

## TEEN YOGA MONTHLY THEME – MAY 2021

### **Yoga During Exam Time: Finding Sthira and Sukha In Everything We Do**

Are there exams? Are there not exams? Are mocks going to be the real exams? How will I be graded? Will I get into uni?! There are just some of the questions that have been swirling around the minds of teens since the start of the school year. This, on top of Covid and the everyday issues that can add emotional stress.

Students missed out on exams last year due to Covid, which left a great deal of uncertainty for many. At the start of the school year this year, many thought exams had been cancelled again, only to find out that it felt as if no one really knew what was happening because many schools are now having students study as if exams were happening. And other schools are putting emphasis on teacher assessments without the exams.

If we as parents/teachers/guardians are confused about the state of exams, imagine how the students must feel? Anxious, nervous, stressed, scared and possibly a little lost. We all know how that feels. And, yet, as yoga teachers, we have the tools to help teens create steadiness (Sthira) and ease (Sukha) in everything they do.

On the yoga mat, we aim to find stability and ease in every pose we do and in doing that, we bring a sense of awareness and grounding into the practice. There are strength and surrender elements in every pose. The balance between the two actions is what makes yoga such a unique and powerful form of fitness: it accentuates strength and grace, stability and flexibility, hard and soft, so that your entire body is engaged in a balanced way.

In addition, we're looking for a quiet, fully present mind in our practice in order to find stability and strength. Breath. By creating a rhythmic flow of breath, we calm both body and mind, creating strength and ease with each breath.

Not only can teens use their breath to create Sthira and Sukha on the mat but off the mat as well. If they notice they can't seem to catch their breath or the breath is becoming quite shallow due to stress or anxiety, it may be an indication that they are straining to overcome resistance. By gently and patiently bringing a focus to breath, the resistance subsides. Very similar to how some yogis feel in a long-held chair pose!

For the month of May, we bring you resources to use that allow you to give tools to your yogis to create a calm, steady mind and body, particularly as they come into exam season.

We have a physical practice that will cultivate a feeling of stability and ease on the yoga mat (and off!). Some mudras and mantras you can teach your teens to use if they find themselves getting anxious. Active listening techniques that you might find useful but that you can also share with your yogis as they look to support their friends through this stressful time – and the general everyday issues that can cause emotional stress.

And, there is no better way to feel a sense of ease than connecting with nature. Mental Health Awareness week is in May and theme is 'nature.' Such a lovely theme and there are so many ways to bring it into a practice. We're suggesting you start with a 'Born to Bloom' seated meditation.

With nature in mind, why not set-up a fundraising challenge whereby you practice outside for 7, 14, 20 or maybe even 31 days in a row?! Get your yogis involved, too!

## **Yoga Practice for Creating Stability and Ease**

Finding stability and ease in our yoga practice can help us calm both our minds and body, on and off the mat. Click [HERE](#) for a practice that focuses on Sthira and Sukha. You might want to take your class outside for this practice so that not only will your students find stability and ease but they can do so while also connecting with nature.

## **Mudras and Mantras**

In meditation, we sometimes make use of mantras and/or mudras. Mantras are words or phrases that can be repeated aloud or to oneself with the rhythm of the breath, and mudras are the use of the hands to focus the brain.

We use mantras and mudras as a mindfulness practice, helping us slow down our minds and keep us in the present moment. Mantras are good because we focus on a word or phrase as a way to calm and centre the mind. In this sense, mantras help us slow down our brains and allow for more space in breath, mind and body.

Mudras are hand gestures used in conjunction with pranayama. Using mudras can help stimulate the prana throughout the body, to quiet the mind by focusing it on the simple touch of our hands or fingers.

Both mantra and mudras could be helpful tools for your teens to use during exam time. As they sit at their desk to take an exam, if any feelings of anxiety or stress start to bubble up, they can quietly use a mantra or mudra to calm their body and mind.

Our Teen Yoga ambassadors created a document with different mudras that you might want to share in your classes. Click [HERE](#) for those mudras. And, click [HERE](#) to read about the power of a mantra. If you're looking for mantras to share with your teens, [HERE](#) are some ideas.

## Active Listening

We are probably all familiar with active listening – listening for the full meaning of a message, responding to emotions, and noticing nonverbal communications. Given all the listening we do, you think we'd be good at it but we're not particularly good at it. Research suggests that we only remember between 25% and 50% of what we hear. With active listening, we become better listeners, better communicators, develop more meaningful relationships, and build empathy.

We thought it might be helpful to share some active listening techniques. Click [HERE](#) to see those techniques. Your teens might find this information useful, too. They themselves might be going through some stressful things so would appreciate your active listening but they might also want to support their friends who are experiencing the same. Active listening is a great starting point!

## Born to Bloom Meditation

Use this seated meditation with your teens as you teach or share it with them online so they can do it on their own. This meditation can be done indoors or out – we'd suggested doing it outside so you can feel a true connection with nature.

This meditation focuses on Spring and the ever-changing elements not only around us in our physical world but also within us. The meditation is a great way to connect with how you and your teens might be experiencing Spring within your/their bodies. Definitely one to share with your teens!

## Fundraising Idea

Give our 20x20 Challenge a try! Do a 20-minute yoga practice outside (weather permitting!) for 20 days in a row and get your teens involved. Here's all you need to do:

- Create a 20-minute yoga class video
- Share the video with your teens (for days that you're not teaching them!)
- Have them commit to the 20x20 challenge
- Start the challenge – a 20-minute yoga practice for 20 days in a row

Encourage them to have their friends and family sponsor them to raise money for Teen Yoga Foundation. People could donate a one-off amount or a certain amount per each day that a practice is completed. You could create a WhatsApp group or FB page to keep everyone accountable.

And, it doesn't need to be a 20x20 – it could be a 10x10 or maybe even a 30x30! All funds donated will go to Teen Yoga Foundation, which means we can offer more classes to those who need it most and teacher training scholarships.