

Mindfulness & Yoga in Schools



Focus

Fun



Engagement

Compassion



By Tonya Schmitt of Mindful SOULutions

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Bringing the power of yoga & mindfulness to schools!

TONYA SCHMITT

YOUTH TRAUMA SENSITIVE YOGA
& MINDFULNESS
MED LIFE SCIENCE, BA BIOLOGY

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Yoga & Fitness Teacher

Western WI & Eastern MN 2008-present

Empowering & fun classes! Design & teach classes in yoga, mindfulness, mindful eating, healthy aging, healthy eating & mind-body fitness. Large & small groups. Adults. Families. Youth.

Naturalist

Carpenter Nature Center 2017-present, 1996-1998

Writing curriculum and teaching classes for environmental education and public programs. On & off-ste. Program animal handling. Preschool through Middle School.

Substitute Teacher

River Falls School District 2017-present

Grades K-12. Primarily at RFPME. Also, Greenwood, Meyer, RFHS. Teach lessons in Math, Language, Science, Reading, Art, Phy Ed.

Science Teacher

Mounds Park Academy 2001-2002

6th & 7th grade Physical, Life & Earth Science. 10th grade Honors Biology. Active, hands-on, minds-on lessons: indoors & outdoors. 6th grade Home Room Teacher.

WELLNESS EDUCATION

YogaFit (YF), Fitness (NETA) & Mindful Schools (MS)

2018

Yoga for ADD & Autism Spectrum and Fit & Focused Kids (YF).

2017

500 hours with YF. Training includes anxiety, depression, trauma. Coursework for adults, children & teens. Graduate credits for Mindfulness in the Classroom with MS.

2014

Fitness Instructor with National Exercise Trainers Association

2010

200 hour program with YF.

ABOUT ME

Skilled, compassionate, empowering & fun yoga & mindfulness teacher!

My effectiveness as a teacher stems from my seamless integration of research-based exercise physiology and neuroscience with ancient wisdom and an abundant sense of playfulness and humor!

OTHER EXPERIENCE

Museum Educator
Aquarium Educator
Program Coordinator
Executive Director
Grant Writer
Storyteller

Highlights:

- 2016-present Teaching yoga & mindfulness to RF Public Montessori families & staff.
- 2018 Teaching yoga at Little Minds Learning Center RF & Hudson.
- 2017-present Family Fitness & Family Yoga at In Balance and Inspiring Actions Yoga studios.

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Staff Training: The Mindful Classroom Series

Daily expectations mount for teacher accomplishments. Students' lives become ever-increasingly media driven. Family and school trauma is becoming ever increasingly common. Social, emotional, physical and mental strain continue to rise. Mindfulness is a research proven tool for healthier living & working, that can be utilized anywhere at anytime, at no cost. This teacher workshop series will provide practical techniques to cultivate mindfulness in staff and students for the benefit of the classroom.

Benefits of Mindfulness*: (*The Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress-Free Living* p. 267, *Beth Shaw's YogaFit*, p. 266-267)

- Stress relief
- Enhanced focus
- Sense of peace
- Improved critical thinking
- Increased mood
- Break unhealthy habits
- Reduced anxiety/depression
- Improved sleep
- Boost immune system

*These are just some of the countless benefits. Each person's response is unique.

Classrooms where mindfulness is a regular part of the school day find that they are characterized by overall: (www.mindfulschools.org)

- Improved focus
- Better emotional regulation
- More compassion
- Greater engagement

The Mindful Classroom Series

Fee: \$100/person for the 5 hour series (Minimum 10 staff; plus travel, when necessary)

Session 1: *Mindful Teachers*, 2 hours

Learn, experience, practice and discuss simple and effective tools of mindfulness for self-care. This is homework and schoolwork that you will want to do and share!

Session 2: *Mindful Students*, 1.5 hours

Learn and apply techniques for mindfulness that are gems for your students. Play in the mindfulness toolbox! Also, share your mindful practice to date.

Session 3: *Mindful Journey*, 1.5 hours

Explore more mindful tools. Share areas of mindful gratitude and areas that need further attention. Plan ways to proceed.

About the Instructor

Tonya Schmitt holds an MEd in Life Science from the University of Minnesota, a BA in Biology from Southwest Minnesota State University, and a certificate in Executive Director Leadership from the University of St. Thomas.

Tonya's studies of health & wellness include:

- 500+ hours of training with YogaFit™, following a therapeutic course. Coursework includes: tools for attention deficit disorder, autism spectrum disorders, youth trauma, anxiety, depression, PTSD, traumatic brain injury, addiction & recovery and self-care techniques. Play-based movement & breathing mindfulness techniques.
- 100 hours of Yoga Therapy with Aura Wellness Center.
- Health Coach certification with Dr. Sears. Coursework focused on physical activity, healthy food choices and nervous system relaxation.
- Fitness Instructor certification with the National Exercise Trainers Association, including Stress Management and Fun Fit Kids.

Tonya is an experienced teacher of:

- Yoga for all ages.
- Mindful Eating.
- Mindful Movement.
- Mindful Meditation.
- Healthy living.
- Gratitude as a way of life.



Meet Tonya

"I love sharing the many tools and toys of mindfulness and yoga through exploration! There are no set roads. There are countless opportunities to try out the tools with a spirit of curiosity, and even fun! Together, we journey to see what will be most helpful and healing for YOU!"

~Tonya Schmitt, MEd

Student Practices: Mindful Journey

Tonya comes to your classroom, sharing mindfulness practices in fun and simple fashion. Length of classroom visit varies according to school needs. Typically, the time is from 10-30 minutes per classroom. Age also determines time length per classroom. Frequency of visits ranges from 1 to 3 times per week, again dependent on school needs.

Examples of tools:

- Breath Awareness
- Thought Awareness
- Guided Visualization
- Mindful Movement
- Mindful Listening
- Mindful Speaking
- Mindful Eating
- Breathing Methods
- Mindfulness in Nature
- Positive Affirmations
- Yoga Poses
- Songs
- Cultural Stories

Available for 4K-12th grade & daycare. Fee: \$60/hour, 1 hour minimum per school, plus travel when necessary.



What People are Saying about Mindfulness & Yoga in Schools



Tonya relates extremely well with a variety of people and personalities. She is clear in her expectations of behavior in children, encourages healthy risk taking in doing yoga poses, is engaging in the delivery of lessons, can adapt at a moment's notice to enhance instruction and does a phenomenal job at communicating observations that she has made during her time with children. Tonya has inspired me to be a better teacher and communicator by her example.

~Karen Olson, Lower Elementary Teacher, River Falls Public Montessori Elementary

Tonya has a compassionate spirit that allows children to trust her and feel free to be themselves. Tonya leads yoga in a way that participants learn at an easy pace that is engaging and rewarding. Children and adults are drawn to the peaceful aura Tonya exudes.

~Katie Purington, Upper Elementary Teacher, River Falls Public Montessori Elementary

Tonya Schmitt has taught my 4 year old daughter Tenley mindfulness and yoga through learning experiences at Little Minds Learning Center and also through family fitness classes we have participated in at In Balance Yoga Studio. Because my daughter Tenley will encounter emotional, social, and physical challenges or conflicts, a dedicated and intentional yoga practice like Tonya brings that includes breathing techniques, communicative guidelines, and physical postures is incredibly valuable. By practicing yoga poses, Tenley even at her young age of 4 has already learned more about exercise, developed a new confidence about becoming calm, and concentrates better. I can appreciate how Tonya shares that breathing, concentration, poses, and the way kids learn to act or react to situations lead to constant self-discovery and inquisitiveness. I love that my daughter enjoys yoga and that she knows she can practice anywhere.

~Kensley Schultz, Parent at Little Minds Learning Center in River Falls, WI



Tonya and I co-wrote a grant to bring our community together with after-school yoga and wellness for families. Through this experience of mindfulness yoga over several months, we have witnessed Tonya's ability to share her mindful approach and positivity in several settings. When teaching children and adults together, Tonya can meet whatever wide range of needs she finds. She effortlessly engages younger minds and bodies by using storytelling and creative imagery, all the while teaching yoga moves, meditation techniques and an awareness of our own bodies' capabilities. In every setting, Tonya manages to make all of us feel capable, safe and inspired to practice a holistic way of moving and to have fun while doing so!

~Maggie Watson, Lower Elementary Teacher, River Falls Public Montessori Elementary

When it comes to mindfulness and instilling the ability to find beauty in oneself and others Tonya has amazing capabilities. Ms. Tonya has such a kind, giving & genuine nature about her. We knew before the interview process was complete that she would be a wonderful fit for our Little Minds Learning Center family! We really appreciate Ms. Tonya's approach to the mindfulness of body & spirit. She teaches the children to find & respect the beauty in themselves & in others. A teacher earns validation when her students enthusiastically carry out the curriculum in between classes. Our students will show us a pose or sing us a song & say, "Ms. Tonya taught me that!". We definitely feel very blessed & fortunate to have her!

**~Samantha Eichman, Director & Charity Purfeerst, Assistant Director
at Little Minds Learning Center, River Falls**



Mindfulness & Yoga Research/Resources

1. Can in-school meditation help curb youth violence? 2017.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-classroom-meditation-disadvantaged-students-met-20161231-story.html>

In progress. Participant comments so far (quoted):

- "It helps you to slow your mind," said James, 17, a senior at Gage Park. The Tribune agreed not to publish students' last names at the school's request. "It helps you to slow down and focus." Before taking part in the Quiet Time program, James said he was quick to anger and often was arguing and fighting. Now, James said, he is calmer and thinks about how to react when someone says something objectionable or he finds himself in a stressful interaction.
"I feel it can help people in school and out of school and with everything you do in life," James said after a restful meditation session.
- Morales, the Gage Park teacher, said, "As a teacher, I've seen a transformation of how we, how I, handle conflict in the classroom." Morales, 57, initially was skeptical of the meditation program, doubting that such a practice would make much difference at a school such as Gage Park. Morales said he thought program and school officials were "naive" to believe the program would resonate with students, and he said he expressed his reservations.
But slowly, Morales began to see the upside with students, and himself.
Morales said the practice has helped him in the work setting and during the slog of his commute. Stuck in traffic, he no longer curses at other drivers or stresses about congestion, trying to bring his mind to a calm place.
- "I was a real belligerent person and a hothead before, and it's really calming and releases stress," said Rakiha, a Gage Park sophomore. "It relaxes me, and it opens my mind up."
- "When I first heard about it, I said, 'What is this? What are we doing?'" Breana said. "When you really get into it, I really got some stress off my mind. I really think before I do certain things."

2. Common brain changes found in children with autism, ADHD and OCD. 2016.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/07/160727110911.htm>

Conclusions (quoted):

- "We found impairments in white matter in the main tract connecting the right and left hemispheres of the brain in children with either autism, ADHD or OCD, when compared to healthy children in the control group," says Dr. Stephanie Ameis, first author on the study and clinician-scientist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's (CAMH's) Campbell Family Mental Health Research Institute. This particular white matter tract, the corpus callosum, is the largest in the brain and among the first to develop.

Connections to this research:

- The corpus callosum is the part of the brain that bridges the left and right hemispheres.
- Cross body activities promote integration of the two hemispheres. Yoga has many cross body movements.

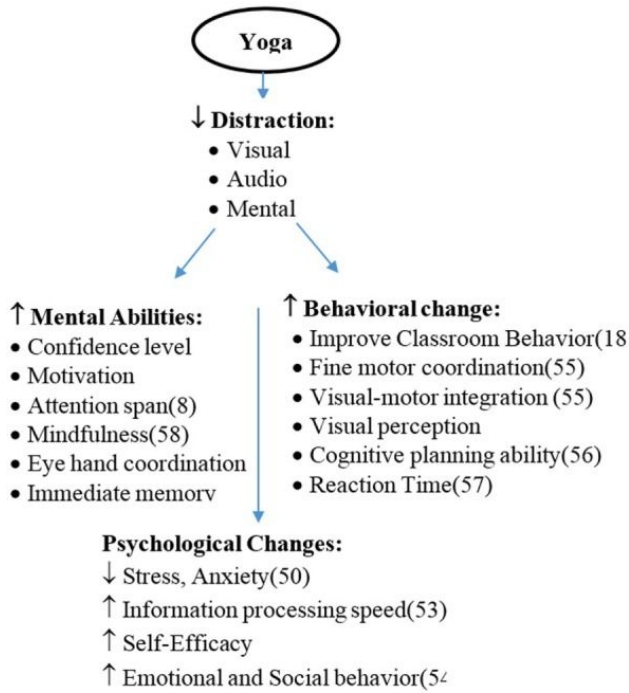
3. Influence of Yoga-Based Personality Development Program on Psychomotor Performance and Self-efficacy in School Children. 2016.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4908105/>

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Conclusions (quoted):

- The results of this study revealed that the school children who performed regular *yoga* practices showed higher self-efficacy and improved performance compared with control group who continued with their normal routine.
- Evidence-based previous scientific studies supporting the findings of the preset study on the effect of yogic practices on psychological, behavioral, and cognitive abilities in children are given in Figure [Figure1.1](#)



- ...the results of our study suggest that *yoga*-based intervention in school children can improve attention, motor function, and different domains of personality.

4. Mind-Body Therapies in Children and Youth. 2016.

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/08/18/peds.2016-1896>

This was a meta-analysis of many studies. Conclusions (quoted):

- Research on structured meditation programs for children and youth is suggestive of benefits, particularly related to improvements in mental health, coping, and self-regulation as well as decreasing hypertension and negative school behaviors.
- Guided imagery as a therapeutic intervention has been shown to have positive effects on psychological functioning, stress reduction, and pain management.
- Yoga, as a therapeutic intervention, has positive effects on psychological functioning, especially in children coping with emotional, mental, and behavioral health problems.

5. School-based Yoga Programs in the United States: A Survey. 2015.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4831047/>

This was a meta-analysis of many programs. Conclusions (quoted):

- These preliminary findings suggest that providing yoga within the school curriculum may be an effective and feasible way to help youth develop skills in stress management and emotional

regulation. The high prevalence of psychiatric disorders among youth,³³ coupled with the fact that most schools do not prioritize training in stress management and emotional regulation,³⁴ suggests that these types of interventions might be advantageous in school settings.

- Schools play an essential role in helping children develop social and academic skills that are required to be successful as adults. Indeed, several preliminary studies suggest that school-based yoga interventions may positively affect numerous aspects of students' health.^{9,17-32} Thus, implementing yoga within the curricula of US schools could have widespread implications, especially considering the fact that school attendance is legally mandated in the United States.
- Given that the majority of psychiatric disorders have onsets during childhood or adolescence⁴² and that more than one-third of US children are considered overweight or obese,⁴³ school-based yoga programs have the potential to provide a large-scale preventive intervention that may target early risk factors for psychological and physical health problems in both childhood and adulthood.

6. Sleep Disorder, Gastrointestinal Problems and Behaviour Problems Seen in Autism Spectrum Disorder Children and Yoga as Therapy: A Descriptive Review. 2016.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28050484>

This was a meta-analysis of many studies. Conclusions (quoted):

- Yoga affects both physiological and psychological level which helps in overall development of ASD children and thus, enhancing the quality of life of children as well as family.
- Yoga should be a routine and part of day to day activity for ASD children.
- If yoga is practiced regularly, it can be used as a preventive therapy to keep away many non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension, arthritis etc. among the caretakers.