

## Yoga for “Special Kids”

***KAY IS NOT A TRAINING FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN***, however, if you work with high functioning kids with issues such as ADD, ADHD, Autism, Sensory issues, some speech issues, Asperger’s – you WILL be introduced to numerous creative ways to engage your kids and help to bring the benefits of Yoga to them. Below we will share with you some information from our very own trainees who work with special needs children and some articles we found helpful on the internet. KAY does not train people to work with special needs populations, however we do have MANY activities that have been proven beneficial by our students. Here’s what they have to say about Yoga for special kids and our program.

### **Yoga for children with Down syndrome.**

**By Kristine Sigler KAY Certified 2012**

I am not an expert, I am just a mom of a child with Down syndrome that teaches children’s Yoga. In my person opinion, when working with children with special needs, it is very helpful to have a basic understanding of sign language. Many children are unable to communicate at young ages and if they are, it could sometimes be difficult to understand them. It is very common that these children learn and are able to use different signs. For example, my son (2 years old) says about 4 words but signs about 9 and understands and additional 4-5. I think this is helpful because it eliminates frustration for the child and for you. You may not be able to understand why a child is upset or that something such as a pose, hurts them but with simple understanding of sign, they can tell you and you will understand.

As an advocate for my son and for other children with Down syndrome, I have to add this little blurb..... <http://ndscenter.org/resources/new-and-expectant-parents/language-guidelines/>

“Down syndrome is a common genetic variation which usually causes delays in physical, intellectual and language development. The exact causes of the chromosomal rearrangement and primary prevention of Down syndrome are currently unknown. Down syndrome is one of the leading clinical causes of

cognitive delay in the world--it is not related to race, nationality, religion or socio-economic status. There is a wide variation in cognitive abilities, behaviour, and physical development in individuals with Down syndrome. Each individual has his/her own unique personality, capabilities and talents. 30%-50% of individuals with Down syndrome have heart defects and 8%-12% have gastrointestinal tract abnormalities present at birth. Most of these defects are now correctable by surgery". National Down Syndrome Congress

Yoga helps children with Down syndrome with basic motor skills, communication skills and cognitive skills. It helps them develop balance, concentration, a better understanding of their surroundings and build confidence. There are many characteristics and health related problems. Some of these are as follows:

- |                     |                          |           |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Developmental Delay | Heart Defects            |           |
| Hypothyroidism      |                          |           |
| Celiac Disease      | Respiratory Infections   |           |
| Hearing Problems    |                          |           |
| Dental Problems     | Depression or Behavioral | Scoliosis |
| Joint Dislocation   | Weak Joints/ankles       |           |

Atlanto-Axial-Instability - weakness and instability in the spinal column of the neck which can result in paralysis or death. There is a screening for this however it is done between the ages of four and six.

Children with Down syndrome receive many therapies such as Physical, Occupational, Speech, Music, Special Education, Body Mind Centering and Craniosacral therapy. Yoga has a lot of these same benefits. Since, I am not a physician, I like to play it safe when it comes to poses. Since, some may have a negative effect on children with Down syndrome, I stay away from things like inverted positions, headstands, back bends and overly complicated poses. KAY provides additional examples in their "Poses and Practices to Avoid" section. Therefore, although I would stay away from some of the poses (as mentioned above) KAY provides a section entitled "Poses for Ailments" which can be very helpful for an individual's needs. If you compare the list with the above health problems you will see that you KAY manual is very helpful, you just have to know the illnesses associated with their needs. In my opinion, you really just need to have a better understanding of the child and their needs. The big ones would be colds or sinus, digestion, balance, concentration, calming and bonding. Don't forget your Salutation to the Sun! In fact, you may be surprised with their

flexibility and ability to do poses that you can't quite do. For example, you could ask a child to sit in flower pose and before you know it and with great ease, both feet are behind their head!

Aside from poses, pranayama is also very important! Based on the child, alternate nostril breathing, vowel/number breathing and Bumble Bee Breath can be difficult. However, this does not mean, don't try it! I'm just saying that it may be difficult for the child. I continuously try Bumble Bee Breath because I feel that for children with sinus issues, the vibration you feel also helps to loosen up all of the congestion they may have. I place my fingers on my son's face and get him to sing and will often do the same for the children in my class. This also gives them a more hands on explanation of what they need to do. Pompoms!!! Bring out the Pompoms, this helps them with the breathing technique but also gives them a goal and an end result because your explanation of pranayama may not be important to them. Lastly, who really doesn't like bubbles??? It may just take a bit more or some additional effort to get the children interested.

Overall, children with disabilities like and/or dislike what any other child their age like and dislike. So, in other words, teach a KAY class to a child with Down syndrome just as you would teach any other class while keeping in mind their specific needs and the poses to stay away from. It may just take them a bit longer to learn a pose and to be able to do the pose. Yoga teaches us patience and that's what we need with any child but maybe a bit more with others. They too will want to sing, read a story, dance, act silly and enjoy Yoga class. For me, the goal is to not look at the class as being different but to plan accordingly and walk into the class just like I would any other.