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Trauma Sensitive Yoga for Children

“Yoga is a way to become friendlier with your own body”

I like this definition of yoga from the US Trauma Center because it simply captures the physical, emotional and mental health potential of yoga.

Children are natural yogis. They know how to drop down from their busy thinking heads and into their playful, active bodies. They know how to be in the present moment. Many yoga postures are named after animals or things in nature, so it's a perfect fit for children to practise mindfulness yoga.

More than just fun, yoga offers children the opportunity to realise early on how much power they have simply by being in a good relationship with their body. This leads to a “friendlier” relationship with their thoughts and emotions. They learn, through the fun, accessible and mindful practices of yoga, how much responsibility they can have for their own well-being.

Awareness of breathing and of healthy posture plays a big part setting them up for optimal development, learning potential and enjoyment of life. The breath has such a useful role to play in managing our own nervous system. In other words, managing our own stress levels.

These fundamentals help children to trust the skin they are in, to value themselves and to have healthy boundaries with others. As well as building emotional intelligence and nervous system resilience.

The tools that yoga provides for self-awareness, self-value and self-care can be so empowering. I wish I had learned them when I was in primary school!

Learning these skills early sets children up really well to deal with everything that comes their way, including difficult circumstances and challenging feelings.

Our kids are coping with an increasingly sophisticated, complex and often violent world. Anxiety, self-doubt, perfectionism, low self-esteem, fear and insomnia are just some challenges that our children are up against. And that's just inside their own heads!

Yoga helps children develop a tool-box of techniques that they can use every day to make shifts for themselves towards feeling more confident, calm, creative and strong. Becoming “friendlier” with our own bodies means we foster kindness, compassion, intuition and discernment ... inwardly to ourselves and outwardly to others. We learn to respond more wisely to what happens to us rather than react automatically.

Research increasingly supports yoga as an effective treatment for trauma and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The work of the Trauma Center at the US Justice Resource Institute in Boston continues to include trauma sensitive yoga for adults and children seeking to heal from PTSD.

Dissociation, or cutting off from the body, is one way in which people survive traumatic experiences. Trauma sensitive yoga offers a path to renewing a safe relationship with the body again. This has the potential to change the brain allowing healing from past trauma. One of the many exciting things about neuroscience today is that we know for sure that a traumatised brain can heal.

At the cutting edge of this work are mindful embodiment practices such as Yoga.

Leanne Toy (Bundaberg Yoga) is an experienced and fully qualified Level 2 Yoga Teacher accredited with Yoga Australia. Leanne is trained and mentored in Trauma Sensitive Yoga teaching by Shirley Hicks, a founder of Trauma Sensitive Yoga Australia which is based on the work of the Trauma Center at the US Justice Resource Institute. Leanne facilitates trauma-informed mindfulness yoga in the community health, mental health, child safety and early childhood sectors of Bundaberg.