Emotional Rescue
Restore Balance
Ease Anxiety

Kids Yoga

Chaturanga
Saved my Life

Journeys through India
Pilgrimages of Western Yoginis

Peace of Heart
Heart Opening Asanas
The Art of Yoga Project

“When I practice yoga I feel whole... I feel nothing is beyond my reach... feel beautiful, strong and perfect. I feel fortunate that I am me.”

—Makendra, age 17

Fortunately there exists the Art of Yoga Project because these days, it ain’t easy being a girl.

A June 2002 report from the Centers for Disease Control found that 34 percent of high school girls have felt sad or hopeless everyday for two weeks in a row, 18 percent made a suicide plan, 35 percent feel overweight (only 6.9 percent actually are) and almost 20 percent have gone without food for more than 24 hours to avoid gaining weight. However, studies show that yoga can reduce stress, promote healthy body image, self esteem and emotional adjustment in teens.

The Art of Yoga Project, created in 1999 by nurse practitioner and yoga instructor Mary Lynn Fitton, is a means for young women to use yoga and creative tools for empowerment and well-being.

Through the online community forum Yoga Girl Gallery (yogagirlgallery.com), young women post their yoga-inspired art and experiences. Poetry, drawing, photography, collage, journal entries, any artistic medium is valid for voicing stories of personal growth through yoga. The process of creative expression empowers the artists and hopefully inspires other teens as well. The art flows; the young women grow.

“The focus was on at-risk teens,” says Fitton, who does hands-on work with girls from the juvenile justice system, “but, you know, all teens are at risk.”

The project developed as Fitton, at clinical practice, sought alternative treatments for anxiety, depression, eating disorders, regrettable sex and substance use she found in teen girls. “Short of therapy and pharmaceutical intervention, there were not many options. I had found yoga, and recognized the benefits for me.”

Through yoga classes and creative expression, the project provides a safe outlet for those raging emotions that can affect teens while they calibrate their hormones.

The cacophony of messages aimed at teens can be overwhelming but through yoga, the girls learn to access their center. “They are using yoga to get in touch with who they really are, their inner voice. They develop a reverence for themselves and their bodies, focusing more on what they can do creatively and less about what society wants from them.”

“I pose to stand gracefully, and watching my body, I’m strong,” was posted on yogagirlgallery.com.

Fitton uses contemporary music in her classes to provide a connection between what goes on inside the yoga studio and the world at large. “I use music, it’s not because I want to be hip. I want teens to relate yoga to their

www.yoga4everybody.com
life.” Some classes start with brief discussions of Yamas and Niyamas, guidelines for healthy ways of living. “Ahimsa, non-violence, how to treat the self and others lovingly. Satya, being truthful. I can introduce guidelines to prevent some of the suffering that comes with adolescence.”

Hundreds of girls, from a range of backgrounds, have been served by the Art of Yoga Project as Fitton works on an upcoming book, Yoga Girl Gallery: Young Women Living the Art of Yoga.

“Kids have a lot coming at them these days, pressures to succeed, socially, academically, to look a certain way. We really need to help them.”

Tax-deductible contributions to The Art of Yoga Project can be sent to: Mary Lynn Fitton, P.O. Box 71, Ashland, OR 97520. www.yogagirgallery.com

Viki Psihoyos

Fun in a Box

Schoolteachers seeking a way to introduce science concepts paired with yoga have been finding their answers in a box. Yoga Science Box is a K-5 grade curriculum program that comes complete with a life-size anatomy book, measuring tape, compass, a stopwatch, 30 four-foot poles to assemble a six-foot icosahedron (a polyhedron with 20 faces for those of us who forget), and lesson plans.

Created by Tony and Sandy Wong Sanchez, founders of the nonprofit United States Yoga Association, the kit is a result of a pilot program they conducted in the San Francisco Unified School District. A group of K through 12 grade teachers practiced yoga three times a week, attended workshops, taught their children and kept journals. At year’s end, district administrators gave the go-ahead for a formal curriculum to be created, integrating phys-ed requirements with academics.

That led to ABC Yoga, a modified series of classic hatha yoga poses, with instructional text and more than 45 lesson plans. Training workshops for teachers in addition to after-school yoga classes prepared faculty to lead students through Butterfly Breathing, Cocoon, Seahorse… simple stretches and movements helping students to refocus and energize. Additional applications include Desk Potato Yoga and Yogasthma: Seven steps to Asthma Control, which was contributed to by Kaiser Permanente, Saint Luke’s Hospital and the San Francisco Asthma Task Force.

The Yoga Science Box program, which won the 2001 Golden Apple Award from the San Francisco Education Foundation, offers teachers structure yet allows them creativity to apply their curriculum alongside the yoga. Concepts of personal space, energy, and alignment are introduced when assembling the 30 bamboo rods and connectors to make the icosahedron. Other tools apply basic laws of math and physics.

“Our program is set up to teach teachers,” says Wong Sanchez, who has sent out hundreds of the Yoga Science Box. “It’s an effective yoga program for the teacher that spends all day with the students. They can implement it as needed.”

Contact: Sandy Wong Sanchez at (415) 563-2296. (For more info visit: www.usyoga.org/html/science_box_programs.htm.)

Viki Psihoyos

Gripitz—A Unique Set of Yoga Blocks

Just when I thought I couldn’t possibly need yet another yoga prop, I found Gripitz, a pair of ergonomic props that are a variation on a familiar theme: not just ordinary yoga blocks, but blocks with handles. Gripitz help to relieve the wrist strain that plagues many yoga practitioners. In the yoga classes I teach, I often notice students rolling their hands into fists to support their body and simultaneously take pressure off their wrists in weight-bearing poses like Plank or Upward Facing Dog. I also notice people wrapping their wrists in black support bands before unfurling their mats. Until now, there have been few effective solutions to help ease the strain of aching wrists in many yoga poses.

To stretch and strengthen the wrist, and to alleviate some of the problems that flare up in conditions like carpal tunnel syndrome, a variety of single asanas and specific sequences are utilized. But, even with stretching...