Dear Mrs. Delgado,

When you first told me about yoga, I thought you had lost your everlasting mind. How I feel about it now is I think it’s really relaxing and easy. Yes, yoga has helped me because it helped me relieve stress, and it eases my mind. I would tell new peers that yoga is really helpful and will relieve stress...tension, and helps you feel calm. Yoga is an amazing thing. I’m glad my teacher started this. Thank you so much for letting us do yoga.

Gabrielle
When children are exposed to constant trauma, it causes their sympathetic nervous system to get stuck in “Flight, Fight, or Freeze” mode. This causes them to stay highly agitated because they are in a constant state of hyper-arousal, alert to every movement, sound, etc. in their environment. This causes increased respiration, increased heart rate, the release of hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which inhibits digestion, and keeps muscles tense and ready to go into fight or flight.
Trauma sensitive yoga helps to disengage the sympathetic nervous system and engage the parasympathetic nervous system which is responsible for relaxing and digestion.

Yoga also helps form new neural pathways in the brain by using both sides of the brain and body at the same time (bilateral integration). This literally helps the brain heal from trauma. 😊

Yoga uses breath awareness which is conscious breathing. This also helps disengage the sympathetic nervous system and the fight or flight response. A deep, long exhale actually triggers this response.
Yoga encourages focused relaxation and allows children to move from doing to simply being. How often do today’s children get to just simply “be?” This gives them a safe place inside themselves, which lets them to relax and recharge emotionally.

Increases a child’s ability to practice self-control which helps children who have difficulty staying focused. The movement of yoga allows them to release energy in a conscious way, and the deep breathing that goes with yoga helps them find self-control.

Yoga also helps build self-esteem. It gives them an opportunity to excel as something without competing with others. “It empowers them as they master skills, and that feels good.” (Maureen Heil)
Other Benefits of Yoga:

- Supports Motor Planning and Muscle Memory
- Allows Child to Withdrawal from External Gratification
- Provides Sensory Processing Support
- Supports Enhanced Cognition
- Creates a Reduction of Stress and Anxiety
- Contributes to Overall Fitness by Developing Large Muscle Coordination, Strength, Flexibility, and Enhanced Breathing.
Who Can Benefit from Trauma Sensitive Yoga?

- Children who have experienced trauma
- Children diagnosed with mental disorders
- Children diagnosed with mood disorders
- Children identified as having behavioral disorders
- Children who have anxiety disorders
- Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Children who have ADHD
- Children with PTSD
- Teachers who are REALLY FREAKING STRESSED!!!!
People and Organizations Using Yoga:

- **Joe Johnson**, 7 time NBA All Star says, “It’s better than weight training or anything of that sort. It’s therapy for my muscles, and my muscles need that more than anything.”


- **Blake Griffin** says, “It is a workout, no matter what people say. For me, the mental part is just as big as the physical part. It kind of lets my mind be at ease and takes my mind off of whatever is going on.”
The Prison Project has brought yoga to over 1500 prisons in 5 different countries including the US, Mexico, and Canada. Some prisons who are currently seeing huge benefits in their prison populations include: Riker’s Island, San Quentin, Maryland Correctional Institute for Women, and Union Correctional Institute.

Public schools like Virginia Beach Schools are using Title I to train and incorporate yoga into all elementary classrooms. Denver schools are substituting yoga for detention. There are literally hundreds of schools incorporating yoga into their daily curriculum.
Alternative and special education classrooms are finding that yoga helps their students calm down, increase attention spans, improve physical and mental health, control impulsivity, and boost school performance.
Articles Worth Reading:

CDC-Kaiser ACE Study found on CDC website
www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html

Transcending Trauma: How Yoga Heals
https://yogainternational.com/article/view/transcending-trauma-how-yoga-heals

More than just a game: Yoga for school-age children
www.health.harvard.edu/blog/more-than-just-a-game-yoga-for-school-age-children-201601299055
RESOURCES:
Contact Maureen Heil, registered Yoga teacher with the Yoga Alliance.
Heil-maureen@comcast.net

Yogabasics.com
Yogajournal.com
Pinterest.com
www.yoga-for-beginners-a-practical-guide.com/
Huffingtonpost.com
Sportsillustrated.com
Tips for Bringing Yoga to Your Classroom:

1. Establish Yoga Rules:
   • Everyone needs to stay in their yoga spaces (we use mats purchased through Title I).
   • Remove shoes and place them in a no trip zone.
   • No running ever. (More for elementary age.)
   • No talking during Yoga.
   • If the pose is uncomfortable for you, you don’t have to do it, but you must do an alternative pose during that time.
   • Do not comment on anyone else’s abilities unless it is positive.
   • If you refuse to participate in Yoga, you lose privileges (Fun Friday for my girls.)
2. Establish a schedule for yoga:
   • Yoga is most beneficial in the mornings.
   • To get the best results, it’s suggested you practice yoga at least 3 times a week for 30 minutes.
   • Teach what you are comfortable with, and practice it.
3. Provide students with blankets, water bottles, small pillows. Children who have experienced sexual trauma are sometimes more comfortable executing some poses with a blanket covering vulnerable areas.

4. NEVER insist that a child do a pose that is uncomfortable to them. Children go through growth spurts that may cause the bone to grow faster than the muscles and ligaments, and this can cause poses that are perfectly comfortable for others to be painful and unsafe for them.

5. A CHILD WITH DOWN’S SHOULD NOT DO ANYTHING THAT INVOLVES PRESSURE ON THE NECK!!!
6. Shoulder standing poses should be done with a person who holds a certificate in yoga. The risk outweighs the benefits. Just don’t do them.

7. Avoid twisting too deeply, and overstretching. This can damage growth plates.

8. Using Intentions and Affirmations may be helpful. Each day before beginning yoga poses, have students write down their intention or goal for the day. Ex: non-harming, being truthful, focusing on being happy/positive, or respecting yourself and others through behaviors. Affirmations are a good way to start your yoga session. Have students close their eyes and repeat after you affirmations. Ex: “I am happy, I am healthy, I like me.” , “I am brave, I am strong, I can do anything.”
9. Incorporate Belly Breathing which helps them learn to do deep breathing while they practice yoga, and when they are not.

BELLY BREATHING: With child sitting, standing, or lying down, have them close their eyes (if they feel safe) and place their hands on their bellies. Ask them to breathe slowly and pull their belly button towards their spine as much as possible, then breathe in slowly but deeply enough to push their belly button as far from their spine as possible.
Poses for Trauma

CHILD’S POSE
TURTLE POSE
RAG DOLL

ELEPHANT
SANDWICH
WARRIOR
WARRIOR 2

DOWN DOG

TREE POSE

CAT COW POSE

Exhale

Inhale
Easy Pose

Reclining Bound Angle

Bound Angle Pose

Wide-Legged Forward Bend
HEAD TO KNEE FORWARD BEND

UPWARD FACING DOG

UPWARD SALUTE

SEATED FORWARD BEND