

Yoga and mindfulness:

A path to self-regulation

Regular yoga and mindfulness practice can support children's development in multiple ways, writes children's yoga teacher Katie Briance.

Structured yoga and mindfulness programs are more than fun and games; they complement the *Early Years Learning Framework* and support children to develop physically, mentally and emotionally.

One of our families recently commented, 'The most valuable part is the tools that yoga provides them to recognise and deal with big emotions'.

As a yoga and mindfulness teacher delivering programs in early childhood education and care services, it fills me with joy when children share stories of how they've used their breathing skills to calm their mind or defuse a situation. Recently, a four-year-old child told me about a situation she had with her older sibling, and instead of getting upset and crying, she used her 'finger breathing' to calm herself—then showed her sibling how to do it, too.

Connecting mind, body and breath

Finger breathing is a simple meditative exercise which is often learned by young children. It involves focusing on multiple senses and one's breathing at the same time. There are a few key elements:

- In this exercise you will use one finger to trace the outline of the other five digits.
- Inhale slowly and calmly, taking a couple of seconds to trace up the outside of the little finger from the base to the tip, then trace down the other side as you exhale slowly.
- Repeat with each of the other fingers, moving across the hand until you finally exhale, tracing down the outside of the thumb. Then go back the other way.
- Throughout the exercise, look at what you are doing and listen to your breathing.



Yoga and mindfulness programs empower children to take control of their thoughts, feelings and emotions. This assists them in developing the ability to self-regulate, which is a key predictor for future success. Children feel secure with routine and predictability. When life changes happen, such as moving house, beginning in a new early childhood service, or a change to family living arrangements, it can be difficult for children to adapt. Yoga and mindfulness give children the tools to deal with both large and small changes.

When children have a heightened awareness of how they are feeling and tools to help them through tricky times, it provides them with space to focus on their learning. They can focus for longer on activities. This also sets them up for a successful transition to school.

Children of all abilities can practise yoga and mindfulness. It can be an invaluable way for them to relax their bodies and minds, release their emotions and completely let go of anything they've been holding on to.

Mental health awareness is highlighting the many challenges that children are facing today. Yoga and mindfulness teaches children to love themselves as they are. It develops robust resilience and boosts self-esteem while creating confidence to build positive relationships, and to reach out and ask for help when it's needed.

It is widely agreed that the first five years shapes a child's life. Introducing children's yoga and mindfulness programs within early childhood education and care can help them get off to the best start.