

ASANA

Warrior (Virabhadrasana)

Stand with the feet parallel and just over hip-distance apart. Turn the left foot out to the side and then lift the right foot and place it down on a 45-degree angle away from the body. Bend the left knee and make sure that you don't lower the body any further than level with the ankle. Widen your stance if you wish to intensify your stretch, but never at the sacrifice of steadiness as this is a grounding pose. Take the arms up and outwards to the sides, palms facing downwards. The arms are held level with the shoulders. Turn the head to look along the left arm, keeping the neck straight. Energise the body. Feel a lifting throughout the spine while stretching the arms outwards through to the fingertips. Consciously lift the crown of the head towards the ceiling. Relax the neck. While in the pose feel the energy and the strength surging through the body. Stay in this position breathing deeply for 30 seconds, if possible. Straighten the bent leg and rise back up to a standing position. Then lower the arms and come back to the middle. Repeat on the other side. Repeat 3 times.

Benefits: Strengthens and limbers up the legs. Builds the muscles in the back and arms and tones the nervous system. Fights against lethargy. Helps eliminate toxins and improve circulation. Promotes self-confidence and enthusiasm. Inspires courage, vigour and strength.

Contraindications: Avoid if suffering from serious conditions relating to the ankles, neck, back, shoulders and knees.

Awareness: Grounding and strengthening.

Chakra: Muladhara (Base of the Spine) – Red.



YOGA

Jane Lee Wiesner

EMOTIONAL EMPOWERMENT

Illustrations: Joy Antonie, from the book *Magic Me (Yoga for Everyone)*

Emotional intelligence, more so than intellectual ability, equips a child for life as a successful, happy adult. Jane Lee Wiesner explains how yoga can help achieve this state

WHAT is a 'healthy' IQ? According to neuroscientists, a healthy IQ has nothing to do with the traditional intelligence quotient. New research shows that a child's ability to find success and happiness in life has more to do with their emotional intelligence than school grades and IQ scores. Studies have

revealed that some of the smartest kids in school can fail to achieve in life because they are handicapped by their emotions.

In his book *Emotional Intelligence – Why It Matters More Than IQ*, Dr Daniel Goleman suggests that the real key to a child's future success lies in their ability

to be at ease with their environment and to feel at peace and comfortable with who they are. Goleman explains how, in primitive times, the brain was largely directed by the limbic system (emotional brain). As evolution took place, the neocortex (rational or thinking brain) developed and human beings began to think before they acted. Today, healthy living relies on achieving a balance between the emotional and the rational brains.

Yoga can help your child become 'emotionally' intelligent. But what exactly is emotional intelligence? Put simply, it is found in our ability to be self-aware and diplomatic, manage our anger, empathise with others and to be self-motivated. The practice of yoga, with its philosophical core, strives to improve emotional intelligence by building a sense of empowerment while strengthening both body and mind. Yogic philosophy recognises the dilemmas human beings face when it comes to the emotions. Yoga asanas are designed to create a positive flow of energy throughout the body, one that supports the healthy function of our emotional circuitry.

To understand more about emotional intelligence, we need to take a look at the circuitry of the emotional and rational brains. The part of the limbic system that governs our passions is called the amygdala. It is the amygdala that sets off our internal alarm system when under threat. It does this by activating the body's flight or fight response (the sympathetic nervous system which signals the body to prepare for action in an emergency). In other words, the amygdala has the ability to trigger raw emotions independent of rational thought; we react before we have time to think. This kind of response shortcuts the usual processes where the neocortex and the limbic system take in information and work, collectively, to determine a response.

Crime is the result of the amygdala's ability to rule the rational brain. When a criminal acts they are reacting from

an emotional rather than a rational perspective. Emotional outbursts and irrational behaviour are what Goleman refers to as 'emotional hijacking'. This is when we act on impulse, overriding our intellect, creating a shortcut that bypasses the rational brain. So, without the neocortex to keep us in check, our reactions are purely driven by emotion. This explains why human behaviour often seems to defy common sense and rationality.

Goleman explains that the right prefrontal lobe is the seat of negative emotions. In contrast, the left prefrontal lobe acts like a thermostat or 'off' switch for these negative emotions. In other words, it controls our ability to 'turn off' distressing feelings. Without this prefrontal control over limbic (emotional) urges our intellectual potential is impeded. Interestingly, the prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain responsible for our 'working memory' (the term neuroscientists use to describe our ability to hold essential facts in the mind that are needed to help complete any given task). If this circuitry is interrupted by emotional problems it can disturb a child's ability to learn. I can vouch for this kind of difficulty, as my own intellectual development was hindered by the distress of losing a parent at seven. I found it difficult to concentrate and grew up thinking of myself as 'dumb'. Unfortunately, this lack of self-esteem can lead to more emotional disturbances and further difficulties throughout life.

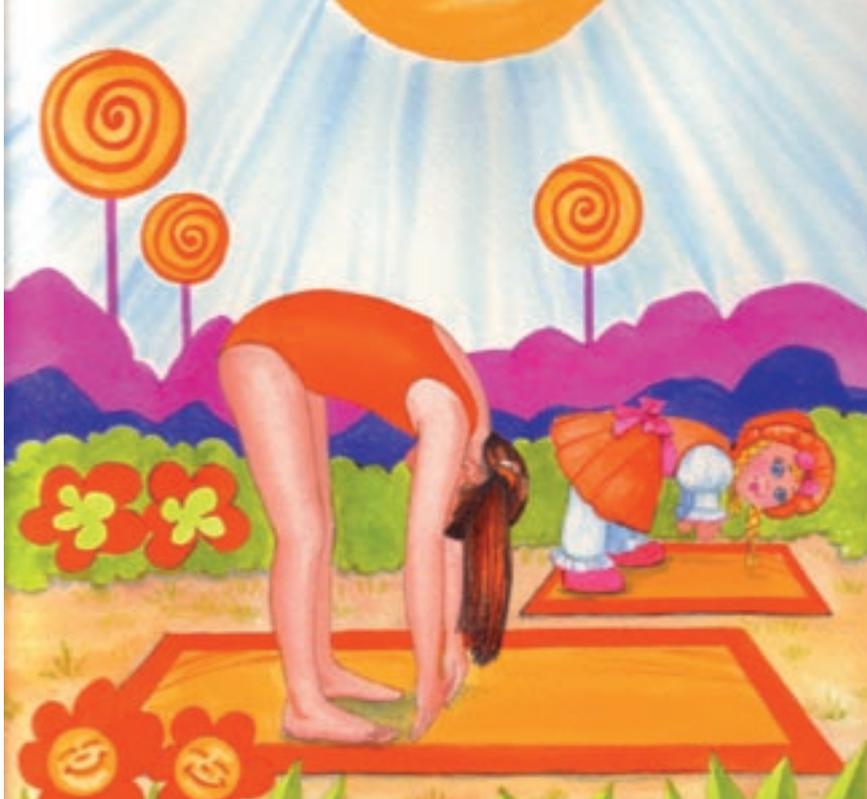
According to neurologist Dr Antonio Damasio, of the University of Iowa College of Medicine, patients with an impaired prefrontal-amygdala circuit can have high IQs yet often have trouble making simple decisions. They tend to obsess endlessly and have a tendency to make disastrous life choices. Philip Harden and Robert Pihl support this view, they wrote in their paper Cognitive Function, Cardiovascular Reactivity and Behaviour in Boys in High Risk of Alcoholism (1995) that children with

an above-average IQ can still do poorly at school or become disruptive due to impaired frontal cortex functioning. In fact, their studies link criminality, alcoholism and academic failure to a lack of control over emotional life.

Considering the impact of our emotions on our lives, it would seem to be vitally important for a child to learn how to use their emotions intelligently. According to Goleman, "academic intelligence has little to do with our emotional life". He describes emotional intelligence "as abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from 'swamping' the ability to think; to empathise and to hope." It would seem that academic intelligence offers us little preparation for the turmoil and difficulties of life, whereas emotional intelligence does.

According to Goleman, the workings of the amygdala and its interplay with the neocortex are at the heart of our ability to gain emotional intelligence. He explains that the circuitry of the brain is not totally formed at birth, it is shaped and moulded throughout life. In fact, the brain's key circuitry continues to shape itself. As the habits of emotional management are repeated over and over again new circuitry is formed, creating a tendency towards particular behavioural responses. The good news is that skills that inspire and create emotional intelligence can be developed at any time; it is never too late.

I'm sure that if we had 'emotional intelligence' as a school subject we would be living in a very different society, one with less suicide, depression and crime. Teaching your child to control their emotions, in a positive and healthy way, is the most precious gift you can give. Yoga is one way that emotional intelligence can be fostered. How? By showing your child constructive ways to release emotional tension and by helping



ASANA

The Rag Doll (variation of Uttanasana)

Stand up straight, feet parallel and hip-distance apart. Stretch up through the spine and lift the crown of the head towards the ceiling. Breathe in, extend your straight arms out to the front and lift them over the head, pointing the fingers in a full stretch. Breathe out and bend the knees slightly. Allow the arms to gently carry the body forward in a floppy doll movement. Let the arms hang down towards the floor. Breathe out in three short "haa" sounds, bouncing very carefully and gently. Then breathe in through the nostrils and roll up, one vertebra at a time, with knees slightly bent, to a standing position (lifting the

head and arms last). When in the pose, focus on the complete surrender of the spine as well as the mind. Repeat 3 times.

Benefits: Relaxes the upper body. Strengthens the back muscles and tones and stretches the legs. Improves circulation, elimination, digestion and aids the reproductive system. Encourages relaxation. Inspires creativity. Aids with a sense of humour. Builds self-esteem.

Contraindications: Avoid if suffering from glaucoma, vertigo (or other balance-related conditions) or heart disease.

Awareness: Surrender.

Chakra: Svadhisthana (Sacral) – Orange.

them develop a sense of emotional strength and wisdom. The movements and breathing techniques used in yoga practice create a sense of personal power, building inner and outer stamina.

There is no magic cure for what ails us. Nevertheless, our physical and emotional wellbeing can be improved by the practice of yoga. The main aims of yogic tradition are 'clarity of thought' and 'control of emotions'. And, being 'comfortable and steady'

is the foundation of its philosophy, both physically and emotionally. The following poses are designed to influence the gross and subtle bodies. The asanas in this article emphasise groundedness, expression and security, qualities that are pivotal to your child's emotional strength. Yoga will help your child to soothe emotional stress and build emotional stability; achieving the ultimate goal: a healthy and happy IQ.

IMPORTANT TIPS FOR PRACTISING YOGA

- All yoga postures should be performed slowly, on a firm, even foundation. The best way to practise them is with bare feet on a yoga mat (non slip), wearing comfortable, loose-fitting clothing.
- Always listen to your body. Close your eyes for a moment before each practice and consider how you feel.
- Read the instructions thoroughly before beginning.
- The yoga postures shown here are suitable for children and adults. Naturally, children should always be supervised by an adult.
- The movements in yoga practice should be comfortable, steady and fluid-like; each asana flowing gently from one to the next.
- The practice of yoga should never cause any pain. If experiencing any discomfort, discontinue the practice immediately and move on to something else.
- During practice, breathe deeply in and out of the nostrils (the nose has a sensitive filtration system in contrast to the throat which allows bacteria to enter the body).
- Breathe in when opening up and moving away from the body – breathe out when closing in and moving towards the body.
- Rest for a moment between each asana. Also rest for a full 30 seconds between each series of asanas.
- Most importantly, use common sense when practising any form of exercise. In essence, one of the main aims of yoga is to learn to listen to your own body and to become more intuitive with regard to your health, wellbeing and energy level.

Chakra**RED****Stability, Groundedness**

The Root Chakra or Base Chakra (Muladhara) is found at the base of the spine. It represents earth. This chakra governs all that is solid in the body (such as bones and teeth) and is associated with stability, solidarity and having one's feet planted firmly on the ground – feeling grounded and secure. Hence, grounding postures help relieve anger and fear, and they give a sense of security, safety, peace and surrender. This chakra is also related to smell, explaining the balancing benefits of aromatherapy. This is the lowest level of vibration in the body. It is connected to

water. It reflects the concept of energy becoming fluid and is connected with the fluid functions of the body, such as urine. The sense of taste is associated with this chakra, hence the term 'mouth-watering'. It is an area associated with 'ripeness' and birth. It is linked to creativity, humour, self-esteem and expression. Imbalance in this area causes low energy, selfishness and the inability to express feelings.

Chakra**GREEN****Love**

The Heart Chakra (Anahata) is located at the area of the spine level with the heart. It is associated with air.

chakra of self-healing, joy and calm. It inspires a sense of connectedness with all life. Imbalance of this chakra causes depression, sadness, insensitivity, arrogance and confusion.

Always remember to consult your doctor before beginning any health programme. An important part of yoga practice is to take responsibility for your own health and wellbeing. This sense of personal power and intuition with regard to health and fitness is something that parents can help their children develop as they grow. We all want the best for our children. And the best way to help them is to teach them ways to help themselves. ✨

ASANA**The Ball or Wind Relieving Pose (Pavanmuktasana)**

Lie flat on your back, with the chin slightly in towards the chest, the neck and spine long and the body comfortably stretched out. Breathe in and lift the knees up towards the chest. The head remains on the floor. Wrap the arms around the legs and hug them gently towards the body while breathing out slowly. Repeat this again slowly for 5 times. Each time, breathe in while releasing and breathe out while hugging the knees to the chest. As the knees are brought to the chest, take the time to embrace your own sense of self-worth. In other words, hug yourself.

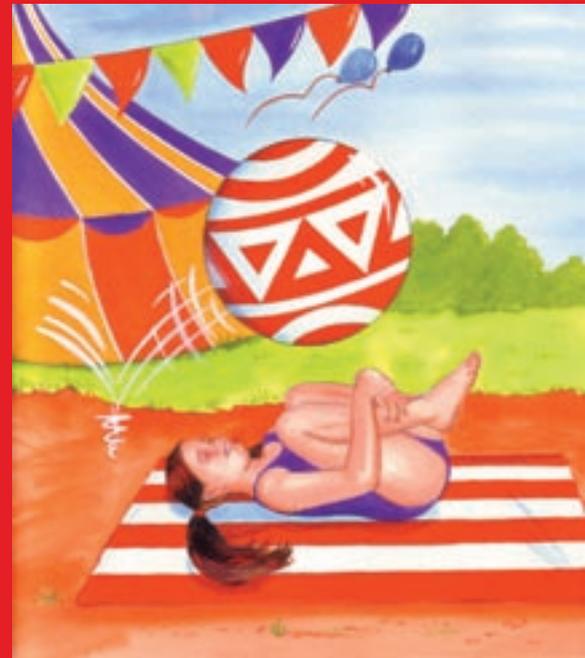
Benefits: Massages the abdomen, reproductive organs, pelvic muscles and digestive organs. Relieves constipation and menstrual problems. Strengthens the lower back.

Contraindications: Avoid if suffering from serious back conditions.

Awareness: The breath and feelings of security.

Chakra: Muladhara (Base of the Spine) – Red & Anahata (Heart) – Green.

Although Pavanmuktasana primarily influences the base chakra (see RED, left) it also has a strong influence on the heart chakra.



the process of elimination and is a vital link to qualities such as strength, focus and courage. Imbalance in this area causes aggressiveness, self-destructiveness, anxiety, self-centredness and fear.

Chakra**ORANGE****Sexuality, Emotion**

The Sacral Chakra (Svadhithana) is located at the level of the sacrum on the spine. This chakra represents

The qualities experienced at the heart level are lightness, airiness, mobility and gentleness. Hence comes the term 'having the vapours' when someone is smitten, light-headed and giddy with love. The heart chakra is associated with the sense of touch. Touch is experienced and represented by relationships. We say we are 'in touch' or 'out of touch', which is really to say that we have more or less of our heart in the relationship. This is the

If you have any further questions regarding these poses, there are many books on the subject and many trained yoga teachers who can assist you to learn more. Or you can find out more about yoga for kids in Who Am I? Yoga for Children of all Ages by Jane Lee Wiesner, published by Michelle Anderson Publishing, 2003. Who Am I? is available in all good bookshops or via the website www.yogaathome.com.au