

"what if  
i fall?"  
oh but my  
darling,  
what if  
you fly?  
- e.h.



# From Couch to Yoga Mat: Using Complementary Treatments in Mental Health Counseling



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# Objectives

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- ▶ Participants will become familiar with the history and philosophy of yoga.
- ▶ Participants will develop an understanding of the benefits of yoga in treating mental health concerns such as trauma, depression, and anxiety.
- ▶ Participants will observe and practice demonstrations of basic yoga techniques



# Misconceptions of Yoga

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- ▶ You have to be flexible to do yoga
- ▶ Yoga is a religion
- ▶ Yoga is only for women
- ▶ You have to wear yoga pants and special clothes to do yoga
- ▶ Yoga is just an exercise, form of physical fitness
- ▶ You have to become a health food nut, stop drinking alcohol, and give up all your material belongings.



# What is Yoga?



*Yoga is the path which cultures the body and senses, refines the mind, civilizes the intelligence, and takes rest in the soul which is the core our being*

*-B.K. Iyengar*

# What is Yoga?

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- ▶ The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root yuj meaning to bind , join, attach and yoke, to direct and concentrate one's attention on, to use and apply.
- ▶ The practice of yoga is an art and science dedicated to creating union between body, mind, and spirit.
- ▶ According to Patanjali, yoga is a technique to still the mental fluctuations of the mind to reach the central reality of the true self.
- ▶ The foundations of yoga philosophy were written down in The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, approximately 200 AD. Patanjali's Yoga Sutra outlines a skillful way of conducting life that fosters moderation and harmony.

(Iyengar, 1966)



# What is Yoga?

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- ▶ The guidelines (8 limbs of Yoga) provide ethical and moral standards of living, postural, and breathing exercises. These guidelines are used to foster spiritual growth and evolve one's consciousness.



# Eight Limbs of Yoga

yogapancake.com

## samadhi

pure bliss  
tranquility, fulfillment,  
and spiritual illumination

## dhyana

meditation  
observation and  
reflection

## dharana

concentration  
focusing and attention

## yamas

5 moral restraints

ahimsa - kindness  
satya - truthfulness  
asteya - nonstealing  
brahmacharya - moderation  
aparigraha - generosity

## niyamas

5 observances

saucha - purity  
santosa - contentment  
tapas - austerity  
svadhyaya - self study  
isvara-pranidhana - surrender



## asana

postures  
positions of the body, connecting  
the mind and spirit to create  
strength, flexibility, balance  
and focus

## pratyahara

turning inward  
withdrawal of the  
senses to the mind

## pranayama

mindful breathing  
control of the breath



# What is Yoga?

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- ▶ Yoga attempts to create a state in which we are always present- really present- in every action, in every manner.
- ▶ Yoga is about the means by which we can make the changes we desire in our lives.
- ▶ The practice of yoga only requires one to act and to be attention in ones actions.



***Yoga** is so much more than stretching. It's about deep breathing, relaxing, and going inward, possibly discovering yourself in the process. Research supports yoga in reducing stress, improving fitness, managing and preventing chronic conditions (i.e. anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, heart disease), and promotion of mental health.*



(Clark et al., 2014; Forfylow, 2011; Javnbakht, Kenari, Ghasemi, 2009)

# Yoga Terms/Concepts

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- ▶ Yogi/Yogini- a male/female practitioner of yoga
  - ▶ Asana- postures, physical practice of yoga
  - ▶ Pranayama- rhythmic control of breath.
    - ▶ Prana= life force
    - ▶ Yama= to control
  - ▶ Ujjayi- throat breathing- often used in Western yoga practices
  - ▶ Savasana- also known as “corpse pose”. It represents the death of the practice where the mind, all limbs and sense organs are switched off and passive. Body and mind still yet conscious.
  - ▶ Dhyana- meditation
  - ▶ Namaste- often said at the beginning or end of a yoga practice- “the light and love in me honors the light and love in you”
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# Yoga Terms / Concepts

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- ▶ **Sun Salutations aka “Surya Namaskar”**- is a general tonic and complete warm-up for the entire body, which can be done just as is, or as a warm-up before yoga asanas. The Sun Salutations are said to remove bodily and mental tensions, improve circulation, stimulate the nervous system and raise the body heat. All joints are loosened and lubricated. It offers great flexibility to your spine. The muscles of the abdomen, pelvis and spine are toned and strengthened. The breathing is regulated, thereby calming the mind. If practiced slowly, it has a calming effect. If practiced briskly, it is invigorating.
- ▶ **Hatha Yoga**- a physical exercise regime that utilizes different “poses” called asanas, for the purpose of strengthening, opening, and cleansing the body.
- ▶ **Vinyasa-Flow**: The style of vinyasa-flow yoga is a type of yoga under the Hatha Yoga branch. It is typically faster paced – one breath one movement.
- ▶ **Yin Yoga**- This practice is designed to help you sit longer, and more comfortably, in meditation by stretching connective tissue around the joints
- ▶ , it is a passive practice.



“ YOGA IS THE JOURNEY  
*of the self,*  
THROUGH THE SELF,  
TO THE SELF.”  
— THE BHAGAVAD GITA

VICKEHEY





# Yoga and Mental Health



*Self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-acceptance are all central parts of the therapeutic process. Self-awareness facilitates personal growth on its own and as a component of self-understanding and acceptance. The development of self-awareness is a core objective of yoga and, therefore, a good starting point for the exploration of insights gained through yoga practice.*



# Review of the Literature

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- ▶ Butler et al. (2008) found that patients suffering from depression who participated in a meditation and hatha yoga group experienced a significant decrease and remission in symptoms compared to participants who did not participate in the intervention.
  - ▶ Similarly, Franzblau et al. (2008) found a significant decrease in depression scores in participants who received training in yoga breath work.
  - ▶ Male inmates who were randomized to a yoga intervention showed improved mood, reduced stress, reduced psychological distress, and improved cognitive behavioral tasks when compared to a control group (Bilderbeck et al., 2013).
  - ▶ Butler et al. concluded that meditation in yoga “may be used to let go of thoughts that maintain the depressive affect” (p. 816).
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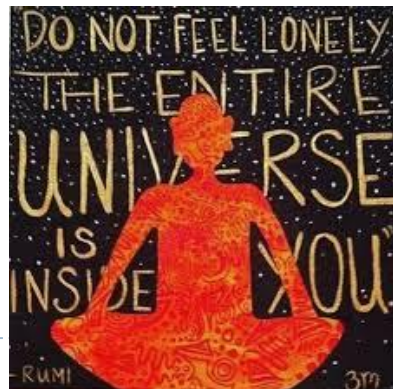




# Review of the Literature

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- ▶ Participants diagnosed with an anxiety disorder who participated in a 2 month yoga class showed a significant decrease in perceived anxiety (Javnbakht, Kenari, & Ghasemi, 2009).
- ▶ Research supports that accessing the mind-body network and changing patterns in these bodily systems through yoga can aid in treating anxiety and depression



# Review of the Literature

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- ▶ Focusing on postures that open and lift the chest counteracted feelings of depression, increased positive mood, offset the collapsed body posture, and helped people with depression
- ▶ Additionally, the breath work practices gave people with depression a sense of control over their bodies, while the meditation practices allowed people with depression to release patterns of rumination on depressive thoughts.
- ▶ Studies showed that yoga improved participants' psychophysiology. For example, the autonomic nervous system response became regulated, and neurotransmitter and hormone levels positively changed.

(Javnbakht et al., 2009)

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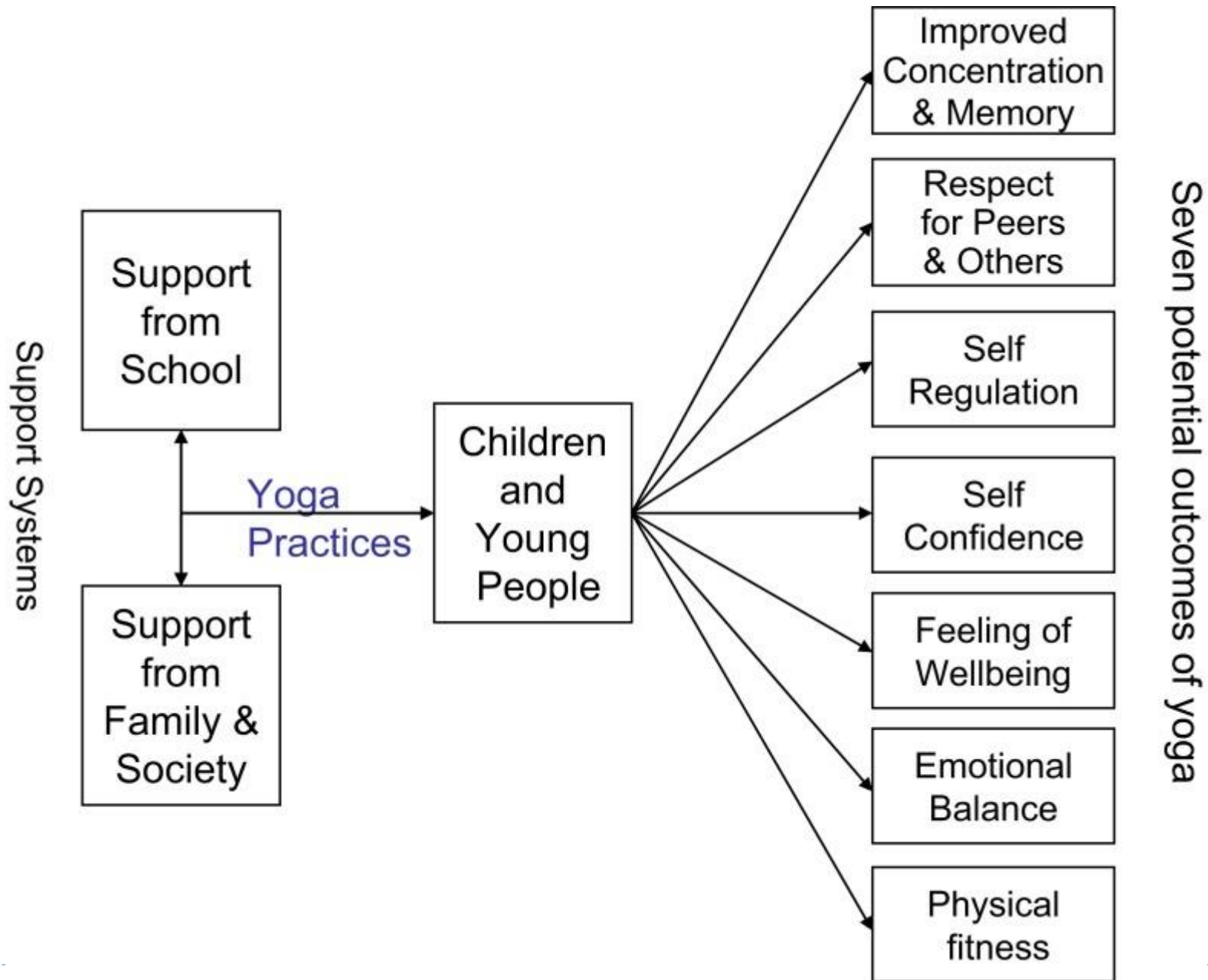


# Yoga in the Schools

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- ▶ In an article titled, “Effect of Yoga on Mental Health in Children,” results showed that yoga improves children’s physical and mental well-being (Telles, 2012) .
- ▶ Similarly, the Harvard professor Sat Bir Khalsa finds that yoga in schools helps students improve resilience, mood, and self-regulation skills pertaining to emotions and stress.
- ▶ Peck, Kehle, Bray, and Theodore (2005) sought to discern whether yoga could be used as an intervention for elementary school children with attention problems. A videotape was used to engage the students in a 30-min routine of yoga postures, deep breathing, and relaxation exercises twice a week for 3 weeks, with positive results.





(Hagan & Nayar, 2014)

# Yoga and Mental Health

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- ▶ Yoga encourages individuals to become aware of their bodies, thus tension through ones breath and asanas (postures).
- ▶ Raising awareness of body tension and learning methods this can be reduced can increase self confidence by promoting a sense of control.
- ▶ Yoga can provide a platform for one to be connected to oneself, hence foster self control and raising self efficacy.



# Trauma Sensitive Yoga

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- ▶ Trauma has physiological impacts, trauma memories are often stored somatically. Due to this, treatment should incorporate the body.
- ▶ Yoga and other body oriented therapies take a bottom up approach.
- ▶ When one can develop a new relationship with ones body, there is a ripple effect on emotional and mental health, on relationships, and one's experiences of living in the world
- ▶ Yoga based interventions assimilate physical movement and restorative action patterns into treatment, and in doing so they endeavor to help trauma survivors build strength internally and resources in an embodied manner.

(Bessel van de Kolk, et al., 2015)

*Trauma is the disease of not being able to be present*

- Bessel A. van der Kolk

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# Trauma Sensitive Yoga

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## ▶ Goals

- ▶ Experiencing the present moment
- ▶ Making choices
- ▶ Taking effective action
- ▶ Creating rhythms

(Emerson & Hopper, 2011)





# Yoga In Practice





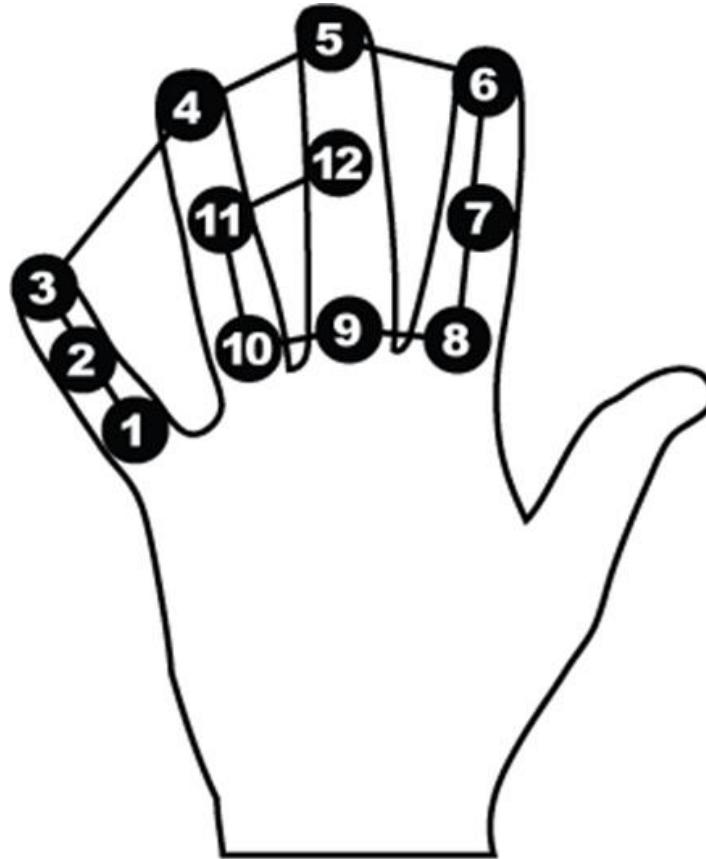
# Awareness of Breath

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- ▶ Conscious breathing or awareness of breath can help create present moment experiences.
  - ▶ Nasal Breathing
  - ▶ Ujayi Breath
  - ▶ Three Part Breath
  - ▶ Sun Breaths



# Practice Time!



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# Living in the Present Moment- Grounding Asanas

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## ▶ **Mountain Pose**

## ▶ **Living in the Present/Grounding Technique**

- ▶ This is a very effective way to anchor your awareness in body sensation, especially when you're upset and can't calm yourself down.
- ▶ Stand up and feel your feet, especially how they feel pressing against the ground. Notice on those spaces that your feet are in contact with the floor
- ▶ Once in the pose, allow everything to release. Let your shoulders drop gently, allow all the muscles in the face to let go.
- ▶ Notice where you are grounded supported with the earth.
- ▶ Notice your own stability



## Mountain Pose



1. Relax Face, Neck And Throat. Look Straight Ahead.

2. Pull Shoulder Blades In And Lift The Chest.

3. Try To Bring Tail Bone In, While Moving Thighs Back.

4. Lift The Kneecaps By Tightening The Thighs.

5. Keep Feet Together With Toes Out Like A Fan. Distribute Weight Evenly across both feet.

# Finding Your Center as a Source of Stability

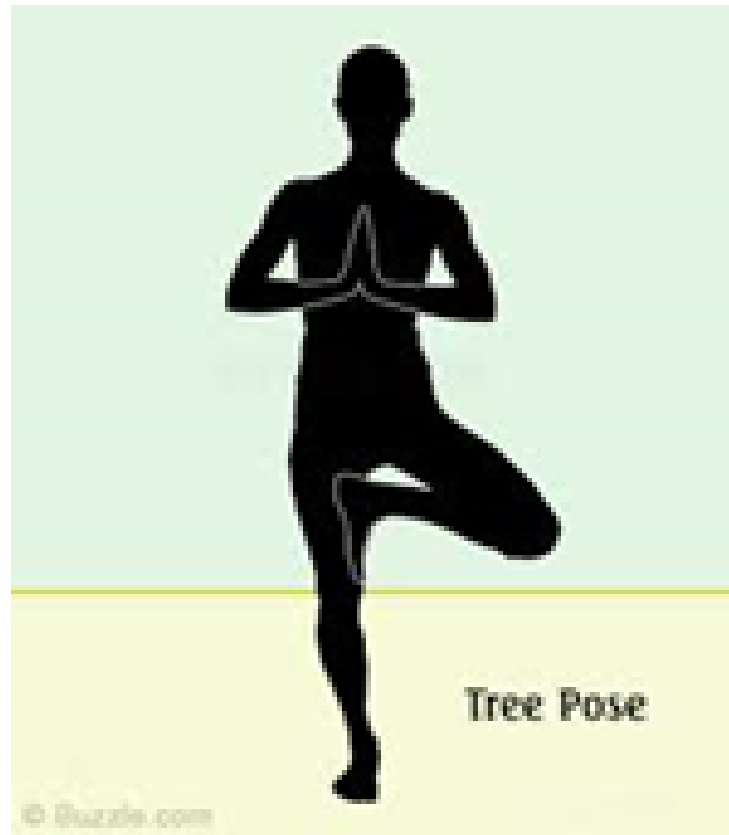
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## ▶ **Tree Pose**

## ▶ **Finding Your Center as a Source of Stability**

- ▶ Finding out center can aid individuals in discovering an internal source of stability and strength right in their own body.
  - ▶ Begin by standing, bring palms together in front of your heart
  - ▶ Allow your breath to be free
  - ▶ When you are ready, begin to shift your weight into your left foot and leg
  - ▶ Explore positioning of left foot (kickstand, calve, thigh)
  - ▶ Find a focal point for your gaze on a nonmoving object in front of you
  - ▶ Hug in your lower belly if it is helpful
  - ▶ Breathe, notice your strength and stability
  - ▶ Be nonjudgmental and kind to yourself, if you fall out come right back in
- 





Tree Pose

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# Self Awareness and Tension Release

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## ▶ Shoulder Rolls

## ▶ Self Awareness and Tension Release

- ▶ Settle into your space, take some time to interact with your space around you
- ▶ Once you are settled commit to stillness.



- ▶ Begin to make circles with your shoulders at your own pace
- ▶ Starting in one direction , begin to get feeling for some space around your shoulders
- ▶ These movements can be small or big, fast or slow
- ▶ Just take some time to be aware



# Matching Yoga-Based Strategies to Goals for Intervention

Challenge	Goal	Chair-based Yoga Posture
Feeling frozen, rigid, holing on to things	Letting go	Forward fold
Anxiety, tension, panic	Decreasing hyper arousal	Neck Rolls, Belly Breathing
Isolation	Building relationship	Group Practice
Dissociation	Grounding	Mountain Pose
Feeling off balance, conflicting feelings	Centering	Seated Twist, awareness to core
Emotionally Overwhelmed	Containment	Child's pose
Stuck, unable to make decisions	Unfreezing, Reorganizing active defenses	Movement based poses (warrior sequence)
Emotional numbing, somatic dissociation	Awareness of body	Mindfulness practices (body scans, should rolls)

(Emerson & Hopper, 2011)



# Mindfulness and Self Compassion

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- ▶ **Self-compassion** is extending compassion to one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering. Dr. Kristin Neff has defined self-compassion as being composed of three main components - self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.



# Implications for Practice

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- ▶ The mental health professional may begin the process by asking clients what they know about yoga. In this way, yoga can be discussed generally and the client's religious perspective assessed and respected.
- ▶ For a client who has an initial negative reaction to yoga being introduced or negative fixed views regarding yoga in general, it may be advisable to disengage from the subject and either discuss breathing exercises from a Western medical model or conclude that a yogic type of treatment is contraindicated for the client at this time.



# Implications for Practice

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- ▶ Professionals should familiarize himself or herself with the reputation of the local yoga studios and teachers, available classes, and the methods taught
- ▶ Both the referring mental health professional and the yoga therapist may work together to co-manage clients and deliver a suitable mind-body treatment



# Implications for Practice

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- ▶ A focus on increasing self-awareness can start with the first yoga class. A counselor can facilitate the process by asking clients to write down their impressions, feelings, and sensations immediately after class to bring to the next psychotherapy session. Here is a list of possible questions for the first class:
  - ▶ Did the class match your expectations? If not, how was it different?
  - ▶ Which postures were the most difficult and which came more naturally?
  - ▶ What did you learn about your body from the process?
  - ▶ What did you notice about your breath as you attempted the different postures?
  - ▶ What did you notice about the tension in your body and mind before class compared with after class?



# Implications for Practice

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- ▶ Integrating Yoga Based Strategies into the Therapy Office
  - ▶ Own personal experience of yoga practice
  - ▶ Understand exercises before presenting to client, practice them yourself and with others
  - ▶ Develop your own “yoga voice”, calm, slow, gentle
  - ▶ Participate in exercises along with clients
  - ▶ Debrief with client
  - ▶ Encourage client to practice at home



# Implications for Practice

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- ▶ For mental health professionals, integrating yoga with counseling enables them to offer an expanded continuum of care beyond psychotherapeutic and pharmacological interventions.



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