

# Safe Teaching Guidelines I: Health & Safety guidelines for yoga class teaching and professional practice



Yoga is a discipline and means unity of body, mind and spirit. It can feed into many faiths and belief systems allowing the student to develop greater self-awareness and a more balanced approach to life.

1. Assess the class (i.e age range, physical condition, yoga experience). Find out if any students have a medical condition you should be made aware of reminding them to inform you if they experience any discomfort or pain during the class.
2. With beginner students, work first with asanas that are clear and simple to follow. Keep your instructions minimal and establish eye contact with your group. Cueing the breath must be simple, remembering that if they are beginners, focusing on their breathing will probably be a new experience. Introducing the breath throughout the class will promote focus, a quieter mind and help get each student grounded. As the students progress in their classes, more complex asanas and pranayama techniques can be introduced as they get stronger and their level of understanding deepens.
3. Yoga students in a general class need a balanced approach, not necessarily a focus on something that you are finding particularly interesting in your own practice.
4. Stand where you can be seen and heard, and make every effort to put your class at ease.
5. Learn each of the students' names, keeping notes on relevant details such as injuries, conditions. These notes must be kept securely and are confidential and should not be discussed with anyone unless the student has given prior consent. Notes should refer to the yoga practice you have done with them, or plan to do with the next time you see them, and should not include any personal comments or information.
6. Keep a record of attendance with their contact details and possibly next of kin in case of emergency and of what you have taught. It is wise to keep these records for at least three years.
7. There should be no discrimination against anyone's race, gender, creed etc, no harassment or any type of victimization of anyone within your yoga teaching circle (colleagues) or your yoga classes (students).
8. Any type of verbal, behavioral or physical abuse is unacceptable.
9. Any physical contact (see *Safe Teaching Guidelines 2*) with a student should be entirely appropriate to the yoga environment and to the student's age (ie minors).
10. Keep verbal instructions simple, avoid 'yoga speak'. Try to think of different ways to express the yoga principles, so your instructions do not get too stuck in a groove.
11. Share your attention evenly with all students. Your relationships should be based on openness, honesty, mutual trust and respect.
12. Prepare a class plan to include an overall objective ie if introducing a new and/or difficult asana, plan a suitable and progressive warm up and asanas that prepare the students.

13. Plan your class with a beginning (warm up), a mid-section (asanas that stretch and strengthen which require the body to be warm. This section would include inverted asanas), and a winding down with emphasis on sitting asanas and twists. Be sure to adopt 'pose and counterpose' movements throughout the class.
14. Keep the content of each class well balanced with use of standing, supine, prone, kneeling, all fours, forward bending, back bending, twisting, inverted asanas, balances, sitting. Always talk through how to ground and breathe in each asana. Allow time to rest between asanas if needed.
15. When planning the class, allow time for demonstration, and for looking at the students.
16. Always leave time for breathing/pranayama (as this is the first step towards meditation) and relaxation.
17. Be realistic about your expectations of what your students can or can't do, remembering that the students on average come to class only once a week.
18. Asanas often need weekly repetition to enable the student to assimilate. Don't over correct.
19. Make notes of asanas and sequences which calm or energise students and self, or which can work well at releasing specific areas of the body. This can be an invaluable resource.
20. If you are using props, make sure that you have enough for the whole class.
21. Respect body differences and help your students to appreciate this side of yoga.
22. Respect students' independence, give them confidence to practice. Encouragement helps them find the courage to practice themselves.
23. Acknowledge openly how we all learn different things at different times, and that we learn differently. Each day our bodies will reflect both the previous days' activities and the present day's bundle of physical and emotional baggage. We have to be patient with ourselves in yoga, and in life, and not always expect to 'be' the same.
24. Should you find that you have an 'awkward' student, you can gently suggest to them that this may not be the right class, offer alternatives. Be aware that sometimes students can infect the whole attitude of a class. As the teacher you have to politely and firmly learn how to deal with this type of situation and maintain good, professional boundaries.
25. Keep use of imagery simple especially in savasana when people are very vulnerable to suggestion.
26. Do not try to be a 'guru' or a 'therapist' it will wear you out and we are not equipped for these roles. We are yoga teachers. Yoga is therapeutic but if a student has problems- whether physical or emotional that cannot be dealt with in a class situation, suggest that they see their doctor or practitioner. It is helpful to build up a practitioner index from personal recommendations, so that you can recommend to students.
27. Sometimes we have to be able to explain why we say 'No' to them doing an asana. Teachers need to be firm and clear with such explanations.
28. Keep the room you are teaching in safe - it must be clean, warm and clear of obstructions.
29. Know where the safety exits and the first aid box are. Belts, cushions, blocks, water bottle, spectacles, jewelry, notebooks, chairs etc. should all be kept neatly to the sides of the room.
30. Teachers must be punctual for their classes.
31. Personal cleanliness and hygiene and not wearing any provocative clothing is

essential.

32. Try to keep a sense of fun/life/humanity in the class as it helps the students to relax and if you are nervous, helps break the ice.
33. To be able to teach yoga well we must be practicing yoga ourselves every day. If we do not, our teaching and our bodies suffer.
34. Above all make sure you **enjoy your teaching**. If you are finding that you are not, then question where you are going wrong as it could be that you are teaching too much, not practicing enough or there are other aspects in your life that are getting in the way. It is very important that you have an experienced teacher who can advise you.