

Using Yoga To Relieve Back-To-School Stress

BY SHARON FEIEREISEN

The end of summer can be one of the most stressful times of the year. To help alleviate the anxiety that comes with back-to-school season we turned to four leading yoga experts to find out how the practice can help bring calm into our lives.

Amanda Murdock, Yoga Instructor at Pure Yoga and SLT

The most important step is just breathing deep breaths in and deep breaths out. It seems simple, but it's the easiest thing to forget. It allows you to become conscious of only the breath and not any racing thoughts. When feeling stressed I always ask myself if the stress is something I can actually physically do something about. If I can, then I take steps to implement a plan to tackle the problem. If not, I allow myself to stress for a little while and then

I tell myself that I can't do anything about it and that I have to let it go. Easier said than done, but being conscious of saying it and trying it will go a long way.

Yoga is a great stress reliever, as it is moving meditation; it's not a competitive sport; rather it's just about you, your mat, and your body-mind connection. It's also a great way to be in touch with your body. Most of us are so unconscious of our body and how we move in the world and how our body responds to the stresses around us. When we are in tune with our body and aware of our surroundings and how they affect us we can be conscious of the things that stress us and to take steps to nip them in the bud before they affect our physical well being.

Sunshine Daidone, Owner Poe Yoga in East Hampton

When I'm feeling stressed, I love to go into

Working through difficult asanas can help work through challenges—knowing anything is possible and most situations are temporary.

inversions—handstand, headstand, or arm stand—they put everything into a different perspective. Yoga allows people to leave things at the door and concentrate on their body and mind. Connecting their breath and focusing on the present calms the soul. Working through certain difficult asanas can help work through the challenges we encounter in life and help us see that anything is possible and most situations are temporary. The physical benefits of the postures also release stress in the body.

Loren Bassett, Yoga Instructor and Founder of Bassett's Bootcamp

When you're stressed, it's nice to practice postures that calm the nervous system and promote relaxation. I think the following ones are particularly effective: Child's Pose: a relaxing, grounding pose that alleviates back pain. Corpse Pose: lying on your back completely still as you quiet the mind and melt into the earth. Ragdoll Pose: it stretches the hamstrings as you relax the torso over the thighs giving you the sensation of elongation through the spine and the back of the legs. Supported Bridge Pose with a block under the sacrum: calms the mind and helps alleviate stress. Reclining Twist: it stretches the spine and shoulders and relieves lower back pain.

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The rockstar pose

I also like to keep the following mantras in mind: *The way to conquer fear is through action. Being brave is being afraid of something and doing it anyway. A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Take the high road, there's less traffic. Peaceful actions begin with peaceful thoughts.*

Serena Tom, Yoga Instructor at Pure Yoga and Sacred Sounds Yoga

I always try to remember that it's the pacing of our breathing that has the power to switch from feelings of stress to feelings of relaxation. Remembering to concentrate on the sound of the breath as you inhale and exhale can really make a huge difference. Also, a commitment to practicing yoga daily is valuable training in focusing the mind on stillness, calmness, and relaxation.

If you can consciously stay calm in the most challenging poses, you will be able to do the same thing when encountered with difficult situations in the outside world. Instead of going into your habitual reactions, yoga enables you to become more self-aware and mindful. Yoga isn't only great for adults, it's great for children, as well. Physically, it enhances their flexibility, strength, improves coordination and body awareness, but it also helps them reduce aggression while promoting inner fulfillment.