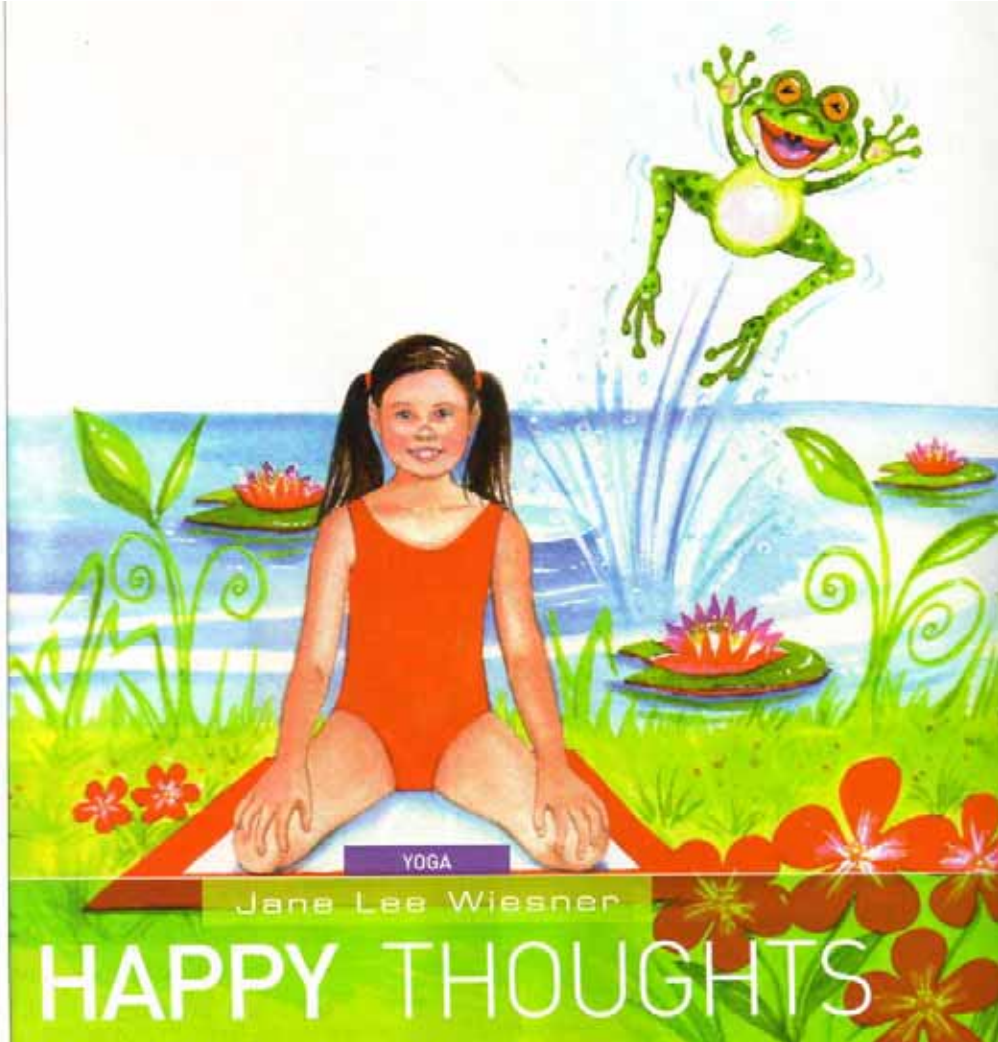


Yoga is a great tool to help children build emotional strength and stamina so they can effectively deal with life's obstacles. Yoga practitioner Jane Lee Wiesner discusses the psycho-technology of classical yoga and describes some poses parents and children can try together

WHEN I read Tania Greig's delightful story about the "magic person" in the July issue of *Kids Life!* I was reminded of the true purpose of yoga – to find that beautiful 'magic person' within. First and foremost, yoga is about the mind, in particular, about attaining that all too elusive 'bliss state' or as us westerners know it – happiness. Very small children experience this state naturally; when nurtured and protected they glow from the pure joy and simplicity of life.

So what happens to us as we grow old? Where do those 'happy thoughts' go? Sigmund Freud and other psychologists give us a list of noteworthy causes for the anxiety that takes away our happy thoughts. Freud concludes that many things can cloud our judgement and repress our joy – from the guilt experienced by the uncompromising pull of our primal drives to the stern disciplinary and often condemning inner voice of our super-ego conscience. I certainly don't wish to make light of the difficulties children may face while growing up. But there are strategies we can put in place to ensure our children are better equipped to deal with the trials ahead of them.

Like Freud, the Hindu sage Patanjali also recognises the mental repercussions of our anxiety. Patanjali acknowledges the conflict emotional blockages (or obstacles known in Sanskrit as kleshas) create within our thought processes. Thankfully, Patanjali's theories offer



YOGA

Jane Lee Wiesner

HAPPY THOUGHTS

The following asanas (yoga poses) are great for building emotional strength and stamina in children and adults:

Frog (variation of Mandukasana)

Sit in a kneeling position. Rest the hands on the thighs – the legs are spread slightly to the sides (only as far as comfortable). Breathe in, lift up through the spine and raise the crown of the head towards the ceiling. Relax the shoulders. Breathe out, bend the body forward from the hips and stretch the arms straight out to the front along the floor. Keep the buttocks pressed down towards the feet. Feel the length and the stretch in the spine. Breathe naturally. Let the breath expand through the shoulder blades. Stay in this position for a few moments. Breathe in and walk the hands up towards the body. Place the left hand on floor to the outside of the left

thigh. Breathe in and while breathing out, slide the right arm across the body along the floor towards the (front) left side. Relax the head down and feel a lovely stretch along the right side of the body. Breathe naturally and hold for a moment. Breathe in and gently sit up. Repeat to the other side with the right hand placed on the floor – stretching to the left side. Always finish with a full stretch to the middle for balance. Repeat all three to five times.

Remember when working with kids to encourage them to be as happy and as free as a frog and to smile during the practice. A good stretching pose. Good for reproductive system, adrenal glands and helps relieve constipation. Reduces anger, calms the mind and works on the red chakra (see box on chakras). Avoid if suffering from hip problems, vertigo or high blood pressure.

some sound advice to the student of yoga. To understand the yogic view of the mind, let us imagine ourselves purely as a vessel of consciousness. As a child,

this consciousness sees the world as it truly is, without judgement or prejudice. But as we grow older the consciousness finds it more and more difficult to see

things clearly. Instead, veils of illusions in the shape of fears colour the way we view the world. A small child's consciousness smiles spontaneously. An adult's consciousness weighs up the situation, analyses it and then decides if it's worth a smile.

So how do we help our children to grow up free of fear and anxiety so that they

can keep their spontaneity? As your child matures she will be faced with all kinds of stimuli that will shape and mould her into an individual, much of which, you cannot control. But what the teachings of Patanjali's Classical Yoga offer is a simple 'psycho-technology' for 'happy' living – something tangible that can help her deal with life's obstacles, inspiring

mental clarity and rational thinking.

I believe it was Dr Georg Feuerstein who first described Patanjali's Classical Yoga as a 'psycho-technology' (*The Yoga Tradition*, Hohm Press, Arizona, 1998). Basically, what he means is that The Yoga Sutras provide a practical and philosophical methodology to help us 'unlearn' reactionary, irrational behaviour. So instead of reacting to life from the perspective of past baggage or anxieties about the future, the individual learns to live in the present – free of the negative thoughts created by destructive internal dialogue.

For children, the teaching of this wonderful eastern philosophy can provide practical tools that help them become aware of their emotions and deal with them rationally. Consequently, as the child grows she sees with a 'clarity of mind' that frees her from fears and anxiety. Through focused asana practice, philosophical teachings and the use of affirmations the growing child learns to feel good about who he is, and as a result of his 'happy thoughts', can smile about life.

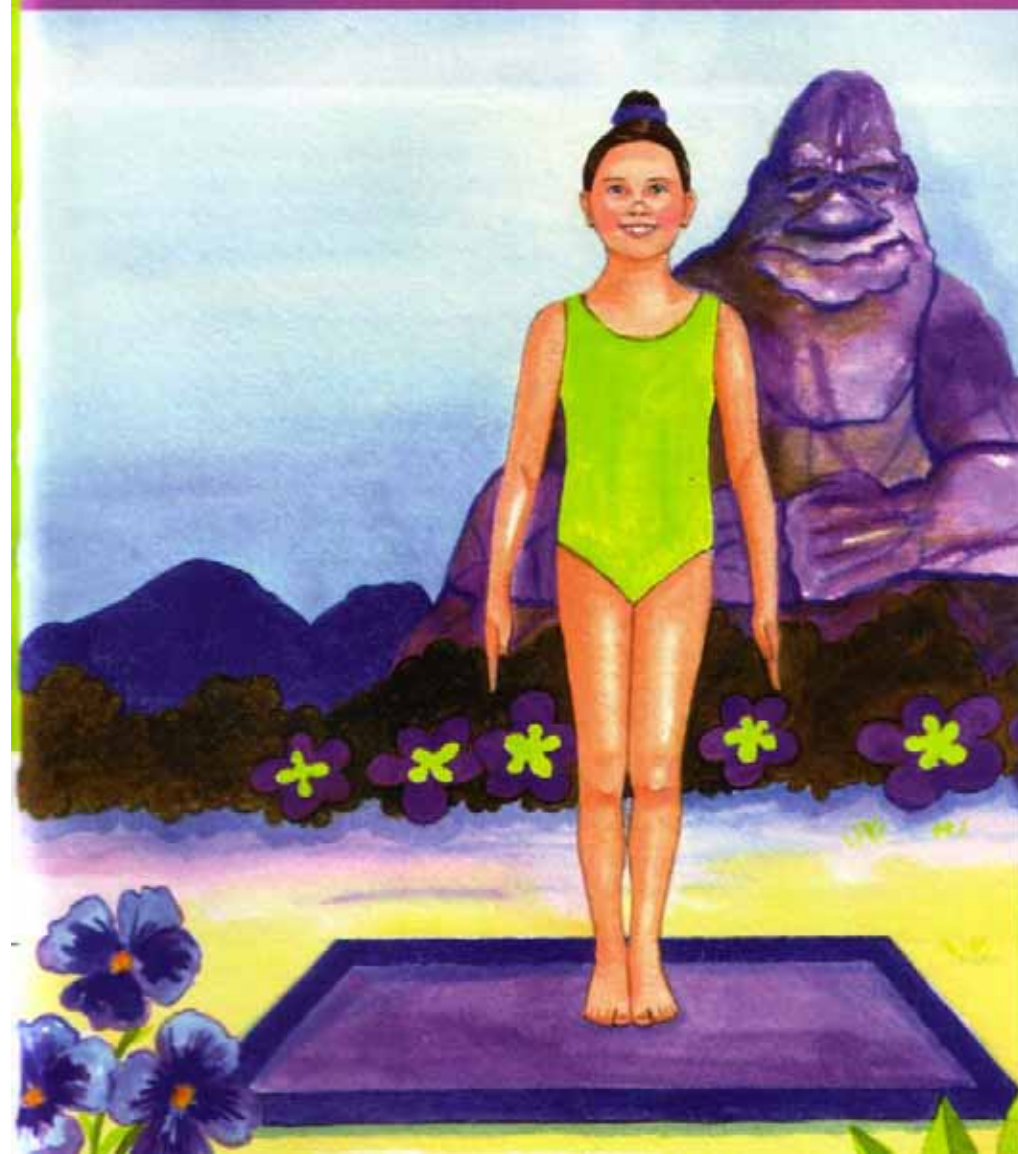
Another very important way you can help your child is to remind him every day how important he is to you. Many years ago I remember reading a magazine article by a child psychologist who claimed a child could withstand immense psychological pressure and still grow up to be a well-balanced and happy individual, as long as she had one person that fully and unconditionally approved of her. In essence, the philosophy of yoga can provide further support by teaching the child to approve of herself.

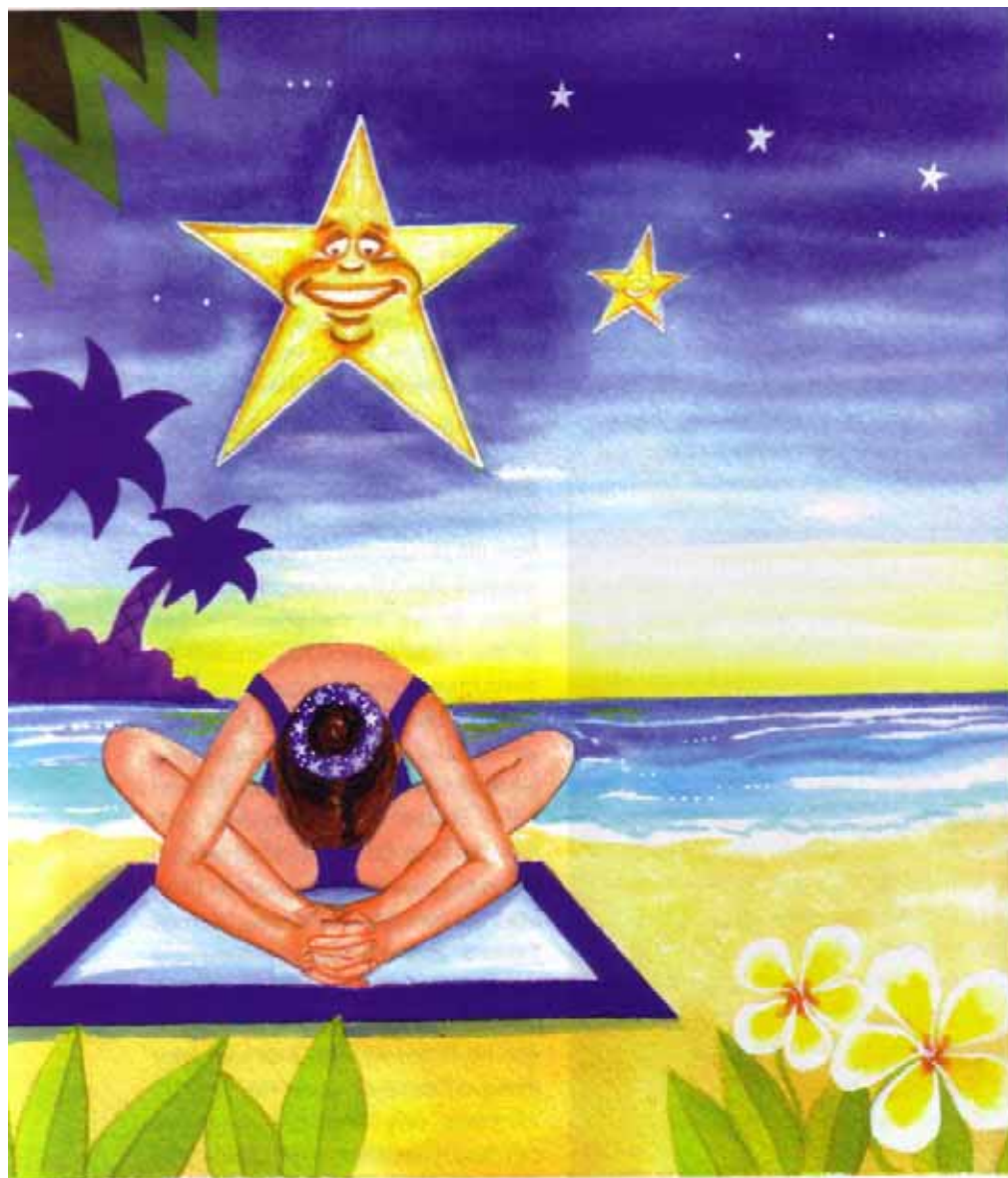
There is no doubt that we love our kids and try to do our best, but sometimes we are so worried about them that our anxiety influences our behaviour towards them. Unfortunately, they may pick these signals up as disapproval. So, apart from introducing your children to the wonders of yoga through qualified and insightful practitioners, you can play an important part in helping them grow up to be emotionally intelligent, happy individuals just by loving them openly and honestly. As Tania put it so eloquently in her story, "Give them a smile and see what happens."

Mountain (*Tadasana*)

Stand tall with feet together and toes spread. Extend arms down to the sides and slightly away from the body, with palms facing the body and fingers slightly energised. Shift the chin slightly towards the chest to allow the neck to be in line with the spine. Gaze at something eye-level. Feel poised and strong, not rigid. Energise the body, grounding down through the legs and feet and lifting up through the waist, spine and head. Lift the crown of the head towards the ceiling. The head should be straight, the neck a natural extension of the spine. Pull

the tummy in gently and tuck the buttocks under. Relax shoulders and avoid locking knees. Breathe easily. Imagine a piece of string running along the centre of the spine and out through the crown of the head, gently expanding the gap between each vertebra. Feel the energy (*prana*) flowing through the body. Hold for a few minutes then release and rest. Remember the affirmation: "I am as still and peaceful as a mountain." This is a good strengthening pose. It works on the yellow chakra and is good for posture, peacefulness, concentration and awareness. Avoid if suffering from vertigo.





Star (Tarasana)

Sit on the floor in an easy cross-legged position. Bring the feet together at the front and clasp them. Take a deep breath and straighten the spine, lifting the crown of the head towards the ceiling. Breathe out and gently lower the head and body down over the feet. Using the arms, apply very slight pressure on the legs, creating a gentle stretch of the inner thighs. Hold for a few seconds, breathing naturally. Breathe in and roll gently up to a sitting position, moving slowly, one vertebra at a time. The neck and head are last to rise. Remember, when rising from any kind of inversion, be very mindful and move slowly, allowing the blood flow to return to normal. Repeat three to five times. Rest. Remember the affirmation: "I am as bright and as glowing as a star." This is a good limbering exercise and it aids digestion and works with the indigo chakra. Avoid if suffering from high blood pressure, glaucoma or spinal conditions.

CHAKRAS

Chakra is a Sanskrit word referring to invisible energy points within the body through which life-force flows.

1. The red chakra (Muladhara) is found at the base of the spine. It represents earth and governs all that is solid in the body (for example, 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 to relieve anger and fear and give a sense of security, safety, peace and surrender. Imbalance in this area causes aggressiveness, self-destructiveness, anxiety, self-centredness, and fear.
2. The yellow chakra (Manipura) is at the level of the spine in between the navel and the sternum. It

is associated with warmth, the expansiveness of the self and the element of fire in our nature. It relates to our sense of power, will, emotion and action. Imbalance in this area causes extremes of emotion.

3. The indigo chakra (Ajna) is found between the eyebrows. This is the seat of the mind. In yogic terms it is referred to as the 'command centre'. It is said that if we reach a heightened level of consciousness we can command the whole personality and we will no longer be puppets, controlled by emotions. Instead, we can detach ourselves from emotions and act rationally. It is at this centre where we can learn to still the modifications of the mind (ripple of thoughts) through meditation. By meditating we can find a sense of oneness, wisdom

and self-mastery. Imbalances in this area cause negativity and lack of concentration.

4. The violet chakra (Sahasrara) is located on the crown of the head. Physically, this area relates to the cerebrum, which governs the voluntary nervous system. It is said to be the location of the Supreme Self. This chakra emits the highest frequency of energy vibration in the body and is associated with very highly evolved beings in many cultures and religions – artists often depict this in drawings of halos around the heads of saints. The chakra relates to the level of consciousness known as enlightenment, samadhi, nirvana or simply the 'bliss state'. Imbalance in this area causes fatigue, loss of direction, closed-mindedness and a sense of isolation.



Fish (modified Matsyasana)

Lie on the back and bring the feet up towards the buttocks. Cross the feet at the ankles. Gently turn the knees out and lower them to the floor. Bring the hands to the back of the head and rest the left hand on top of the right, palms up. Cradle the head in the hands. Press the lower back gently towards the floor. Experience a sense of opening and expanding through the diaphragm. Move the chin back slightly towards the chest just to make sure the neck is in line with the chest. Close the eyes and breathe naturally, resting in this position. Stay in the asana for a few minutes. Slowly open the eyes, stretch out the arms over the head and away from the body. Uncross the legs gently, stretch the whole of the body from the tips of the fingers to the tips of the toes. Then, hug the knees to the chest once again on an outward breath. Give yourself a hug. You deserve it. Finish by unfolding the legs and placing the arms to the sides, palms up and slightly away from the body. Rest. This pose is good for relaxation and digestion and works on the yellow chakra. Avoid if suffering from hip, shoulder or knee problems.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PRACTISING CLASSICAL YOGA:

- The yoga postures shown here are suitable for children and adults. Naturally, children should always be supervised by an adult.
- All yoga postures should be practised slowly, on a firm, even foundation. The best way to practise is in bare feet on a Yoga mat (non slip), wearing comfortable, loose-fitting clothing.
- Always listen to your own body. Close the eyes for a moment before each practice and consider how you feel.
- Read the instructions thoroughly before beginning.
- The movements in yoga practice should be comfortable, steady and fluid-like, each asana flowing gently into 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 the 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.)
- For adult practice, breathe in when opening up and moving away from the body. Breathe out when closing in and moving towards the body. For children, breath emphasis is something that comes gradually and need not be applied except where outward breaths create the 'haa' sound (children find these great fun).
- Rest for a moment between each asana. Also rest for a full 30 seconds between each series of asanas.
- Always warm up by gentle stretching before starting your yoga practice.
- Most importantly, use common sense

when practising any form of exercise. In essence, one of the main aims of yoga is learning to listen to your own body, becoming more intuitive with regard to your health, wellbeing and energy level. This sense of personal power and intuition with regard to health and fitness is something parents can help their children develop as they grow. We all want the very best for our children. And the best way to help them is to teach them ways to help themselves. ✨

Jane Wiesner is the principal of The Body and Mind School of Yoga in Melbourne, and has been practising yoga for over 30 years. She has published two books on yoga: Magic Me: Yoga a Magical Gift for All Ages and Who am I? Yoga for Children of All Ages. See her website: www.beingwell.net.au

The illustrations shown are by Joy Antonie from Jane's new book Magic Me: Yoga a Magical Gift for All Ages (Michelle Anderson Publishing) now available via contacting Jane on jane@beingwell.net.au or via her website www.beingwell.net.au or through all good bookshops.