

little flower yoga for kids

A Yoga and Mindfulness Program to
Help Your Child Improve Attention
and Emotional Balance



connect,
breathe, move,
focus, relax —
includes exercises to
help kids learn the
key elements
of yoga

Jennifer Cohen Harper, MA, E-RCYT

Foreword by Daniel J. Siegel, MD

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For many children, movement is their natural state of being. Kids fidget, run around, and bounce in their seats, and sometimes it seems like the last thing we would want is to get them moving more. When we ask our kids to focus or to pay attention, one of the things we often want is for them to stop moving. Yet movement in the body can have a tremendously positive impact on a child's emotional well-being and on her capacity to focus.

While parents and teachers may interpret a child's stillness as attentiveness, in our own lives we find ourselves pacing when we are trying to solve a problem, shifting in our seats while we listen to a lecture or watch a play, and going for a run when we feel overwhelmed. We intuitively know that by moving our bodies we are affecting our minds, and research confirms this is true for both children and adults.

Movement has a positive impact on anxiety, stress, and general mental health. Yoga programs have been shown to increase executive function in children, including improving focus and reducing impulsivity (Diamond 2011). "The flow of energy and information from the body up into our brain stem, into our limbic region, and then up into the cortex, changes our bodily states, our emotional states, and our thoughts" (Siegel 2011, 61).

The yoga poses discussed in this chapter will teach your child to use her body in an intentional way, so that movement helps generate and maintain a state of engaged alertness. Frenetic and hyperactive energy is reduced, yet she will still feel energetic and strong. The goal of these Move activities is to validate your child's inclination to be active, while giving her the tools to make choices about it. The objective is not to send the message to your child that she just "needs to calm down" but rather that she can be mindful of her actions and find an enjoyable balance of energy and stillness.

The Practices

The following Move activities are presented in three categories—grounding, strength, and balance. While you can practice one activity at a time, choosing one activity from each category to practice in sequence will give a more well-rounded practice and will leave your child feeling energetically balanced.

Remember when you start these activities with your child that all movement in yoga is about exploration. At some point, your child is likely to ask you if she is doing the pose "right." This can be a tricky question to answer, because the real impact of the movement comes not from the shape of the pose but from the child's intention, effort, and attitude. When your child asks if she is doing a pose right, try to answer with some version of "You

can't tell from the outside if a yoga pose is right." Some children resist this type of answer because they are very achievement oriented and want some way to measure their ability and the external validation of getting it "right." Talk about all of the ways your child can figure out for herself if she is having a good yoga experience. Ask some questions such as: "How do your arms feel? Is your breath steady? Do you feel strong?" Point out that she can decide for herself if she is doing the pose right, by making sure that nothing hurts, that her breath is steady, and that she is focusing on what she is doing at the moment.

Warming Up: Cat, Cow, and Twist Poses

At the beginning of any Move practice, consider taking a few minutes to gently warm up your body with the following simple cat and cow stretches, plus a twist, particularly if you are planning on doing some of the more challenging poses.

1. Start on your hands and knees in the middle of your mat. Make sure that your hands are directly under your shoulders and that your knees are directly under your hips.
2. Spread out your fingers.
3. Take a full breath in and arch your back, pulling your shoulders down and looking up toward the ceiling. This is cow pose. (See illustration 5.)



Illustration 5: cow pose

4. As you breathe out, round your back, spreading your shoulder blades apart and looking toward your belly. This is cat pose. (See illustration 6.)



Illustration 6: cat pose

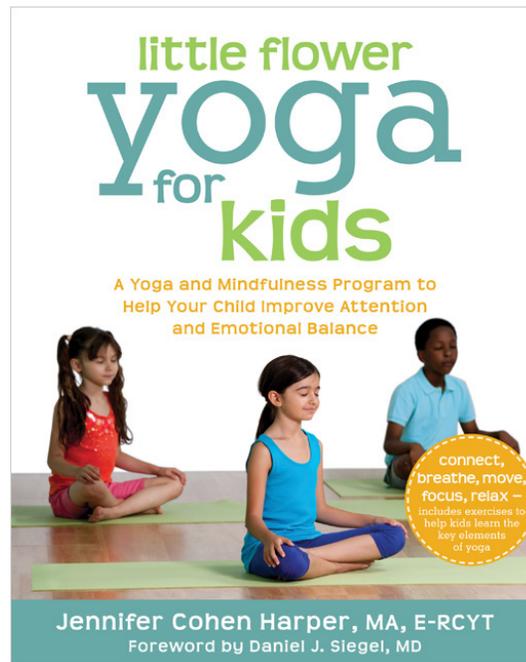
5. Repeat this three to five times, moving slowly and breathing fully with each movement.
6. After three to five rounds of cat and cow poses, bring your back to neutral (nice and flat).

7. Slide your right arm underneath your left shoulder, twisting to the left and bringing your shoulder and ear to your mat. (See illustration 7.) Rest here for three breaths and then come back to the middle slowly. Twist to the other side for three breaths.



Illustration 7: a gentle twist following cat and cow poses

8. Come back to the middle, and rest for a moment or two in child's pose (see next pose) before moving on to the rest of your practice.



Designed especially for parents and kids, this easy-to-use book combines yoga and mindfulness to teach children to pay attention, increase focus, and balance their emotions—all while building physical strength and flexibility. The simple yoga exercises can easily be integrated into a child’s daily routine, ultimately improving their health, behavior, and even school achievement.

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