



Program Facilitation Guidelines

"The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater our own sense of well-being becomes. Cultivating a close, warm-hearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. This helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the ultimate source of success in life." -- H.H. Dalai Lama

Post-Lineage and Trauma-Informed

Over the millennia that yoga has been practiced, sharing the practice has often taken place within a lineage founded by a guru, featuring a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student.

Prison Yoga Project favors a “post-lineage” approach. Theodora Wildcroft, an ethnographer, scholar, and yoga practitioner who coined the term, defines “post-lineage yoga” in the following way:

[Post-lineage yoga] rejects the idea that any individual yogic text or modern alignment paradigm can hold complete universal truth, and rejects unquestioning allegiance to a single deity in the form of a living or historical figure. It rejects the common practice of attributing any harm caused within the practice to defects in the practitioner, and seeks to re-situate the practice in community, and socio-political contexts. Post-lineage yoga is a re-evaluation of the authority to determine practice, and a privileging of peer networks over pedagogical hierarchies, or saṃghas (communities) over guru-śiṣya (teacher-adept) relationships.¹

In the context of a prison or jail, where social hierarchies are explicit, fraught with power dynamics, and often traumatizing, we feel this approach is essential. A post-lineage approach makes space for a trauma-informed methodology, shifting control away from the teacher and empowering the practitioner to discover the truth of yoga as it is revealed to them through their own experience.

¹ Wildcroft, Theodora R. (2018). *Patterns of authority and practice relationships in 'post-lineage yoga'*. The Open University (PhD Thesis).

Without a specific lineage with prescribed practices, we need to consider the needs and circumstances of the people we will be practicing with.

A common factor in the lives of incarcerated people is trauma. Many incarcerated people have, since childhood, experienced significant chronic interpersonal trauma. Social factors such as race, gender, or economic class also contribute to trauma, and the incarceration environment compounds it. Many have turned to substances to cope with this trauma, leading to addiction.

Our prisons and jails are the de facto providers for those who do not have reliable access to mental health care. Anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia are overrepresented in our prisons and, especially, in our jails.

Recognizing the prevalence of trauma, addiction, and mental health concerns among the incarcerated, Prison Yoga Project adopts a trauma-informed, mindfulness-based approach adapted for prisons and jails based on our experience working in this context.

In studio settings, physical fitness is often the primary objective of yoga practice. In Prison Yoga Project's approach, physical fitness is a component of the practice, but the primary objective is the health of the practitioner's nervous system. This document provides guidelines for offering yoga according to this approach.

The goal of this approach is to offer an immersive somatic experience with the objectives of:

- Awakening and strengthening embodiment through interoception
- Discharging accumulated tension
- Cultivating resilience to stress and trauma
- Developing tools for self-regulation; managing states of hyper-/hypo-arousal
- Experiencing the present moment and the passage of time
- Practicing personal empowerment, taking effective action, and making choices
- Strengthening self-awareness and the capacity for insight
- Building relationships and community, empathy, and compassion

Reflecting on Our Readiness to Serve

Consider how your experience with leading yoga practices might influence how you show up. If you're new to teaching yoga or are nervous, this can be communicated to the group and potentially diminish benefits or create an unsafe environment. If you have extensive experience leading practices in a methodology that is not trauma-informed, you might have habits that undermine the objectives of a trauma-informed approach. You might also consider your prior experience with prisons or jails. If it's a new environment for you or one in which you've had negative experiences, this may influence how you show up. Knowing how these things might shape your practice and presence will help you avoid allowing habit or unconscious tendencies to color the practice you facilitate.

Beyond your prior experience facilitating yoga practices, it's important that you have a close relationship with your own embodied experience. You must be able to meet challenging circumstances with an informed response rather than a triggered reaction. Depending on the

facility you choose to work in, you might be facilitating practices with people who are incarcerated because of addiction, mental health issues, or another non-violent offense. In other facilities, you may facilitate practices with people who are incarcerated for acts of violence resulting in serious harm and even death. Consider how you would feel learning what a person has done and how that might affect your ability to meet them with compassion.

Many factors, both internal and external, affect how we show up. We cover many topics in the Foundational Training and invite you to reflect on the following:

- What are your motivations?
- What are your potential triggers?
- How might the space impact your feeling of physical and mental safety? How can you care for yourself?
- What is your understanding of the history of oppression in incarceration?
- What implicit biases might you hold?
- Do you resent the incarceration system that may block you from showing up as your best self?

Facilitator Requirements

The minimum requirements for becoming a Prison Yoga Project facilitator are:

- Completing a PYP Facilitator Application & Facilitator Onboarding Training
- A dedicated personal practice that includes somatic mindfulness
- Completion of a 200-Hour Yoga Teacher Training with a Yoga Alliance Registered Yoga School or the equivalent
- Completion of PYP's *Foundational Training*
- Experience facilitating trauma-informed yoga and mindfulness practices

Preferred candidates will have the above plus yoga therapy certification (C-IAYT), Somatic Experiencing Practitioner (SEP), or mental health provider training emphasizing body-based therapies. Additional training for working with specific populations, e.g., youth, seniors, addiction recovery, chair yoga, accessible yoga, and so on, is extremely valuable.

On-going Education

Becoming a skilled trauma-informed yoga facilitator is deepening skill and understanding. We encourage our Facilitators to continue learning through training, workshops, webinars, podcasts, and online resources through Prison Yoga Project and other organizations that promote an accessible and trauma-informed approach to offering yoga.

Because our methodology is profoundly influenced by *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk, we've included it in our recommended reading list. There are many other books and sources you might turn to in your self-study to gain more skill and understanding in facilitating a trauma-informed yoga practice. It is important to read from multiple perspectives that consider factors such as systemic oppression and different lived experiences,

A few that we highly recommend are:

- *The Body Keeps the Score*, by Bessel van der Kolk
- *Accessible Yoga*, by Jivana Heyman
- *My Grandmother's Hands*, by Resmaa Menakem
- *Trauma and Memory*, by Peter Levine
- *Skill in Action*, by Michelle Cassandra Johnson
- *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga*, by David Emerson and Elizabeth Hopper, PhD
- *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, by Gabor Mate
- *Befriending the Body*, by Ann Saffi Biasetti

Prison Yoga Project published books include:

- *Yoga: A Path for Healing and Recovery*, by James Fox
- *Freedom from the Inside*, by Josefin Wikstrom and James Fox

A full list of recommended readings can be found on PYP's Bookshop:

<https://bookshop.org/shop/prisonyoga>.

Note that you may find recommendations in these resources contradict the guidelines in this document. You may also work in an environment or with a group that requires deviation from these guidelines. In such a case, we expect you to adapt based on an informed perspective and can support you in determining the best approach for the population you serve.

Establishing a Program

A *program* refers to a recurring meeting at a facility. A program may be ongoing (without a defined beginning or end date) or close-ended. A program might occur according to various schedules: daily, twice-weekly, weekly, monthly, and so on. A program might follow a structured curriculum, such as our Yoga and Mindfulness Immersion Program, or follow an ad-hoc practice-focused path. The group participants may be consistent or come and go depending on the nature of the facility.

When establishing a program, be aware of the following considerations:

- **Group size** – The preferred group size is up to 15 participants; with additional facilitators, up to 25 participants can be accommodated. Building trusted relationships with participants is the essential component of our program, and the greater the number of participants per facilitator, the harder this can be. Consider the size and configuration of the practice space when determining group size and vice versa. There are other factors you might need to consider; for example, when working with groups who have a serious mental illness or with youth, you might opt for a smaller group.
- **Team size** – We recommend starting a program with at least two or three facilitators to ensure consistency and class coverage if a facilitator is unavailable. Having a team of three or more available allows for greater flexibility in scheduling. It lessens the chance a session will have to be canceled while preserving the consistency of facilitators. The consistency of facilitators is essential for building trust in relationships. A program session can be facilitated by one or two facilitators. We recommend two facilitators for large group sizes or high-need groups, such as youth.
- **Gender** - We recommend that male-identifying facilitators not facilitate programs in women's facilities, understanding there may be exceptions for certain circumstances. Many incarcerated women have experienced significant trauma at the hands of men. While developing trusting relationships with men is essential in the long run, an incarceration setting is not the ideal space for this healing work.
 - All PYP programs should be inclusive and accessible for transgender, non-binary, and gender-non-conforming participants. It is critical to remember that some participants may not feel safe disclosing their gender identity to the group. It is best to avoid language that assumes the entire group identifies as male or female. It is also helpful to begin class by sharing your pronouns, understanding that some participants may ask why you are choosing to share, and being prepared to answer.
- **Ability** – In almost every program, if not all, participants will have different ability levels. This is to be expected, and Facilitators should be prepared to offer many different versions of the same pose, breathing, and meditation techniques so that the program is accessible to all participants. It can help to have more than one facilitator present to model variations to accommodate differing abilities. The Accessible Yoga School has excellent resources and training for this, which we advertise to our facilitator community.
- **Frequency** – Programs are typically held weekly; research into effective dosage for yoga suggests 2-3 sessions per week is preferred. The frequency will often be influenced by the space availability in the facility and the availability of facilitators. Consider how you can encourage and support self-practice in between sessions.
- **Duration** – 1-hour sessions are recommended; 45 minutes to 1 hour for youth programs. Consider additional time at the beginning and end for set-up, participant check-in,

practice, closing, and clean-up. Additionally, you will need to consider the time you spend getting into and out of the facility through security checkpoints and, possibly, waiting on escorts who may be delayed.

- **Allowing people to “opt out”** – It goes against trauma-informed principles to require someone to participate. For people with significant trauma, being forced to come into awareness of embodied experience can trigger or re-traumatize. If an institution insists on participation (i.e., requires someone to be in the room), give the participants options about whether and how they engage with the practice.
 - For example, "You have choices in how you participate. Participation includes sitting on your mat and breathing or trying poses from a seated position. Participation does not include talking with the person next to you or distracting others in the group."
 - “You are welcome to do this next part seated or standing. I will show both versions, and you can choose what is best for you. If you aren’t quite sure which version you prefer, you can try both.”
 - “You are welcome to participate in belly-breathing, or you can practice resting however feels best. I ask that we practice silence so that people have space to practice as they need to. If this quiet and silence are overwhelming, you are welcome to make fists, tap on your legs, or look up at me or around the room.”

Staff at the facility might interpret non-participation as a sign of disobedience or disrespect and order participants to practice. It's best not to confront correctional staff in front of participants. Work with the coordinator at the facility to explain the potential for re-traumatization and the importance of allowing participants to make a personal choice to engage in a positive, pro-social group activity. They can help you communicate this with the correctional staff.

- **Yoga as a reward** - It is worth noting that some facilities seek to establish programs as a reward for good behavior. Only granting access to the “best behaved” may also prevent the people who need it the most from having access. Therefore we discourage facilities from offering yoga programs as a system of reward. Similarly, we discourage facilities from revoking access to yoga as a punishment. However, rewards or incentives for participation in a yoga program, such as "time off sentence" credits, are entirely acceptable. We encourage supporting participants with letters of support and certificates for participation and completion in the program.

Facilitator Presence

We use the term ‘facilitator’ rather than ‘teacher’ intentionally. We also use the word ‘participant’ rather than ‘student.’ There is a strong hierarchical relationship implied by teacher/student that is not as explicitly present in facilitator/participant.

Each participant is his/her/their authority on their experience; they are their own best teacher. The role of the facilitator is to create a space and guide an experience that allows participants to connect with their embodied experience and develop their internal resources.

Your presence, how you show up, in this work has a significant influence on the outcome:

- **Create an invitational container** – We want all participants to feel welcome in class. When facilitating, consider demonstrating poses that invite the group in and create accessibility, as opposed to modeling the most strenuous/flexible version of a pose. For example, while you can touch your toes in a forward fold, you don’t have to model this. It is also helpful to let participants know when something is challenging for you and normalize that all bodies may feel different.
- **Create belonging** – Be mindful of body language, eye contact, and your expression. Strive to show up in a spirit of equality that welcomes and acknowledges each participant and every staff member.
- **Be consistent** – Commit to whatever length of time the program will run – 12 weeks, 16 weeks, six months, and so on. Show up on time for each session and try to end consistently at the same time each session. If you cannot conduct a future class, inform participants beforehand and tell them who your sub will be if you have one. Remember, you are modeling a relationship with others that many (if not most) incarcerated people have not experienced in their lives.
- **Strive to be calm** – When you are relaxed, others around will be able to relax; the principle of co-regulation in Polyvagal Theory. When you are agitated, others may become agitated. Our energies resonate. Prisons and jails can be chaotic and intense environments. Your long-standing practice supports you in meeting this energy with equanimity.
- **Be authentic** – Grounding yourself in your intention to serve others is essential. Like those you serve, you are unique and have much to contribute to others. Be aware of feeding the power dynamic by fulfilling a role as a "yoga teacher." We have learned that you will build trust faster with groups by being genuine and embracing your humanity.
- **Maintain professional boundaries** – Your personal experience with the practice and how it has helped your life is relevant and can be shared. Details of your personal life are not and should not be shared. Intimate relationships of any sort, even consensual, are prohibited by law because the incarceration setting confuses issues of consent. Notice: what motivates you in this work? Do you consciously or unconsciously need something

from the relationship? Are you trying to save? Or to be saved? These needs and motivations can create porous boundaries and lead to more harm than good.

- **Know the limits of your scope of practice** – Your role is to facilitate a yoga experience, not to be a therapist. Even if you are a licensed mental health care provider, this is not your role in this context.
- **Let go of attachment to an outcome** – Trust the participant's pace at which they are ready to reconnect to the body. Trust that the poses they are in/the modifications they are choosing are the right ones for them. Understand that participants do not need to/may not meet a specific outcome that you decide is best for them. We provide an opportunity for people to practice being their best selves because we show up without preconceptions.

However, this does not mean we should ignore the potential for harm. This concept does not take away the need for program monitoring and evaluation.

- **Practice unconditional positive regard** – This means we respect our participants in their wholeness as human beings with the agency to choose how they respond to their situation.
- **Acknowledge your mistakes** – If you do something that harms another, make amends. If you violate a rule of the institution, let your program coordinator know.
- **Keep it non-denominational** – Yoga has its roots in ancient Vedic texts and is closely associated with Hinduism. Buddhism lists mindfulness of the body as the first of the four foundations of mindfulness. We are not, however, a Hindu or Buddhist organization. There are abundant teachings from Christianity, Islam, Indigenous cultures, and other faiths that can inform how we care for ourselves and treat others. We don't promote one faith over another. Many feel yogic practices open them to divinity and spiritual experience. Others prefer a secular approach. There is ample scientific evidence illuminating and invigorating our practice. We share that science alongside the illuminating and invigorating teachings from various traditions. We strive to create as inclusive a practice as possible. We respect the right of our participants to identify the knowledge, wisdom, and insight which verifiably reduces their suffering and increases their joy. What we share with others is only a pointer. Personal truth is grounded in the intimacy of one's own experience.

And some more practical considerations:

- **Be respectful of staff** – We recognize that working in prisons and jails can be a challenging experience. It can negatively affect longevity and quality of life and influence how they treat the people in their custody. Avoid falling into an "us vs. them" mentality. Show respect by learning the customs for addressing personnel in the facility, such as not referring to an officer or staff by their first name. If you need to address a concern with staff, do so through your liaison at the facility in private. Contradicting or challenging staff in front of participants could lead the facility to revoke your clearance.

- **Dress appropriately** – Know the rules for the dress code of the institution(s) where you work and follow them. We recommend wearing loose-fitting clothes. Layering short sleeves over another shirt or wearing an undershirt is also a great option.
- **Avoid wearing strong scents, excessive make-up, or jewelry** – Scents and excessive make-up or jewelry can distract from practice in an environment where these things are not typically present.

Language

Aside from your warm, authentic, and calm presence, your primary tool for communication will be language. Example cues below are imagining guiding participants in “chair” or “fierce” pose.

- **Use simple, direct physical cueing** – Prefer phrasing of direct physical cues that are simple and direct, such as “Extend your arms in front of you at shoulder height.”
- **Emphasize mindful interoceptive awareness** – Dissociation from the body is a common feature of trauma. Interoception means “inward seeing,” mindful awareness of the sensations arising from within the body. Offering poses that create a noticeable sensation, such as “chair pose,” allows participants to connect to these sensations. An example of a guide to interception is, “What sensations do you feel in your legs as you hold this position?” Note, for people with trauma accompanied by strong dissociation, feeling into the body can be a potential trigger. Therefore, always allow participants to titrate, moving in or out of an experience to remain within the window of tolerance.
- **Include a complete range of mindful sensory awareness** – While interoceptive awareness may be emphasized in our approach, over the course of practice, there will be moments where it is appropriate to guide mindful awareness of a complete sensory experience: touch, taste, smell, sight, sound, sensations arising from within, awareness of thoughts and emotions, and sense of connection to others and the environment. “Notice the sounds coming from outside the room. Notice the sounds coming from within the room.”
- **Use language of active self-inquiry and participation** – Use language that encourages participants to explore their experience – “be curious about,” “experiment with.” Encourage participants to try different variations of poses and movements with attention to how embodied awareness guides their choices.
- **Normalize a range of experience** – Provide cues that normalize a range of experience, including having no experience at all. For example, “You might notice that your legs feel cool or warm, or you might not notice a sense of temperature.”
- **Report your experience** – Rather than creating an experience for a participant by telling them how to feel, report your experience while allowing participants to have their own unique experience. “For me, I feel that my heart rate increases as I hold the pose. You might have a similar experience, or you might notice something different.”

- **Choice/personal agency** – Use language that allows participants to be in control of the choices they make in their practice. “You can choose to continue to hold this pose or exit the pose when you’re ready. We’ll meet in a forward fold.”
- **Personal reflection** – Give participants opportunities to reflect on their experience during practice to allow them to connect to their personal insights. “Notice what informs your choice to stay in this pose or exit. Is there a story that informs the choice you make?”
- **“Your” vs. “the”** – Because we intend to help people to reconnect with their bodies, use “your” instead of “the” to emphasize participant’s ownership of their bodies. “Extend your arms in front of you at shoulder height,” rather than “Extend the arms....”

Some language to avoid:

- **Do not take control of another person’s breath** – It might be necessary to direct inhalation and exhalation occasionally in concert with a movement, such as guiding people through a standing sun salutation. However, once the sequence is established, do not over-cue the breath. When moving with the breath, use a phrase like “Follow your breath” or “Moving with your breath” rather than cueing each inhalation/exhalation. Never ask participants to breathe or hold their breath according to a count you establish.
- **Do not direct people to close their eyes** – When inviting a person to close their eyes, begin with the option to remain with their eyes open, the default position. “You can leave your eyes open, or you may choose to close your eyes.” Closed eyes can cause a person to feel unsafe in their environment.
- **Avoid value judgments** – Avoid language that indicates a value judgment, like “good,” “bad,” “right,” “wrong,” or “more advanced.” Avoid creating hierarchies of variations; for example, “If you can’t bring your foot to the inside of your thigh, keep your foot on your calf.” Instead, you can say, “You can place your foot on your thigh, calf, or the ground. You may enjoy placing your hand on the wall or bench to support you. Find what works for you.”
- **Avoid flowery language** – For example, “Raise your arms skyward embracing the abundance of spacious creation.” Instead: “Extend your arms above your head.”
- **Avoid guided imagery** – Avoid language encouraging participants to imagine non-present sensations or experiences. Such as, “Imagine you’re lying in a sun-dappled meadow. In the distance, you hear the gentle babble of a brook. You feel the warm sun on your skin and breathe in the sweet scent of the wildflowers. A pair of songbirds sing to each other as a contented smile spreads across your face.” It might be a lovely experience, but our goal should be to help people connect with present-moment experiences, particularly sensations arising within the body.
- **Avoid suggesting an experience** – For example: “Allow yourself to surrender and relax in this posture (child’s pose).” Your participant’s experience may be different; some find a child’s pose claustrophobic. You can normalize a variety of experiences suggesting,

“Some find this pose restful, and some find this pose confining. What’s your experience? You can exit this pose and find something different.”

- **Avoid triggering language** – This will be influenced by the group you are working with. For instance, working with a group of veterans or people from a community where there was violence, you might not want to use the term “corpse pose.” It is good to be relatable (avoiding complicated anatomical terms) when referring to body parts, but not too informal or inappropriate. For example, you can say “back of your legs” versus “hamstrings.”
- **Avoid calling attention to a single participant** – Don’t call out a student by name during practice, even to offer praise. Provide feedback after the practice, one-on-one. Some people may feel comfortable being singled out, and those who are not may feel neglected.

Space Set-up/Environment

- **Practice in a circle** – This creates equality among participants and with the facilitator(s). It ensures everyone can see each other, and no one will have anybody behind them. Occasionally, the size and shape of the room will not allow for this.
- **Maintain consistent lighting** – Lighting should not be changed during the class, even in the final resting pose. The lighting should allow participants to see clearly; lights may be dimmed at the start of class, but the room should remain well-lit. It is often impossible to adjust the light in the facilities where our practices are held.
- **Avoid music** – Music can become a distraction or a hook for dissociation/loss of embodiment. Additionally, we hope participants will develop internal resources so that the benefits of practice do not depend on an external component. That being said, if there are times when music feels appropriate, consider how to integrate it into the practice while still encouraging mindfulness, interoception, and embodiment.
- **Avoid scents or aromas** – In some studio classes, teachers use essential oils or scents to create a relaxing environment. Again, as with music, we hope to connect participants to internal resources they can call on outside the practice space. Further, a scent may be associated with a traumatic memory and may be triggering for some.
- **Props** – Depending on the facility, you may only have yoga mats available. Often you will also have one or two foam blocks per participant. If possible, mats and blocks should be uniform to avoid participants becoming attached to preferred props and a political conflict resulting from those preferences. Bolsters and blankets are difficult to store and clean in an institutional environment and are not usually available. Straps are not typically permitted in facilities due to safety concerns.

Before Practice

- **Welcome each participant** – Learn participants' names and address them by their first name. If you don't know what a person prefers to be called, ask them. Don't assume a particular pronoun or salutation is appropriate.
- **Allow personal agency in set-up** – Participants should be allowed to choose their props and where they position themselves in the circle. There may be a good reason two people are not positioning themselves close together that you are not aware of, so allow them to choose. Allow participants to spread out if the space is available; personal space may be limited outside the practice space.
- **Be available** – Make yourself available to participants to check in with you. Allow them to ask questions, share concerns, provide feedback, and so on. Be positive and encouraging while maintaining a grounded awareness of the reality of the situation. It's worth restating that it's not our role to offer unsolicited advice or fix anything. We are there primarily to listen.

Beginning Practice

- **Establish personal agency** – Remind participants that they can choose how (and if) they wish to participate in the practice. Encourage participants to listen to their body, to not push past what feels safe, to stay in any pose for as long as it feels right for them (even if that means staying in one pose for the entire class), to stop doing a pose or practice if it feels unsettling.
- **Begin with movement** – Movement helps engage embodied awareness. It allows participants to transition from the institutional environment and begin to discharge some of the stress and anxiety they carry from living in the chaotic, stressful, and, at times, trauma-stimulating environment in which they live.
- **Check-in** – Create an opportunity for participants to check in and become aware of how they feel as they enter the practice. You might suggest that they note how distressed they are feeling on a scale of one to ten (e.g., the SUDS scale) or come up with a word or two about how they are feeling. That word might be a feeling, a color, an animal, a shape, and so on. Allow time for that awareness to land. The option for people to share this will depend on how familiar the group is with one another. If you're unsure how some in the group will feel about being asked to share, it might be best to skip sharing and always remind participants that they are always free to pass.
- **Establish an external resource** – Because we are asking participants to pay attention to the experience they are having in their bodies, where significant trauma may be held, it's helpful to establish an external resource for participants to turn to if they begin to feel overwhelmed. Guide participants to notice something outside their body that feels neutral

or grounding. Let them know that they can turn to this resource if they feel overwhelmed by their internal experience.

During Practice

- **Choose accessible postures** – Choose postures accessible to the vast majority, if not every group member, while still creating an opportunity for achievement. This balance can be tricky to establish. Successfully achieving a challenging posture can foster a sense of self-efficacy. However, if a person cannot successfully do a pose, this can reinforce a negative self-image. Recall the intention of the postures in creating an opportunity for embodiment, discharge of accumulated tension, and building resiliency. A pose can be both challenging and accessible.
- **Choose safe postures** – Avoid postures that might lead to physical injury. An injury could jeopardize the program, especially if the injury necessitates expensive medical treatment. Yoga is generally a safe practice; there are poses, however, that are prone to causing injury, and any pose engaged too intensely can lead to injury.
 - **Prohibited poses** – headstand, shoulder stand, plow pose.
 - **Poses to be used with caution** – backbends poses that create rotational strain on the knees (Warrior II, Half-Pigeon), extreme-forward bends.
 - Consider that participants may have high or low blood pressure, as well as physical injuries that may make a forward fold or repetitive up-and-down movement potentially dangerous for them. It is important to remind participants that a forward bend can be done without lowering their head below heart level or can be skipped altogether.
 - **Poses considered safe** – lunges, squats, side-bends, gentle forward bends, gentle twists, seated poses.
- **Avoid postures that may be triggering** - there are no hard fast rules about what postures to avoid because they may be "triggering" or make participants feel vulnerable. Any pose or cue phrasing could be a potential trigger for someone. However, with awareness and discernment, we can choose poses that avoid disempowering participants and leaving them vulnerable in a space where they may not feel safe. It's essential to consider the group you are working with and what you know about their histories, and recognize there are things you do not know about them. It's evident that a pose such as "Happy Baby" would be contraindicated for a group of known survivors of sexual abuse. It should be avoided and is best avoided in the general population, too.
- **Offer choices in postures** – Offer choices for each pose, including Savasana. Avoid defining one choice as more advanced than another; use the term 'variation' instead of 'modification.'

- **Alternate active and neutral/resting postures** – By alternating between active movement and neutral or resting postures, you are helping to develop participants’ ability to smoothly move from states of sympathetic nervous system activation (SNS, or fight/flight) to parasympathetic nervous system activation (PNS, or rest/restore). The importance of this modulating from SNS to PNS activation cannot be overemphasized.
- **Go slow** – Moving too quickly through practice doesn’t allow time for participants to feel into the pose (mindful interoceptive awareness) or to adjust based on their awareness of their experience.
- **Give options for longer holds** - Allowing for longer holds allows participants to discharge accumulated stress while building resilience and developing impulse control. This also allows participants to learn to experience their edge and take effective action, exiting a pose before it becomes overwhelming.
- **Offer opportunities to practice “effortless effort”**- Allowing participants to practice physically challenging movements, such as chair pose, allows them to feel the effort their body is putting out while at the same time cultivating a relaxed and stable mindset or attitude. Practicing effortless effort has everything to do with developing and strengthening impulse control, and handling challenging physical moments with an internal sense of calmness and ease.
- **Offer conscious breathing practices** - Breathing practices provide tools to regulate stress response and anxiety levels, increase Heart Rate Variability (HRV) and vagal tone, and strengthen the Parasympathetic Nervous System. Remember, though, when offering breathing practices to allow participants to remain in control of their breath. (See the note on breathing in the language section.)
- **Create periods of stillness and silence** – It’s important to include periods of stillness and silence to allow participants to notice the effects of practice or posture in their bodies and to reflect on their experience. Be aware that silence and stillness can also be triggering particularly when asking a participant to notice what’s happening in their body. This is why it’s important to establish an external resource outside the body where the participant can return to if they begin to feel dysregulated.
- **Practice along** – By practicing along with your participants, you integrate yourself into the community on an equal basis. You can enhance the accessibility of the practice by modeling the most accessible options.
- **Remain on your mat** – Do not walk around during class, including (and especially) during the final resting pose. If you need to leave your mat, let the group know that you are going to do so and why; narrate what you are doing. “I’m going to close this window now.”
- **No hands-on adjustments**– In most incarceration environments, nothing more than a handshake, fist bump, or elbow tap is allowed; some prohibit even this. Please know the guidelines for the facility you are working in, and follow them. Our reasons, however, for refraining from hands-on adjustments go beyond this. In this environment, it may not be

easy for a participant to feel they can say no. Consider that trauma is often associated with the intrusiveness of the perpetrator and a lack of boundaries. Physical assistance may be a reminder of a traumatic event and can trigger an overwhelming response. They also tend to take away the participants' agency in their own experience and may inhibit internal resources development. "No intervention that takes power away from the survivor can possibly foster her recovery, no matter how much it appears to be in her immediate best interest." (Judith Herman)

Closing Practice

- **Always offer a final resting pose** – This important part of practice should not be skipped. It allows our bodies to enter as fully as possible into a state of PNS engagement. Give the option for doing this pose lying down (in a traditional Savasana position or with arms and legs configured in a way that feels most comfortable to the participant) or in a seated position. Consider taking a seated position and letting participants know that you will be there to keep an eye on the room. Participants should always be given the choice of whether they want to open or close their eyes. This pose may be very challenging for participants - you can also provide tools such as tapping or making fists and releasing them to support them in this rest pose.
- **Integrate the experience** – After the final resting pose, create an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experience and acknowledge any insight they might have gained through the practice. You might refer back to the check-in, particularly if you used the SUDS scale, to allow an opportunity to notice a shift in the level of distress. You may choose to offer a space for optional sharing depending on the size of the group, their familiarity, and the time available. Always allow participants to pass when inviting them to share.
- **Namaste or not** – The choice to close the practice with the word Namaste and a bow is up to the facilitator. Some prefer not to use this word or any Sanskrit. Others feel this practice allows a moment for integration and acknowledgment of the community. You might also offer an opportunity to acknowledge themselves, offer gratitude for the community, offer up the benefits of the practice, or a short version of a cultivation of compassion practice to close.

After Practice

- **Be available** – Make yourself available to participants to check in personally, ask questions, share concerns, provide feedback, and so on. Finish a bit early, if necessary, to allow for this.
- **Perform an After-Practice Review (APR)** – After leaving the facility, use these questions to guide a conversation with your co-facilitators (or with yourself) to perform an After-Practice Review.

- What was your intention?
- What actually occurred?
- What went well and why?
- What can be improved and how?
- **Keep a Journal** – It's helpful to keep a journal to capture the insights gained through an APR, significant events and stories that will help you to develop as a facilitator.

Epilogue

At the end of the day, if there is nothing else that you take away from these guidelines, remember that our work is to create a space where others can feel a sense of safety, belonging, and personal agency. These are the foundations of recovery and every person's birthright. If you bear this in mind and consider how your words and actions land with those around you, this will be enough.