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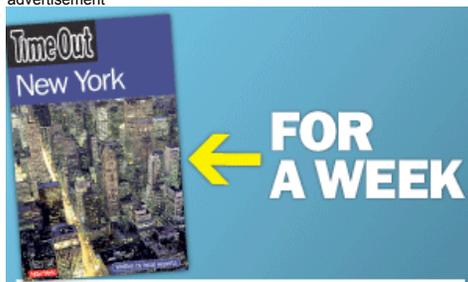
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CHILD'S POSE At Karma Kids Yoga the program—and the decor—is made for mini mat rats. Photo: Astrid Stawiarz

Yoga for children is proving popular with kids and parents alike

By Elizabeth Barr and Annie Bell
Photographs by David Allee

Rarely do kids embrace something that they've been told is "good for you." But since yoga classes for kids began turning up on the schedules of studios throughout the city, more and more children are joining the ranks of the converted. Not only is the practice fun for them—from tot to teen—but they reap the same benefits from yoga that adults do. As Deborah Bos, teacher of the Yoga Garden for Children, explains, "We know that there is no better tool than yoga—from cradle to grave—to help us cope with our daily lives. It's great to reach kids at an early age with that message." And if parents aren't ready to send their little beloveds off to a class by themselves, there are a lot of adult/child classes to choose from as well. Of course, classes for kids aren't identical to their adult counterparts. Short attention spans and less-developed motor skills mean routines are very loose, and no one is expected to hold precise poses. Rather than being strict about teaching traditional asanas, Bos encourages children to use their imagination and incorporates their creativity in her sessions. At a recent adult/child class of about eight kids ranging from three- to six-years-old and their guardians, the grown-ups struck tree poses while the little ones worked on breath by pretending to be wind. Another breathing exercise used Beanie Babies placed on participants' abdomens; when their breath was correct, the toys would "swim" up and down. Often Bos lets the kids make up poses, which closely resemble actual asanas. One child's "shark" was reminiscent of locust pose, while another's "elephant" could have been warrior one.

Traditional poses are used at Universal Force Healing Center, where, except for baby/parent classes, children practice without adults. (The center has scheduled adult classes concurrently with kids' classes for those guardians who want to get a session in.) But, as at the Yoga Garden, the practice is tailored for kids. Instead of Sanskrit names, or even their English translations, asanas are referred to in terms little ones can relate to: A "sideways plank," for example, is called a "rainbow" for tots and is referred to as a "racecar" for the benefit of seven-year-old boys. Instead of "child's pose," kids settle into "rock" formation. Instructor Kristin Kaminski uses blocks at this time to teach students about their bodies. Curled up in rock pose, children recite each part of their body as Kaminski massages it with a block: spine, lower back, shoulder blade. And since it wouldn't be child's play if the youngsters didn't get to make a little noise, each student is allowed a bang on UFHC's large brass gong at the end of each session.

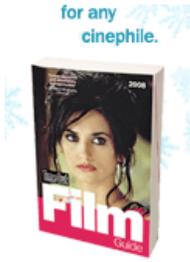
Four-month-old Karma Kids Yoga specializes in asanas for minors, offering both child-only and adult/child classes. After patiently settling down a group of antsy seven- to nine-year-olds, co-owner Jeannene Levinson leads them in chanting "I am strong," a phrase which emphasizes Karma's message of being in touch with your body. The activities are paced quickly enough to keep children interested and focused: A traditional yoga pose is followed by a hula-hoop game, then students are encouraged to close their eyes and envision a pleasant, peaceful place. Aside from one rowdy boy who repeatedly (and loudly) suggests "the Pokémon store!," the kids smile sweetly, eyes shut. Karma's adult/child classes usually include 6 to 11 people (the minor participants ranging from 7- to 13-years-old) and incorporate moves such as balancing small beanbag pillows on the head, down-dog stretches and a final relaxation, when Levinson comes around and treats students to a brief foot massage.

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Throughout the class, Levinson is conscious of not making her charges feel like they're in school. "Just like adults," she says, "kids have a bad day and feel stress, whether it's from peer pressure or due to a test—this is a place where they can relax and hopefully improve their moods." Bos, too, notes the importance of attending to her young students' minds. "All their lives kids are looking to parents or authority or celebrities for direction," she says. "But if you can get them in touch with their bodies and improve their self-esteem and let them use their imaginations, they'll learn to look inside themselves for answers." Grown-ups who attend an adult/child class should know that the emphasis is on children, and it isn't the place for an intense workout or perfecting your technique. But if having your child reap all the benefits isn't enough, there's always this: It is a great way to fit in a mild workout and clear your head—without the hassle of finding a baby-sitter.

For more information on yoga venues for kids, see "[The shape of things.](#)"



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