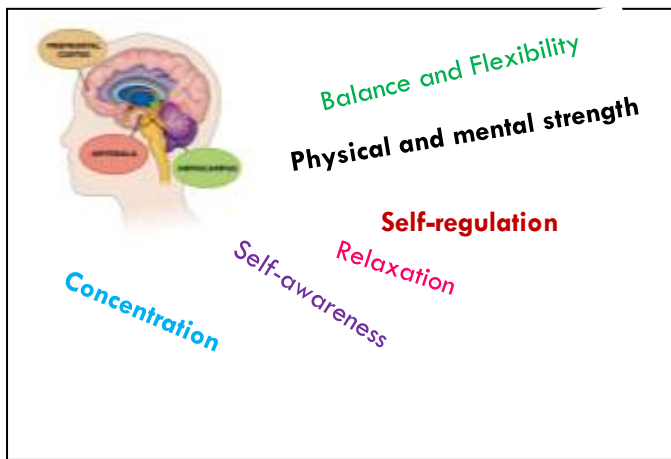




YMR

Yoga and mindfulness for resilience

Supporting children and young people's wellbeing: **Information for teachers and parents**



'Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities but from the everyday magic of ordinary human resources in the minds, brains and bodies of ordinary children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities.' Ann Masten, University of Minnesota

About the programme

A unique and inclusive 6-week targeted programme, designed to support children of all ages to build their capacity for resilience: This programme marries together an understanding of how children learn, mindfulness practices, neuroscience, recent theory and research regarding resilience, a trauma informed approach and the ancient art of yoga.

How you can support each child involved in the programme and use some of the techniques in class and at home.

To have the best possible impact on the children's wellbeing, it is important that any early intervention for children is not carried out in isolation. Ensuring that the learning from each session, including strategies for managing feelings, positive thinking, and information about how the brain works and breathing techniques are used and practiced both in the classroom and at home. This document has been produced to give each teacher and parent information about the aims and focus of the programme and to share what the children will be learning each week. It also provides some follow-on activities for each weekly theme that can be done at home or with the whole class.



Each child will be provided with a yoga booklet that includes, information about yoga and pictures of the poses, breathing techniques and affirmations that are practiced in the class. This can be shared with the parent/s/carers so that children can discuss and practice at home and share their learning with their family. A booklet will also be provided for each teacher so that breathing techniques can be talked about with the children taking part in the programme or can be practiced with the whole class.

A little bit about RESILIENCE

Resilience is not a trait, or a rare ability and we all develop our resilience over time throughout our lives. Resilience can be learned and developed by virtually anyone. Some children and families face many challenges in their everyday life that may weaken resilience or can become overwhelming. These can include, housing issues, isolation, family problems, trauma, discrimination, SEND, health issues and poverty. Some families face more than one of these challenges in their daily lives.

Learning resilient behaviours from an early age can help children and young people to gain agency over their own wellbeing and mental health and learn important strategies that can help them now and in the future.

Over the six weeks, the children will explore various yoga poses and sequences, mindfulness practices, breathing techniques and different ways of relaxing.; promoting feelings of confidence, optimism, and strength. Throughout the program the children will also learn what is happening in their brains when they experience strong emotions and when they practice the themes explored in each session, such as gratitude, empathy, kindness and positive thinking.

Focussing on the development of 5 key strengths:

- A sense of self agency and control
- An improved ability to withstand challenge.
- Strategies to manage feelings.
- The ability to remain focussed/in a flow state.
- The ability to relax/switch off.

Each session the children will have the opportunity to:

- check in with their emotions, name them, talk about them and understand what is happening in the brain.
- Learn and practice mindful and breathing techniques to use in their everyday life



- Learn many different yoga poses and build a healthy and positive connection to their body
- Practice optimism
- Work alone, in pairs and in a small group
- Have fun

All sessions will be adjusted and adapted to meet the unique needs of each group. All learning styles and abilities are supported through demonstration, visuals, props, story, and music.

Each session is from 30 mins to an hour depending on the age of the children and includes various elements known through research to promote resilience.

Session 1: Introduction. Welcome to Yoga and Mindfulness for resilience

This session will focus on getting to know each other, introducing the yoga code (A few ground rules of working together) and our routine of activities. The yoga teacher will introduce some of the props that we will be used each session such as, eye pillows for relaxation and our model brain. We will play some mindful games and learn some poses and have some fun. We will relax at the end and try a breathing technique.

Session 2: Managing our emotions

This session teaches the children about what happens to their brain when they are experiencing a strong emotion. There is a full-sized model brain to show them the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus. They will be asked to share what strategies they use now, and we will practice bumble bee breathing, using a stress toy, a special stone and breathing balls, among others to manage our feelings. We will play the volcano game. This allows children to express themselves loudly/freely in a safe environment and then use some strategies to bring themselves back to stillness. Younger children will practice a set of yoga poses to the story **“When Sophie gets angry-really, really Angry” by Molly Bang**. The older children will practice heart opening back bends followed by spinning and laughing and using our breathing to calm us down

Session 3: Positive thinking

This session explores the importance of optimism and positive thinking. Children are taught the technique of thought watching, watching out for negative thinking and practice reframing negative thoughts, helping our brains to create more positive synapses. Using the magic “yet” to talk about things we have yet to



learn and before we try some difficult yoga poses. The children will practice balloon breathing during this session and younger children will practice yoga poses set to the story “**Daniels Good Day**” by **Micha Archer**. The older children will practice a warrior pose flow with affirmations before we start the poses. Using the magic “YET” to support children to change their thoughts about their abilities to positive statements.

Session 4: Gratitude

During this session the children will find out what happens in our brains when we are grateful and the importance of practicing gratitude for our wellbeing. They will play the gratitude freeze game and continue to work on their balloon breathing. Then the children’s ideas will be used, alongside the yoga teachers’ ideas to create yoga poses of the things we are grateful for.

Session 5: Empathy and connection

This session is aimed at supporting children to understand how important the practice of empathy is in making meaningful connections with others and building friendships. Social connection is vital for the development of resilience and this session explores what happens in our brains when we practice empathy and the importance of mirroring. The children will practice back-to-back breathing, and the mirroring game. Younger children will practice yoga poses linked to a story about being different and people making fun (the elephant who wanted a friend, source unknown) and older children will practice empathy paired yoga.

Session 6: Kindness

During this session the children will be taught about what happens in the brain when you practice acts of kindness and why it makes you feel good. They will play the yoga freeze game using animal poses and then the yoga teacher will use ideas from the children for acts of kindness and create poses from their ideas. The teacher will also add in some ideas of their own to create flow. They will practice bumble bee breathing and a love and kindness relaxation, sending love and kindness to themselves and others.

Evaluation

Children are referred to this course of resilience yoga for a variety of reasons. At the end of the programme the teachers and the children will be asked to answer a few questions to evaluate the impact on the children’s progress in the development of:

- A sense of self agency and control
- An improved ability to withstand challenge.



- Strategies to manage feelings.
- The ability to remain focussed/in a flow state.
- The ability to relax/switch off.

History of the programme

This programme was originally trialled in three schools in 2019, using funding from the Guys and St Thomas trust and was fully evaluated. It was aimed specifically at improving the wellbeing of children with a history of adverse childhood experiences. Understanding how trauma impacts on the developing brains and bodies of children and young people. Following a positive evaluation of the trial, the programme has been further developed to include positive psychology and recent theories of resilience and supports children to understand what is happening in their brains and bodies when they are experiencing emotions.

About the Author

This programme was written and developed by Kellie Ansell. Kellie has been a teacher and leader in education for 38 years. She has led children centres, early years departments and for nine years was a deputy head teacher in a Southwark primary school. Among other roles she has led on safeguarding, the implementation of a mindfulness programme and a trauma informed approach. She has been an early year's consultant for Southwark offering support to schools and the private and voluntary sector and training teachers and practitioners. Most recently as an independent consultant, she has been supporting schools to develop their whole school approach to improving mental health and resilience. Having practiced yoga for 30 years she trained as a yoga teacher in 2018 and took further training in trauma sensitive yoga practice. This programme marries together an understanding of how children learn, recent theory and research, a trauma informed approach and the ancient art of yoga.

Follow on activities for the classroom and the home

Breathing

Throughout the six weeks the children will be practicing a variety of breathing techniques that can help them to manage their emotions, stay in the present moment, aid relaxation and sleep and even bring energy and alertness. These techniques are all described in the booklet each child and family and class teacher will have a copy of. Gentle encouragement to practice these techniques at home and at school will reinforce the learning in the sessions and allow the child to share their learning with other children and their family. You never know you might all benefit from a little bit of bumble bee breathing at bedtime, or bunny breathing in the morning when you can't get going 😊

Gratitude



There are lots of activities that can support children to practice gratitude. From simply asking the children regularly, maybe at the dinner table at home or at the end of the day on the carpet in school to think of three things they are grateful for today, can make this a regular habit that promotes everyone's wellbeing. Here are a few more you might like to try:

Make a class or family gratitude collage.

Children and adults can take photos, cut out pictures from magazines and draw pictures of all of the things they are grateful for and hang it somewhere as a reminder.

Gratitude journals

Some people and children find it helpful to have their own private gratitude /wellbeing journals. Developing the habit of writing down how we feel about stuff and all the wonderful things we have in life and for life itself, can help us develop the necessary resilience we need when times may not be so good.

Write some thankyou notes

This is an old-fashioned practice that I remember as a child and a lovely way of practicing gratitude (and gets the children to practice their writing 😊). Children can choose someone special to write a thank you too. It is also an act of kindness and will make everyone feel good.

Gratitude jars/boards/trees

To be more spontaneous you could have a gratitude jar for the family /class or for each person in the family. Then children and adults can put their little notes of things they are grateful for, and they can be read out once a week.

Thinking positively

Throughout the six weeks children will be encouraged to challenge negative thinking about themselves and different situations. You can help in class or at home by noticing when a child has a negative thought about themselves, or a situation and it is holding them back or affecting their confidence and abilities. Ask them to change that thought into a positive thought. Remind them that we can train our brains to be more positive by helping to change negative thoughts and statements into positive ones and growing more positive synapses in our brains. For example, a child saying, "I can't do this maths problem, I'm no good at maths", can be changed to "I can't do this maths problem yet but if I try and ask for help I'll learn how to solve it"

Play the "Best thing about" game



Sit in a circle and pass a shell or an interesting object and explain that when you get the shell it is your time to turn a card over and talk. You can make a selection of cards with one or 2 words on (use pictures alongside the words for younger children), such as my family, playtime, school, dinner time, the names of the children. You get the idea. When you get the shell, you pick up a card and say “the best thing about “, naming the subject on the card is....

This also helps children to think positively, using optimism. It can help a child see a situation/person/time in a different more positive light. Creating more positive synapses in our brains (🌀)

Kindness

We all need to model kindness to the children, by demonstrating that we can do kind things for them and for others and it makes everyone feel good. These things don't have to be big or cost money.

Make a list of acts of kindness

Brainstorm with the class or with your child/children all of the kind things that could be done everyday at home and at school, such as:

- Push someone's chair in at school
- Clear up someone else's mess
- Make someone a drink
- Make someone laugh
- Make a picture or a thankyou note for someone
- Let someone in the line ahead of you
- Hold a door open for someone
- Knock on a neighbour's door to ask how they are

You get the idea. The list is endless once you start. If the children generate the ideas, they are more likely to do them. You can check in from time to time to see if these things are being done and everyone is feeling good about themselves for being kind.

Pay each other compliments

This is a simple practice, but how often do we do it. It feels so nice when someone compliments you and takes the time to notice something about you.

It can be something that you slot into the day at the end of carpet time or before playtime, so all the children feel good about themselves before they leave you. At home, it can be done at any time, before leaving for school or at the end of



the day. When we practice giving compliments the serotonin that is released into our brains and bodies is a very good feeling.

Managing our emotions

Throughout the six weeks the children will be encouraged to check in with how they are feeling, to name the emotion and then think of a way of managing this feeling if they need to. They accept that all emotions are valid and sometimes we become overwhelmed and may need to find some strategies that work for us. It would be amazing if this could be supported in the classroom and at home. If the school are already using a particular program to support children with emotion such as “The zones of regulation or Ruler”, the yoga teacher will endeavour to use the language of that program to ensure consistency for the children. Children can be reminded in class or at home to think about what they have learned in yoga class. Ask them how they are feeling and if they are overwhelmed, understand that they will not be able to reasonably talk about it until they have used a strategy to calm the Amygdala in their brain. Offer them some strategies if the child is unsure and then offer to talk through the problem when the child is calm.

It is important to offer the children a consistent approach and an opportunity to consolidate what they are using in yoga class and use those strategies off of the mat yoga in ordinary situations

Make a calm down box/area

This can be a container that is decorated by the child for use at home or a calm down /wellbeing area in the classroom. This box could have a squidgy stress toy, a breathing ball, some paper and nice pencils to draw on, some calming music, some colouring in. You can decide with the children.

Check in regularly with the child and ask about how they are feeling.

Empathy

You can play the “Guess the emotion “game

Sit in a circle and everyone is to choose an emotion to wear on their face (you can use emotion cards to help with ideas and expressions). Children have to guess the emotion

Role playing



This is always fun. Choose some scenarios to act out (children to do the acting) ask the rest of the group to think about how the person might feel in that situation and what could they do in response.

Some scenarios might be:

Someone is left all alone in the dining hall but everyone else has someone to sit next to..... OR

Someone is walking in the corridor, and they trip up.....

OR

2 friends are talking quietly about something, and another friend wants to join in, but they don't want her to and tell her to go away.....

You get the idea. Puppets can be used with younger children to explore issues that may be arising at the time. This makes it the puppet's problem and its much easier to empathise when its not about you!!!

These are just a few suggestions and I'm sure you can think of many more.

Have FUN everyone 😊