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# YOGA FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

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Student Program Manual



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## NATIONAL EXERCISE TRAINERS ASSOCIATION EDUCATIONAL COURSES

NETA's mission is to support and inspire the development of well-qualified fitness professionals. We accomplish this through the delivery of quality education programs incorporating evidence-based research and practical application. NETA is committed to guiding fitness professionals throughout their career by offering affordable and accessible educational opportunities.

As a Group Exercise Instructor, Personal Trainer, or Wellness Coach you realize the importance of maintaining your certifications and staying current with the advancements in the health, fitness, and wellness industry. It takes hard work to become a professional, but it takes an enduring commitment to training and continued education to help others achieve their goals.

Our goal is to provide fitness professionals with an amazing educational experience. These educational workshops include master classes taught by our world-class presenters, practical learning opportunities and ideas to implement with your clients or in your classes.

We continually develop new continuing education courses, so let us know if there's a course you would like to see that we don't offer. We're here to aid you in becoming the best fitness and wellness professional possible and we're committed to expanding and strengthening your educational foundation. Please feel free to provide us feedback so that we know what you liked, what we can improve, and how we can better support you. Send feedback to [samantha@netafit.org](mailto:samantha@netafit.org)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Yoga is for everybody. With NETA's Yoga for Special Populations workshop, instructors will take an in-depth look at creating an open environment, teaching to students with special needs, and learn ways to help every individual meet their goal in a group setting through a coaching approach. Explore pose adaptations, specialty class themes, and learn ways to make every individual feel comfortable in your class environment.

### Key Topics:

- Yoga for Disability and Special Needs: The person, not the pose
- Trauma informed yoga
- Teaching individuals in a group setting: the yoga coach approach
- Participation in one practice class
- Practice teaching

## Earning the Yoga for Special Populations Specialty Certificate

The testing process to earn the Special Populations certification consists of an online-exam. The online exam is 15 multiple choice questions, and 70% correct is required to pass. **MUST BE TAKEN WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE WORKSHOP.**

## Renewal Process

Each of the 1-and 2-day Specialty Certifications is valid for two years from the date of issue. Students that choose to take any of the workshops as stand-alone specialty certifications with no intent to pursue the 200hr. teaching designations must renew their specialty certification every two years to keep them valid. To renew a yoga specialty certification, the certificant must complete ten (10) continuing education credits (CECs) between the date of issue and the designated expiration date. Six (6) of the 10 CECs must be obtained from NETA workshops or NETA home study courses purchased directly from NETA. ***However, students that intend to complete the entire 200hr. program can complete the Continuing Education Waiver Agreement and submit the required non-refundable deposit of \$99. By completing that form, paying the deposit, and showing intent to complete the entire program, continuing education requirements will be waived for all 1-and 2-day yoga specialty certifications.*** The \$99 deposit will be credited toward the Advanced Certification for Yoga Teachers workshop registration fee.

# SECTION 1: WHO WILL YOU TEACH?

## The Demographics of Yoga in America

In 2016 the results of a combined national survey by Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance was published, outlining the different demographics of yoga participation in America. This was a repeat of their 2012 survey and showed that the number of participants in yoga has increased by over 16 million and that the industry has undergone significant changes. The infographic below highlights some of these results.



Of special note are the facts that:

- The number one place people are participating in yoga is at home
- Most American yogis are new to the practice
- Most yogis aren't doing yoga alone and consider the benefits to be mostly physical/emotional and not spiritual

What does this mean for us as yoga instructors?

## SECTION 2: SPECIAL POPULATIONS

### Special Populations

One of the areas not addressed by this survey is the need for yoga with special populations. Special populations is a term often used in the fitness field to describe persons with cardiovascular, pulmonary, metabolic, immunological, musculoskeletal, neuromuscular, psychological/behavioral, and/or cancerous disease; are older or younger than the general population; and/or females that are pregnant, postpartum, or menopausal; and all individuals that are usually under the care of physicians or other health care personnel. While this definition aids in understanding special populations from a health perspective, it does not encompass everyone.

### Cancer

Cancer is defined as abnormal or uncontrolled cellular growth brought on by changes to the genetic messages a cell's DNA sends to its chromosomes for continued cellular growth and function. While the body can repair itself, mutations within chromosomes can take hold during the process of cellular division. This genetic change creates an abnormal chromosome within the cell, thus the rapid and unorganized growth of a tumor. Cancer cells are classified as either benign or malignant and include carcinomas, which are the most common, melanomas, sarcomas, leukemia and lymphomas.

Cancer patients who practice yoga as therapy during their treatment often refer to their yoga practice as a life-saver. When battling cancer, the worst part is not just the symptoms of the disease itself, but often the discomfort and debilitating fatigue brought on from cancer treatments.

#### TIPS:

- Be aware of fragile bones that may increase the risk of fracture.
- Be aware of abdominal sensitivities.
- Be aware of weak muscles.
- Be aware of peripheral neuropathy, which affects balance.
- Be aware of compromised immune systems, increasing the risk of infection.

## BENEFITS/GOAL

- Creates a mind/body connection that aids the healing process
- Produces a sense of focus and power through meditation practices
- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Aids in the reduction of insomnia

## BENEFICIAL POSES

- Legs up the wall
- Knees to chest
- Cow/Cat
- Breathing and meditation techniques

## MODIFICATIONS

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## Chronic Conditions

Chronic conditions are those that last a year or more and require ongoing medical attention and/or limit activities of daily living. Examples include arthritis, diabetes, heart disease and hypertension. Behavioral health conditions are also increasingly common and include substance use and addiction disorders, as well as mental illnesses, dementia and other cognitive impairments. Yoga has been reported to have positive effects on distress and functional performance in patients with chronic diseases and improves several immunological indicators. A yoga class geared specifically to people with a particular illness or condition can also provide a great deal of emotional support to students, who have the opportunity to bond with others in similar conditions.

## TIPS:

- As a yoga teacher, it's important to recognize that the needs of this population are often different from those of a general student population. The most important elements in this type of class are safety and comfort, as well as relaxation.
- When working with students with chronic illness, safety and comfort are the goal of the class. It's important to let go of expectations of "perfect" postures, of keeping up for full times, or, depending on energy levels, of completing the entire class plan. If the primary need that day is to rest, plan for some gentle movements and then a long savasana (final relaxation) or yoga nidra.
- In a class with people suffering from chronic illness, the number of postures taught is much lower, there is more time to transition from one to the next, and more rest time is built in.

- Avoid postures that may cause discomfort. For many people, sitting on the floor in “easy pose” is not easy. Have a chair ready as a backup. Depending on where the students are in the process of their illness, some yoga poses may be counter-indicated, so be sure to ask if there are any particular movements their doctors have advised them to not do, or any parts of the body that need to be treated with more care and compassion.

## BENEFITS/GOAL

- Promotes, repairs, and improves range of motion for musculoskeletal issues
- Produces a sense of body awareness, creating better balance and stability
- Improves posture
- Builds bone density

## BENEFICIAL POSES

- Down Dog
- Tree pose
- Hero
- Restorative Yoga

## MODIFICATIONS

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## Musculoskeletal Limitations

Musculoskeletal limitations may include mobility conditions. Mobility conditions may be caused by a genetic disorder, serious illness, or injury. These conditions may affect a person’s ability to use one or more of his/her extremities, or a lack of strength to walk, grasp, or lift objects. Mobility limited participants may need external support in order to maintain independence (e.g. wheelchair, crutches, or a walker).

## TIPS:

- To avoid compounding injuries, invite participants to let you know if they are injured.
- Remind participants to check with their doctor before performing any physical activities.
- Teach participants to listen to their bodies and stay within a pain-free range of motion.



## BENEFITS/GOAL

- Aids in dealing with pain
- Produces a sense of body awareness, creating better balance and stability
- Improves joint health
- Builds positive body image

## BENEFICIAL POSES

- Spinal Twist
- Warrior II
- Mountain

## MODIFICATIONS

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## Older Adults

Chronological age refers to the number of years that a person has lived. However, biological age considers personal health status. The physiological signs of aging may be more, or less, present amongst yoga participants.

### TIPS:

- Use your yoga voice, but a little slower and a little louder. If you are in a gym setting or a studio with a mic system, use it to help everyone hear a little easier.
- Keep your shoes on. Be mindful of the daily struggles of this population. Hip replacements, lower back pain and limited range of motion can make it difficult to complete a basic task like getting shoes on and off. Your senior students will be more comfortable keeping their shoes on.
- Use encouraging language. Rather than cuing “raise your arms for tree pose,” begin by asking students to lift just one hand off their chair. This gives those students who need the extra help permission to hold on to their chair for balance in a way that lets them feel successful.
- Begin with warming up the larger joints and muscle groups. Finish class focusing on fine motor skills. Simple tasks like buttoning buttons, picking up coins or closing a zipper become difficult with the onset of arthritis. Simple exercises like touching each finger to your thumb or making a tight fist then opening the hands wide can help maintain dexterity.

## BENEFITS/GOAL

- Aids in dealing with other chronic conditions and effects of medications
- Produces a sense of body awareness, creating better balance and stability
- Improves mental capacity

- Reduces the risk of falls through improved muscle/joint function
- Builds bone density
- Increases socialization and peer support

## BENEFICIAL POSES

## MODIFICATIONS

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| • Seated pyramid pose | • |
| • Warrior I           | • |
| • Standing arch       | • |
| • Tree pose           | • |

## Overweight/Obese

Obesity is defined as total body weight 30 percent over ideal for women and 23 percent for men.

However, the fat distribution and structural instabilities caused by excess body weight may be more significant indicators of an individual's overall health status. Yoga practice is beneficial for individuals with obesity, but adaptations to poses may need to be made for stability and comfort while performing poses.

### TIPS:

- Widen the foundation. In many standing postures, feet are often supposed to be hip-width apart. But if working with larger bodies, it may help to spread feet farther until they're at a comfortable distance to increase stability.
- Help participants get to know their bodies. If the skin of the belly, thighs, arms or breasts get in the way, invite "flesh moving" to create space and comfort in the pose. This type of instruction may not be written in the scripts of most traditional yoga classes, so tread lightly when providing these tips.
- Use props. A yoga strap and block can help participants achieve poses and increase stretch. Be prepared to demonstrate pose adaptations.

## BENEFITS/GOAL

- Aids in dealing with other chronic conditions
- Produces a sense of body awareness, creating better balance and stability
- Less impactful than other forms of exercise
- Improves breathing
- Increased confidence and empowerment

## BENEFICIAL POSES

- Child's pose
- Triangle pose
- Sun Salutations

## MODIFICATIONS

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## Pre/Post-Natal

Pregnancy affects body systems in a variety of ways. From hormone changes to weight gain, exercise adaptations are made to increase comfort and reduce stress during fetal development. The post-partum period must be approached carefully as the body returns to its pre-pregnancy state.

### TIPS:

- Pregnancy is not the time to initiate a hard-core yoga practice. If a woman didn't already practice pre-pregnancy or has not practiced for a long time, then their best option is entering into prenatal yoga practice.
- If consistent practitioners become pregnant, it is advisable for them to begin adding in or shifting over to prenatal classes during the late 2nd trimester or beginning of their 3rd trimester. This will provide them with necessary elements taught in prenatal, which prepares their body for birth and beyond, and are not taught as part of a regular class.
- Heat is ill-advised during all phases of pregnancy, so suggest to those who are into a heated practice to shift to one that's not.
- Stay away from twists. Though there is some level of twisting that can be done, it's best to just not go there if you've not gone through a prenatal training. Twisting in the abdomen compresses and wrings out that region, which clearly doesn't make any sense to do during pregnancy.
- During the first trimester, limit inversions (ex. handstand, headstand, etc.) even if the practitioner has a consistent practice. The first trimester is the time for the baby to really settle into the body so turning it upside down isn't the best time to do that. *Supta Baddha Konasana* (reclining bound angle pose) is a great alternative to offer.
- Skip the core work. Since the belly needs to expand, it's not advisable at *any point* in the pregnancy to work on building abs. Suggest to your pregnant students to rock in a flow like Cat & Cow.
- Keep the breath steady. Heat-building breath practices and any other practice involving fast inhaling or exhaling should be avoided. *Nadi Shodhana* (channel cleaning breath) is the perfect middle road to calm the mind, settle your student's energy and help her to be present to her practice.

- Start making space. Though pregnant practitioners may feel comfortable lying on their stomachs very early on in the pregnancy, it's best to get them into the practice of creating space for the belly. An easy way to do this through a vinyasa is to keep their toes tucked under when doing *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana* or Upward-facing Dog.

## BENEFITS/GOAL

- Helps participants adapt to a change in body
- Produces a sense of body awareness, creating better balance and stability
- Less impactful than other forms of exercise
- Can facilitate an easier delivery

## MODIFICATIONS/BENEFICIAL POSES

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| • Corpse pose            | • |
| • Standing Wide Leg Fold | • |
| • Garland                | • |

## SECTION 3: WHY I AM TEACHING?

Now that we've discussed special populations and their needs, let's consider your reasons behind working with a particular group. Perhaps you teach an open, drop-in style class that attracts all kinds in your community, or maybe you have a strong desire to teach to a specific group. Over the next three sections we'll explore your reasons for teaching and understand how best to approach teaching special populations.

### The 4 P's

#### 1. Purpose

As we will discuss further in the next few sections, the "WHY" you have come to yoga will impact your ability to teach and reach these special populations. Consider the following questions:

- When entering this community of special populations, why do I want to help?
- What does help mean to me?
- What kind of impact can I make?
- Who am I in service to?
- What is my relationship with this community?
- Do they want my help?
- Is my desire to teach coming from a place strongly controlled by ego? Do I feel a need to save or cure these participants?

#### 2. & 3. Power and Privilege

An often overlooked part of being a yoga instructor, in a community of special populations, is our power and privilege. Privilege may be earned or unearned. Unearned privilege is no one's fault, it's something you're born into, like a natural athletic ability, but should not be rejected, just acknowledged. Earned privilege comes from other unearned and earned factors. For example, some of us are easily able to pay for our teacher training experience, while others must scrimp and save and space out their training for years in order to be able to afford it. Earned privilege also comes from the hard work that we put into our training and our practice.

Power is slightly different from privilege, but comes from a place of privilege. It is the ability to decide who will have access and to exercise control over others. If you have already taken the Yoga for Professionals training you are aware of the Yoga Alliance Code of Conduct and how yoga teachers may be able to exert power over participants in an unethical way.

## YOGA ALLIANCE CODE OF CONDUCT

This code of conduct applies only to instructors who register with Yoga Alliance to become a 200hr RYT but is an example of the tenets of yoga for which we expect the yoga instructors in the field to uphold.

- Conduct myself in a professional and conscientious manner. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that I live up to any commitments I make to my students or to the public, and ensuring that my practices and behavior conform to the representations I make about myself in holding myself out as a yoga practitioner who adheres to certain precepts.
- Acknowledge the limitations of my skills and scope of practice and, where appropriate, refer students to seek alternative instruction, advice, treatment or direction.
- Create and maintain a safe, clean, and comfortable environment for the practice of yoga.
- Encourage diversity by respecting all students regardless of age, physical limitations, race, creed, gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.
- Respect the rights, dignity, and privacy of all students.
- Avoid words and actions that constitute sexual harassment or harassment based on other legal protected characteristics.
- Adhere to the traditional yoga principles as written in the yamas and niyamas.
- Follow all local government and national laws that pertain to my yoga teaching and business

Now, considering our own privilege and power, let's answer the following questions:

- How do I benefit from privilege and power?
- How do I participate in perpetuating my own privilege and/or power?
- When is a time that I have felt powerless? Unprivileged?
- Do I ever use my power/privilege in the oppression/exclusion of others?

## 4. Prejudice

In the United States the word prejudice holds heavy weight and historical trauma. However, prejudice is not something that only happens outside of the realm of yoga. Prejudice happens any time that we act based on a preconceived notion about a certain group that is not based on fact. It is not always intentional, but is very reflective of the type of bias that we have toward groups different from ourselves. We will talk later about how to recognize and include those who are different from ourselves through our language and teaching styles. For now, let's consider the following questions:

- What types of assumptions do people make about you?
- When was a time that you made an assumption about someone or an experience, but were surprised by the reality of the situation? (This doesn't have to be yoga related)
- What prejudices do you see in the yoga world?
  - ***Racism***
  - ***Sexism***

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*IS SOMEONE ELSE BETTER QUALIFIED OR SKILLED TO WORK WITH MY CHOSEN GROUP? COULD I WORK WITH/LEARN FROM THAT PERSON?*

Understanding your own purpose, power, privilege, and prejudice, and how that impacts those you are trying to help, is an important step in the practice of Svadhyaya, as well as growing as a yoga instructor.

## SECTION 4: WHAT IS MY MESSAGE?

Communication. It's something that we do all day every day with little to no thought about the true impact of our message. You're all communicating something at this moment: through your dress, your personal area, your body position, even your words. We'll discuss in Section 5 about the impact of a message as well as how to use those messages to create behavior change. But messages can often be mistakenly communicated in the wrong way. Think about text messaging or email. Have you ever read further into a message than need be? Taking messages out of context and not considering the receiver of your message can cause all kinds of problems. In this section we'll address the goal of our message and how to adapt it to all participants, while dealing with those who are difficult, conflict situations, and avoiding shame through our words and actions.

### A Real Life Scenario

Here is an account of a morning session from a NETA trainer.

"This morning I had an odd experience in my regular yoga class. I had all of my same students and they had no special requests for what to do that day or things they wanted to avoid. I was cueing along as one of the older and less flexible participants did what she could. She always does and I'm okay with that. But what caught me off guard was the moment when I cued a pose and she (under her breath) announced, "Yeah Right". It wasn't anything crazy or anything they hadn't done before, but her verbalization of the expectation drew my attention. It's a small group of 5-7 participants on the regular in a room barely big enough for all 8 of us. I wasn't the only one who had heard; had I missed something in including her? Was I not offering enough modifications? Did I misjudge the group's ability that day? Or was she just having an off yoga day?"

Each day, consider:

- Am I reaching the majority of the class where they are?
- How do I include everyone?
- Am I thinking of the class vs. what I want to teach?
- How do I deal with the "commentary"?



## Adapting your message

Because yoga now reaches such a wide audience of participants, it is important to consider the needs of each of those groups and how you present your material as an instructor. Let's first consider your audience.

### TARGET AUDIENCE



In the graphic above, list at least 6 demographic descriptors of the people who regularly attend your yoga classes. Knowing that Target Audience may not always be “ideal audience”, we will always have to consider adapting our classes and our message for the various people in class that fall into a category of special populations.

## OBJECTIVES

Our Target Audience is the main recipient of our yoga message. Consider what it is that you want participants to gain by attending your class. List at least 4 objectives to accomplish through your teaching.

1)

2)

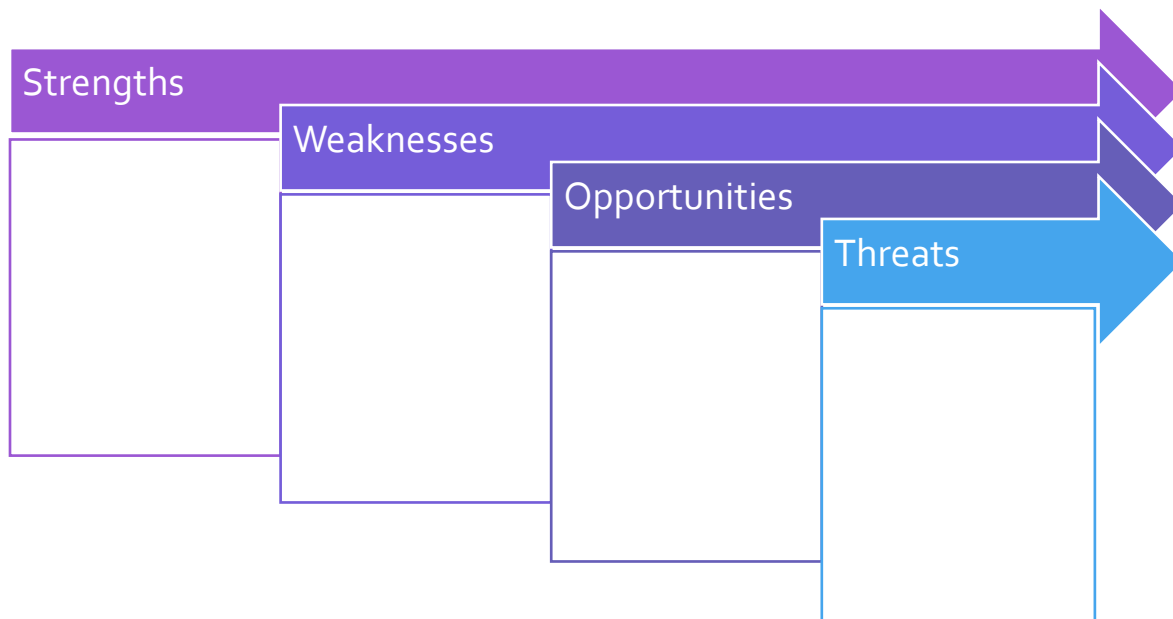
3)

4)

## SWOT Analysis

Now, considering our Target Audience and Objectives above, evaluate your own abilities:

1. What are your strengths at meeting the needs of your participants?
2. What are your weaknesses?
3. What opportunities do you have to increase communication and adaptability of your classes?
4. What threatens the success of your goals?



## Strategies

The word Yoga means to yoke together, or unite. This message of unity should travel through your teaching and into your communication strategies. An adapted message reaches multiple types of participants within your class instead of just a smaller group of participants.

***NO MATTER HOW YOUR BODY GETS THERE, YOU'RE STILL DOING THE POSE***

Words matter. We know that our cues won't always reach all participants, but we use resources to extend care to each other and pay attention to both how we want the world reflected back to us as well as how our participants want the world reflected to them through the words we use.

As you cue, ask yourself:

***HOW DO I TEACH YOGA IN A WAY THAT CREATES THE LEAST HARM?***

Different educational organizations assign different definitions to the term “at risk” including:

- Physical disabilities and learning disabilities
- Prolonged or persistent health issues
- Habitual truancy, incarceration history, or adjudicated delinquency
- Family welfare or marital status
- Low parental educational attainment, income levels, employment status, or immigration status
- Households in which the primary language spoken is not English

The dictionary defines “at risk” as being exposed to harm or danger. If you were labeled “at risk”, what would you assume about your own abilities to participate in yoga?

If you were to teach a class to “at risk” participants, what kinds of things might you assume about the participants before class?

These feelings may be considered bias created by the language or terminology used. Is it necessarily reflective of the actual situation or the inclusive nature of yoga? Consider the following cues and determine which type of prejudice or bias the language cue creates:

### SCENARIO 1:

Let’s all bring the bottoms of our feet together into butterfly pose. Sitting tall through the spine and allowing the hands to cradle the feet, gently press the knees open with each exhale. Understanding that men tend to be tighter in their inner thighs and probably will not be able to open as far, let’s have the guys place blocks underneath their knees for support.

### SCENARIO 2:

From staff position, let’s inhale the arms up and exhale into seated forward fold. We will reach out to the feet, anchoring our hands, and feel the chest press forward to the thighs. For those of you who cannot reach, please pick up your strap and place it around the balls of the feet and try again.

It is important to understand that mentioning differences doesn’t create the divide, it’s not knowing how to talk about difference that creates barriers. Language can liberate when used correctly.

## CUEING TIP: ASK FOR FEEDBACK!

Feedback is a great way to understand how language impacts your class and allows participants to feel collaborative in the process of yoga. Take a few moments to consider a time when you felt truly cared for in a yoga class.

## CUEING TIP: "IF, THEN"

In order to remove leveling from our cues and to make all bodies feel seen and cared for, try "If; Then" cues. For example: in child's pose, if your belly feels compressed here, then open the knees wider to make room to breathe.

Practice writing an If; Then cue:

## CUEING TIP: ELIMINATE CHALLENGE AND/OR JUDGEMENT

When we cue the breath in our practice, do you instruct when to inhale or exhale? Is it paired with a movement or should the entire class breathe together? Consider the way that language creates challenges to "keep up" or "be enough". **What does the phrase "Yogi's Choice" evoke for you?**

## CUEING TIP: KEEP IT REAL

Consider language that is natural to you...is it belly, abdomen, or tummy? Is it curvy, plus, round, or overweight? **How can you be authentic in your teaching style while also being inclusive in language for all?**

**List 4 strategies you've used or experienced to create an inclusive message.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

## Peacekeeper or warrior

Most of us think of our teaching as a moment of bringing peace and enlightenment to our students, not as a time of fighting battles. However, there are going to be moments when communication between you and your students is strained. Let's look at three different scenarios:

## The Rogue Student

You're teaching a class and everyone is flowing along together. It seems that you're communicating your message well. Then, after a few minutes you notice that one student has veered off course a bit. At first it's just Down Dog when everyone else is in Child's Pose, but then the participant is doing Sun Salutations in the middle of your Warrior sequence. They are in their own yoga world and as you enter restorative work they go over to the wall for Handstands.

**What are you to do with a rogue student?**

## The Interrupter

It happens all the time these days....the quiet moment during beginning breathing exercises and there it is....the dreaded cell phone alert. Maybe it's not a cell phone at all....maybe it's a fitness tracker powering up, someone dealing with the noise inside their own head, or a comment/question during final relaxation.

**What should you do to deal with a chronic interrupter?**

## The Anger Management

Maybe it's a facility policy or your own personal teaching style, but either way the door is locked, class has started, and here it comes....the tug on the door. It's followed by a jiggling of the handle, a soft knock and then louder, and someone's peering in the door. You ignore it and continue class, but after the door reopens in storms the member who missed their Zen and you are now their target.

**How do you handle anger outbursts about rules and/or your teaching methods?**

## Conflict Communication

Yoga instructors tend to find conflict within themselves when external conflict arises. Why? Because it's hard to maintain a peaceful image when you feel like you're under fire. Part of conflict communication is a practice of Svadhyaya – self-study. We need to understand ourselves and our part in the conflict and possible resolution as much as the need to understand the other side. Ask yourself:

**What feelings are arising in me? (Take responsibility for your emotions or beliefs about what has happened)**

**What am I asking for? (Know that others cannot automatically know what you require and therefore you have to communicate that, as well as find out what the other person needs)**

## S.T.O.P.

When confronted with conflict it can be helpful to remember the acronym STOP:

- **S**top whatever you're doing
- **T**ake 3 deep breaths
- **O**bserve how your body feels
  - Don't take it personally – the reaction and behavior is not about you; everyone is experiencing a personalized reality
  - Walk away if necessary – don't get drawn into a place where you cannot maintain your awareness and objectivity

- Drop expectations – let go of the idea that all situations can be resolved in that moment; sometimes conflict needs time and space
- **Proceed with kindness and compassion**
  - Use your words – remember that body language, tone of voice, and choice of words all impact the message you’re providing in that moment
  - Give more than you take – remind yourself that the true yogic warrior offers friendship instead of attack
  - Grow – use this as a moment to ask yourself, “What am I to learn from this?”

We all have moments in which we act out of character. It may be that the stress of life, lack of sleep, need to eat, or another situation has taken over our ability to be reasonable. No matter how someone might appear to be in a situation, it is a good idea to remember that:

“WE DO THE BEST WE CAN WITH WHAT WE KNOW, AND WHEN  
WE KNOW BETTER, WE DO BETTER.”

~ MAYA ANGELOU

## The Shame Game

A part of communication is understanding how to reach your students in a way that doesn’t single them out. All kinds of bodies need modifications and variations to stay safely aligned and to challenge them in yoga. But knowing how to modify a pose is not enough. Poses are an expression of the way that our body is **DOING** yoga and the words that we use to help them express can cause shame when someone doesn’t fit the mold. Here are some ways to help participants feel empowered in their practice at every level.

1. **Personal Practice** – emphasize participants having their own practice both in and outside of class

**What cues could we use in class to allow participants to practice in their own way?**

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2. **Prop It up** – make it standard practice in class each day that everyone grabs the same equipment and demonstrate using the equipment so that it doesn't look like "Real Yoga" is without props
3. **Adjust the Focus** – while there are many ways to do the pose, there are also many ways in which to experience the pose. Offer up at least three different things to focus on. For example, as written by Yoga International in Extended Hand to Big Toe (utthita hasta padangustasana), you might introduce the pose and then tell students:

You can take it to the wall and work on:

- finding the shape of the pose
- getting really strong through the standing leg
- finding more freedom to bring the lifted leg a little higher
- see what it's like to take the toe with the peace fingers vs. using a strap (keeping the leg bent, or starting to straighten)

Or you can stand on your mat and work on:

- focusing on your balance
- finding your drishti
- finding strength and stability in the standing leg and keeping the other knee bent
- finding an energetic lift from the foot all the way up to the crown of the head

4. **Build Foundations** – always start with the foundation of the pose and recognize that this may be the only pose that some participants can achieve. Values should not be placed on the variations (ex: beginner, advanced)
5. **Mindful Movement** – instead of cuing bony or other bodily landmarks, try using placement cues in relation to the mat, walls, etc. No two bodies are, nor move, exactly the same.
6. **Different Demonstrators** – don't allow the most flexible student to always demonstrate; it glorifies a specific body type as the "best at yoga". This can also be demoralizing to you as an instructor and detract from the level of respect you get from students.

## SECTION 5: HOW DO I HELP?

### Yoga, Meet Life Coaching

While yoga is an old tradition, life coaching (as it's defined today) is relatively new. People seek out a life coach when there is a gap between where they are now and where they want to be in life. Life coaches are part consultant, part motivational speaker, part therapist and part rent-a-friend. They are sought out because people are looking for a new perspective, a sounding board, or a motivator. Yoga is different than life coaching in that we ask our participants to look for the answers within, while still acting as a mentor/guide/motivator/friend on the journey. Think about these four attributes of yoga teaching:

**ONENESS:** The word yoga means to yoke, join, or unite in such a way that we feel connected to others. The practice of Isvara pranidhana is the surrender to something bigger than ourselves in which we connect to the universe. Yoga teaches connection between the mind, body, and spirit so that a person feels whole.

**TRUTH:** The second Yama, Satya, honors truth not only in the words we speak, but in the way we live our own truth. The fifth Chakra, Vishuddha, also asks us to speak our own truth and express who we are authentically in the way we live our lives.

**ALIGNMENT:** In the study of the Chakras we look for balance and alignment in our lives in much the same way that the foundation of a pose forces us to consider our roots and then build upon them for proper balance and alignment of the body. Alignment of the mind and body is essential for a strong meditation practice.

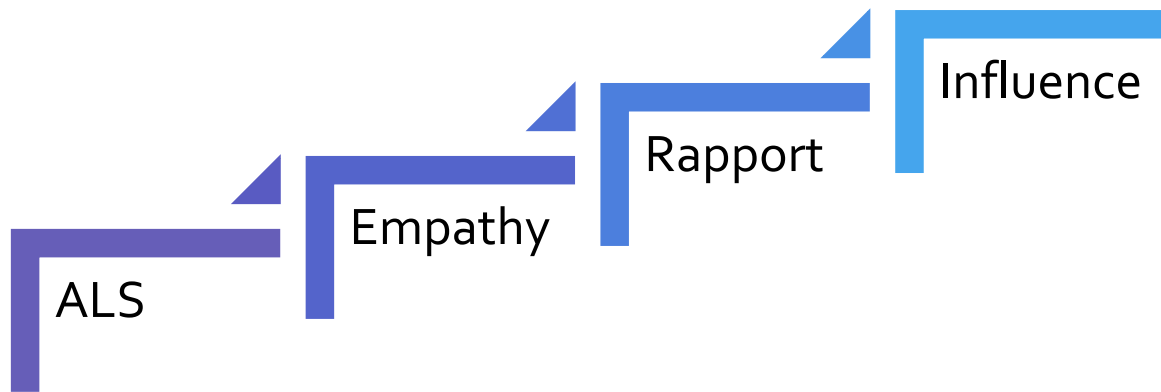
**LOVE:** The fourth Chakra, Anahata, teaches us both universal love for all others as well as a true love for ourselves and those we hold dearest. Similarly taught is through Ahimsa, the first Yama, in which we cause no harm to ourselves or others. Love radiates through yoga practice and teachings.

**In which ways do you communicate to your class participants that cultivates the above values?**

**How do you use these values to coach someone through the gap between where they are now and the yoga life they want to live?**

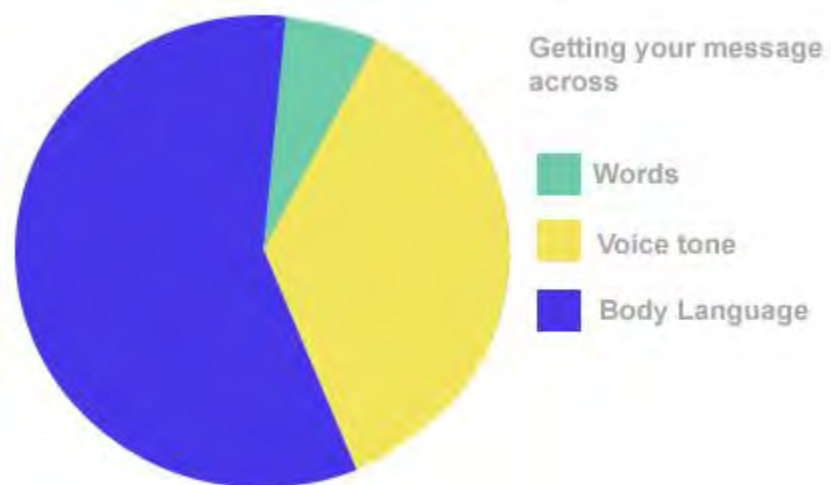
## Behavior Change Staircase

One of our main goals as a yoga teacher is to encourage others to live a more yogic lifestyle by eliciting the type of behavior change that makes sense for each of them. The elements of behavior change are discussed more thoroughly in NETA's Wellness Coaching Certification.



## Active Listening Skills

The first time someone attends your class they may not say a word to you, but it's also your first opportunity to begin to actively "listen" to what they need. Each message we project out into the world creates an impact on those around us. Of that impact, only 7% of what is "heard" are the actual words spoken. Much more of our message comes from the way we say it (38%) and our body language (55%). This is important to understand as far as the messages we are projecting to our class as well as learning to read the messages they are giving to you.



When listening to your student consider the things being said, the way they're being said, and what the body tells you. Then, practice these Active Listening Skills:

1. Clear the path to communication. Suspend your assumptions, values and beliefs; make eye contact; remain humble and non-attached; and don't take things personally or personalize the information.
2. Use minimal encouragers to keep participants talking. Usually the whole story doesn't come out at first. Brief responses like "Really, Yeah, Ok" indicate you're present and you're listening.
3. Ask questions and specifically open-ended questions that encourage more than a yes or no answer. Gathering more information conveys a sincere interest in understanding and doesn't make the conversation feel like an interrogation.
4. Help to label emotions and to rephrase messages into communication of feelings. Restate the emotions that you hear and see to help the participant communicate them better. Help them use "I" statements to express their situation instead of accusatory "you" or "they" statements. Encouraging ownership of emotions and their present situation allows them to be present and prepare to move forward.
5. Reflect, Paraphrase, and Summarize what you're hearing throughout the conversation in order to clarify the message you're receiving. Try not to problem solve just yet, but be sure you know what the problem is. You will only be able to help a student through change if you understand what change they want.
6. When all else fails, take an intentional pause. Many of us are uncomfortable with silence and tend to fill that space with words. Pausing effectively can help focus a thought and give the person a chance to expand on the topic.

## Empathy

Empathy is different than sympathy. Empathy does not indicate that you agree with the person or their perceptions. Empathy is a skill in which you place yourself in the other person's shoes in order to express compassion for their struggle or success.

## Rapport

### WHAT IS RAPPORT?

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## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

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## HOW DO YOU BUILD RAPPORT?

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## Influence

Leading by example is one of the best ways that yoga teachers can influence participants. List three ways we can lead by example:

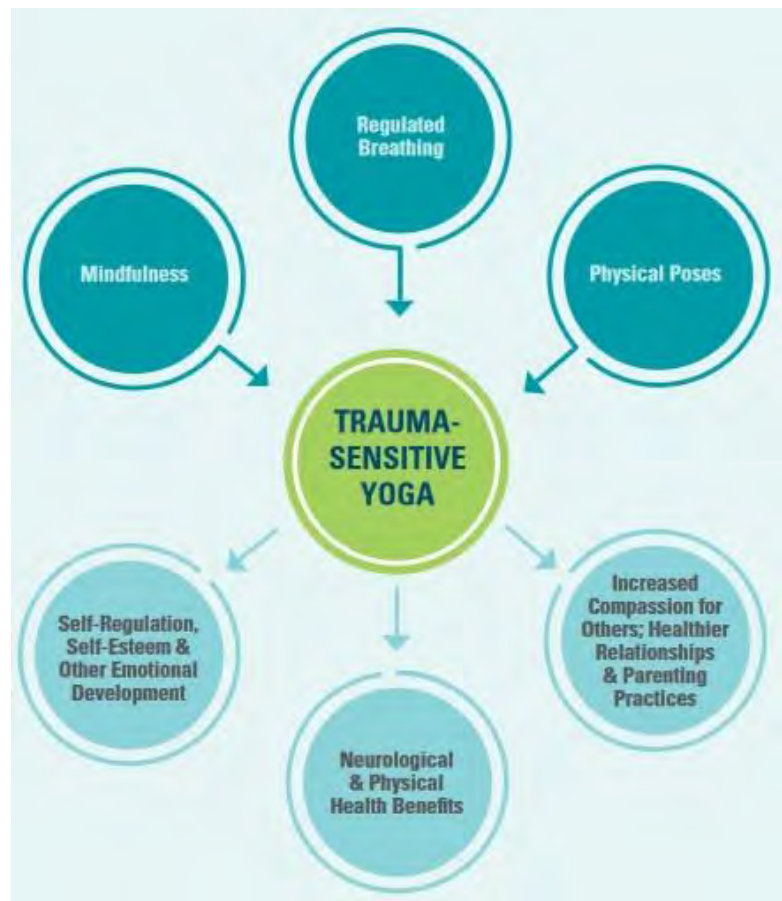
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## SECTION 6: WHEN DEALING WITH TRAUMA

Trauma (both acute and chronic) has a significant effect on both the body and the mind, increasing the risk of negative long-term mental health outcomes, including depression and suicide, as well as negative long-term physical health outcomes, such as heart disease, cancer, and liver disease. Research has shown that somatic interventions that include three core components:

- Asana practice
- Pranayama practice
- Meditation and/or mindfulness training

can improve resilience and help build coping mechanisms and self-regulation skills, improve self-esteem, and increase concentration. Research documenting the effectiveness of yoga, meditation, and mindfulness to improve mental health has grown accordingly. More than 40 published studies have evaluated the use of yoga to address mental health conditions, including controlled clinical trials, and all reported some measure of positive benefits.



## Building the Setting

Teaching and leading a practice contributes to the sense of safety and comfort your participants will experience. Equally as important is the setting in which you practice. Here are a few tips for what to and not to do in class to improve the setting:

1. Review the protocol for safe practice – how to protect the body from injury and when to drink water is just as important in trauma-informed teaching as letting them know how to leave the room if they need a moment. Creating signals with your students for what they may need is also helpful.
2. Talk about saying no – some trauma-sensitive participants have difficulty with the idea of saying “no”. They may think that it is not an option or have a hard time communicating, verbally, their dislike for something. Reading body language of our participants is only part of the challenge as we should also aim to empower them to speak up when they are uncomfortable with a practice.
3. Avoid physical adjustments – similar to our last tip, some participants are not comfortable with physical touch and may also have difficulty telling you “no” if they are under the impression that this is what is expected of them in the class. While we want to correct alignment to protect the safety of our participants, we should also note that physical touch may cause more harm than good to some participants. Using a technique to allow them to opt out (cards, signals, etc) gives them a safe space to work within and lets you know how best to communicate with your participants. Be aware: if they do allow touch, the placement of your hands can also cause immediate discomfort within participants, so it is again necessary to read body language, noticing when a participant’s expressions change or if they all of a sudden become stiff.
4. Make yourself available – it may be easier for students to communicate with you before or after class. While our schedules may be such that we have little time before or after class, consider how this dramatic abandonment may make some of your students feel. Consider leaving space for questions so that students feel supported in their practice and not intimidated by a time crunch.
5. Allow alternatives to closing eyes – the imagery you choose to use in class will have a differing impact on each student. Additionally, the option to keep the eyes open and fixed in a constant gaze (drishiti) may be more suitable for some participants than eyes closed during meditation, breathwork, or other practices. Yoga is an individual expression and allowing for variations increases the connection.
6. Let go of how it “should be” – because each person brings their own body and experiences to a yoga class, each person will feel differently in the practice. Avoid explaining how one should feel based on how you feel or some other standard of “right” within the yoga practice. Using words like “may” or “can” when describing benefits of a pose can prevent a student from feeling less than or flawed in practice.

7. Create equality – yoga is a non-competitive practice and this should be taught to each of our students. While we may challenge them from time to time, they are not in competition with themselves or others in your eyes and we should avoid special praise for the way that an individual practices. Highlighting “Best Students” can be defeating to others and can also cause that best student to feel a constant need to meet your standard instead of connecting to the practice in a personal and non-judgmental way. Encourage participants to listen to their bodies and their limits and to be grateful for what they accomplish each day. We don’t mean to get rid of public praise all together, but reward progress and effort in the same way as “perfection”.
8. Choosing how to move the body through practice is an important element of teaching in the trauma informed yoga class.

## WHERE THE BODY HOLDS STRESS

When trauma is experienced it can show up in the form of illness, anxiety, or emotional/mental conditions, as well as tension in the body. The body retains stress in seven main areas:

- Pelvis
- Diaphragm
- Throat
- Jaw
- Hamstrings
- Shoulders
- Neck

These are the areas most often affected because of their ability to hold binding and complete constrictive movements. The body becomes essentially stuck into these patterns and holds the tension, turning the trauma into a physical obstruction to the person moving forward toward healing.

## HEALING POSES

Certain yoga poses may work to alleviate stress in specific areas of the body. To reduce the amount of tension in a pose, create a comfortable environment with a relaxed atmosphere. Control the nervous system’s stress response by skillfully inviting participants into relaxation.

### ***What are poses that would address each of the seven areas of tension?***

- Pelvis –
- Diaphragm –
- Throat –
- Jaw –
- Hamstrings –
- Shoulders –
- Neck –



## When yoga goes wrong

Some poses create a deeper sense of grounding and others leave participants feeling vulnerable. The goal of building your sequence is to avoid those poses and techniques that could cause more trauma for our students. Here are some tips of things to avoid in practice:

- Downward facing dog, table top, happy baby, child's pose, and crocodile can conjure memories of sexual assault (consider practicing with vulnerable parts of the body facing a wall instead of in the middle of the room)
- Closed eyes and quiet rooms can trigger PTSD (consider playing music during final relaxation and consider the sounds involved in certain meditation practices that may be startling)
- Language that describes body parts in detail (using imagery language like drawing up from our root instead of engaging the pelvic floor may be less traumatic or triggering)
- Specific imagery that can trigger past traumatic events

## SECTION 7: PRACTICUM

Throughout this course we have discussed the many ways in which students may feel “different” from the group as well as strategies to be more inclusive.

- 1. Describe the style (e.g. restorative, fitness, meditation) of class you think you may teach.**
- 2. Describe the community in attendance: what experience do they bring? Think about the different bodies that attend your class.**
- 3. Choose 2-3 of your favorite postures to teach.**
- 4. Name the pose.**
- 5. Describe how you would instruct it from beginning to end considering the foundation, props, language, etc.**

## SECTION 8: KNOWING YOUR LIMITS

### Self-Care

One area that many teachers neglect in their own practice is that of self-care. While self-care is recognized as a privilege, consider this phrase: “Drinking as we pour”, by Ma Jaya. Everyone’s self-care may look a little different, and there’s no single way to take good care of yourself. Try some different strategies until you have a full toolbox: something that energizes you, something that helps you unwind, and something that helps you manage when you’re having a hard time. Finally, encourage students to do the same. Self-care helps us sustain as teachers and as learners.

1. **What does self-care mean to you?**
2. **What are three things that you need to sustain the work that you do?**
3. **What signs do you notice in your body when you are reaching the point of burnout, exhaustion, or feeling overwhelmed?**
4. **Take a moment to write down what your daily schedule looks like. Where in there do you find Sadhana (a daily ritual of self-care)?**
5. **Why is self-care important for yoga teachers?**

**What are three things that energize me?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**What are three things that help me unwind?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**What is something that helps soothe me during difficult times?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Yoga Nidra

Yoga nidra, or yogic sleep as it is commonly known, is an immensely powerful meditation technique, and one of the easiest yoga practices to develop and maintain. While the practitioner rests comfortably in savasana (corpse pose), this systematic meditation leaves you with a sense of wholeness.

Notes:

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## APPENDIX: SAMPLE CLASS

### Centering:

Seated breath work-Nadhi Shodana

Mantra or focus: I love and respect myself

### Warm-Up:

Seated vinyasa-

- a) Arms up, exhaling twisting right, inhaling arms up, exhaling twisting left. 3-5x
- b) Inhaling tall spine, exhaling fold to the right, inhaling tall spine, exhaling over to the left. 3-5x
- c) Hands to heart, Inhaling arms wide, exhaling hands to heart, repeat 3-5x

Adapted sun salutation-5-8 rounds

- a) Rolling to hands and knees, extended child's pose
- b) Inhaling forward to ½ plank
- c) Exhaling to 8 limbed pose
- d) Inhaling cobra
- e) Exhaling child's pose or ½ down dog

Downward Facing Dog-Walking feet forward to standing forward fold.

½ Fold to forward fold with breath 3-5 times

Standing Cat/Cow with hands on thighs 3-5 times, up to Mountain Pose

### Work:

Series 1: Step RT Back to Warrior 1, Opening Warrior 2, Reverse Warrior. 5 breaths per pose.

Step rt up to:

Standing knee to chest. Both feet down, hips back and down to Chair pos. 5 breaths, Forward fold. Repeat Lt.

Series 2: Step right back to Warrior 2, Reverse Warrior, Side Angle. Step up to tree pose. All poses 3-5 breaths. Step down to Mountain. Repeat left.

### Floor Series:

Step back to plank and lower to floor to Cobra and Locust. Child's pose to all fours. Cat/Cow and Spinal Balance. Cross ankles and lower to reclining. Hold each pose 5 breaths.

**Restorative:** Reclining Pigeon, Reclining Leg Stretches, Reclining bound angle, Bridge Pose, Reclining Twist. Hold each pose for 5-8 breaths.

**Relaxation:** Savasana