

Consider Yoga for kids

BY KATHRYN WAUGH-SKENE

It's no secret that many kids today are over scheduled, over sugared and over stimulated. From soccer practice to piano lessons, from homework to family responsibilities, children are under more pressure than ever. But how do kids get fit without competitive sports? How do they wind down without complaints of boredom? And, most importantly, how do they learn to eat healthy foods and respect their bodies?

Yoga is one possibility.

Yoga for kids might seem like the latest trend in children's programs, but the results are in and the benefits are hard to ignore. Yoga is about getting kids into shape, focusing their minds and, of course, having fun.

"A lot of kids come to the first class inflexible and out of shape", says Shasta Townsend of Balanced Life Yoga in Ajax. "By the last class they are stronger and more flexible". Parents often tell her that after regular practice their kids are also "sleeping better, concentrating better at school and getting along better with others."

As children move through the different poses they also learn to focus. The ability to slow down their minds and concentrate on what they are doing is a skill that can be taken home, leaving kids better equipped to deal with such things as wide ranging emotions, school tests, and even bullying. Townsend also teaches breathing exercises and has class discussions, showing children how to develop a sense of calm and how yoga can help in everyday life.

Ashley Skiffington of Whitby says that she saw a change in her daughter Tahlia immediately. "She was able to stay calm



and relaxed even after the class." Skiffington continues to say that she will definitely enrol her daughter again. "You need to continue practicing in order to gain the benefits." Plus, her daughter loves the class. "She loves yoga. She often practices at home and loves showing people the different poses she has learned."

Townsend says another benefit of yoga is the confidence it instils. Kids are bombarded with media images and staggering peer pressures. By developing a sense of body awareness and confidence, she says yoga teaches them to learn, improve and succeed. And because they are in a non-competitive environment, children can practice at their own pace and respect

what their bodies are able to do. Building self esteem and confidence is one of the best things that yoga can teach kids, according to Townsend.

So, where do you find these classes?

Many yoga studios now offer classes for children and families. You can also find programs through your local Parks and Recreation. Although Townsend recommends that you take a class with a qualified instructor first, home practice is also an option.

As with anything, Townsend says you should research the class you are thinking of enrolling your child in. If you are going

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Yoga's benefits

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the studio route, pay a visit and check out the atmosphere. This will also allow you to speak with the teacher and ask any questions.

It's a little more difficult to suss out a community class, but since they're usually less expensive than a studio, you're taking less of a financial chance. You could also ask to speak to the instructor to get a sense of what things will be taught.

If you're thinking of practicing at home, either as part or in lieu of an external class, there are many books and DVDs that can give you guidance. Most libraries carry the popular titles if you want to try them before buying.

Whatever route you choose your kids will reap at least some of the benefits of yoga. And since those benefits include happy, healthy, confident kids it's worth a shot.