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Yoga for the Whole Family

by Hannah Boyd

If you've opened a magazine or left your house anytime in the past few years, you probably know that yoga is trendy. Well, it's not just for celebrities and socialites any more. Families across the country are hopping onto the yoga mat, and you can too.

"Yoga helps build confidence, self-esteem, focus, and concentration," says Shari Vilchez-Blatt, founder and director of Karma Kids in New York City. "It's a great way to give kids tools to relax in times of stress."

It's also a noncompetitive form of exercise that strengthens muscles and flexibility, while providing kids who stick with it a real sense of accomplishment. And yoga is a hobby that parents and kids can enjoy together – no tutu or shin guards required.

Parents introduce their kids to yoga for different reasons. In many cases, the parents are simply teaching their kids to love something they already enjoy. In other cases, kids come because they've been told improved strength and flexibility will increase their performance at another sport. In some cases, teachers suggest yoga for kids who struggle to sit still during class. "We have creative ways to get them to focus and concentrate, but we know how to make it fun," says Vilchez-Blatt.

Starting to understand why yoga's so popular? Formal classes are a great way to get started, especially if you're new to yoga yourself. Vilchez-Blatt suggests looking for an instructor who's been certified to teach children, pointing out that even the best instructor will need extra patience to work with young ones. The environment should be safe and the atmosphere should be kid-friendly. Watch a class to see how the teacher handles behavior issues, and to gauge whether your child is having fun.

If you can't find a suitable class nearby, consider the living room option. There are lots of yoga DVDs available for home practice. Some, like Yoga Journal's *Family Yoga*, feature both kids and adults. You may have to crane your neck to see the screen, but this won't be an issue for most kids, who tend to have great memories. Focus on fun rather than form; Vilchez-Blatt suggests incorporating puppets and stories, barking while in "downward dog" position, and generally being silly.

"Children's yoga is very animated and fun," she says. And fun is one trend that never goes out of style.



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