FAMILY ACTIVITY: Animal Yoga

During this activity, youth and family members will explore animal-themed yoga poses, yoga breathing, and the health benefits of yoga. Yoga breathing is a type of breathing that connects the mind to body and is critical to yoga practice. Youth will learn two yoga breaths that can be used while practicing their yoga poses and outside of yoga to calm their bodies, minds, and emotions. Youth will then learn animal-themed yoga poses, and will be encouraged to focus on their yoga breathing while they get independent time to practice the poses. Finally, youth will learn about the health benefits of yoga including stretching and strengthening muscles, calming bodies, minds, and emotions, and allowing individuals to explore types of movement and physical activity that feel good for their bodies.

MATERIALS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Materials

- Yoga mats or squishy mats (optional, but recommended)
- Printed Animal Yoga picture cards (see end of the document) - print front to back or tape or glue cards together so that the animal picture is on one side and instructions are on the other.

Instructions

Begin with an introduction to yoga breathing

1. Introduce youth to the importance of breathing in yoga

   - Breathing is one of the most important parts of yoga since it keeps us focused on what we’re doing, which is mindfulness
   - It can also help us calm our minds and emotions

2. Invite youth to find a comfortable place on the floor and sit cross-legged with their back straight

3. Guide youth through three types of breathing - normal breathing, yoga breathing and “Let it Go” breathing

   1. Normal breathing: for 30 seconds, have youth breathe as they normally would with their eyes closed
   2. Yoga breathing: with eyes closed, breathe in for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 4 seconds and exhale through your nose for 4 seconds. Repeat 4 times
   3. “Let it Go” breathing: With eyes closed, breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 2 seconds, exhale through your mouth letting out a big sigh. Repeat this 4 times.

4. Reflect

   - Which breath felt the best?
   - When might you use these breaths and how might they make you feel?

In yoga, yoga breathing is used to help guide us through different poses and help us tune into our practice.

Outside of yoga, we can use breath to help us regulate our emotions. When we are feeling stressed, upset, or anxious practicing either of these breaths can help us feel better and react to a situation after we’ve had time to calm down.
Transition to animal yoga poses

1. Ask your youth if they have ever done yoga before
2. Share basic information about yoga with youth

- Yoga is a type of physical activity that stretches and strengthens our bodies while calming and focusing our minds.
- Yoga is great because we can always change poses to make them feel better for our bodies.
- There is also no right or wrong way for us to do a pose, since our bodies are all different.
- I just ask that we all try our best and focus on what our bodies are doing and not on what others are doing.

3. Demonstrate cat cow, downward dog, and tortoise yoga poses and invite youth to practice alongside you

Reference the animal yoga cards for step by step directions for each pose.

4. Reflect

- Which pose felt the best for you?
- How do you think that yoga can be a part of a healthy lifestyle?

Finish with a discussion of the health benefits of yoga

1. Ask youth to share which parts of their bodies they felt that they were using while moving through the yoga poses in the last activity
2. Share the physical benefits of yoga with youth

One benefit of yoga is that it strengthens and stretches our body as we move through different poses.

Share specific information about which parts of the body our yoga poses engaged, if desired.

- When we did Cat and Cow Pose, we were strengthening and stretching our arms, back and neck.
- When we did Downward Dog Pose we were stretching and strengthening our stomach, leg, and arm muscles.
- When we did Tortoise Pose, we were stretching our hips, back and arms.

3. Ask youth how they felt while doing yoga
4. Share the mental benefits of yoga with youth

Yoga can help us practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, right now without judgement.

Yoga can also help us calm our minds and emotions just like we talked about when we practiced our yoga breathing.

5. Share that yoga can also help us learn what kinds of physical activity and movement feel good for our bodies

Just like we don’t all like the same kind of food, our bodies don’t all like the same kind of movement or physical activity. Yoga can help us be more aware of what feels good to our bodies and can help us learn how to make changes to movement and exercise so that it feels good for our bodies.
QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

1. What did you like about yoga? What did you dislike?
2. Would you like to do more yoga in the future?
3. How does yoga compare to other ways that you like to be active?
4. Why do you think that yoga poses are named after animals?

IDEAS TO INCLUDE YOUNGER SIBLINGS! (ADAPTATIONS FOR 0-5 YEAR OLDS)

- Toddlers and preschoolers can easily join in and attempt basic yoga postures. Focus on safety (Little ones are adventurous, so it’s important to exercise caution, inversions like head stands are for experts only). As you try the postures (called asanas) talk about being aware of your breath during each of them.

MODIFICATIONS & EXTENSIONS

Modifications
- This session is most age appropriate for youth ages 5-8 years old but can be modified for older youth using the suggestions below
  - Add two additional yoga poses - butterfly and cobra. Instructions for all poses can be found at the end of this document.
  - Invite youth to create their own yoga sequences using the animal yoga poses, then work through these sequences
  - To practice communication and leadership skills, invite youth to guide you or other family members through the yoga sequence that they created using verbal and visual cues

Extensions
- If your youth would like to practice more yoga, check out some kids yoga resources below
  - YogaEd on Youtube
  - Alo Yoga on Youtube
  - Omtastic (you will need to enter the password OmtasticLibrary19 to get free access to their library of resources)
Cat and Cow

1. Begin in tabletop (on hands and knees with a flat back)
2. Gently arch your back up while looking down at the ground. This is Cat pose.
3. Move your body back to neutral tabletop.
4. Next, cave your back in while gently looking up. This is Cow pose.
5. Move your body back to neutral tabletop.
6. Cycle through poses as many times as desired.

Table Pose
Cat Pose
Cow Pose
Add the yoga poses below to make the activity more advanced.

**Downward Dog**
1. Begin in tabletop (on hands and knees with a flat back).
2. Lift your knees off the ground and push your hips into the air. Stand on your tip-toes with your knees slightly bent, pushing your hips as far back as is comfortable.
3. Hold for as long as your comfortable, remembering to breathe. If you ever need a break, simply lower your knees.

**Tortoise Pose**
1. Begin in tabletop (on hands and knees with a flat back).
2. Slowly lower your body to the floor while slightly widening your knees. Your chest should rest between your knees.
3. Sink your hips to the ground as must as is comfortable.
4. Extend your arms in front of you.

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Table Pose

Downward Dog Pose

Table Pose

Tortoise Pose

Add the yoga poses below to make the activity more advanced.
**Cobra Pose**

1. Begin laying on your stomach.
2. Place your hands next to your armpits, flat on the ground.
3. While pressing into the ground, gently lift your head and chest to the sky. This doesn’t have to be a large lift!
4. Gently lower your chest and head to the ground.

**Butterfly Pose**

1. Sit with your legs straight in front of you.
2. Bend your knees and pull your heels toward your pelvis.
3. Drop your knees out to the sides and press the bottoms of your feet together.

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