

The Essential Starter Guide to

# TEACHING KIDS YOGA

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## Introduction



**Aruna in 2003 with one of her kids yoga classes at a yoga studio.**

This report is for anyone who has a passion for kids yoga. Its so much easier to teach kids when you know what to expect. At Young Yoga Masters, I've gotten emails of exasperation from adult yoga teachers who went into a kids class unsuspecting and unprepared. One of them confessed leaving such a class in tears. Oh wait a minute, that was me after my first attempt at teaching kids yoga twelve years ago!

I can relate.

### The Hardest Class Is The First Class

I learned how to teach kids yoga and so can you. I was one of those adult yoga teachers who had no idea what I was getting into trying to teach kids about yoga. Unlike the adults in my classes, those kids didn't follow along quietly and happily. Instead they did what they wanted, when they wanted, and where they wanted.

I knew if I wanted to survive as a kids yoga teacher I would have to get training fast.

Years of experimentation and training later, I'm never afraid to teach a new kids class because I know I can deliver a great experience for all, both the kids and me. Being able to deliver a great kids yoga class means being ready to make a living as a kids yoga teacher.

These pages contain what I have found to be the Essential Starter Guide for Teaching Kids Yoga. I've selected the most informative articles from Young Yoga Masters to help you start teaching kids yoga.

If you've already entered your e-mail on Young Yoga Masters you'll be receiving weekly articles about Kids Yoga with a variety of lesson plans, songs, games and resources. If you got this guide from someone else, give yourself the benefit of a community of kids yoga teachers and sign up now at [www.YoungYogaMasters.com](http://www.YoungYogaMasters.com).

Young Yoga Masters was the first blog exclusively dedicated to kids yoga. It is read by kids yoga teachers from around the world! Be sure to enter your e-mail and become a part of this kids yoga movement.

### **Discover Real Yoga, Real Fun for Real Kids**

We strive to pass on real yoga concepts in kid friendly ways, making children's yoga more than just pretending to be animals. Young Yoga Masters has more than 100 articles on the blog and you have free access to all of them.



**Aruna Kathy Humphrys  
of Young Yoga Masters**

I also invite you to join me for [a Kids Yoga Teacher Training](#). This uplifting weekend will rejuvenate your lesson plans and your spirit. At Young Yoga Masters, you are not left on your own after the training, you become part of our blog community getting new ideas and connecting with other yoga teachers after the training is over.

If you have any questions about Kids Yoga or are interested in booking Young Yoga Masters training in your area, please feel free to contact me.

Once again, welcome to the wonderful world of kids yoga!

Yours truly,

*Aruna Kathy Humphrys*

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Young Yoga Masters

Real Yoga ~ Real Fun ~Teacher Training

## *Isn't Yoga Supposed to be Quiet?*



My spirited (noisy) yoga students  
in a school-age class.

At one of the daycares where I teach a new teacher got to experience kids' yoga for the first time.

It was her first week as a teacher at the daycare and her first time seeing kids do yoga. Plus she does yoga herself. She was very excited and joined us in the circle with about twenty children aged eighteen months to four years.

It kind of surprised me when she exclaimed five minutes into the class "Isn't yoga supposed to be quiet?"

### **Welcome to Kids Yoga!**

One of the hardest things to get across in Teacher Training with adults is what kids are actually like in a class. No matter how much I encourage and cajole the teacher trainers to pretend they are kids, they are still quite mellow compared to a real kids class.

It can take a new teacher by surprise when they experience the actual noise level in a classroom.

### **You Mean the DVD's are not what Really Happens?**

Every kid's yoga video I've ever seen shows all the kids politely and peacefully following along, just smiling away with joy. Six or eight well chosen kids who love doing yoga demonstrate each pose.

In a daycare class of twenty kids it's a whole different encounter. One day I want to bring a recorder into class so you can hear it for yourself. It's nothing like what you see in videos – especially if it's your first class.

### **Spirited Expression**

The way I'll describe it is Spirited Expression. Kids yoga appears as bedlam, a state of wild uproar and confusion, when compared to an adult yoga class.

It's no wonder this new teacher asked the question, "Isn't yoga supposed to be quiet?"

## Do We Want Kids to Be Like Adults, or Adults to be More Like Kids?

We know we sometimes want kids to be more like adults, to sit quietly, not to interrupt, not to ask lots of questions, and just do as they're told! How else would we manage all these big souls in their little seats?

*"You are the spark of the blaze and the spark has  
all the power of the blaze to create the same blaze.  
You are the drop of the Ocean and all the Ocean is  
in the drop of the Ocean."*

- Tulshi Sen, p. 122  
*Ancient Secrets of Success for Today's World*

If adults actually said  
what they were thinking out loud  
when there is a hard pose...  
You'd have a kids yoga class!

It's impossible to extinguish that spark within and why would we want to be the ones who put it out anyway? The spark is so strong in children they don't hold back expressing how they feel.

Adults apply a filter to their thoughts in yoga classes. When we do a hard yoga pose with adults, their eyes may emit laser glares and angry faces cry out in protest telling me how they feel.

If those adults actually said what they were thinking out loud, you'd have a kids yoga class.

### What It's Like to Start a Kids Yoga Class

If you want to get a feeling for a kids yoga class when you're first starting up the class, here's a suggestions:

Take a notepad to the next adult yoga class you take. As the teacher gives each pose jot down your first thoughts when you're told the next pose, your feelings as you do the pose, and your opinion of the pose.

Now imagine a class of twenty people with at least five people saying these thoughts out loud almost all of the time.

Now that's what your first kids yoga class sounds like!

The truth is a kids yoga class is much like an adult yoga class, only for the adults the bedlam is going on inside rather than outside.

Is yoga supposed to be quiet?

Is the Ocean supposed to be calm?

So if you're going in to teach your first kids yoga class, don't take it personally when the noise erupts. It does get better, quieter, and more like yoga as both the teacher and the children become skilled. With practice, you'll be able to manage the outbursts and direct the kids' energy and enthusiasm.

Then again I teach some youngsters who I applaud for being silent for 2 minutes. Now that I know how it works, I enjoy listening to what they are saying.

Welcome to the real world of kids yoga!



Camel Pose: One hump or two?

## Kids Yoga Animal Poses

One yoga teacher in the Young Yoga Masters kids yoga teacher training course asked me a question that every new teacher must ask when doing kids yoga:

*How do we do kids yoga animal poses?*

Yoga animal poses are part of the basic tools for teaching kids. You'll find them in many kids yoga books like:

[The Yoga Zoo Adventure for Little Kids](#) by Helen Purperhart

[Fly Like A Butterfly: Yoga for Children](#) by Shakta Kaur Khalsa (I've bought this book twice, my first one I used so much it fell apart!)

I have to admit I haven't included a simple animal story in my training curriculum. My yoga animals are part of bigger themes like the Story of the Lion Cub who Was Raised by Goats. We do lions and even a goat pose!

Young Yoga Masters training is much more than just pretending to be animals. Besides if you want animal yoga, it's out there in books, cards, and blog posts.

But I realized that I didn't stop doing animal poses till I had done them hundreds (maybe thousands) of times. At the beginning I loved animal poses. Only a few years later did they start to bore me to tears. That's when I developed my own Kids Yoga Teacher Training that is still very playful and fun, includes animals, but also includes real yoga concepts too.

I changed my training and it now include this article to refer to for Animal poses! Animals and yoga go together so naturally, it is a fundamental of kids yoga.

Here are my current top ten favourite yoga animal poses:

1. **Camel Ride** - a basic warm-up in Kundalini Yoga, sit in easy pose, hold your ankles, inhale lift your spine forward and up, exhale and relax your spine back – as if you were riding on a camel.



2. **Elephant taking a Shower:** stand up and make a trunk with both arms, standing forward bend and dip your trunk into the imaginary watering hole in front of you, “glug, glug, glug.” Then lift your trunk up overhead and spray like a shower. Say, “I’m out of water” and repeat. The kids will follow along.
3. **Frog:** squat down like a frog and then jump!
4. **Cobra Pose:** a classic pose. Snakes like to hiss, wiggle their tongues, and then rattle snakes shake their tails in the air.
5. **Downward Dog:** another classic. Bark and be prepared for noise in a large group so sometimes I have the puppies whine.
6. **Butterfly Drinking Nectar:** sitting, put your feet together and flutter your knees up and down like a butterfly. Then move forward bend to drink the nectar from a flower (your feet).
7. **Cheetah:** move quickly on all fours like a cheetah running across the land
8. **Camel Pose:** See the picture (on page 11). Camel pose is different from camel ride, but this challenging pose is one kids will be able to improve over time.
9. **Unicorn:** Make your hands into a magical unicorn horn over the centre of your head then gallop.
10. **Donkey Kicks:** here’s a link to this pose.

You can start an animal yoga class by saying, “Put your hand up if you like animals.” You’ll get so many hands you may have to limit comments from the kids. Some people believe yoga poses came from watching how animals stretch.

Then ask the class if they want to do some animal yoga. I've never had young kids say no, although the older kids (10 – 12 yrs) may lose interest in this. And you may lose interest doing only animal yoga without any real yoga.

But with animal yoga you'll be off to the races, or should I say the Zoo, going through all the poses, plus the ones the kids make up. When I do a "one time" class at a special event or festival, I often choose animals as a theme and mix it in with the other real yoga concepts from my [Kids Yoga Teacher Training](#) weekend.

Click here to see the original blog post with comments from other community members who share their favourite animal poses.



### **3 Simple Health Tips for Kids Yoga Teachers**

Recently I've been feeling the excitement, perhaps the over-excitement, of life. With so many things on the go I got run down and decided to stop everything for awhile to get back to a healthy state. My Mentor, [Tulshi Sen](#), always said that when things get overwhelming it's time to stop everything and re-connect with your hearts desire.

These wise words have guided me through some intense times although when I first heard them I didn't believe I could stop EVERYTHING. I now know that only by stopping can I change track both physically and emotionally.

Stopping got me thinking about how important it is for us to take care of ourselves as teachers. If we get sick or run down we can't do what we love to do – teach. If we don't acknowledge we're sick and keep teaching, we spread sickness around instead of happiness.

By stopping, I saw I was getting robotic, completing tasks without experiencing any joy in doing them. I missed the signs of not eating well or not getting a good night's sleep.

When I rested I realized three tips that were missing from the Health and Safety part of my Kids Yoga Teacher Training Curriculum. They help us stay healthy as teachers. These three simple health tips remind us to slow down, examine our habits, and sometimes stop altogether so we can do what we love:

### **3 Simple Health Tips for Kids Yoga Teachers**

#### **I. Wash Your Hands Between Classes**

Recently a child I teach ended up in hospital for a week with a very serious virus. This virus has people lining up all day to get a flu shot. I realized that at this school I teach in all the classrooms. I see all the children. I'm a carrier!

||

If you teach multiple classes in a day you could carry a virus from class to class without knowing it. Slow down so you can wash your hands after each class. You'll help stop the spread of illness from one class to the next and also to yourself.

## 2. Sleeve Cough/Sneeze

When I was a kid we were taught to cover our mouth with our hand when we coughed or sneezed. That habit was so deeply ingrained in me it took months to change – even though it now seems so obvious how germ-y our hands and everything we touch will become if we cough into them.

The new etiquette: if you don't have a tissue [sneeze into your sleeve rather than your hand](#). This keeps your hands clean for when you touch other things like your yoga props or the children. Hopefully you know about this one, but I still see people covering their mouth with their hand – probably out of habit. I teach this by saying “sleeve cough” and demonstrating the move whenever someone sneezes or coughs. Children are natural imitators so they'll pick it up without much more having to be said.

## 3. If you are Sick - It's time to Stop

Teaching yoga is important but if you are sick it is a time to stop what you are doing and reconnect with what is important. If it means cancelling a class then cancel it. I know it is hard to do, especially if you are self-employed, but it is worth it. What amount of money is more important than good health?

Yoga and meditation help us become the Masters of our Destiny. When we get run down we forget the power we have to change our lives. Stopping helps us realize that we don't HAVE TO do the things that are causing us to be run down. The only thing we have to do is give ourselves the freedom to live a happy and healthy life.

We were once taught to cover  
your mouth with your hand....  
It now seems so obvious how  
germ-y your hands and  
everything you touch will  
become if you cough into them.

## ***Kids and Relaxation – a Trouble Shooting Guide***

Here's a part of a letter I received asking about the sometimes difficult part of a kids yoga class: relaxation with kids.

Dear Aruna,

After completing my yoga therapy course I stayed in Bangalore for a couple of days and I went to teach kids yoga at my friends daughters kindergarten of 4-5 year olds. We did a “yoga safari” letting the kids imagine what animals we ran into. It was really fantastic, they loved it! The total time was around 30 minutes.

What is the ultimate time frame for small kids verses older kids? 4-5 year olds 30min? 7 year olds 1 hr? The relaxation part was the most difficult, I tried doing simple Yoga Nidra but it was not very successful.

Anna Bervander, Singapore  
[www.theforeststudio.com](http://www.theforeststudio.com)



Kids Yoga Encourages Children to  
Discover the Art of Relaxations

The Ultimate Time Frame for kids yoga classes is answered [in this post here](#). But the part Anna threw in at the end about how the relaxation was the most difficult is another good question that needs answers.

Does relaxation with kids have to be hard?

### **Why Won't Kids Relax?**

This trouble shooting guide will help you when you're wondering why the relaxation isn't going too well and also what you can do about it:

- **The Kids Are Not Tired:** Usually at the end of an active yoga class we want to relax! So if they aren't relaxing why not add another pose onto the end. Especially a pose that helps a person sleep and works the central nervous system – like table pose. After a minute of this pose the kids are usually happy to lie down.

Also consider the time of day of the class. Some kids may have napped in the afternoon (especially a four year old) and are now coming to class. If the class is in the morning, they just woke up and may not be tired.

- **They don't want to relax:** Certain kids don't like to be told what to do. In many classes when I say, "It's time to relax." A few kids will automatically say, "I'm not tired."

Often my toughest customers will start off refusing to lie down, then half way through the song they will quietly repose.

I always give a choice during relaxation. I often play a song and invite the children to either lie down or join me in meditating to the song (we cover lots of songs in my [Kids Yoga Teacher training](#)). If you try to tell kids what to do without giving them a choice or explaining why they would want to do it, you will run into problems.

Children don't follow along like an adult class would. If they don't want to do something they will straight out tell you – NO! So let them get to know what relaxation time is all about and then decide. I consider it my job to make relaxation so great that they want to do it. Besides how do you make a child relax?

As they get to know you and trust you, you can explain benefits like how relaxation is good for your body, rejuvenates, and feels good. But until they want to relax, I suggest letting them sit and meditate.

Often my toughest customers will start of refusing to lie down, then half way through the song they will quietly repose.

- **They're not comfortable relaxing with strangers:** In a first class like Anna had – kids aren't sure who you are and the whole experience of yoga may be new to them. Some people won't be comfortable closing their eyes and resting with strangers (both kids and adults). They will only be comfortable resting when they feel safe.

- **They just ate a birthday cake:** Kids eat all kinds of junk food. This food can make them very active and relaxation won't be easy for them. Consider doing a yoga theme class on nutrition to tell kids about this connection and healthy food choices.
- **They are not used to Corpse Pose:** Many teachers insist on Corpse pose during relaxation time. Personally, I don't spend too much time getting the children into corpse pose when I'm with a new group of kids. I let them relax in any position at the beginning. Shivasana is a pose that takes time to develop like all the other poses.

When a class is more advanced I'll introduce guided imagery relaxations. Eventually I build up to relaxation with no music, the hardest way for most kids.

### **You Can't Teach Everything In One Class**

There are so many topics to introduce to kids in yoga, I know I can't teach everything in one class! Keep this in mind if you are going into a one time class. What are the main points you really want to introduce and is it realistic for a first class.

If you tell children too much they get overloaded and tune you out. When relaxation comes, don't spoil a peaceful mood with constant corrections and directions. If the kids are quiet and focused let them find a comfortable position and experience the joy of being. As time goes by you can introduce more tools for deep relaxation.

## ***Marketing Kids Yoga: What's So Good about Non-Competitive Kids Activities like Yoga?***

If you want to become a kids yoga teacher you'll eventually have to "sell" the benefits of kids yoga to a school, daycare, or in a poster for your class. This article will give you a little help on how to write about the benefits of yoga for children.



These boys like both sports and meditation.

The other day I saw a kid's yoga poster touting yoga as "non-competitive" in one of the bullet points. Most people know benefits of competitive sports, but the idea of doing a non-competitive activity, like yoga, is fairly new. Do parents, educators, and coaches understand why a non-competitive activity can help today's children and today's health crisis?

### **Are You Saying what you Think You're Saying?**

Choose your words carefully when making a poster or writing a description of your kids yoga classes. If you write non-competitive, it may mean a lot to you, but it may not mean anything special to your reader. If you're looking for new classes or students, it will help if you spell it out.

Non-competitive means many great things!

In ads and conversation, give people a new look at exercise. Exercise is no longer for athletes. Exercise is something to enjoy, not something you have to do. Exercise improves health and combats stress. It's for a lifetime not a competition. Exercise can save lives – studies prove it!

Yoga is the best exercise for these criteria! Paint a clear picture of these benefits of non-competitive kids yoga. Try some of these phrases:



## 8 Ways to Say “Non-Competitive” that show the true value of Kids Yoga

For an out of shape child,  
exercise hurts physically...  
Yoga allows kids to go at  
their own pace.

1. **Kids love yoga!** Getting physical can be embarrassing for kids who are out of shape or un-coordinated, and there are too many kids out of shape these days for obstacles like embarrassment. The thought of gasping and tripping your way to learning to take a shot or play defence discourages many kids from even starting a team sport. In yoga, the learning curve is more private and personal. It's easier to get started and you continue at your own pace. Kids may not want to join a team, but kids love yoga!
2. **Big Value: Affordable for any school/daycare/family:** Competitive sports need equipment, referees, a team of players and another team to play against. Many sports are just plain expensive. Yoga is a great value, all you need is some open space – all the other props in yoga are really just extras. After kids take yoga, parents often witness them downward dogging or meditating on the living room floor or in their bed – that's something you won't find a hockey player doing.
3. **It's never been easier to get kids active:** In competitive sports only a few people make the team and the rest are spectators. In Yoga everyone participates, there are no spectators!
4. **The foundation for a lifetime of health:** Many kids who are athletes in school find a void once they finish school. Most eventually stop playing sports which means they stop exercising. Yoga is a lifelong practice that grows with you as you grow older.
5. **Learn to relax with yoga:** In the end, competitive sports are a win/lose proposition, that's why we keep score and stats. One side wins and one side loses. In Yoga everyone feels like a winner after practicing.

- 6. Perfect for Beginners:** For an out of shape child, exercise hurts physically. Stretching hurts, running hurts, lifting hurts – you get the idea. Yes, yoga will also hurt for a newbie too. But yoga allows people to go at their own pace more easily than competitive sports. Five minutes on the basketball court is a horror for someone out of shape. In yoga, the individual can determine the intensity of their effort. Five minutes of yoga is different for each person because there is no group expectation. Working at your own pace makes exercise a more enjoyable experience which may keep kids exercising!
- 7. Kid-Friendly tools for success:** Balance, coordination, and focus carry off the court and the yoga mat. These skills can be derived from sports, but they are learned directly in yoga. In fact many athletes use yoga and meditation to help them control stress and anxiety and to visualize success. If you do yoga, you learn skills to use in real life.
- 8. Help children deal effectively with stress:** Life is a battlefield, just read the Bhagavad Gita. We all need to find our inner compass, our inner Guru, to guide us through the battle. Sports build us to be tough competitors. Yoga helps us decide what team to play for.

**Help Kids see that Exercise is not Just for Athletes**

For the first part of my life I thought of myself as a non-athlete after I accidentally scored on my own net (What! Passing to the goalie IS a soccer move). In university I played softball because they needed girls for the co-ed team. I loved playing but stopped soon after graduating when the team started going their separate ways.

It wasn't until I discovered yoga that I found something that helped me feel healthy, happy, and centered. I found something I can do for life. I've done yoga with different intensity over the years, but yoga has always been there for me no matter where I've been.

Being able to communicate the benefits of a non-competitive activity like yoga may help other children find a healthy lifestyle too. So when you tell people that yoga is non-competitive, use some of these examples to really show them what non-competitive means.

Here are more comments on this blog post from the Young Yoga Masters community. Feel free to add your own definition of what non-competitive means to you.

## Funny Kids Yoga Story



**Aruna teaching kids yoga to pre-school kids.**

You've made it through the Essential Starter Guide to Teaching Kids Yoga! To finish, here's a story to remind you that above all – bring your smile when you teach. You never know what you're in for!

In my first blog I asked, *“Have you every had someone pee on your yoga mat?”*

Well, you guessed it, that question comes from personal experience. It happened with a group of toddlers I teach in a Montessori School. For half an hour each week we have our yoga session and it includes all the aspects of yoga including asana, deep breathing, meditation, and relaxation. Of course all of it is kids-style yoga.

If you've done yoga with kids between 2 and 5 you probably know, once they know you and get comfortable with you, they do everything whole-heartedly. In this class one of the little girls, just out of diapers, was really getting into yoga. She was pretending to be animals, doing the yoga poses, and having fun with the meditations and songs.

On this day, when it came time for the relaxation, she went straight to my mat, lay down and closed her eyes.

### **Resting Like a Peaceful Little Angel**

Now usually I don't let the kids sit on my mat, mostly because then everyone wants to sit on the mat and then everyone is squished on the mat and no one is sitting on the carpet. But today all the other kids were quietly relaxing on the carpet. She was the only who went to my mat, looking like a little angel, curled up, eyes closed, all quiet and peaceful.

“Knowing that whatever  
you intend will be done  
is the secret of success.”

- Tulshi Sen,  
Ancient Secrets of Success  
for Today's World

I admired her from my place by the CD player while the soft music played and the moment of stillness and contentment lingered in the air. And I made the decision to let everything be as it was.

Then I noticed a dark circle forming on the mat by her little cherub bottom. At first I didn't understand what was happening. Waves of confusion washed over the stillness. Then she slowly sat up in the center of that dark circle and looked up at me with big, knowing eyes and said the two simple words so common and profound to a toddler:

“I pee.”

Yes, she pee alright. There was no question about it, no shame, and no victory. It was a simple statement of “what is.” It was a perfect moment of knowing and being, a profoundly real example of living without judgement or expectation.

### **What More Could a Yoga Teacher Desire?**

It was all these things and yet more! Immediately the world responded to take care of all her needs. The Montessori teacher jumped into action and carried her, at arms length, to the bathroom. Another one of the teachers came over armed with the diluted bleach spray bottle and paper towels. And before you know it, we moved on.

This little incident was a beautiful example of yoga, union, and the fun of teaching children. I think everything I have learned helped me enjoy that moment rather than getting upset or angry.

As it says in one of my favourite books that guides me in my life,

*“Being concerned about results and being anxious about the outcome and worrying about the future is interfering with the work of your Consciousness. It is your minds desire to fail. Knowing that whatever you intend will be done is the secret of success.”*

- Tulshi Sen, *Ancient Secrets of Success for Today's World*, p. 147

My intention for teaching children's yoga is to assist children in developing tools to enjoy life, with all the feelings that come with it. It's an intention to learn the secrets of true success, knowing that whatever you want to do will be done. Knowing that even when someone pees on your yoga mat, it won't stop you!

I also want to be a model of what I teach. I don't want to be concerned about the bumps on the way. Enjoying the fun of that experience was a great success for me!

And by the way, in case you're wondering, I never did use that yoga mat again. Although my yoga mat was sprayed with bleach and cleaned very well, I just had to throw it out. I couldn't look at it anymore without thinking of pee!

## Next Steps



Yoga helps us reach for our dreams!

Children need more than pretending to be animals to deal with the different obstacles they face in our demanding world. They need teachers who can pass on the ancient wisdom of yoga. The Essential Starter Guide to Teaching Kids Yoga will help you on your way.

Feel free to send me any questions you may have about kids yoga – you are not alone in your journey to teach kids with Young Yoga Masters. All comments are welcome too! The more we share our experiences, the more we all become better leaders for today's children.

I'd love to meet you in person for a kids yoga teacher training or you can look at the on-line kids yoga resources that you get instantly.

I look forward to connecting with teachers around the world who have a passion for kids yoga like I do.

Thank you for supporting Young Yoga Masters.

Yours truly,

*Aruna Kathy Humphrys*

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Real Yoga ~ Real Fun ~Teacher Training