yoga can be a gentle method for your child to get more physical activity and enhance his or her well-being," the Mayo Clinic maintains. Benefits include developing discipline, strength, and confidence; increasing focus and concentration; promoting calmness and easing stress; heightening body awareness and self-control; teaching exercise and breathing; building flexibility; and creating healthy habits. Yoga also encourages strength of character, joy and passion, compassion, tolerance, responsibility for oneself and others, and concentration. Our children are the future



The ABCs of Yoga for Kids

leaders and change agents for the world and, if our next generation could learn to calm themselves, while at the same time building strength and fortitude, our planet would be a better place.

Furthermore, yoga is a noncompetitive form of exercise, as not only are the poses meant to be practiced at one's own individual pace, but can be performed by children of all ages and sizes and varying degrees of athletic ability. Since yoga instills noncompetitive skills, it is a huge boost to a child's self-esteem.

There is a growing global interest in the health of our youth, with an increased focus on their personal, spiritual, social, mental, and physical development. This is reflected in the World Health Organization's definition of health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. In addition, the United Nations has developed 17 sustainable development goals to transform our world, with the third one being to ensure healthy lives and pro-



different 10-posture routines, representing a balanced yoga sequence for kids to practice for just five minutes a day. These ambassadors introduced the kids to the routines in advance of Kids' Yoga Day, so that the children were familiar with the poses beforehand.

One of the routines contains only standing yoga postures, and is ideal for schools as kids do not need a mat and can do the poses next to their desks. The second sequence is designed for youngsters practicing at home or in a yoga studio or other venue that has more room to spread out. These routines are intended for children to flow from one pose to the next, holding each posture for around 20 seconds before moving on. Kids practicing the same yoga poses on the same day all over the world creates a sense of unity and inclusiveness with others despite cultural differences.

The second annual International Kids Yoga Day is set for April 7, and all 50 states are represented, as well as two dozen countries. Life

mote well-being for all at all ages. Health and wellness are seen as essential to sustainable development for adults and children.

International Kids Yoga Day, observed on the second Friday in April, celebrates the diversity and oneness of children all around the world. Its mission is to ignite a passion for the health and fitness of our youth through yoga, regardless of age, race, ethnic group, color, sex, language, religion, or other condition or status. Every child should be given the opportunity to be exposed to the benefits of yoga. This is a free event and no prior yoga experience is required.

In 2016, more than 25,000 kids in 46 states and 21 countries participated in the first annual International Kids Yoga Day. At 11 a.m. local time at schools, homes, yoga studios, and child care organizations throughout the world, official Kids' Yoga Day ambassadors and countless others who followed along at home led students through a specially designed five-minute yoga routine. After they finished the

routine, the children received a special certificate of completion and a copy of the routine to practice all year round.


Thousands of kids—including preschoolers, elementary, middle, and high school students—put down their books and let their imaginations run free as they molded themselves into trees, flamingos, windmills, kites, and other kid-friendly positions. They were joined in spirit by other children throughout the world, all led by more than 135 official ambassadors to raise global awareness about yoga for kids. It is empowering for communities to realize the full potential children can reach through the practice of yoga on a large-scale undertaking.

Many of the ambassadors had little or no prior experience teaching yoga to children; they were given free resources, as well as two











KIDS' YOGA DAY

Friday / April 7th, 2017 / 11:00 am

5-Minute-a-Day Yoga Routine



THE FOLLOWING 10 POSES are a balanced yoga routine for kids (and adults) to practice for just 5 minutes a day. This sequence is designed for kids practicing at home, in a yoga studio, or other venue that has more room to spread out. There is no need to have a yoga mat; a beach towel or carpet is sufficient. Children may want to have *The ABCs of Yoga for Kids* book or flash cards nearby to refer to. Start with **Candle Pose**. Taking several deep breaths in and out through the nose. After this, kids can flow from one pose to the next, holding each posture for around 20 seconds before moving on. For **Flamingo** and **Tree**, have kids practice these postures on both sides of their body. Remind children to breathe in and out through their nose while practicing yoga. Focusing on the breath can have a positive impact on children's moods and energy levels. Try not to correct children while they are doing the poses; instead let them feel the postures in their own individual bodies. End with **Do Nothing Pose**: have children close their eyes and stay still for at least 60 seconds to gain all the benefits of the previous postures.

 1. Candle	 2. Cow	 3. Dog	 4. Flamingo
 5. Tree	 6. Cobra	 7. Rocking Horse	 8. Mouse
 9. Pretzel	 10. Do Nothing Pose	Illustration by Kathleen Riehr and excerpted from <i>The ABCs of Yoga for Kids</i> www.kidsyogaday.com info@kidsyogaday.com	

is moving too fast, and using the tools of yoga is one way to slow down and appreciate one's natural surroundings and say "hello" to our greatest gift of all—our minds and bodies. International Kids Yoga Day can change the world, one pose at a time. ★

Teresa Anne Power is the author of The ABCs of Yoga for Kids, as well as the creator of a product line of the same name, and the founder of International Kids Yoga Day.