



*Three And A Half Acres Yoga*

**Three and a Half Acres Service and  
Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Training**

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## INTRODUCTION

“Each human needs about three-and-a-half acres of land to breathe properly . . . and you create that needed space by giving back to our communities.”

Sharath Jois, director of Ashtanga Yoga Institute, Mysore India

## MISSION

Three and a Half Acres Yoga (THAY) provides yoga, breathing and mindfulness techniques to underserved communities. We use these tools to support individuals in recognizing their own power for positive change.

## AUDIENCE

THAY partners with community organizations within Harlem, Upper Manhattan and Washington, DC that serve residents facing emotional, physical or social trauma. We provide yoga, breathing and mindfulness programs to nonprofits to support their existing missions and build bridges of understanding among neighbors. We believe this work creates space and clarity in the day-to-day interactions between members of our community.

### Lara Land: Founder/Director

Lara Land is a Level 2 authorized Ashtanga Yoga teacher with 2 decades yoga experience. She has worked all over the world teaching yoga and mindful living and developing programs to heal and empower. In 2008-2009 Lara spent three months in post-genocide Rwanda bringing yoga as healing to survivors, and from there went to India where she worked with HIV positive children bringing yoga and meditation to their treatment room. In June 2011 Lara opened Land Yoga, a ground floor Yoga, Arts, & Wellness Center in the heart of Harlem. Through Land, she developed programs such as Harlem Earth Day, SOULFest NYC, and Women Who Wow landing her recognition by The Wall Street Journal, the Daily News, & on Fox5.

In 2015 she founded non-profit, Three and a Half Acres Yoga to inspire community healing and activism through yoga. Forever in awe of the transformative power of yoga, Lara continues to study and to challenge her limits. She leads retreats worldwide, is a public speaker, spiritual coach, and writer with recent contributions to the Health Magazine, Apartment Therapy and the Huffington Post. Lara recently released My Bliss Book, an evergreen planner and online coaching system.

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## WELCOME

Thank you for choosing Three and a Half Acres Service and Trauma Yoga Training. This is a basic level training for yoga teachers with 200-hr+ certification(s) who are interested in working in trauma-specific/affected populations.

As you work with THAY, there will be continuing education opportunities to go even deeper than this initial training. In the meantime, you will leave this weekend with a basic understanding of trauma, how to sequence a safe class, and a chance to observe our teachers as well as practice these skills on site. Demo-ing is a requirement for completion of the training.

Volunteers interested in teaching with THAY are required to observe a minimum of two trauma yoga classes and trial teach two classes beforehand. Not all graduates will teach for their volunteer commitment. Events, outreach, light physical labor tasks, research, and social media are some of the other volunteer opportunities. Please let us know if you prefer one of these.

ADDITIONAL DISCLAIMER: YOU ARE NOT BEING TRAINED AS THERAPISTS, SOCIAL WORKERS, YOGA THERAPY TEACHERS – TRAUMA TRIGGERING CAN BE INTENSE, PLEASE TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

In this training, we will cover:

1. What is Trauma, How Manifests in Body/Brain, Why Yoga is Helpful
  - a. The effects of trauma and post-traumatic stress
2. Best Practices for Working in Trauma-Affected Yoga Settings
3. How to Build and Teach a Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Class
  - a. Basic Ashtanga Yoga Sequence and Principles
  - a. How to Transform any Practice to a Chair
2. Importance of Mindfulness for Teacher and Student
  1. Cultural Competency Awareness
  2. Opportunities for practicum, volunteering, and mentorship, including specific needs of our partners.

## OPENING EXERCISE

Please tell us your name and a little bit about what brought you here today and what you hope to gain from this training. Why do you want to do service/work with traumatized people?

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## WORKING DEFINITIONS ON TRAUMA

### What is trauma and who has experienced it?

- Trauma: a normal reaction to an abnormal situation or experience.
  - A deeply distressing or disturbing experience (ie war, natural disaster, sexual violence, oppression and discrimination, poverty . . . );
  - The psychological and emotional response to such an event.
  - Related to a person losing her/her agency and may result in challenges to function or cope normally
    - Came without warning; unprepared to deal with; left with no resolution
- Three types:
  - Acute: results from a single incident
  - Chronic: repeated and prolonged
  - Complex: exposure to varied and multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature
- Symptoms:
  - Shock, denial, disbelief
  - Confusion, difficulty concentrating
  - Trouble learning from experience
  - Anger, irritability, mood swings
  - Guilt, shame, self-blame
  - Withdrawing from others
  - Difficulty engaging in intimate relationships
  - Dissociation / depersonalization
  - Feeling sad or hopeless
  - Feeling disconnected or numb
  - Physical pain
  - Difficulty sleeping
  - Anxiety and fear
  - Flashbacks out of nowhere
- PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) — a mental health condition characterized by vivid, intrusive memories of a terrifying event lasting longer than one month and interfering with day to day living
  - Symptoms are generally grouped into four types:
    - Intrusive memories (ie flashbacks, nightmares)
    - Avoidance

- Negative changes in thinking and mood (ie hopelessness, difficulty with memory, detachment, numbness . . . )
- Changes in physical and emotional reactions (ie easily frightened, hyper-vigilant, self-destructive behavior . . . )
- May start within one month of a traumatic event; sometimes symptoms may not appear until years later

### **Can we cure trauma?**

No one can cure trauma. But one can:

- Find a way to become calm and focused
- Learn to maintain that calm in response to images, thoughts, sounds, or physical sensations that remind you of the past
- Find a way to be fully alive in the present and engaged with the people around you
- Be free from keeping secrets from yourself including secrets about how you have managed to survive

In a safe space, we can allow the body to have experiences that deeply and viscerally contradict the helplessness, rage, or collapse that result from trauma. For real change, the body needs to learn that the danger has passed.

We also want to help people reclaim their power: power over body, power over thoughts and feelings, power over responses/reactions to internal or external situations.

### **Physiological Changes as a Result of Trauma**

The brain's alarm systems are way off, which may result in:

- Difficulties with sleep, appetite, touch, digestion, and arousal — sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems unbalanced
- Agitated, easily startled, angry
- Issues with thalamus which helps distinguish what sensory information is relevant and what's not
- Hyper-vigilance to threats at expense of spontaneity; could also result in the opposite, carelessness
- Attempts to maintain control over unbearable physiological reactions can result in
  - racing heart, high blood pressure
  - diabetics may find their blood sugar levels difficult to control
  - aches and pains that have no other explanation
  - chronic health conditions related to stress (due to suppressed immune system): obesity, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, depression, gastrointestinal problems, and asthma

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- fibromyalgia
- chronic fatigue
- other autoimmune diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, Crohn's disease, and celiac disease

WHICH IS WHY IT'S CRITICAL FOR TRAUMA TREATMENT TO ENGAGE THE ENTIRE PERSON:

Body, Mind (memories and emotions), Brain

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## WHY YOGA?

In Yoga, we engage the whole body, mind included.

- Different from talk therapy where a client is led to the awareness of a problem (ie behavior), then asked to unpack thoughts, emotions, memories, and/or actions.
- Sometimes the body gets left out of the inquiry.
- And yet, no matter how much insight and understanding we develop, the rational brain is basically impotent to talk the emotional brain out of its own reality. As Dr Bessel Van Der Kolk explains, **“the body keeps the score.”**

For healing, the body needs to be invited back into the conversation. As yoga already involves body/mind/breath awareness as well as the realization we are not simply the thoughts, emotions, and memories of our mind but something more, this practice offers a unique supplementary path to wholeness.

As you focus your attention on breathing and scan the sensations moving in your body from moment to moment, you begin to notice the connection between your emotions and/or thoughts with your body. You can then experiment with changing the way you feel (actively) by taking a breath to shift your focus and then practice moving your attention throughout your body and mind.

- Self-regulation is a person’s ability to calm his/herself down when he/she feels emotional. **Simply noticing what you feel fosters emotional self-regulation.**

In Trauma-Sensitive classes, the emphasis is not on alignment or getting the posture “right;” it’s more interesting to tune into what that particular shape/pose feels like in your body.

- **Encourage and remind your students: “My body has a lot to tell me and I am willing to listen.”**
- It’s helpful for traumatized people to learn little by little that they can tolerate the body’s sensations, have new experiences, and create new action patterns.

All poses have a sensation, physical or emotional, that may pass, lessen or increase. Each of us can determine whether or not to stay with those sensations.

- As a teacher, you can prompt students with “Notice that...” or “What happens next?,” bringing attention to different areas and what they might be feeling.

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- Cultivate curiosity and mindfulness. Mindfulness puts us in touch with the transitory nature of our feelings and perceptions.
- **Practicing mindfulness calms down our sympathetic nervous system, helping us become aware of how our body organizes particular emotions or memories.**

Understanding why you feel a certain way does not change how you feel. But it can keep you from surrendering to the intense reactions. For this, we must have access to the emotional brain where we can begin restoring the alarm systems. Neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux and his team have shown that the only way we can consciously access the emotional brain is through self-awareness.

There are two kinds of self-awareness:

- One that keeps track of the self across time and one that registers the self in the present.
  - The first creates connections and assembles them into a story. This system is rooted in language.
  - The second, moment-to-moment self-awareness, is based in physical sensations. If we feel safe and are given time we can find words to communicate this as well.

Body awareness changes your sense of time. Notice what you feel while timing the sensation with the flow of breath. **This helps you anticipate the end of discomfort and strengthens your capacity to deal with physical and emotional distress.** Awareness that all experience is transitory changes your perspective on yourself.

There are two aspects of self-regulation: top-down and bottom-up.

- Top-down regulation involves strengthening the capacity of the watchtower, or witness, to monitor your body's sensations. Mindfulness meditation and yoga can help.
- Bottom-up regulation involves recalibrating the autonomic nervous system which can be accessed through breath, movement, or touch.

We have the ability to regulate our own physiology including some of the so-called involuntary functions of the body and brain through such basic activities as breathing, moving, and touching.

Talk therapy is important in conjunction with body movement, and we are not trained therapists. We are not here to prescribe. **OUR JOB IS NOT TO TRANSFORM THE BODY EXPERIENCE INTO EMOTIONS.** If the student does, that is ok. If the student notices they feel good during a yoga technique like taking a breath or



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a forward bend, that is great and yes, go with it. Do not tell them what they should expect to feel. And in fact tell them it is totally ok if they don't feel anything.

One great tool yoga offers to all folks, is the ability to ground.

- Grounding is becoming more completely aware of the present moment, by tuning in to all five senses.
- Remaining anchored in the present is essential to deal with the past so as not to be pulled into it.
- When so fully rooted in the present one may feel more calm and perhaps even safe. When one feels safe, one can begin to unpack what's going on inside.

What are some exercises that you think could help with grounding?

- Name 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you taste
- Notice your feet on the ground; feel where in contact with the chair
  - Especially bring attention your back body — energetic place where store unconscious thoughts and emotions, as well as hide issues we're not prepared to acknowledge or handle

ONCE YOU APPROACH YOUR BODY WITH CURIOSITY RATHER THAN FEAR,  
EVERYTHING SHIFTS

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## SCIENCE TERMINOLOGY/GLOSSARY

a. CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM (brain and spinal cord)

a. SOMATIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

- i. Voluntary, with conscious control
- ii. Part of the peripheral nervous system (ie, the nerves extending to and from CNS)
- iii. Major functions: voluntary movement of muscles and organs, as well as reflex movements; mediates sight, hearing, touch
- iv. Carries motor and sensory information/signals to and from CNS

b. AUTONOMIC SYSTEM

- i. Occurs involuntarily, without conscious control
- ii. Responsible for control of bodily functions not consciously directed, such as breathing, the heartbeat, and digestive processes
- iii. Controls smooth muscle of the viscera (internal organs) and glands
- iv. Divided into three parts (complement one another):

1. ENTERIC/INTRINSIC NERVOUS SYSTEM: consists of mesh-like system of neurons that governs the function of the viscera (gastrointestinal tract)

- a. Known as the “second brain”/brain in gut because it can operate independently of the brain and spinal cord, the central nervous system
- b. Also called "first brain" based on evidence suggesting that ENS evolved before CNS

1. PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM: conserves energy; “housekeeping”/“rest and digest”/“freeze or faint”/“shutdown”; promotes rest — deeper/older/more primitive

- a. Decreases alertness, blood pressure, and heart rate
- b. Helps with calmness, relaxation, and digestion
- c. Remember ASLUDD: Arousal, Salivation, Lacrimation, Urination, Digestion and Defecation
- d. In communication with vagus nerve, interfacing with control of heart, lungs, digestive tract

2. SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM: expends energy; “fight or flight”; promotes action — “newer” evolutionary development

- a. Increases alertness, energy, blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing rate

- b. Constantly active at basic level to maintain homeostasis

b. LIMBIC SYSTEM

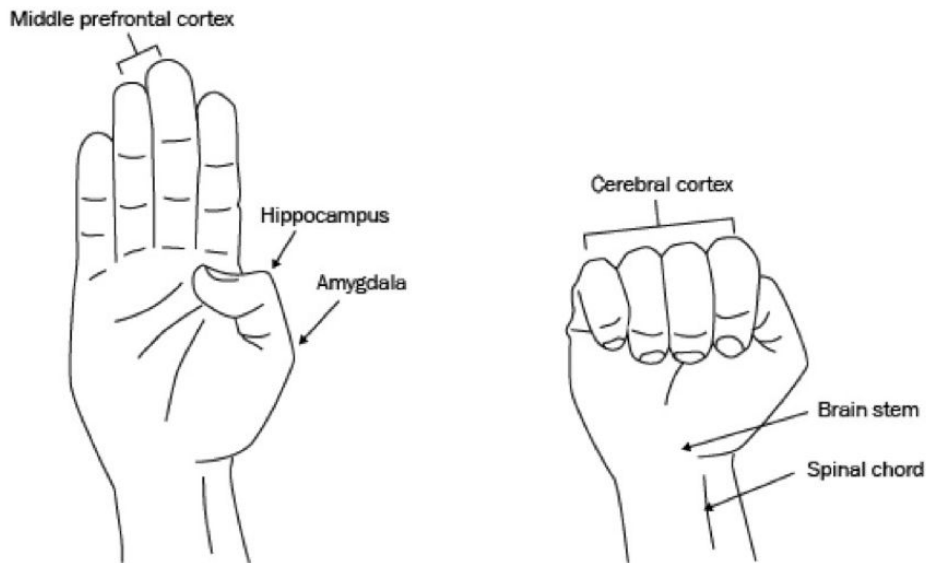
- a. Complex system of nerves and networks in the brain, located beneath cerebral cortex
- b. Controls basic emotions (fear, pleasure, anger) and drives (hunger, sex, dominance, care of offspring) — about self-preservation
- c. Deals with motivation, learning, memory as well
- d. Primary structures within:
  - i. AMYGDALA: one of two almond-shaped clusters of nuclei located within temporal lobes of brain (right and left have slightly different functions, yet work together)
    - 1. Perform a primary role in processing of memory, decision-making and emotional responses (including fear, anxiety, and aggression)
  - ii. HIPPOCAMPUS: also of a pair, one in each hemisphere, located under cerebral cortex
    - 1. Plays important roles in consolidation of information from short-term memory to long-term memory, and in spatial memory that enables navigation
  - iii. THALAMUS: also of a pair, located above brainstem, between cerebral cortex and midbrain with extensive nerve connections to both
    - 1. Relays motor and sensory signals to cerebral cortex; has significant roles in motor activity, emotion, memory, and arousal
  - iv. HYPOTHALAMUS: located at base of brain, near pituitary gland, links nervous system to endocrine system
    - 1. Plays crucial role in releasing hormones, regulating body temperature, hunger and thirst, fatigue, sleep, and circadian rhythms

c. VAGUS NERVE

- a. Cranial nerve X (10, of 12 pairs linking brain to body)
  - i. “Vagus” means wandering in Latin, an appropriate name, as vagus nerve is longest cranial nerve, running from brain stem to part of colon
  - ii. Also called ‘pneumogastric’ nerve
- b. Motor functions include:
  - i. Stimulating muscles in pharynx, larynx, and soft palate
    - 1. Provides movement functions for muscles involved in swallowing and speech — responsible for gag reflex
  - ii. Stimulating muscles in heart, helping lower resting heart rate

- iii. Stimulating involuntary contractions in digestive tract (peristalsis), including esophagus, stomach, and most of intestines, allowing food to move through and out
  - 1. Plays a role in satiation following food consumption — knocking out vagal nerve receptors has been shown to cause hyperphagia (greatly increased food intake)
  
- c. Other vagus nerve effects include:
  - i. Communication between brain and gut (enteric nervous system)
    - 1. When mind strongly stimulated, instantly affects the state of the viscera — under excitement will be much mutual action and reaction between these two most important organs of the body
  - ii. Fear management: vagus nerve sends information from gut to brain, linked to dealing with stress, anxiety, and fear — "gut feeling" — these signals help a person to recover from stressful and scary situations
  - iii. Communicates with diaphragm: stimulates relaxation with deep breathing
  - iv. Decreases inflammation: sends an anti-inflammatory signal to other parts of body.
  - v. Lowers heart rate and blood pressure: if vagus nerve overactive, can lead to heart unable to pump enough blood around body
  
- d. POLY-VAGAL THEORY (Stephen Porges):
  - i. Social engagement system (mixture of activation and calming — third way between Sympathetic and Parasympathetic NS) — requires a sense of safety
    - 1. Ventral vagal nerve affects middle ear, which filters out background noises to make it easier to hear human voice
    - 2. Also affects facial muscles and thus ability to make communicative facial expressions
    - 3. Finally, affects larynx and thus vocal tone and vocal patterning, helping humans create sounds that soothe one another
  - ii. Poly-vagal theory helps us understand both branches of vagus nerve calm body, in different ways
    - 1. Dorsal vagal system: "reptilian"/older — where Shutdown/"freeze or faint" response located
      - a. Fatigued muscles, lightheadedness
      - b. Become immobile or dissociated
      - c. In addition to affecting heart and lungs, affects body functioning below diaphragm and is involved in digestive issues

2. Ventral vagal system: “mammalian”/more evolved — where seek comfort and help, serves social engagement system
  - a. Dampens body’s regularly active state (eg reining in a horse: pull and release)
- b. HEART RATE VARIABILITY (HRV)
  - a. Physiological phenomenon of variation in time interval between heartbeats, determined by variation in beat-to-beat interval
  - b. Measures the relative balance between Sympathetic and Parasympathetic NS
  - c. **Try this experiment:** take resting heart rate, breathe deeply for 3 minutes, take heart rate again— heart rate effects breathing, breathing affects heart rate
  - d. Yoga helps regulate — yoga changes the way one breathes
    - i. Inhales stimulate Sympathetic Nervous System and Exhales stimulate Parasympathetic Nervous System
    - ii. Can improve problems with anger, depression, anxiety
      1. When HRV or our autonomic nervous system is well balanced, we have a reasonable degree of control over our response to minor frustrations
    - iii. Effects wide range of medical problems: high blood pressure, elevated stress hormone secretion, asthma, chronic low back pain
- c. PARTS OF BRAIN
  - a. Amygdala: danger signals trigger release of powerful stress hormones including cortisol and adrenaline, which increase heart rate, blood pressure, and rate of breathing, preparing us for fight or flight.
    - i. Acts as a smoke detector — a faulty one can make alarm go off at wrong times or all the time, ruining relationships
    - ii. Responsible for perception of emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness, as well as the controlling of aggression



*Hand model courtesy of Dan Siegel*

- b. Prefrontal cortex: enables you to observe what's going on and predict what will happen if you take certain actions and make a conscious choice — whether you are able to hover calmly and objectively over thoughts, feelings and emotions (mindfulness)

**Three most common responses to trauma:**

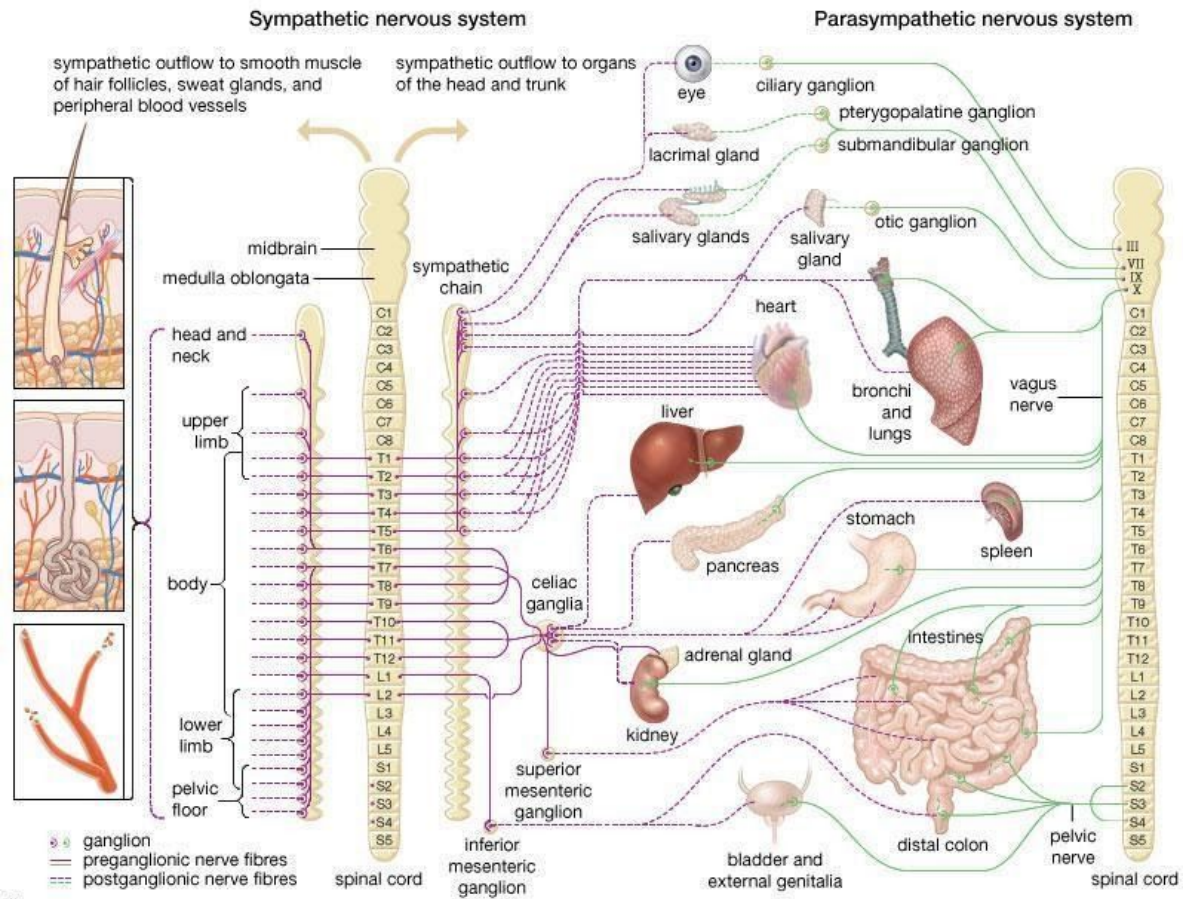
1. Sympathetic response: fight or flight. This can show up in arguments and even in an emotional shutdown.
2. Freeze or shutdown: related to primitive vagal, reptilian.
3. Submission: form of coping. Some ways this can show up are disassociation and substance abuse.

Experiential - creating a safe space physically - keeping the lights on, not using visualizations methods, bringing the student to the present moment.

Bottom up approach - being aware of breath work, a voluntary control over an involuntary mechanism. Observing one's body, bringing awareness to the body can bring you out of your mind.

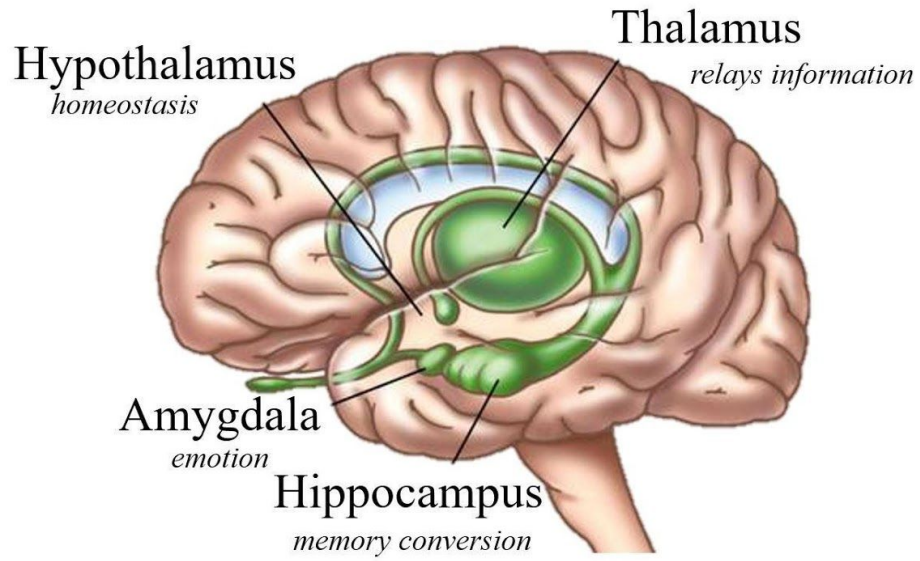
Top down approach - meta cognitive level.

<b>Organ</b>	<b>Effect (opposite for PsNS)</b>
Eye	Dilates pupil
Heart	Increases rate and force of contraction
Lungs	Dilates bronchioles via circulating adrenaline
Blood Vessels	Dilate in skeletal muscle (in animals). Constricts in gastrointestinal organs
Sweat Glands	Activates sweat secretion
Digestive tract	Inhibits peristalsis
Kidney	Increases renin secretion
Penis	Inhibits the process of subsiding arousal
Ductus deferens	Promotes emission prior to ejaculation





# The Limbic System



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## Basic Principles for Working with People Who Have Experienced Trauma

THAY's trauma-informed yoga classes offer the following 3 elements of Ashtanga Yoga as modalities of healing: 1) Gaze, 2) Breath, 3) Awareness of the body as the shape and space.

### Goals

#### • EMPOWERMENT

- Traumatic experiences/memories are disempowering as the event removed choice
- Therefore, always invite (never direct) and offer choices/options — encourage curiosity
  - Focus on feeling in the form, rather than perfecting
- Anything that is disempowering for the person who has experienced trauma is not healing
  - Create space for students to have their own experiences
  - Allow them to do what feels right, at this moment, in this shape, with their breath

#### • SAFETY

- Demo basic/beginner aspect of pose — let them start there and notice
- Muscle dynamics: contract, stretch/lengthen, rest
  - Play with muscle intensity on purpose — knowledge is power — try “tense and release”
- A single act of kindness creates well being

#### • SPACE — just because you are not doing something doesn't mean nothing is happening

- Old negative patterns do not go away — when we are tired or stressed the brain will go to that old pattern
- As we create positive patterns they grow and strengthen
- Small experiences repeated 10 times a day, for instance, rewires the brain by adding new positive states that contradict the old patterns

### Breath Work:

#### Can be very challenging — focus on expanding capacity for breath, finding a bit more space

- Natural breathing: begin to notice breath in and breath out: is air cool or warm? is your pace fast or slow? where do you feel it in your body, if at all?

#### Add more controlled breathing when client is comfortable, have been together for some time

- Ujjayi Pranayama: An ocean-like sound made by limiting the opening at the back of the throat (by half-closing the epiglottis which narrows the throat).
  - *“Inhale into cheekbones, and exhale like ‘HA’ but with closed mouth.”*
  - Benefits include: aeration of lungs, removal of phlegm, heating the body, soothing the nervous system, centering the mind, decreasing heart rate
- Alternate Nostril Breathing, *Nadi Shodhana*: A balancing breath that calms and purifies the nerves. Use ring finger and thumb of right hand to gently and alternately close off nostrils:
  - 1 cycle: inhale through both nostrils, close left, exhale right, pause at bottom of breath, inhale right, pause at top, close both, open left, exhale left, pause, inhale left, pause at top, close both, open right, exhale right
  - Can try mentally, without physical touch and restriction

### **Pace — go slower than you think**

- Go at a snail’s pace! Start with slow small movements isolating different body parts
- Take the time to really describe and let it sink in — even before get into pose
- May keep same sequence — predictability is grounding
- Keep even counts of breath — builds trust — helps student better choose to stay or go
- Intention: remain in present moment, to help people see themselves

### **Touch — not helpful for healing in group setting**

- Can upset others in the room simply watching
- Demo most basic poses — learn to mirror
- Repeat cuing rather than adjust
  - Don’t single a student out, offer as general alignment
  - Be very specific, especially as to why need to shift (ie health/safety of knee or hip)
- Perhaps offer opportunity for self-massage

### **Language — invitational**

- “Notice that . . .”
- “What happens next?”
- “You may want to try . . .”

- “If it feels good for you today . . . ”
- “How does this feel when . . . does it change?”
- When bring attention to area, lights it up — sensation already there, didn’t notice before — tune in
- Perhaps ask “What physical sensations are happening in relation to emotions? Name them. Focus on that sensation and see how it changes when you take a deep breath out.”

**Things to Stay Away From:**

- Lights off
- Walking around the room
- Correcting poses
- Even offering praise
- Singling a student out
- Forcing eyes shut
- Standing over/above any one
- Guided meditations that trigger the past, even thinking of a positive memory
- Encouraging people to “relax”/“get comfortable”
- Forcing laying down
- Sexually triggering poses and language
- Calming yoga poses that are not necessarily for someone who has been through trauma: Child’s Pose, Supta Baddha Konasana, Happy Baby
- Using language such as “you will feel,” or “you should feel”
  - Instead, allow experience — do not tell them what they should expect to feel
  - Let them know it is totally ok if they don’t feel anything
  - Want to normalize, not minimize — they can’t fail at yoga

**Safety Concerns if flashback occurs**

- Practice grounding to bring back to present
- Adjust height to be eye-level
- Seek a licensed helper

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## MINDFULNESS

*“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.” – Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)*

When we cultivate a practice of mindfulness, we develop our capacity to see things as they are, whether circumstances, emotions or thoughts. We recognize that all these things flow and change. As we pay attention we become more aware of our body sensations, thoughts, emotions and how they're interconnected. Strengthening this ability to notice and watch, we develop better ways to respond rather than react, to sit with what is rather than wish it were otherwise. — Important for yourself, especially as you teach, and for your students

### **Seven Attitudes of Mindfulness, adapted**

#### 1. Judgment Free Zone

- A place where a teacher or fellow students are not evaluating the ability of others in the room — rather, allowing them to have their own experience in their own body at their own pace
- Know that trauma reactions are a normal response to an event or series of events that were not normal at all
- One of our roles as teacher is normalizing the trauma reaction
- If you rush to change someone, you are showing your judgment. Let them be in their body, experiencing subtle or gross sensations, even none at all — we're not here to fix
- Encourage students to begin to notice mind's ability to judge (completely natural) and play with putting critical thoughts aside (in a box or outside the door)

#### 2. Patience

- The capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset — the wisdom to know life unfolds in its own time
- In class, this is a decision to devote oneself, with openness and curiosity, to the present moment; try to release any focus on the end result
- Watch your own personal thought on what it means to be “recovered” — everyone's on their own path/journey, and it's not easy
- Remind your students: “Practice patience with yourself as you let experience guide you.”
- Being patient with ourselves as a model for the students.

#### 3. Beginner Mindset

- Zen Buddhist concept, Shoshin: having an attitude of openness, eagerness, and lack of preconceptions when studying a subject, even when studying at an advanced level, just as a beginner in that subject would

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- Admit that we know nothing – from the very first session; let them know it is a self-guided practice. We go at the pace you think is right for you: you are the expert of your own body. This body ownership was stripped from them in the process of trauma.
- We are teaching mental flexibility as well as physical
- Be open to your students in the present moment, even the ones we think we “know.” Something that was okay everyday can suddenly not be. Keep asking. Each day totally new and different.

#### 4. Trust

- A firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of someone or something
- As a teacher, be clear about and follow through with commitments: arrive on time (before class), set up the room the same way, keep using inviting language
- For healing, we must each trust ourselves to the level of trusting that our mistakes were necessary along the path
- Encourage student to trust themselves, their feelings and the sensations of their body — better to trust own intuition than authority — look within for guidance and honor self

#### 5. Non-Striving

- To Strive = to manipulate, strain, or force events in order to achieve a certain outcome, state of being, or result
- To Non-Strive = try less and be more — with the goal to simply be yourself, all that you are
- Our efforts are not for a future result, but enacted with the desire to feel how we feel, in the present moment — keep getting to know yourself
- Striving leads to stress and worry thoughts. Practice watching what is right now. Release the habit of fixing.
- Learning how to tolerate discomfort and comfort with the same open mind and heart; attending to the moment-to-moment sensations and not trying to change what we might have labeled “unpleasant”
- Meet the student where she is — this includes her mood
- Check in with yourself before and after on the question of striving
- Must be honest with ourselves
- Be aware of transference and of wanting the student’s recovery more than they do — this results in burnout
- Every day, we must ask ourselves why we are teaching and why specifically TODAY?

#### 6. Acceptance

- Agreement with or belief in an idea, opinion or explanation; also, willingness to tolerate a difficult or unpleasant situation

### Three and a Half Acres Service and Trauma Yoga Training

- Accepting ourselves and our shortcomings within our pure intentions and remaining in the present moment: we are who we are in this moment and we can/will change at the right next moment
- Acceptance is not passive; it does not mean you have to like everything and abandon your principles and values
- We often waste a lot of time and energy denying what is fact — this creates more tension and prevents positive change occurring
- Acceptance is a willingness to see things as they are — you are much more likely to know what to do and have an inner conviction to act when you have a clear picture of what is actually happening
- Accepting our students and not rushing them. Modeling acceptance by acceptance in self.

#### 7. Letting Go

- Non-grasping of all things, people, circumstances, thoughts and feelings
- Teach students to let go in the moment, to be present with current asana, breath work, or discussion
- Let go of our own expectations, agenda, and history to be in the moment
- Holding on doesn't fix things; nor does replaying the past or wishing you/your life were different — these habits are holding you back, as familiar and comfortable as they may seem
- Practice releasing a negative thought/story for just one yoga pose, as you follow the breath instead — add on as you're able, continuing to expand your capacity to forgive the past

## CULTURAL COMPETENCE (Harlem United)

### What is Cultural Competence?

- An ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds.

### What is Culture?

- An integrated pattern of human behavior including:
  - Thoughts / Communication
  - Roles / Relationships
  - Beliefs / Values
  - Practices / Customs

### Levels of Cultural Competence

- Acknowledgement: able to see differences
- Tolerance: aware that differences exist, and accepting of them
- Celebration: we celebrate differences

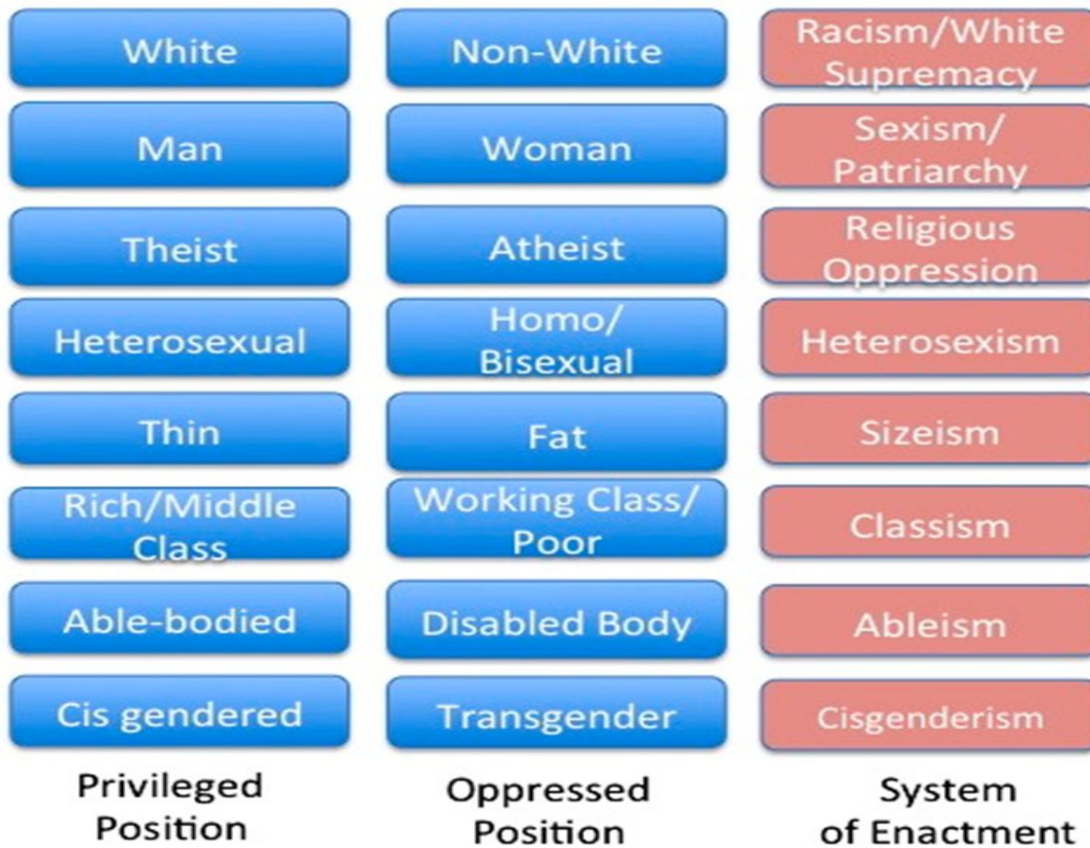
### Becoming Culturally Competent: 3 components

- Knowledge: The fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association
- Awareness: Brings to light our own beliefs, biases, privilege, judgments, and limitations that can ultimately impact our ability to do work with others
- Skills: Tools developed through training, supervision, and self-awareness used to assist in finding own way of growing

### Privilege

- Privilege is unearned advantage: it operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups. It is also often overlooked and not discussed.
- What privilege do you have?
- How does it provide you unearned advantages? In schools, jobs, stores, and other social settings?





### **Oppression**

- Combination of prejudice and institutional power:
  - Discriminates against target groups
  - Benefits dominant groups
- Enables dominant groups to exert control over target groups by limiting:
  - Rights, freedom, access to basic resources such as health care, education, employment, and housing

### **Race**

- A social construct based on the perceived similarity between people's appearances; historically used as a tool of oppression

### **Racism**

- A system of structured inequality where benefits of society are available to individuals according to their presumed membership in particular racial groups

### **Ethnicity**

- Identification with others on the basis of a common ancestral, social, cultural, or national experience.
- Members of an ethnic group may or may not share a racial identification and may or may not appear to share an ethnicity

### **Gender**

- Identity: how a person views their gender
- Role: how much a person adheres to masculine and feminine norms set by the society they live in
- Expression: how a person chooses to present themselves to the world (may be conforming or non-conforming to societal norms)

### **Sexual Orientation**

- A pattern of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to men, women, both genders, neither gender, or another gender

### **Think about these identities:**

- Age
- Ability status
- Health status
- Country of origin
- Documentation status
- Marital status
- Religion
- Size

### **Examining Difference**

- Reflect on your earliest memory of being different.
  - Draw a picture or brainstorm words that depict this memory.
  - Reflect on the who, what, where, why.
- Share your discoveries with the group, if comfortable.

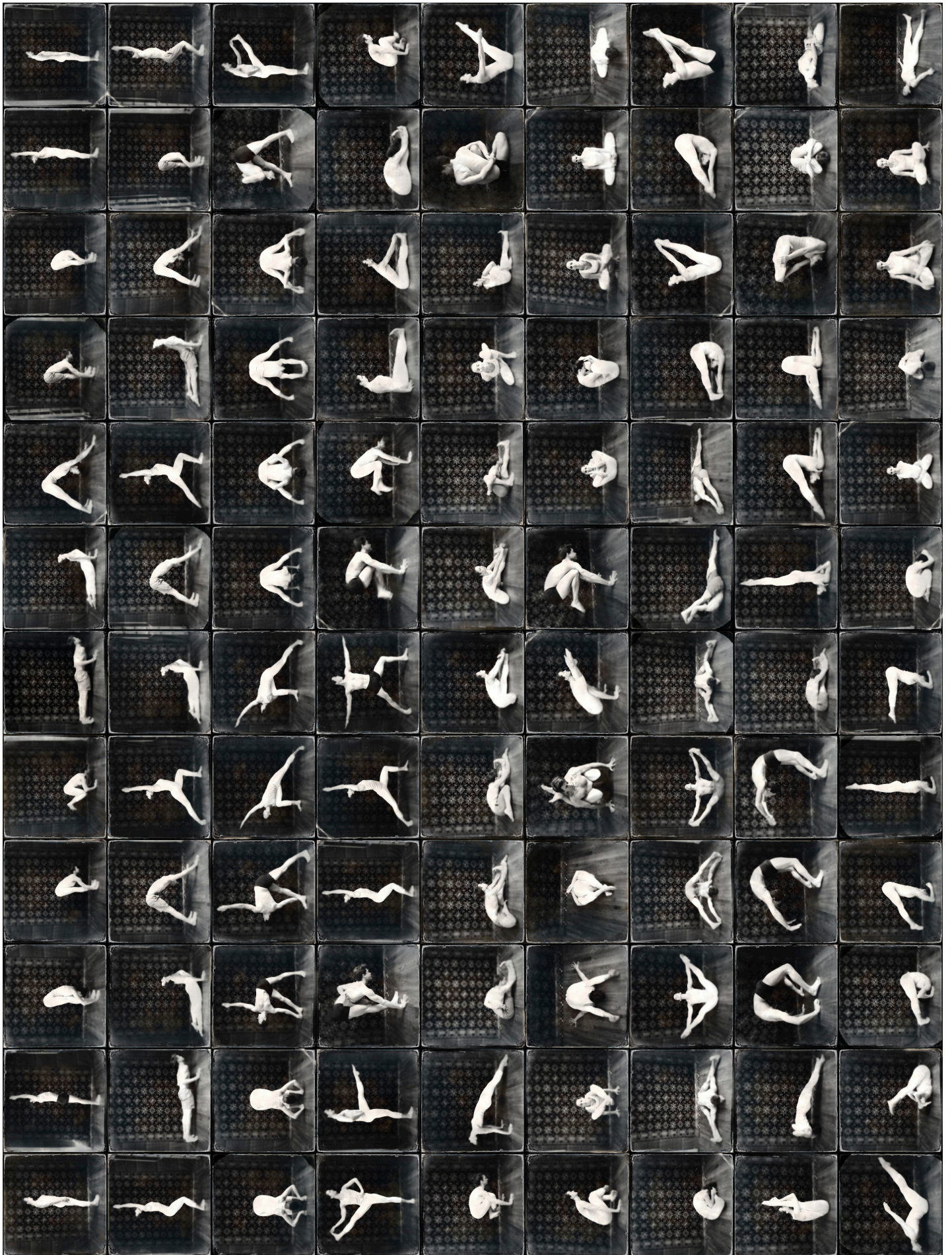
*Don't forget! Becoming culturally competent is an ongoing process.*

*Cultural competency involves three components: knowledge, awareness and skills.*

*Understanding privilege and oppression is essential.*

*Know your "blind spots."*

**How can you begin to practice and develop the awareness that you gained today?**



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## Suggested Asana Sequences for a Trauma-Informed Class

Preparation / teaching checklist:

- Importance of going over a body scan, areas to avoid
- Go over an opening transcript with language and provide an example
- Make clear the sun salutations, the options, and be sure to demo first
- Importance of mirroring (maybe short practice to explore that without touching, clear with verbal adjustments)
- Importance of metronome (maybe an exercise to focus on just metronome)
- Only saying what you see, staying away from too much praise of student

Settle In, Get Grounded/Present:

breath work . . . why yoga . . . about getting curious and inviting . . . begin linking breath to small movements

Surya Namaskar A (modified)

Surya Namaskar B (modified)

Standing Poses (modify as needed):

pada hastasana

padangusthasana

trikonasana / parivrtti trikonasana

uttitha parskonasana

prasarita padottanasana

utthitha parsvottanasana

Finishing Poses:

Sukhasana, forward fold

Chin mudra

Utplutihih

Final Rest: 5min, again tense and release/body scan . . . notice what, if anything, different . . .

continue to tune in . . .

## CHAIR YOGA ROUTINE

Coming into the space: Sitting in front of chair. Feet flat. Rolling out thighs for more sit bone surface area.

Exploring breath: What moves? How can we breathe into different areas of the body using our hands to help guide us?

Sun breathing.

Face exercises.

Twists.

Mini Sun Salutations.

Standing Poses in the seat.

Standing poses using chair for support.

Balancing poses.

Leg lifts.

Navasana and core poses from chair.

Contract and relax.

Centering, and closing

# Carl Dawson's Chair Yoga

The following table lists the 24 poses shown in the image, organized by row and column:

Row	Column 1 (Left)	Column 2 (Right)
1	Forward Bend	Hamstring Lift
2	Seated Leg-Lift	Forward Bend/Hip Opener
3	Leg Stretch	Lunge
4	Hip Opener (outer)	Tree Pose
5	Hip Opener	Bridge Pose
6	Hip Opener	Restore
7	Shoulder Stretch	Hamstring Stretch
8	Bottom Lift	Hamstring Stretch
9	Bottom Lift	Hamstring Stretch
10	Bottom Lift	Hamstring Stretch
11	Bottom Lift	Hamstring Stretch
12	Bottom Lift	Hamstring Stretch

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## YOGA FACTS

**from Yoga Journal: “Destress with Yoga,” Linda Knittel, updated 4/5/17**

<https://www.yogajournal.com/health/beginner-s-bliss>

Practicing yoga—even for the very first time—can normalize cortisol levels that are either too high or too low.

The deep breathing in yoga elicits something called 'the relaxation response,' which invokes the restorative functions of the body.

When researchers measured the cortisol levels before and after the yoga class—which included postures such as Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand), Salabhasana (Locust Pose), Vrksasana (Tree Pose) and Halasana (Plow Pose)—they discovered a significant decrease after the class.

**from Dr Sara Gottfried, MD: “5 FAQs about Yoga and Hormones; Yoga Changes Your Adrenaline, Cortisol, and Melatonin,” Sara Gottfried, 4/25/16**

<http://www.saragottfriedmd.com/5-faqs-about-yoga-and-hormones-yoga-changes-your-adrenaline-cortisol-and-melatonin/>

Beyond [decreasing] adrenaline and cortisol, yoga raises melatonin after three months of practice, which may help you sleep more soundly and restoratively. One small but interesting study found that yoga helps women when their hormones are out of whack by correcting thyroid, prolactin, luteinizing hormone, and follicle stimulating hormone.

**from Michelle Dwyer, Health Coach and Nutrition Consultant: “Yoga Helps Lower Cortisol,” Michelle Dwyer, 10/28/13** <http://healthcoachmichelle.com/health/yoga-helps-to-lower-cortisol/>

When you take those deep breaths, you are lowering your cortisol and adrenaline levels and increasing our oxygen flow to the brain. Inverting by putting your feet above your heart will also lower your stress responses by activating your parasympathetic nervous system.

**from Bamboo Moves, Yoga Studio in Englewood, NJ: “Yoga Lowers Cortisol Levels,” Charlemagne, 9/7/16** <https://bamboomovesyoga.com/yoga-lowers-cortisol-levels/>

Normally, the adrenal glands secrete cortisol in response to an acute crisis, which temporarily boosts immune function. If your cortisol levels stay high even after the crisis, they can compromise the immune system.

Temporary boosts of cortisol help with long-term memory, but chronically high levels undermine memory and may lead to permanent changes in the brain.

Additionally, excessive cortisol has been linked with major depression, osteoporosis (it extracts calcium and other minerals from bones and interferes with the laying down of new bone), high blood pressure, and insulin resistance.



**from National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI)**

- 1. “A Single Session of Hatha Yoga Improves Stress Reactivity and Recovery After an Acute Psychological Stress Task — A Counterbalances, Randomized-Crossover Trial in Healthy Individuals” 10/31/17** <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29154056>

Our results show that a single video-instructed session of hatha yoga was able to improve stress reactivity and recovery from an acute stress task in healthy individuals. These positive preliminary findings encourage further investigation in at-risk populations in which the magnitude of effects may be greater, and support the use of yoga for stress reactivity and recovery.

- 2. “Yoga In Correctional Settings: A Randomized Controlled Study,” 10/16/17**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29085307>

Yoga has been associated with the reduction of depressive symptoms, anxiety, stress, anger as well as in the increased ability of behavioral control. When a yoga study was performed in nine Swedish prisons, inmates had less perceived stress, better sleep quality, an increased psychological and emotional well-being, less aggressive, and antisocial behavior.

- 3. “Brief Training in Mindfulness Meditation Reduces Symptoms in Patients with Chronic or Recurrent Lifetime History of Depression: A Randomized Controlled Study,” 10/12/17**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29078199>

Mindfulness meditation reduces symptoms in patients with a chronic or recurrent lifetime history of depression.

- 4. “Effects of Mindfulness Training on Emotional and Physiologic Recovery from Induced Negative Affect,” 8/4/17** <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28923751>

Mindfulness training has been shown to improve psychological well-being and physical health. Studies indicate that mindfulness training may lead to an enhanced emotional experience coupled with the ability to recovery quickly from negative emotional states.

**from NPR Ed: How Learning Happens: “The Role of Yoga in Healing Trauma,” Anya Kamenetz, 6/2/17**

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/06/02/527570310/the-role-of-yoga-in-healing-trauma>

A new report from the Center on Poverty and Inequality at Georgetown University’s law school, says that young women who have been through, there is mounting evidence that yoga can have specific benefits.

The study focuses on girls in the juvenile justice system. It also reviews more than 40 published studies on the mental health benefits of yoga.

Findings:

- Fights decrease in juvenile detention wards after adolescents participate in yoga.
- Juvenile justice system young girls request medication less often and have fewer physical complaints after participating in yoga.
- Girls and young women who do yoga report better self-esteem and develop skills that they could use in stressful situations — taking care of their own children, for example.

Since the effects of trauma can be physical, "body-mind" interventions, like yoga, may be able to uniquely address them. Regulated breathing, for example, calms the parasympathetic nervous system. Practicing staying in the moment counteracts some of the dissociative effects of trauma. And the physical activity of yoga, of course, can directly improve health.

Yoga that is specifically designed for victims of trauma has modifications when compared with traditional yoga teaching.

**from Kripalu: Center for Yoga and Health: “How Yoga Helps Heal Trauma: Q & A with Bessel van der Kolk”** <https://kripalu.org/resources/how-yoga-helps-heal-trauma-qa-bessel-van-der-kolk>

When people are traumatized, they become afraid of their physical sensations; their breathing becomes shallow, and they become uptight and frightened about what they’re feeling inside. When you slow down your breathing with yoga, you can increase your heart rate variability, and that decreases stress. Yoga opens you up to feeling every aspect of your body’s sensations. It’s a gentle, safe way for people to befriend their bodies, where the trauma of the past is stored.

Studies show that yoga is equally as beneficial—or more beneficial—than the best possible medications in alleviating traumatic stress symptoms.

**from Uplift, We Are One: “The Power of Trauma Sensitive Yoga,” Azriel ReShel, 6/7/17**

Trauma experts say that virtually every person on the planet has experienced some degree and form of trauma in their lives; we all carry trauma in our bodies and in our DNA.

Increasingly, trauma therapists are turning to yoga for its indisputable and remarkable effects on people struggling with the effects of trauma.

Trauma Sensitive Yoga helps students have a heightened sense of body awareness, embodiment, choice and empowerment. These simple outcomes have a profound effect on trauma survivors and are proving more potent than other previously used modalities for trauma.

Trauma Sensitive Yoga is vital in helping people who have experienced trauma to learn how to calm the mind and gain safety in their body by noticing and learning to tolerate physical sensations.

Trauma Sensitive Yoga brings back a sense of empowerment and choice for people who may have felt choiceless and powerless.

### Three and a Half Acres Service and Trauma Yoga Training

Yoga has greater beneficial effects in alleviating traumatic stress symptoms as the best possible medications. One study with a group of women who had suffered domestic violence, and were exposed to a 12-week trauma sensitive yoga course of one class a week, showed a reduction in severity of PTSD symptoms and frequency of dissociative symptoms, and gains in vitality and body attunement.

In other research, scientists found patients who had been in therapy for over ten years and were placed on a trauma sensitive yoga program had a significant decrease in symptoms of PTSD.

<https://upliftconnect.com/power-of-trauma-sensitive-yoga/>

#### **from USNews & World Report: “How Yoga Helps Survivors of Trauma: Trauma Informed Yoga Provides Tools for People to Deal With Emotional Scars, Experts Say,” Ruben Casteneda, 3/29/17**

The meditative aspect of trauma-informed yoga “changes the way you react to triggers and gives you skills to manage physical or emotional symptoms that occur due to long-lasting trauma. . . . Yoga may help with emotional stability and assist in changing your physiology so that physical symptoms are lessened. It gets you out of your amygdala, the part of the brain where a lot of your fear response is located. Instead, you’re focusing on the here and now and using your pre-frontal cortex, so it’s like you’re moving away from the fear while being mindful.”

<https://health.usnews.com/wellness/mind/articles/2017-03-29/how-yoga-helps-survivors-of-trauma>

#### **from The Breathe Network: Building Resilience Through Embodied Approaches to Healing: “The Journey to Heal: Understanding Trauma-Sensitive Yoga,” Alexis Marbach and Zabie Yamasaki**

Trauma can create both an emotional and physical imprint on the body; unresolved emotional trauma creates “issues in our tissues”, manifesting as physical symptoms such as migraines, nervous ticks, clenched shoulders/neck/jaw, a sunken chest, and a heavy heart. Trauma survivors often display physical characteristics as a result of a somatic reaction to emotional distress, dysregulation, and hypo- or hyper-arousal. Students may find that their throat constricts, their shoulders move up, their range of motion becomes limited, all as a result of experiencing trauma.

While the experience of trauma and its aftermath can feel isolating, yoga provides an opportunity to be physically in sync with others. Moving in unison with fellow classmates or with an instructor can help re-establish interpersonal (and intrapersonal) rhythms. A trauma-sensitive yoga practice can increase connection with the breath, enabling the brain to become less aroused, and relaxation to begin. Yoga can rebuild connections with both the insula and prefrontal cortex, strengthening the mind-body connection. The practice can help a student to regain their sense of control and ownership over their own body and their own experience.

<http://www.thebreathenetwork.org/the-journey-to-heal-understanding-trauma-sensitive-yoga>

## FURTHER READING

- Yoga Mala: The Original Teachings of Ashtanga Yoga Master by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois
- Yoga and the Quest for the True Self by Stephen Cope
- Trauma-Sensitive Yoga in Therapy: Bringing the Body into Treatment by David Emerson
- Overcoming Trauma Through Yoga: Reclaiming Your Body by David Emerson and Elizabeth Hopper, PhD
- The iRest Program for Healing PTSD: A Proven-Effective Approach to Using Yoga Nidra Meditation and Deep Relaxation Techniques to Overcome Trauma by Richard C. Miller, PhD
- The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.
- Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers: The Acclaimed Guide to Stress, Stress-Related Diseases, and Coping by Robert Sapolsky
- The Giraffe and the Jackal Within: about Nonviolent Communication by Justine Mol
- Yoga for Emotional Trauma: Meditations and Practices for Healing Pain and Suffering by Mary NurrieStearns, LCSW, RYT
- Teaching Trauma Sensitive Yoga: A Practical Guide by Brendon Abram
- Trauma Sensitive Yoga by Dagmar Harle
- Yoga for Everyone: 50 Poses for Every Type of Body by Dianne Bondy
- Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence: Understanding and Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race by Derald Wing Sue
- The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander











