

# **Did You Say Yoga?**

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## Did You Say Yoga?

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That's right – yoga and preschoolers can go together. In fact, Yoga is a wonderful way for children to exercise their whole body. While Yoga is known as a way to stretch and relax, it also has many other physical benefits for children. Because the poses are based on slow, focused movements, Yoga actually helps: develop & strengthen muscles; enhance flexibility; develop & strengthen balance and posture; build self-confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem; and finally sharpen a child's ability to focus.

The key to teaching Yoga to children is to remember that they are children. Adults might enjoy a totally quiet, peaceful atmosphere when practicing Yoga but children are going to need to make a little noise. If you're learning the dog pose, then let them bark like puppies. If you're working on the snake pose then surely the children will want to hiss like a snake. When you do the volcano talk about the lava building up so much pressure that it has to explode and overflow. Keep the Yoga at an age appropriate level for your kiddos and you will all end up enjoying it so much more.

Another contributing factor to having a successful Yoga session with your children is to not expect perfection in their poses. Explain the pose, model the pose and then let the children give it their best shot. Follow up with positive comments and don't point out any mistakes for the first several times you work on a particular pose. Keep your comments general so as not to single out any child. For instance, as you're doing the child pose you might say, "I like to make myself into the smallest ball that I can." You can also point out children who are doing poses correctly, commenting on specific things that are right.

It's also important to keep your Yoga session short, focusing on no more than 3 poses at a time. You can stretch that out once the children have become familiar with a set of poses by adding just 1 new pose each session. Remember, preschoolers love repetition and need that repetition to help them learn. If you practice the same 3 poses for 3 weeks in a row, that's great. This gives the children a chance to build their skills and their confidence. And you'll need to build your skills too. Make sure you are very familiar with any Yoga poses you plan to teach the kids before you try to teach them.

Yoga is an activity that can be done in many different settings. For instance, maybe your kiddos need a Yoga break before moving onto a new activity so try a few poses right there in your classroom. What about with a group outside on the playground? Think of how much fun it would be for the children to practice the tree pose or the butterfly pose while outside where they can see real

trees and butterflies. If you have a center that has “large group movement”, ask your music/movement teacher to add some Yoga to the routine. You know your children and you’ll be able to sense when a little Yoga break would be beneficial to the whole class!

### **Easy Ways to Introduce Yoga**

- Read a yoga book (“The ABCs of Yoga for Kids”)
- Use yoga cards (“The ABCs of Yoga for Kids Learning Cards”)
- Roll a cube (use an empty tissue box, cover it with white paper, print/cut/tape yoga poses to the six sides, cover in packing tape)
- Choose a letter (i.e. “A” is for “Alligator pose”, “B” is for “Butterfly pose”, etc.)

### **Simple Yoga Poses to try with your preschoolers**

#### **Child pose**

- Kneel with your knees & feet under your body, resting your bottom on your feet
- Lean forward & place your forehead on the floor
- Bring your arms to your sides with palms facing upward

#### **Snake pose**

- Lay down with your stomach flat on the floor
- Place your hands at your shoulders, palms on the floor
- Lift your upper body up until your arms are straight; your back is bent and you keep your hips and legs flat on the floor

#### **Dog pose**

- Get down on all fours (hands & knees)
- Stretch your bottom up keeping your feet flat on the floor and try to “press down” into the stretch with your upper body

## **Volcano pose**

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart, stretch arms out to sides
- Bring arms down slowly to the front and touch palms together
- Slowly move palms straight up like the lava rising in the volcano
- When arms are stretched straight up overhead, slowly move arms back out to your sides

## **Warrior pose**

- Stand with feet spread wide apart
- Hold arms stretched straight out to your sides
- Point your left foot towards the left wall and lean to the left, bending the left knee, keeping arms up and straight
- Repeat to the right

## **Butterfly pose**

- Sit on the floor, bend your knees and touch the bottoms of your feet together (your legs are the butterfly “wings”)
- Straighten your back, slowly wave your arms if you want and breath in and out

## **Triangle pose**

- Stand with feet spread wide apart, stretch arms out to sides
- Point your left foot toward the left wall, very slowly “tip” to your left, keeping your arms straight, and touch your left hand to the lower half of your left leg (go lower as you get better at this one)
- Repeat to the right side

## **Bridge pose**

- Lay down on the floor on your back with arms at your sides, palms to the floor
- Bend your knees and lift your hips from the floor forming a “bridge”

## **Flamingo pose**

- Stand with your feet together
- Slowly lift one leg and stretch the leg behind you
- Keep your arms stretched out to your sides and hold the pose
- Switch and repeat with the other leg

## **Turtle Pose**

- Sit on the floor with legs spread wide
- Bend your knees
- Gradually lower your upper body forward and slowly slide both arms under your legs and rest your forehead on the floor (this is the turtle “hiding in his shell”)
- Lift your chest & head, stretch up (say “hello!” – the turtle is “out of his shell”)

## **Driving My Car pose**

- Sit with legs extended in front of you
- Rock on your bottom (“warm up your car”)
- Put arms in front of your to grab your steering wheel
- Using the rocking motion, move forward, then try moving backward

## References

Wenig, Marsha, Yoga for Kids. Yoga Journal. Retrieved from <http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/210>

Power Tots Inc, Explores the Benefits of Yoga for Children. *Vocus/PRWEB*, Washington DC (March 2011). Retrieved from <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2011/3/prweb8168771.htm>

Benefits of Yoga for Kids. *Yoga 4 Beginners*. Retrieved from: <http://www.yoga4beginners.org/yoga-for-kids.htm>

### Other Great Resources:

“YogaKids – ABC’s for ages 3-6” with Marsha Wenig, DVD by GAIAM ([http://www.amazon.com/Yoga-Kids-Vol-ABCs-Ages/dp/B0001DCXTM/ref=pd\\_bxgy\\_mov\\_text\\_b](http://www.amazon.com/Yoga-Kids-Vol-ABCs-Ages/dp/B0001DCXTM/ref=pd_bxgy_mov_text_b))

“YogaKids – For ages 3-6” with Marsha Wenig, DVD by GAIAM ([http://www.amazon.com/Yoga-Kids-Ages-Marsha-Wenig/dp/B00062DKMM/ref=pd\\_bxgy\\_mov\\_text\\_c](http://www.amazon.com/Yoga-Kids-Ages-Marsha-Wenig/dp/B00062DKMM/ref=pd_bxgy_mov_text_c))

“The ABCs of Yoga for Kids” by Teresa Anne Power ([www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com), [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) )

“The ABCs of Yoga for Kids Learning Cards” by Teresa Anne Power ([www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com), [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) )

### Songs to try during Yoga (all available on iTunes):

- “Better Than a Hallelujah” by Amy Grant
- “Jesus Loves Me” by Christy Nockels
- “Blessings” by Laura Story
- “This Little Light of Mine” by Addison Road
- “How He Loves” by David Crowder Band
- “You Are Mine” by Go Fish
- “What Love Really Means” by JJ Heller
- “God Speaking” by Mandisa
- “Held” by Natalie Grant
- “What If” by Nichole Nordeman
- “What a Wonderful World” by Louis Armstrong
- “Beauty and the Beast” by Celine Dion & Peabo Bryson
- “I See the Light” (from “Tangled”) by Mandy Moore & Zachary Levi
- “Go the Distance” (from “Hercules”) by Michael Bolton
- “You’ve Got a Friend in Me” (from “Toy Story”) by Randy Newman
- “Whole New World” (from “Aladdin”) by Peabo Bryson & Regina Belle
- “Can You Feel The Love Tonight” (from “Lion King”) by Elton John