



YOGABEAR

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS OF MIXED-LEVELS CLASSES

Mixed-levels classes typically contain students with a variety of abilities, experience, injuries, and illnesses. The following guidelines help ensure that all students, including Yoga Bear participants, feel safe and welcomed in your class.

When a new student walks into your classroom. Welcome every student, and be ready to offer assistance setting up or answer questions about the class. Don't make assumptions based on age or appearance about what they can physically do and what they are looking for in a yoga class. A young student who looks physically fit may have a serious injury or illness and need encouragement to rest or modify as needed; an older or overweight student may be an experienced yoga practitioner ready for a challenge.

When a student appears to have special needs or require extra instruction. Not all new students, students with injuries/illness, or students who don't fit the typical profile of your class (e.g. obese students or seniors) will want continuous extra attention. They may be self-conscious enough and already feel like they stand out. Offer one-on-one attention and support as you would with all students, but try to offer a variety of options to the entire class, rather than constantly singling out one student for special instruction.

When a student isn't following your instruction. There are many reasons a student might choose to modify a pose or refrain from a practice. Don't make assumptions (e.g. laziness, fear, confusion about instructions) about why the student is not participating fully. Check in with the student and offer information or alternatives, but don't pry. Student with injuries, symptoms of illness, or side effects from treatment may not want to explain why they need to modify, especially if they are in class to experience some freedom from being a "patient" or a person with cancer (or other illness/injury).

Use informed and intentional touch. Students with injuries and illnesses may enjoy supportive touch in a yoga class, but—like any student—may also be wary of

getting hurt by an adjustment, or be sensitive to being touched. When you offer touch to students, make sure they have an opportunity to give you permission and feedback. Remember that adjustments can be confusing to students. When possible, explain what you are doing, why, and what you want the student to do in response (e.g. relax your shoulders, bring the knee over the heel, let your torso turn).

If you use partner work in your class, give students an easy way to choose whether they want to participate. Just as with touch from an instructor, many students have concerns about being supported or adjusted by an untrained student. Have an alternative for students who consciously choose not to participate in partner work.

When emotions come up in practice. In yoga practice, students may experience strong emotions, especially if they are going through a difficult time or dealing with a health challenge. This does not necessarily mean that anything is wrong, or that the student needs special comfort. If you notice a student is upset, privately and discretely ask if there is anything they need, or offer a tissue and give them permission to take care of themselves.

Compiled by Kelly McGonigal, PhD, (www.kellymcgonigal.com), author of *Yoga for Pain Relief*, for Yoga Bear (www.yogabear.org), a non-profit organization that provides yoga to cancer patients and survivors in hospitals and yoga studios around the U.S.