

Yoga: Shared health for families and kids

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I'm not so cranky with my kids. I actually smiled when one irritated me the other day," declared Ruth.

"I feel as if I can have things happen to me but not react to them as I normally would," noted Annie, a high school junior.

"Those alignments and exercises in class have helped my back pain," said the young mother learning to carry her little one more attentively.

We often hear comments like these from our students. By learning to be more aware of and sensitive to our physical and emotional experience, we suffer less.

Psychologists and healthcare providers recognize that our ways of moving, emotionally reacting and breathing can affect our body, mind and relationships. Patterns of reactive physical tension, mood swings and chronic pain go hand-in-hand with personal and family suffering.

Family therapists often see parents who express a feeling of disconnection with

their children. These children exhibit challenging behaviors, often in attempts to reconnect.

This can begin to soften in appropriately tailored yoga and mindfulness courses.

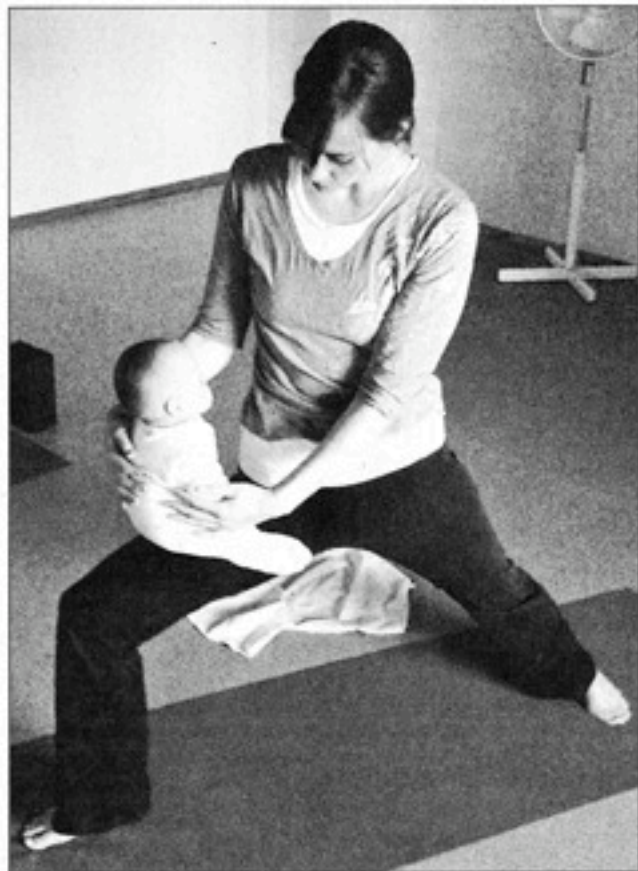
A growing number of organizations are studying and promoting yoga and mindfulness practices to help children and families with many modern hot-button problems, including childhood obesity, ADD/ADHD, mood disorders and more.

A recent article in the Miami Herald noted that Big Brothers Big Sisters is offering yoga for children and mentors aimed at building trust and reducing childhood obesity. The Journal of Child and Family Studies recently published a study that showed a reduction in anxiety and behavior problems for children in a mindfulness-based learning program. And the journal Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry published a study that showed improvements for children's ADHD behavior, self esteem and relationship quality after a parent/child six-week yoga and meditation course.

Our experiences in family yoga and mindful parenting classes follow suit.

Students include infants, children, parents and grandparents, even prenatal mothers and fathers. Families discover ways to slow the pace of their busy lives, become mindful and present in interactions and tune in to each other.

What unfolds is an expansion of each individual into a space of being accepted by their loved ones, rather than being overshadowed or dominated by their family members. Parents practice with their children, sharing movement, breathing and relaxation techniques that enhance health, regulate mood and relieve stress.



Melissa Hills, family yoga instructor at Yoga Hillsboro, demonstrates proper biomechanical alignment and the possibilities of attentive, gentle, playful movement for mom (or dad) and baby.

Participants begin to move more freely and actively with each other; laugh together; remember how to feel the experience of breathing and find moments of shared quiet ease. Rather than embody the suffering that is often at the heart of their personal and family tension, students are invited to soften tensions and practice just "being" with each other with open hands, hearts and minds.

Family members work in partnership, communicating through movement, body language and touch and in turn develop more mutual respect, strengthening their relationship. As a complement to talk therapy and medical treatment, yoga and mindfulness practice can be

a powerful, fun way of knitting the fabric of a family together simply and kindly.

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