

Focus and strength: Practicing yoga has numerous benefits for the little ones

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May 13, 2019



Kid's yoga teacher Sharon Stetter, left, demonstrates during last week's Copper Queen Library San Jose Annex ice cream social. MARK LEVY HERALD/REVIEW

More Information

Kids Yoga with Sharon Stetter

Thursdays. 12:30 PM at the Copper Queen Library, 6 Main St, Bisbee, AZ. Ages 3-8. Free.

Kids Yoga with Samantha Conway

Most Wednesdays. Class for Kids 5-8, 3.30-4p.m., class for kids 9-12, 4-4.30p.m, at Thrive, a Wellness Center in Medical Office Building 2, 5750 East Highway 90, Suite 180, Sierra Vista. First class free; \$5 afterwards.

Classes are all-abilities friendly.

Yoga has long been a popular way for adults to increase their flexibility and reduce stress. While children — even those who can barely toddle onto a mat — have different needs than grown-ups. Numerous studies have shown that practicing yoga can have positive impacts on children’s development and physical and mental health as well.

Among those benefits are learning how to regulate emotions, improving focus, increasing body awareness and coordination, and helping to reduce stress and anxiety, according to a 2014 study from *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. Research has also suggested that the practice can be particularly helpful for kids with special needs, said Samantha Conway, a yoga teacher based in Sierra Vista.

“(Kids’) minds are extremely adaptive, and they’re highly influential, and yoga has this unique capability to help children with many aspects of their lives,” said Conway, who recently began offering a weekly kid’s yoga class at Thrive, A Wellness Center at Canyon Vista Medical Center.

Conway, whose little brother has autism, took a specialized training course for teaching yoga for children with special needs after seeing how beneficial it could be for young children, she said.

“When I took (the training,) we talked a lot about how children can be helped with body awareness — especially actions like crossing the midline, that’s really good for integrating information in the brain,” Conway said. “It helps them regulate emotions, and it helps kids communicate more with their parents.”

While more schools and studios have been offering yoga classes for kids in recent years, it has long been a practice in India, said Bisbee-based yoga teacher Sharron Stetter. Stetter offers a free weekly yoga class for kids at the Copper Queen Library in Bisbee.

“My teacher training in India included teaching to children,” she said. “I would watch these children’s classes and watch children sit in meditation with such calmness and ability to sit still that it blew my mind, so I was like, we need to do more of this in the U.S!”

Stetter has found that some of the benefits of yoga, including breathing techniques that help clear the mind, can be especially helpful for children with attention deficit disorders, she said.

“Kids, I think, go through an awful lot of stress when school age knocks on the door,” she said. “It’s a very unnerving situation for children, and that’s why it’s essential for kids to learn to control their emotions, and learn how to calm their thoughts.”

A kid’s yoga class proceeds quite differently than an adult class, depending on the age range and abilities of children in the class. For example, Conway says that when she teaches special needs children, some of whom might have a sensory processing disorder, she is careful not to overload their senses with music and other stimuli, and often uses flash cards to show the poses she is teaching.

Kid’s yoga classes are much more “fluid,” than an adult class, said Stetter.

“In the kids class you’ve got to be ready to do whatever it is that the day presents to you,” she said.

The class Stetter teaches at the Copper Queen Library is open to children ages 3-8. The classes Conway offers in Sierra Vista are for 5-8 year olds and 9-12 year olds. Conway also can offer private classes for younger children or children who would do better outside a group setting, she said.

For more information about the classes, visit https://www.canyonvista_medicalcenter.com/community/wellness-depot/ or <https://www.bisbeeaz.gov/2155/Copper-Queen-Library>.