

Yoga at school can boost mental health of children suffering from anxiety: Study

Yoga at school can help improve emotional health of children, according to a recent study. Researchers at Tulane University worked with a public school in New Orleans to add yoga to the school's existing empathy-based programming for students needing supplementary support. These findings support the view of many Indian educationists that focused efforts to popularise yoga among school children is the need of the hour.

Third graders, who were screened for symptoms of anxiety at the beginning of the school year, were randomly assigned to two groups. A control group of 32 students received care as usual, which included counselling and other activities led by a school social worker. The intervention group of 20 students participated in small group yoga activities for eight weeks using a Yoga Ed curriculum. Students attended the small group activities at the beginning of the school day. The sessions included breathing exercises, guided relaxation and several traditional yoga poses appropriate for children.

Researchers evaluated each group's health related quality of life before and after the intervention, using two widely recognized research tools."The intervention improved psychosocial and emotional quality of life scores for students, as compared to their peers who received standard care," said principal author Alessandra Bazzano."We also heard from teachers about the benefits of using yoga in the classroom, and they reported using yoga more often each week, and throughout each day in class, following the professional development component of intervention."

Researchers targeted third grade because it is a crucial time of transition for elementary students, when academic expectations increase."Our initial work found that many kids expressed anxious feelings in third grade as the classroom work becomes more developmentally complex," Bazzano said. "Even younger children are experiencing a lot of stress and anxiety, especially around test time."

The study has been published in the journal Psychology Research and Behavior Management. One hopes that this study will encourage more and more school administrations to provide yoga training to school children.