



EVERY BODY BELONGS:

CHAIR YOGA FOR TEENS

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AN INTRODUCTION

The teenage experience is rife with feelings of not fitting in. Developmentally, adolescents have the herculean tasks of redefining all aspects of their identity and growing their self-awareness at the same time.

Teens wrestle with several staggeringly difficult questions at once:

- “Who was I then, and who am I now?”
- “How do I fit in here, where I’m at?”
- “What feels safe and comfortable now?”
- “Who am I becoming?”
- “Where do I belong in the future?”
- “What’s worth the risk to learn/experience?”

While this stage of life yields many exciting discoveries, it matches every soaring high with crushing lows. After all, growth demands that we

accept new realities and shed former ones, for better or for worse, often much faster or slower than we would like.

What we know is that yoga and mindfulness tools can provide crucial support for adolescents as they learn to navigate our changing world. However, we also realize that these very practices can raise feelings of self-doubt, distrust or exclusion when presented in a way that values some identities and circumstances over others.

You’re likely already familiar with yoga apparel companies’ promotional images: light-skinned, slim and athletic, nondisabled bodies; form-fitting attire and specialized gear; an air of privilege and exclusivity.

Perhaps you have experienced this troubling

exclusion first-hand. You may have attended yoga studios that expect you to wear particular clothing or to bring your own resources like yoga mats. Perhaps you've had a class with a yoga instructor who didn't know what supportive cues to offer your body shape, so they guided you into a resting posture as the other bodies in the room went on without you.

As adults, we know that the fitness industry has co-opted the practice of yoga over the past few decades, branding and rebranding it for sales and profits. The visual messages say: "Buy this thing, pay this fee, and you'll overcome your inherent 'not-enough-ness' and finally fit in."

For teens, the unsubtle suggestion that our authentic selves are less-than has dangerous consequences. Because this messaging falls on adolescents' greatest vulnerability, they face additional peril to their wellbeing than adults might.

What does this mean for bringing yoga to teens? Sadly, the impact of commercialized "yoga" images and biased applications of yoga makes many teens turn away from yoga and mindfulness altogether, before they have a chance to experience any practices at all. This means that our adolescents are missing out on these tools just when they need their benefits most.

With this toolkit, we disrupt the narrow presentation of "what yoga should look like" and unpack six specific, practical tools you can use to share yoga and mindfulness with your adolescent students and any teens in your life.

All six tools prioritize two important objectives:

1. How to address common roadblocks that (seemingly) limit teens' access to yoga and mindfulness, and
2. How to liberate and affirm teens' identities in yoga and mindfulness.



REVOLVED TRIANGLE WITH THE CHAIR

Are you limited by space? Try this pose right next to your chair.



BENEFITS:

- + Stretches the legs, spine, shoulders, and arms
- + Eases tension in the legs and lower back
- + Relieves symptoms of stress and fatigue
- + Improves focus

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Begin standing in Mountain Pose facing the back of your chair.
2. Inhale, place both palms on the back of your chair.
3. Exhale, step your right foot back a leg's distance.
4. Inhale, bring your left palm to your left hip.
5. Exhale, lift your left palm towards the sky, keeping your hips forward.
6. Breathe.
7. When you are ready, inhale to find length through your torso and legs.
8. Exhale, release your left palm back to your left hip.
9. Inhale, place your left palm back on the chair.
10. Exhale, step back to Mountain Pose.
11. Repeat to the opposite side.

NECK CIRCLES

Are you limited by time? Try this practice for 60 seconds.



Neck Circles 1



Neck Circles 2



Neck Circles 3



Neck Circles 4

BENEFITS:

- + Strengthens and stretches the neck
- + Calms the mind

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Begin seated in your chair with your feet flat on the floor. Inhale, sit up tall.
2. Exhale, bring your chin to your chest. Inhale.
3. Exhale, bring your right ear toward your right shoulder. Inhale.
4. Exhale, bring your head to center. Inhale.
5. Exhale, bring your left ear toward your left shoulder. Inhale.
6. Exhale, bring your chin back to your chest. Inhale.
7. Exhale, bring your head to center and sit up tall.
8. Repeat the sequence, going in the opposite direction.

SEATED EAGLE

Are you limited by clothing? Stay in your seat and try this.



BENEFITS:

- + Strengthens the ankles, calves, knees, and abdominals
- + Stretches the quadriceps, hip flexors, back, and shoulders
- + Builds focus
- + Develops willpower
- + Stimulates the mind

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Scoot to the edge of your chair, grounding your feet to the floor. Sit tall in your body.
2. Inhale, cross your right thigh over your left thigh.
3. Exhale, use your leg muscles to hug the outsides of your calves toward each other.
4. As an option, keep both feet planted on the floor, without crossing your legs.
5. Inhale, reach your arms out to the sides.
6. Exhale, bring your left arm over your right arm, as if to give yourself a big hug.
7. As an option, snug the left elbow into the crook of your right elbow and raise your forearms perpendicular to the floor, drawing the backs of your hands to touch.
8. As another option from here, wrap your hands to let your palms touch.
9. Breathe.
10. When you are ready, unwind your arms and legs to return to Mountain Pose, or return to seated tall in your chair.
11. Repeat on the other side.

CONSTRUCTIVE BREATH

Do you need to keep queer or trans students safe/affirmed? Try this tool that doesn't require bending over, twisting, closing eyes, or doing any other shapes that might provoke insecurities.



Constructive Breath 1



Constructive Breath 2



Constructive Breath 3

BENEFITS:

- + Calms the mind
- + Releases tension in the neck and lower face

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Begin sitting towards the edge of your chair, with feet on the floor, planted a bit wider than hips distance apart.
2. Interlace your fingers. Touch your knuckles underneath your chin, with your elbows pointing down.
3. Inhale, raise both elbows out to the sides in upward arcs, keeping your interlaced fingers touching your chin.
4. Exhale, soften your ribcage and let your elbows arc downward, still keeping your knuckles connected to your chin.
5. Inhale, raise your elbows out to the sides and up, feeling your ribcage expand.
6. Exhale, lower your elbows again, feeling your ribcage soften and your shoulders relax.
7. Continue this inhale-up exhale-down pattern.
8. When you are ready, unlace your fingers, and sit back into your chair.

LAYERS

Do you need to support BIPOC students who are processing trauma?
This tool provides an opportunity to practice self-kindness.



INSTRUCTIONS:

Read or paraphrase the following script:

- *“Close your eyes or keep them open, whichever is most comfortable for you. Breathe, and rest. As if you’re falling asleep, let go of all thoughts. Just feel your breath.*
- *“I’ll wait for everyone to settle, sigh and melt. Release any movement and tension. When you’re silent and still, I’ll know you are ready to listen. With every breath, you become more and more calm.*
- *“With kindness and non-judgment, bring awareness to yourself as you see yourself. Picture fully your whole being and notice what or if any feelings start to arise. Breathe in and breathe out. Breathe in and breathe out. Breathe in those feelings, then breathe them out.*
- *“Now, imagine seeing yourself as a collection of layers—a carefully and beautifully stacked arrangement of all the pieces that you are.*

LAYERS (CONTINUED)

- *“Start with your top most layer, the external. Perhaps this is who you imagine people see you as, or who you want people to see you as. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in this layer, and breathe out as you peel that layer away.*
- *“Now, take a moment to think about what’s underneath. What makes up that second layer of you. Maybe the person you are to your friends, or even your family. What’s different or the same about this layer? Breathe in and breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in this layer, breathe out and let it peel away.*
- *“The third layer is who you are to yourself, the internal, who no one else truly knows, except for you. This may be a place of vulnerability, of uncertainty, or of strength and resilience, or even creativity and that which is still yet to be discovered. Breathe in and breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Before you peel this layer away, ask yourself: How can I make this part of myself feel more loved, supported, and appreciated?*
- *“As emotions or sensations arise, use your breath as a reminder to acknowledge the positive and release the negative. I’ll give you a few moments to reflect.”*
- *Pause for a few moments.*
- *“Take a deep breath in, and deep breath out. Breathe in that which makes you uniquely you, and breath out anything holding you back. Breathe in all the layers as they work together, and breathe out any unhelpful expectations of yourself. As you breathe, experience you, exactly as you are.*
- *“Now, it’s time to come back to the room. Gently begin to move your fingers and your toes. Take any final movements that feel good to you in your body. When you are ready, come back to a comfortable seated position in your chair.”*

GROUNDING BREATH

Do you need to bolster yourself at this time? Use this tool to invite a gentle awareness to your breath and ground your energy. As you practice, lovingly remind yourself that you are enough.



Grounding Breath 1



Grounding Breath 2



Grounding Breath 3



Grounding Breath 4



Grounding Breath 5

BENEFITS:

- + Increases breath awareness
- + Increases connection of brain and body

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Begin sitting in your chair with two feet on the floor.
2. Inhale, lift your right foot up a few inches by unbending your knee.
3. Exhale, place your right foot back down, feeling all parts of your foot connect to the floor.
4. Inhale, lift your left foot up a few inches by unbending your knee.
5. Exhale, place your left foot back down, feeling all parts of your foot connect to the floor.

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