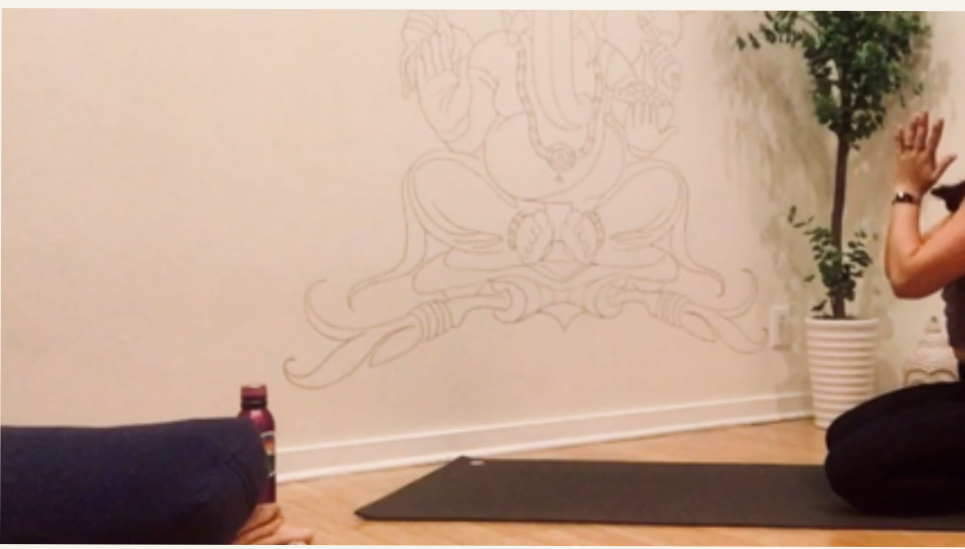




Yoga Your Way, LLC

THE TIY POCKET GUIDE

10 PROVEN METHODS TO
SETTING UP AND CREATING
A SAFE SPACE FOR A
TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA CLASS





NAMASKAR, I'M NICHOLE

Early on in my yoga teaching career, I knew yoga and mindful movement needed to be accessible to everyone regardless of body shape, experience, disability, or circumstance.

For over 4 years, I have implemented trauma-informed teaching techniques as an added modality to mental health treatments. I learned that by understanding how trauma shows up in the body, how racism and the lack of access to resources affects our communities mental health, and why creating a safe space for a person to explore their nervous system is so important, that you *can* offer people the ability to self regulate and heal from current or past experiences that are being stored in the body.

After applying this method to youth and adult students across the state of Nevada, I found out one thing... it works and it helps our communities heal.

Thank you for being here.

Nichole Schembne

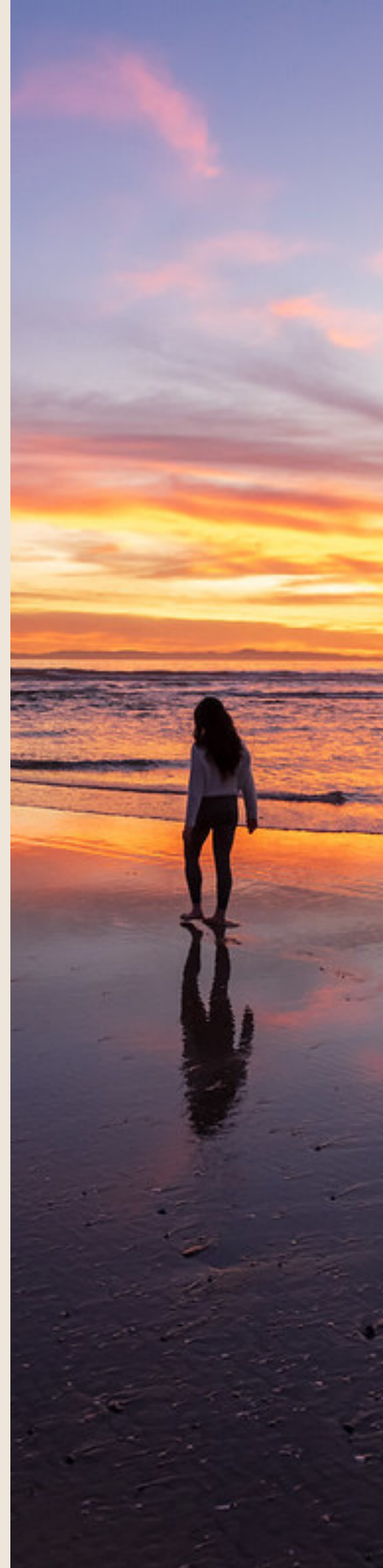
WHEN YOU'RE READY,
TURN THE PAGE




YOUR BIG TAKEAWAYS

1. HOW TO CREATE A SAFE YOGA SPACE FOR YOUR STUDENTS
2. HOW TO HONOR DIFFERENT BODIES NEEDS AND CAPABILITIES
3. TRAUMA-INFORMED LANGUAGE BEST PRACTICES
4. THE VALUE OF EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION AND WHY YOUR INTENTION IS SO IMPORTANT

IN THIS E-BOOK, WE'LL COVER WHAT I BELIEVE TO BE THE TOP 10 TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR GUIDING A TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA CLASS FOR YOUR STUDENTS AND CLIENTS WHO ARE IN NEED OF AN ALTERNATIVE AND INTUITIVE HEALING EXPERIENCE.



A woman with her hands raised near her face, wearing a teal headscarf, with a quote overlaid.

"ONCE YOU START
APPROACHING
YOUR BODY WITH
CURIOSITY RATHER
THAN FEAR,
EVERYTHING BEGINS
TO SHIFT."

-BESSEL VAN DER KOLK
THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE



01

LEAVE YOUR EGO AT THE DOOR

Meet your students where they are when crafting a yoga class sequence and mindful therapeutic exercises for your students and clients.

The program you create is not about your capabilities or your experience, it is about the needs of your students in this moment. You don't need to show off or prove your own worth here. You are supposed to be here.

Remember, that just because a particular posture, breathing technique, or meditation works well for you, does not mean it is what your student or client needs at this moment. You may even ask your class what they found useful and enjoyable and what they did not. Be open to hearing their needs and feedback and structuring your program accordingly.

Many times, you may not receive praise for your yoga class and that is OK. This does not mean the session was not effective. Many students may not feel comfortable sharing their feedback.

Imagine This..

You are guiding a yoga class or a client and they decide to not move with you and instead giggle or yawn. Or perhaps they are moving and then decide they are no longer interested in the movement and choose to sit or lay down instead. How would that make you feel? What would you do next? How would you ensure the student feels safe and empowered in their choice to move or not move?

TAKE A MOMENT HERE TO GRAB A PEN AND PAPER AND EXPRESS YOUR THOUGHTS TO THE QUESTIONS ABOVE. OR JUST SIMPLY PONER THESE QUESTIONS TO YOURSELF TODAY AND THROUGHOUT YOUR JOURNEY THROUGH THIS GUIDE.



REMEMBER THIS

This class is first and foremost for the students, their needs, and for their body and mind experience; however, that looks for them **today.**

Your consistency in showing up for your student(s) is quietly helping them build trust and relationships.

You may experience a lack of class praise from your student(s) - that does not mean it was ineffective. Keep showing up and keep guiding them in a consistent manner. When you do this, you are **building trust for the whole room.**

02

READ THE ROOM

Take note of each body in the room and the energy each body is giving off to the room.

You may find that the sequence you have planned is not the right fit for your group today and you will need to throw it out and go in a new direction. (I'll address this again in Tip #3).

You may find you will add more options and suggestions to postures and shapes as you watch the bodies in the room move and explore the movements.

The more accessible you make the postures, the more empowering your student will feel by giving it a try. (I'll talk more about posture accessibility in Tip #4).

Consider that there may be a mixture of energies in the room and recognize the energy that you are bringing in as well.

IF STUDENTS HAVE LOW ENERGY

You may notice that your student's energy level is slow and tired. This could be for many reasons such as: how their day has gone so far, if they use medications, if they received enough sleep, if they feel depression or disconnected. Without putting your student's into a box give any or all of these tools a try:

- Begin lying down or seated
- Focus on their breath and bring them to awareness of something that they can sense at this moment.
- Body scan meditation

Move towards getting their energy up:

- Begin standing
- Lead them into mindful walking around the room.



IF STUDENTS HAVE HIGH ENERGY

You may notice that your student's energy level is hyper and elevated. Perhaps getting their attention or guiding them to stillness is not useful for them right away. As you get them to explore slowing down and creating focus, give any and all of these tools a try.

- Begin standing up
- Shake-it-out movements
- Making shapes (great for kids)
- Mindful walking

Move towards getting their energy down:

- Begin lying down
- Being with body scan meditation



03

THINK ON YOUR FEET

Be prepared to take the program that you have created for your group and throw it out the window completely. This may occur when you arrive to your group and the energy is shifted or not as it was the last time you gathered together. Perhaps there is a student who has a new injury or ailment they are experiencing.

Checking in prior to the beginning of class on how everyone is feeling and if they'd like to share anything going on in their body will help you decide which movements to utilize. Remember, your students may not necessarily share - that is OK, you will be prepared for this.

This also involves removing your ego from the expectations of the class. Once you have Read the Room (Tip #2), you may begin to take the yoga session in a new direction for your students as you are committed to meeting them where they are and providing them with an experience that will benefit their needs (not your own).

Having a backup plan and multiple offerings ready and available, the smoother it will be for you to think on your feet at any given time through the session.





04

MAKE ALL MOVEMENT ACCESSIBLE

Yoga in the West has focused predominately on the physical practice (asana) and is often promoted through young, fit, thin, financially secure, white-able-bodied women. This sales tactic ultimately excludes every other human body that will benefit from the practice and creates a narrative that one must be or look a certain way to join into a yoga space. The feeling can be daunting and familiar to other forms of exclusion and oppression one has experienced in their lifetime.

In order for your students to begin to find body awareness and confidence through mindful movement, they will first need to be able to access every shape and technique in a way that feels most comfortable for them and their bodies at that moment.

Having the ability to offer multiple suggestions to your students to access a shape is going to build trust in them towards you and is going to allow them to build trust in their own preferences and decision-making.

Keep this in mind because you will have at least one body in the class that has limitations to movement and mobility. Just because your body moves a certain way or can access a shape a certain way does not mean others will as well. Concurrently, just because you feel a shape in a certain area of your body does not mean that your students *should* or *will* the same way. They may feel no sensation at all.

MASTER TIP: Speak to all bodies in the room in layers and levels rather than speaking toward the peak/advanced level of a shape and offering supportive alternatives second. This can make a student feel unworthy or a shape feel inaccessible. Allow them to build the shape with confidence by introducing a foundational level first. I will speak more on invitational language in TIP #8.

POSTURE ACCESSIBILITY



SPEAK TOWARDS ALL BODIES

Everybody in the room is unique and has their own capabilities and experience. Do not assume your student's capabilities based on their appearance. Offer suggestions to enter and hold a posture for every single shape change. What works for one may not work for everyone.



REMOVE COMPETITIVENESS AND POSTURE HIERARCHY

Removing competition in postures and judgments can help your students feel safe in the class setting. At the same time, remove the notion that one posture or level is considered 'better' than another (posture hierarchy). This will remove ego from the practice and allow the student to accept and explore comfortably where their body is at today.



OFFER PROPS

Every posture has an alternative shape that is equally as effective and many shapes can be more accessible with the use of a blanket, block, chair, or bolster.

MASTER TIP: Guide your students using the block first and then let them decide if they want to use it or not.



GUIDE YOUR STUDENTS WITH CUES - NOT TOUCH

Show your students how to get into each shape by using your body as an example. Allow your students to explore how to comfortably and safely access the shape without touching their bodies in the process.



05

MOVE WITH YOUR STUDENTS

Your class and your presence for your students are a form of relationship-building and trust-building. For a student who is new to moving in a mindful manner or Yoga postures, having you as their guide to physically demonstrate each shape and their alternatives will help to build trust, awareness, and greater confidence.

Remember to leave your ego out of the shapes (postures) when you cue your students and consider taking an accessible variation of each shape as a way of showing your student what the shape could look like.

Feel free to express why you decide to take certain variations. This may also help your students feel more comfortable taking a variation that they feel is more suitable for them as they are learning the confidence to honor their unique needs and preferences. This also remove the notion that there is only one 'perfect' way to move in yoga.

MASTER TIP: Remain on your mat. Moving around the room can create unease in your students who are in a heightened or survival state of being. The practice of remaining on your mat and moving with your students will help your students feel safer in the class setting rather than you looking at each student or walking around the room.

Furthermore, be predictable and consistent with your students. You are building a relationship based on trust. Showing up consistently and in the same manner each time will create a massive impact and show your students what stability can look like.

06

AVOID HANDS-ON ASSISTS

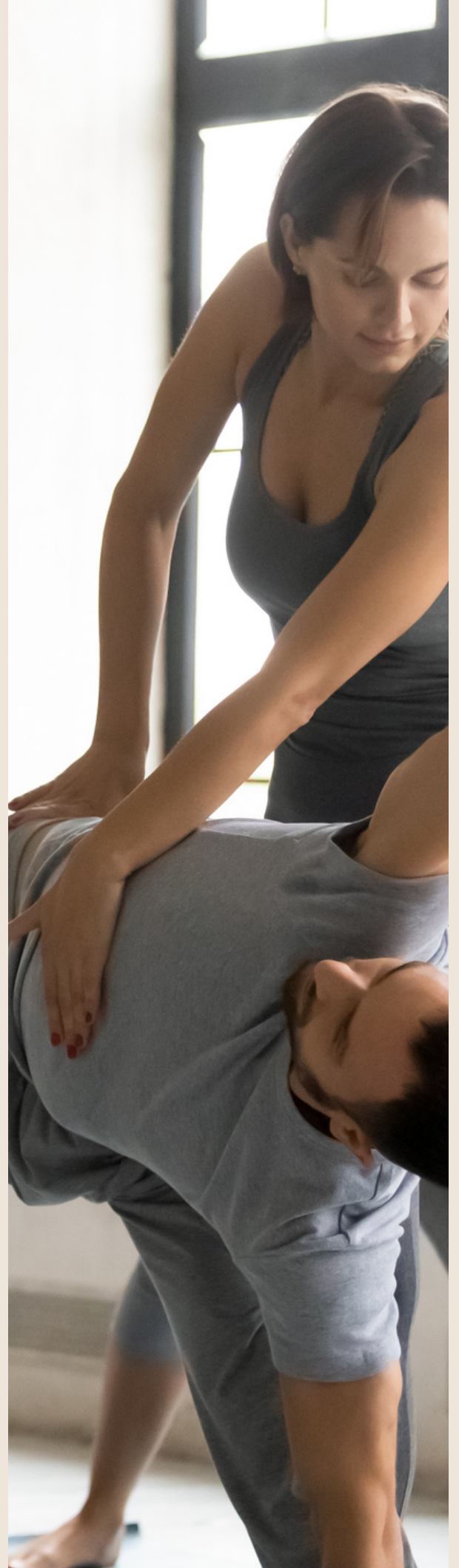
The use of this method may differ between teachers and students and depends on preference.

It is important to recognize that everyone has unique needs and preferences. And it is crucial that the teacher treat each student with sensitivity and respect.

If you do not have permission to touch a student on any area of their body and you approach them during class, the student may experience an unsafe feeling.

Though you may approach the class by asking the student if it is okay to offer them assistance in a shape, the person's experiences or cultural background may make touch unavailable to them at this time and your student may not know how to share this, resulting in the feeling of pressure to say 'Yes.'

MASTER TIP: When beginning with a new class and students, remain on your mat, demo the shapes, and avoid hands-on assistance. Consider the group and their needs before your own and remember your intention behind the assistance.





07

REMOVE LABELS

For this example, I am speaking about two commonly used descriptive terms that we learn at a young age. These two terms can be used to express how a sensation feels and shows up physically, emotionally, and behaviorally.

Each has a connotation and definition that can impact a student's ability to experience the yoga class and your teachings. Those two words are *good* and *bad*.

While teaching a trauma-informed yoga class, you will invite the student to explore a shape in a manner that feels '*useful*' for them. In a manner that feels '*available*' to them - rather than if it feels *good* or *bad* (*doesn't feel good*).

What you are doing here is inviting your student to understand a sensation without it being considered bad or good, ultimately giving them full control over their body movements and choice without the weight of whether or not what they are doing is considered '*right*' or '*wrong*.'

OTHER ELEMENTS TO AVOID

- **Student praise**

Speak to the entire room rather than singling someone out whether the feedback is positive or critical.

- **"If you can't do this, do that"**

Rather than making your student feel like they 'can't' do something - empower them to make a choice that is accessible for them. Honoring their choice will build confidence. You may consider saying, "if it feels more useful for you, try this."

- **Abrasive language**

This may include using language that you may feel is motivating but may actually seem demanding or forceful for your student. For example, "Keep pushing past the discomfort." (More on this in TIP # 8.)



- **Sudden changes in the room environment**

Remember that consistency shows up in the way you speak to your students as well as the way you set up the room for them. Consider the amount of clutter, where objects are placed, and what energy the room/space gives off.

- **Trying to be their therapist**

Even if you are a licensed therapist, if your group class is in a setting outside of a one-on-one therapeutic session, you are their yoga and mindfulness instructor. Students may feel drawn to open up to you. Remember your qualifications and boundaries. Offer resources or make an appointment with you for outside-of-class time.

- **Saying 'should'**

Just because you feel and experience a shape in a specific area of your own body or access a shape a certain way does not mean your students *should*. Allow them to explore where the shape shows up for them.





08

USE INVITATIONAL LANGUAGE

Your trauma-informed yoga class is an invitation for your students to explore the operating functions of their minds and bodies through movement, attention, and breathing techniques. Your class will allow your students to explore their unique needs without any pressure of how their choices must appear, look, and feel. For your students, the only person they need to please during the class session is themselves. The language you use to guide your students to choice-driven action will be void of expectations, exclusion, and judgments. In this approach, you are promoting self-awareness, self-compassion, and self-discovery which paves the way to learning how to trust oneself and others.

Your choice of words in a yoga class will impact your students, even if the phrases you use commonly feel relatable and useful for you. Take time to exercise caution and consider how a student who is learning to embrace this new level of body and mind awareness may feel when they hear certain cues or directions. You may not be familiar with each student's background, therefore a consistent and invitational approach to your language will help to create safety within your student's experience.

Remember, as yoga teachers, we may be unable to prevent all potential triggers that arise in our classes but you can become more aware of what terms may elicit negative reactions within the Yoga space.

On the next page, I will briefly outline terms you may consider avoiding and terms and phrases you may consider using to create a more invitational experience for a trauma-informed yoga class.

USE INVITATIONAL LANGUAGE

Consider avoiding the following language in your yoga space as any and all have been reported to create unease and feelings of inaccessibility in the student.

- You **should** be able to feel the sensation **here** - first of all, says who? Your student may feel a shape in other places or not at all. Remove expectations.
- **Let go/Surrender** - this can be challenging and feel demanding.
- **Breathe deeply** - may be inaccessible or evoke feelings of suffocation.
- **Open/Spread** - may be challenging for survivors of sexual violence.
- **Hold this pose** - may seem demanding and remove the choice to be able to move if they feel discomfort
- **Feel the burn** - telling your students how they need to feel a sensation of discomfort may prevent the creation of their own confidence and feel unsafe.
- **Lengthen/Engage/Activate** - these terms may not have a meaning to your students if they are new to yoga and gaining body awareness. Try to use terms they can understand or explain the meaning so they can apply it to their own body and experience.

Consider using the following language in your yoga space to provide an experience of growth that will lead to a deeper connection to one's self, emotions, and intuition.

- When you feel ready...
- If it's available to you...
- If it feels useful/It may feel useful to...
- There is no right or wrong here, only what feels most useful for your body at this moment.
- Trust that you can move away from a shape if it doesn't feel available to you.
- I invite you to take this shape with me or another preferred shape of your choosing.
- I invite you to take any variation of this shape that I have shown you that feels most suitable for you today.

Inward observances - consider these questions to allow your students to inquire inwardly and explore their capabilities and needs.

- How does it feel to breathe in this shape?
- How does it feel to lift/place your arms in the air/on your hips/etc?
- Where do you feel sensations in your body?
- What other variation of this shape could you try today?

JOURNAL: Reflect on a time when you experienced or witnessed language that was not trauma-informed in a yoga class. How did it make you feel?



09

BE INTENTIONAL

One way to 'check your ego at the door' is to take time before class to remind yourself what YOUR intention behind offering this service is. Find your intention and sit with it for a moment. Leading with your intention will offer you guidance in how you show up, the words you choose, your body language, the postures (shapes) you teach, how you teach them, and the sound of your voice as you speak to your students.

Your voice has the power to shift the energy in the room and is a crucial role in establishing a safe environment for your students to heal. Keep in mind your tone, volume, and pitch consistency.

Remember that this class is for them and not you. It is about their exploration of self and you guiding them towards that. Remove the idea of perfectionism and replace it with gratitude, compassion, and patience.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: If your intention is to empower your students, then using direct or demanding language may make your students feel that they do not have a choice, which will result in a lack of empowerment. Remember that no one fits into a box here. There is no right or wrong or one size fits all in yoga. Guide your students in a way that allows for freedom of expression.



10

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF BEFORE AND AFTER EVERY CLASS

You are giving your energy, intention, and purpose to your students. It is extremely common to find yourself feeling depleted after leading a yoga class and that is OK. You are putting your own needs to the side when you are guiding your students which takes self-awareness and your own nervous system regulation practice.

Being able to conserve and mindfully soothe your own energy before and after a class is just as important as the work you are doing during the class. In fact, it is needed in order to continue to do the work you are doing and prevent burnout.

Your self-care matters and it is not selfish. In order to give, you must have the overflow of energy, compassion, and availability to give.

When you have not given yourself the love and nurturing that you need to thrive, your energy will begin to deplete. You will feel it happen, and if you choose not to do anything about it, your body will choose for you.



4 SELF CARE IDEAS TO ADD TO YOUR PRE-EXISTING ROUTINES

ENJOY A HOBBY OUTSIDE OF YOGA & MENTAL HEALTH

Believe me, I get it. This work we are doing is powerful and you consume knowledge and stay hyper focused on mental health advocacy because you are passionate. However, consider giving yourself a break from it through other outlets. Whether that be artistic, spending time in nature, crafting, or a fictional/fantasy book or experience. Allow your mind to stay creative and in love with joy.



STAY CONNECTED

You are not alone in this journey. Remember that you have support systems available to you. There are people who love and support you that are willing to hold space for you when you need it. Sometimes that is a friend you have never met on social media or a new person you have met in a support group. Wherever they are showing up in your life, embrace it.



IT'S OKAY TO SAY 'NO'

It's okay to say 'No' to making plans, to not feeling the need to please others, and it's okay to say 'No' to a teaching opportunity. If something is not aligned with you and your values or if you currently don't have the space or energy for a new opportunity, that is OK. You are not missing out on anything you don't feel available or pulled towards.

MASTER TIP: If you don't have the space for someone or something, refer it to someone who does.

GET MORE GUILT-FREE REST

Your sleep is important, yes. So is your ability to do nothing. To not give energy to another or a thing. To be able to be with yourself. Whether that be for 5-minutes, hours, or days. When your mind and your gut tells you that it would like to do nothing, be still, or be alone - I urge you to listen. You are not a selfish being, you just need to re-fuel so you can give again.



BONUS

SETTING UP A SAFE SPACE

First and foremost, as you are creating a safe space for your students, you will work towards setting up the space to feel accessible, safe, and comfortable even before the class begins. This is a crucial aspect in building trust in your students and cultivating a space for them that allows them to explore their body, the mind, and the emotions that flow through them.

And, this may not occur for your students in the first class. Especially if this yoga setting is new to them. This is where showing up consistently and intentionally will be in your best interest and allow for your students to subtly begin to find ease and peace within this space.

MASTER TIP: Ask questions! You may get answers. Ask your students how they feel about the lighting, where they are seated, if they'd like to move their mat, etc. Feedback will help you create the safest environment. And you may not know, until you ask.



CONSIDER THIS WHEN CREATING A TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA SPACE



MUSIC OR NO MUSIC

This answer will depend on the student's needs and the instructor's preference. A great foundation is to not use music as it can distract from the intention of the class. Some music with lyrics or certain melodies can be a trigger. Try not to assume because you enjoy a song that your students will.



NUMBER OF MATS IN A ROOM

Allow for your students to have space to move freely without feeling like another student is right on top of them. Consider giving enough space so each student can expand both arms without touching each other.

MASTER TIP: a single row or stagnant rows allow students to be able to see who is next to or behind them.



WHERE ARE THE EXITS

If your students are in survival mode, they may feel more safe when they know where the exits are. Consider facing the mats in an orientation where the exits can be seen. If there is a closet door or curtain, you may want to open the door to show the students what is behind it and assure them that it is not a person.



LIGHTING & MIRRORS

Consider the brightness and dimness level of the lights in your yoga space. Too bright may feel harsh and exposed while too dim may feel uneasy to your student. If there are mirrors in the room, consider facing your students away from the mirrors to prevent body judgments or unease from seeing one's self.

THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING TO BE A GUIDE FOR HEALING

The work you are doing is extremely important in this world. Providing a safe space for human beings to honor their unique needs and allow for healing will create a snowball effect of positivity in this world because the tools that you are teaching others will work and they will share them with others.

You are teaching humans of all ages, circumstances, and life experiences that it is OK to feel and that it is OK and safe to move through those feelings.

You are teaching humans how to respect and love themselves while respecting and appreciating one another.

You are providing a safe space for humans to explore who they are and who they want to be when the world around them may be telling them who, what, and how to be.

This life, it is precious. The more love and kindness that you can share with this world will begin healing one person at a time. That's all it takes. And know that there are others with the same intention - to help one person at a time.

You are doing a great job and I'm so glad you are here.

Light and love,

Nichole Schembne



CLASS FEEDBACK

Date # of Students Age Range

Class Energy Level Low High Mixed

When were the students most engaged in class today?

.....
.....

Was there a theme or central message of the class today?

.....
.....

How was your energy when you entered the class today?

Low High Mixed

.....
.....

What would you change for next class?

.....
.....
.....

Testimonials/ Memorable moments from the students and yourself.

.....
.....
.....

IMAGINE BECOMING POSITIVELY IMPACTING
HUNDREDS OF LIVES THROUGH GREATER
MINDFULNESS PRACTICES



YOGA YOUR WAY 20-HOUR TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA TRAINING

AN IMPACTFUL, IN-PERSON, IN-DEPTH APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING HOW TRAUMA FORMS IN THE BODY, HOW TO EFFECTIVELY AND EMPATHETICALLY SHOW UP FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR STUDENTS REGARDLESS OF RACE - IDENTITY- CULTURE- OR DISABILITY, AND HOW TO BUILD & APPLY A YOGA CLASS THAT IS ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYBODY.

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- MENTAL HEALTH ACROSS CULTURES
- TEACHING APPROACHES
- TYPES OF TRAUMA
- VAGAL NERVE THEORY
- MINDFULNESS & S.E.L APPLICATIONS
- POSTURE ACCESSIBILITY
- HOW TO CREATE A SAFE SPACE
- DESIGN A PROGRAM
- HOW TO PITCH YOUR PROGRAM

EARN 18 CONTINUED EDUCATION UNITS

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NEVADA STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS (MTF, CPC)

NEVADA STATE BOARD OF SOCIAL WORKERS

YOUR LEADERS



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**RACHEL
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