



# Training Manual

## **Prison Yoga Project Training Manual**

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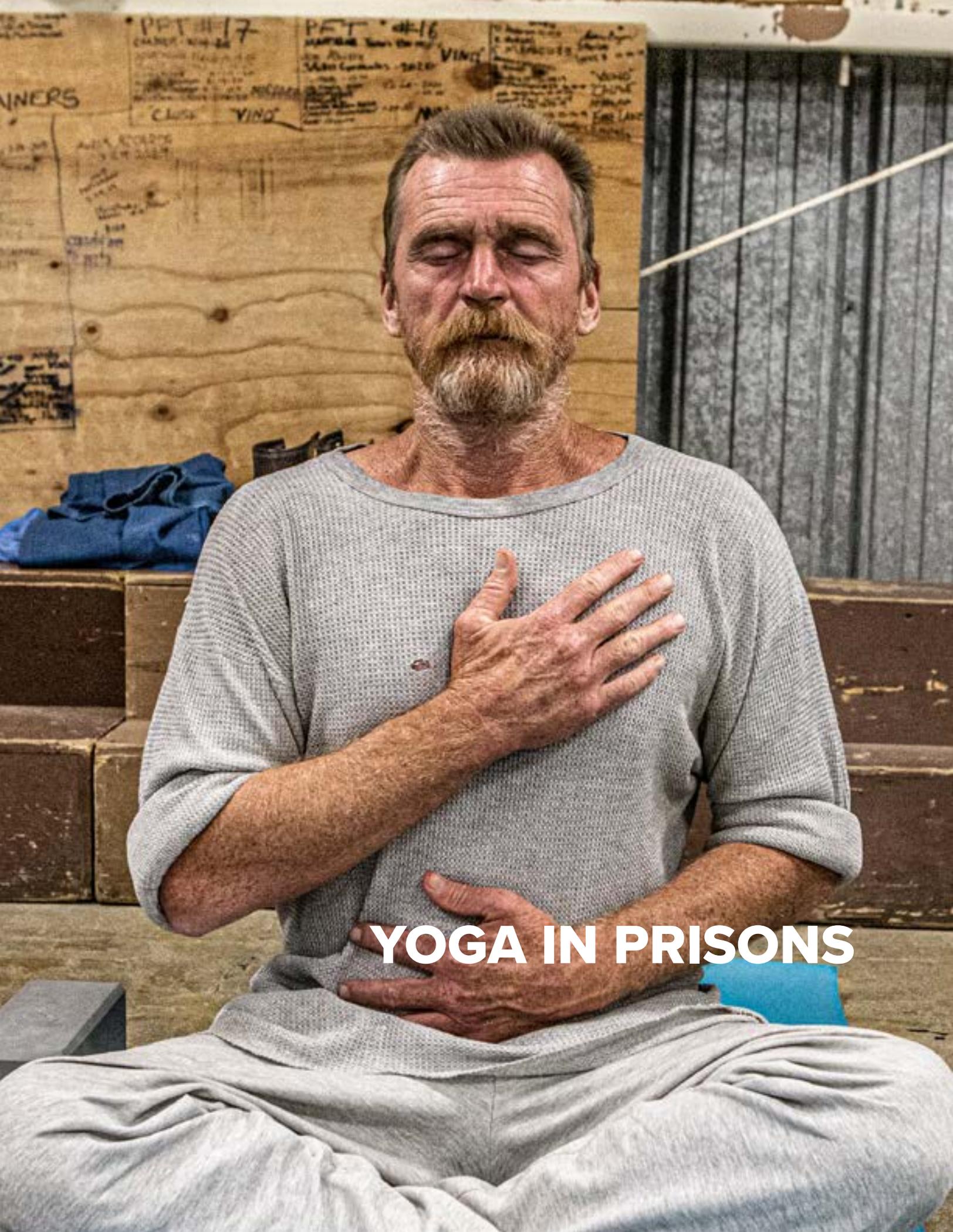
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**YOGA IN PRISONS**

## Yoga in Prisons

The Prison Yoga Project's pioneering, trauma-informed approach to applying yoga practice to behavioral rehabilitation has yielded demonstrable benefits for thousands of prisoners. With twenty years of experience, the project has developed an evidence-based methodology that has earned international acclaim in the yoga community and is rapidly gaining adoption by prisons and probation services worldwide.

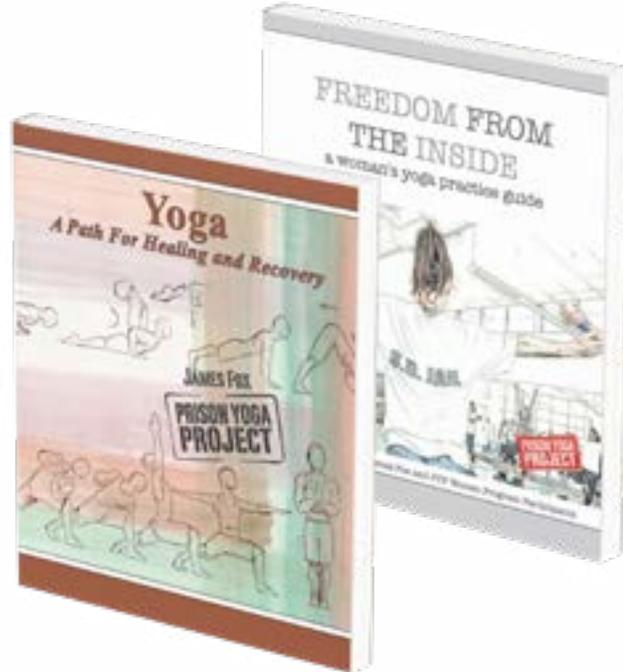
While cognitive behavioral therapy has traditionally been the approach to help people process unresolved trauma, psychiatrists, psychologists, and clinical social workers—many of whom work with U.S. military veterans—have more recently acknowledged that embodiment practices such as yoga, enriched with mindfulness, can have a greater impact in alleviating the symptoms that lead to reactive behaviors and stress-related diseases. The Prison Yoga Project has advanced these practices with incarcerated people and developed a low-cost model that enhances mental and physical well-being, encouraging behavioral rehabilitation. Overwhelming evidence is mounting that supports its effectiveness.

### **Physiological and Psychological Evidence-Based Impacts of Yoga**

The physiological and psychological impacts of yoga have been studied extensively for the general population, in clinical settings, and in prisons (Sharma & Haider, 2013; Kahya & Raspin, 2017; Streeter & Gerbarg, 2012; Kerekes et al., 2017). Regular yoga practice reduces physiological responses to stress, state and trait anxiety, depression (Sharma & Haider, 2013), antisocial behaviors, anger, and aggression. Besides the important psychological benefits, yoga practitioners experience physiological benefits such as improved body posture, proper breathing techniques, increased body awareness, and a greater ability to relax. Furthermore, regular yoga practice is associated with increased positive and decreased negative emotional states, lower levels of stress, and significantly improved impulse control and sustained attention (Bilderbeck, 2013; Kerekes, 2018). Importantly, yoga in correctional settings has a positive effect on risk factors associated with criminal recidivism, such as compulsive and antisocial behaviors (Sfendla & Kerekes, 2018).

Because yoga can be practiced in group settings, it can also have positive effects among practitioners in terms of social engagement and feelings of belonging (de Manincor & Bensoussan, 2016). A regular yoga practice improves vagal tone, increasing mental and physical resilience and helping to develop regulation of internal states.

In our training, you will learn how our approach to yoga supports other therapeutic interventions. You will also learn beneficial practices for improving self-regulation and stress reduction. All of these practices are illustrated in our books for incarcerated individuals.



### **A Positive Counter-Culture**

Yoga also aids in addiction recovery and exercises the brain's attention network, thereby improving rational decision-making. Yoga practitioners develop increased self-acceptance and self-worth, which over time dislodges the false sense of unworthiness associated with incarceration (shame-based identity), replacing it with an understanding of the individual's own essential goodness. Yoga programs also benefit prison management by reducing rates of violent incidents and infractions, and by promoting a positive counter-culture (reference: communication from custodial staff at Hinseberg Women's Prison, Sweden).

## Core Components of Yoga

Yoga perceives a person as a holistic entity rather than merely a composite of independent physical, emotional, and mental parts.

### **Mindful Awareness (Mindfulness)**

Mindful awareness – also known as mindfulness – lies at the heart of yoga practice. It involves utilizing the mind for a purpose beyond mere thought. Instead, it encompasses observing or becoming a witness to one’s thoughts without becoming entangled in them. It represents an expanded awareness that encompasses connection to one’s body and breath, and being fully present in the moment without judgment or evaluation. This practice can be pursued in stillness or movement and aids in seeing things as they truly are, creating a pause, space, or perspective that enables transcendence of habitual thought patterns and behavioral reactions.

### **Conscious Breathing (Pranayama)**

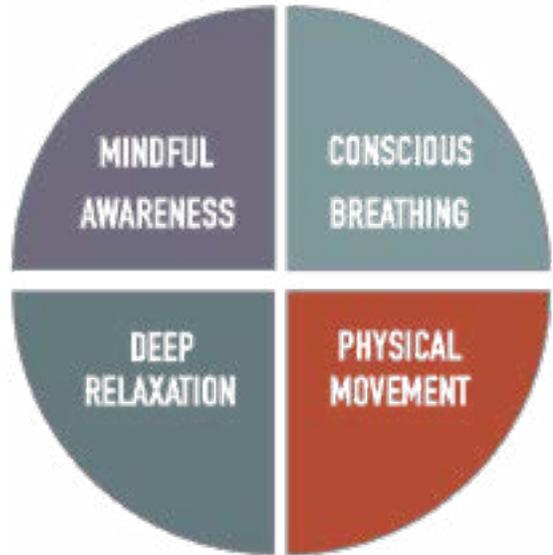
Prana, the yogic term for life-force energy, forms the basis of pranayama, one of the Eight Limbs of Yoga (refer to page 9 of “Yoga: A Path for Healing and Recovery”). Pranayama involves influencing the flow of life-force energy throughout the body using conscious breathing and related techniques to induce desired states of mind and body. These practices contribute to decreased stress levels, reinforced autonomic nervous system, enhanced resistance to stress, and improved focus and inner presence, all integral aspects of yoga. PYP’s methodology provides safe exercises and instructions tailored for common mental health disorders.

### **Movement and Postures (Asanas)**

Our bodily movements influence mood and breathing patterns. Asanas, another of the Eight Limbs, consist of physical postures used in yoga to strengthen the body, alleviate tension and stress, enhance flexibility, and establish mental, emotional, and physical stability. The combination of conscious breathing with movement not only impacts the physical body but also yields positive effects on brain chemistry and the nervous system.

## Deep Relaxation

Achieving deep relaxation strengthens the parasympathetic nervous system and offers numerous health benefits beyond feeling rested and restored. Regular relaxation practice reduces stress and symptoms associated with mental health conditions such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. It also lowers blood pressure, slows heart rate, diminishes muscle tension and fatigue, enhances concentration, and uplifts mood.



### Benefits of Trauma-Informed Yoga Practice

- Allows you to be yourself, free from performance pressure or judgment
- Acknowledges how trauma can impact posture, body perception, and reactions
- Promotes relaxation and reduces stress and anxiety
- Enhances conscious presence and body perception
- Contributes to inner peace
- Improves joint mobility
- Increases energy flow and concentration
- Reduces aggression and negative emotions, while enhancing positive affect, impulse control, sleep quality, and mental well-being

## Overall Health Benefits of Yoga

### Enhanced Sleep Quality



Improves sleep, making you more well-rested and resilient, essential for stress recovery.

### Grounding & Self-Regulation



Enhances self-control and mindfulness, aiding in detecting and managing stress responses.

### Improved Brain Function



Balances brain functions, improving focus, learning, and decision-making.

### Heart & Lung Health



Increases lung capacity and improves heart health by lowering heart rate and blood pressure.

### Nervous System Support



Strengthens the autonomic nervous system, enhancing the ability to remain calm under pressure.

### Tension & Pain Relief



Alleviates muscle tension, reduces chronic pain, and inflammation in the body.



### Diabetes & Digestive Health



Lowers blood sugar levels and stimulates internal organs for improved digestion, reducing the risk of diabetes.

### Immune System Boost



Strengthens the immune system by lowering stress hormone levels, fostering overall health.

### Community & Belonging

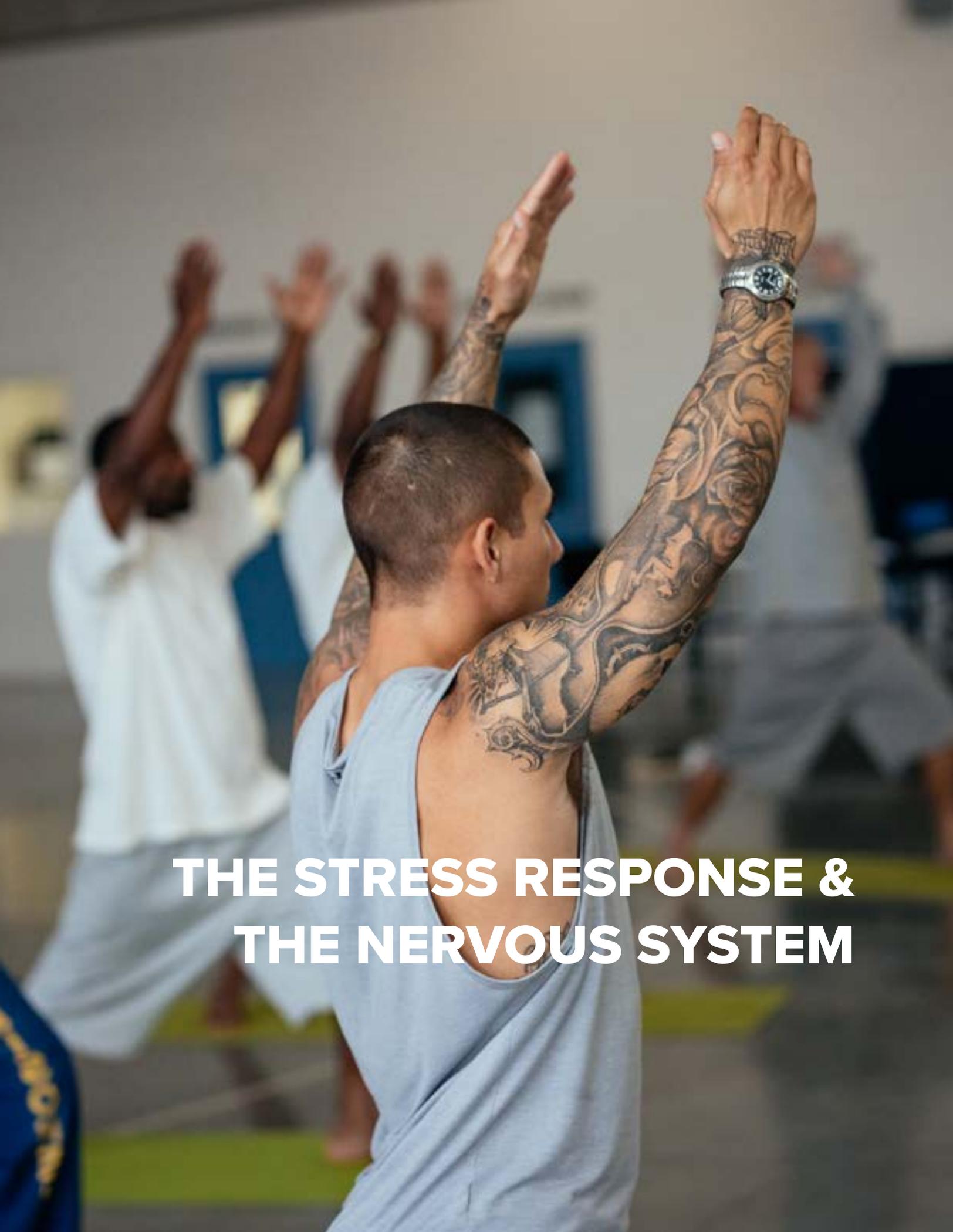


Fosters a sense of community and belonging through group practices.

### Recovery & Resiliency



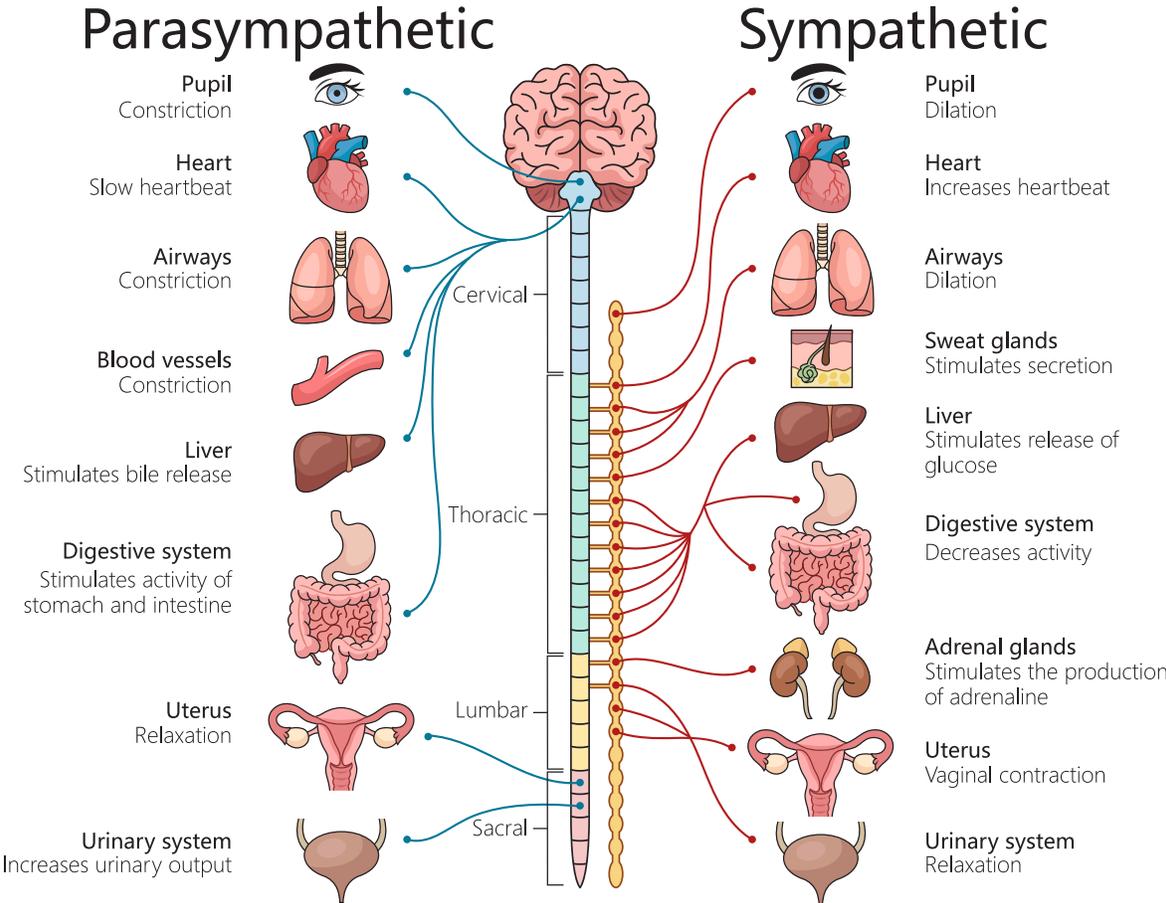
Bolsters the body's systems to enhance recovery from stress and facilitates natural healing processes.

A man with extensive tattoos on his arms and a watch on his left wrist is shown from the side, raising his arms in a group setting. He is wearing a light blue tank top. In the background, other people are visible, some with their arms raised, suggesting a group exercise or performance. The scene is brightly lit, possibly outdoors or in a well-lit indoor space.

**THE STRESS RESPONSE &  
THE NERVOUS SYSTEM**

# The Autonomic Nervous System

The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) is the division of our nervous system responsible for regulating bodily functions such as heart rate, digestion, and normal breathing, mostly unconsciously. Prolonged periods of stress, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed can disrupt the balance of the ANS.



The ANS comprises two distinct parts with different functions. The Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) serves as an acceleration system, initiating and sustaining the “stress/survival response,” which includes the responses of “fight, flight, freeze, and fawn.” Conversely, the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) functions as a rest-and-relaxation response, facilitating calmness, social interaction, and recovery.

**Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)**

- Initiates the stress response: “fight, flight, or freeze.”
- Keeps us active and alert. Increases heart rate and breathing rate.
- Releases stress hormones, beneficial in the short term but detrimental if constantly released.
- Leads to physical exhaustion when overactive and dominant, analogous to driving a car at high speed in low gear.
- Activates the behavioral survival response known as “fawn,” characterized by attempts to appease others at the expense of one’s own needs.

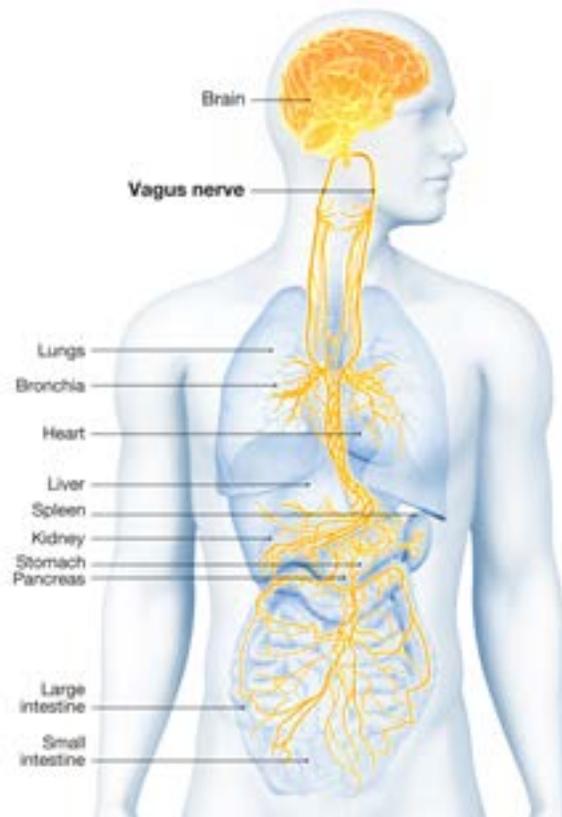
**Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)**

- Promotes relaxation, sociability, and recovery.
- Releases hormones and chemicals that induce feelings of safety, happiness, and connection.
- Enhances blood flow to internal organs and aids digestion.
- Involves an extreme survival response known as “collapse” or “tonic immobility,” often described as the faint response that involves loss of muscle tone and varying degrees of consciousness alteration.

When the SNS and PNS are in balance (called homeostasis), we are better equipped to manage stress and maintain internal stability and a sense of calm.

## The Vagus Nerve

The vagus nerve, the longest nerve in the parasympathetic nervous system, links the brain to vital organs like the intestines, stomach, heart, and lungs. It is often divided into two parts: the dorsal vagus, which is less developed and linked to survival, and the ventral vagus, which is more advanced and associated with socializing and well-being (Stephen Porges, Polyvagal Theory).



Acting as the heart's "brake," the vagus nerve sends signals to slow down heart rhythm, with around 80% of its signals traveling from the body to the brain. It also influences respiration, digestion, and heart rate, all of which are crucial to mental health. Additionally, the vagus nerve connects with the larynx, soft palate, facial muscles, and vocal cords.

Vagal tone, an internal biological process reflecting vagus nerve activity and myelination (the white fiber mass that facilitates faster signal transmission), diminishes during prolonged stress (Van der Kolk, 2012). Enhancing vagal tone activates and fortifies the parasympathetic nervous system, facilitating quicker relaxation after stress (Gerbarg P., 2013).

Low respiratory sinus arrhythmia, which indicates low vagal tone, correlates with negative moods, fear, and depression in infants, and with aggression, antisocial behavior, depression, anxiety, and panic disorders across age groups (Beauchaine, 2001). Increased vagal tone enhances the ability to express perceived emotions through facial expressions and voice modes (Stephen Porges M.D., 2005). High vagal tone correlates with reduced inflammation due to higher levels of the parasympathetic nervous system's anti-inflammatory neurotransmitter acetylcholine (Streeter et al., 2020). Elevated vagal tone is also associated with improved social engagement, reality perception, and empathic behavior (Philippot, Chapelle & Blairy, 2002).

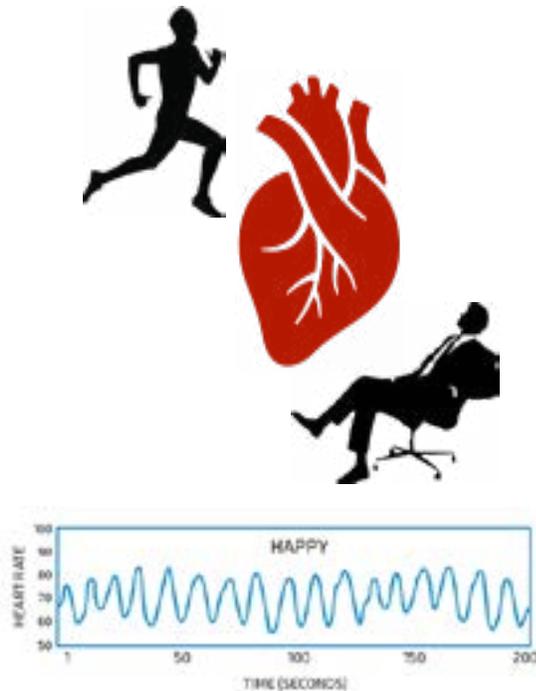
### **Practices for Increased Vagal Tone**

- Relaxed deep diaphragmatic breathing and extended exhalations (Brown and Gerbarg, 2012)
- Singing
- Facial muscle movements
- Splashing cold water on the face (Jungmann, M. 2018)

## Heart Rate Variability: HRV

Heart Rate Variability (HRV) reflects our resilience and strength in the autonomic nervous system.

Throughout the day, heart rate naturally fluctuates: sometimes the sympathetic nervous system dominates (resulting in a faster heart rate), while at other times, the parasympathetic nervous system dominates (leading to a slower heart rate). The ability to elevate heart rate during activity and then return it to a resting state during relaxation indicates a robust and adaptable autonomic nervous system.



In essence, the capacity to swiftly accelerate in response to danger and then promptly calm down when the threat subsides relies on healthy heart rate variability.

Changes in heart rate are synchronized with the respiratory cycle: inhalation raises heart rate through the sympathetic nervous system (the “accelerator”), while exhalation lowers heart rate via the vagus nerve (the “brake”). This rhythmic interplay maintains cardiovascular health.

Prolonged anxiety, psychiatric illness, and traumatic stress often disrupt this flexibility by causing dominance of the sympathetic nervous system. Consequently, the body remains in a heightened state of arousal throughout the day, while the parasympathetic nervous system—the “brake”—remains underactive and weakened.

Weakened autonomic nervous system manifests as decreased variability and irregularity in the intervals between heartbeats. This condition, known as low HRV, contributes to reduced resilience to stress, heightened vulnerability to mental illness, impaired sleep, diminished cognitive functioning, and elevated anxiety levels.

Conversely, high HRV reflects a consistently variable rhythm in heart rate, as depicted by the blue curve. This signifies robust flexibility and strength in both the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, thereby enhancing the ability to recover from stress.

Yoga practice strengthens the autonomic nervous system much like resistance training strengthens muscle: by regulating pulse, toning the vagus nerve, and fortifying the heart against the resistance of stress. Through these mechanisms, yoga fosters optimal functioning of the autonomic nervous system when faced with challenges.

### **Practices That Strengthen HRV**

- Alternate from movement that gradually increases heart rate to periods of stillness with extended exhalations to slow it down.
- Practice relaxed diaphragmatic breathing to promote calmness and regulate heart rate
- Engage in relaxation exercises to further calm the body and mind, supporting a slower heart rate and overall well-being.

## Feeling Your Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

One effective way to strengthen and balance your autonomic nervous system (ANS) in a yoga practice is through modulating your activity and heart rate. First, use movement and breathing techniques to gradually increase your heart rate, then counterbalance that activity by slowing both back down. As your ANS grows stronger, you'll become better equipped to handle stress and challenging situations, which is a quality known as resilience.



### Engage the “Accelerator”

Try this exercise to activate the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS):

Energize: Lift your arms as high as comfortable, then extend them out to the sides, opening your chest. You can synchronize your breath with the movement, inhaling as you lift your arms and exhaling as you open them wide. Repeat this rhythmically 5-10 times or until you feel your heart rate rise. Can you feel your heart beating faster?



**Press the “Brake”**

Try this exercise to activate the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS):

Slow Down: Place one hand on the center of your chest and the other on your belly. Relax your shoulders and notice the warmth of your hands. Keeping your belly relaxed, feel its movement as you breathe into your hand. Inhale through your nose, then exhale longer out your mouth, whispering a “haaa” sound. Try this for 5-10 breaths. If it feels soothing, continue for another 5-10 breaths. Can you feel your heartbeat slowing down? This is the activation of your parasympathetic nervous system and your vagus nerve.

## The Stress Response

Our stress response is crucial for survival as it ensures our movement away from danger. It becomes activated during periods of stress, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed. Even our thoughts alone can trigger this response by dwelling on distressing matters. When this state of distress becomes normalized, habitual over-reactivity can cause serious damage to our nervous system.

Continuous stress, worry, anxiety, or encountering life-threatening events automatically trigger stress/survival reactions.

### Step 1: Mobilization for Survival

The fight/flight/freeze response is initiated. Signals from the brain prompt the production and release of adrenaline and norepinephrine into muscles, prompting swift movement away from danger. Blood pressure and heart rate increase, blood sugar rises, airways expand, and blood vessels dilate.

- Fight/Flight: Engaging in combat or escaping danger.
- Freeze/Collapse: Immobility, playing dead to avoid danger.
- Appease/Fawn: Attempting to please a threatening individual to escape harm as a behavioral response rather than face an immediate stress reaction.

Calming down involves recognizing that the danger has passed, physical movement (such as “shaking things off”), deep breathing, and connecting with others.

### Step 2: Moving Away from Danger

Increased cortisol levels provide energy to move away from danger over an extended period. Cortisol, an activation/stress hormone, regulates the release and circulation of sugar, fat, and protein in the body. It also mobilizes glucose stores for immediate use. However, constantly elevated cortisol levels can be harmful despite their role in maintaining wakefulness and focus.

**Vulnerabilities:**

Regulating stress and processing overwhelming events can be challenging with a weakened autonomic nervous system and brain changes from chronic stress and childhood trauma. Additionally, having a mental health condition and being confined or unable to move and regulate the stress response can worsen symptoms and increase the risk of developing PTSD.

**Traumatic Stress:**

The body continues to react with an ongoing fight/flight/freeze/collapse/please response, even after the danger has passed.

## Common Reactions to Ongoing Stress

Everyone copes with stress differently, experiencing a range of physical and emotional responses. There's no "right" or "wrong" way to think, feel, or react. It's essential to recognize that these responses are your body's way of adapting for survival. Symptoms may persist for an extended period or fluctuate hourly or daily.



### Stuck in Fight/ Flight/ Freeze

- Hyper-vigilance
- Restlessness
- Impulsivity
- Difficulty concentrating
- Confusion
- Anger, irritability
- Frustration
- Rage



### Stuck in Freeze/Collapse

- No motivation
- Tired
- Depressed
- Feeling numb
- Difficulty speaking
- Lost in thought
- Not feeling connected
- Disorientated
- Avoiding situations

**Benefits of Regular Yoga Practice**

Regularly practicing yoga and mindful awareness can help to feel more relaxed, able to concentrate better, sleep well, be active without feeling stressed or exhausted, help you to build endurance, and generally feel more vitality.



## The Brain

The brain is a sophisticated organ composed of different networks that continually interact with our body and surroundings to ensure our survival, motivation, presence, and social engagement. Here is a simplified model:

### 1) The Brainstem: “Survival Brain”

- Regulates the autonomic nervous system.
- Controls automatic bodily functions, like breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, and digestion.
- Maintains inner balance and sends signals between the body and brain.

**Trauma and stress** cause overactivity and trigger the stress/survival response.

**Yoga and mindfulness** calm the brainstem and strengthen the autonomic nervous system, facilitating relaxation and improved stress management.

### 2) The Limbic System: “Emotional Brain”

- Manages our stress response analyzing current situations, memories, and instincts to assess safety.
- If a threat is detected, it communicates with the brainstem to activate the body’s ‘fight or flight’ survival mode.
- Includes the amygdala which acts as the brain’s alarm system and supports short-term memory, detecting and reacting to threats.
- Includes the hippocampus that helps regulate the stress response, learning, and long-term memory.
- Includes the insula which reads the internal state of the body.

**Trauma and stress** lead to hyperactivity of the warning system and reduce memory processing.

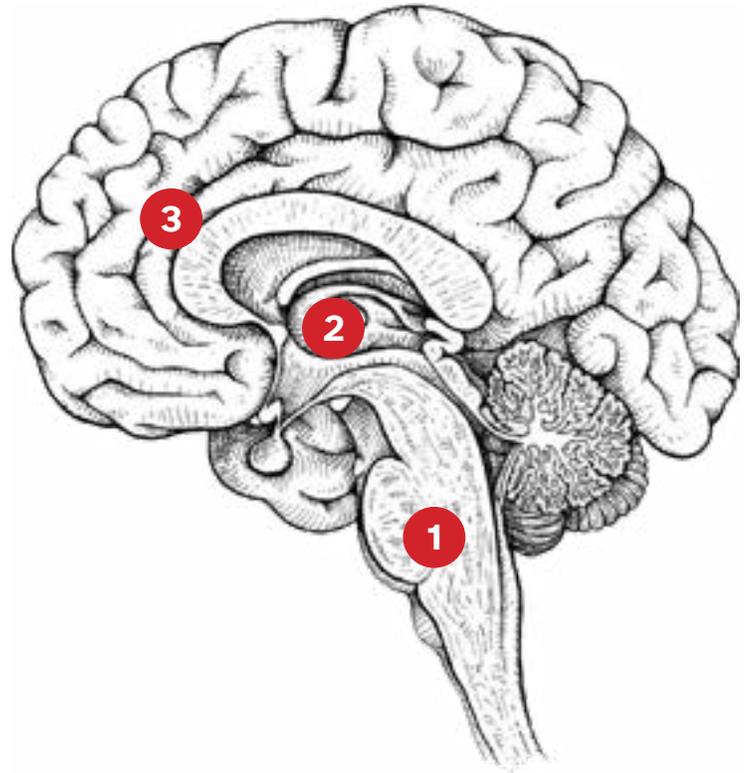
**Yoga and mindfulness** lower stress levels, calm the limbic system, including the amygdala, improve the hippocampus and insula’s functioning.

### 3) Prefrontal Cortex: “Thinking Brain”

- Handles rational assessment and decision-making.
- Involved in planning.
- Understands others’ emotions and motivations.
- Aids in making social connections.
- Can override the limbic system to soothe stress responses.

**Trauma and stress** inhibit prefrontal cortex activity and impair its functioning, especially during chronic stress and mental illness.

**Yoga and mindfulness** improve cognitive ability and prefrontal lobe functioning.



#### Developmental Timeline of the Brain

- The brain stem and cerebellum develop during the fetal stage.
- The limbic system forms during the fetal stage but continues to develop as we begin to engage with our environment.
- The cerebral cortex and anterior forehead lobe develop last and are heavily influenced and reshaped by our actions and thoughts.

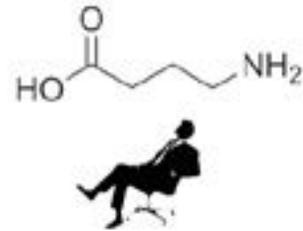
## Neurotransmitters

Neurotransmitters allow for communication between neurons, enabling the brain and nervous system to carry out functions essential for everyday life. Without them, the intricate network of neurons throughout the body would be unable to transmit signals effectively, leading to disruptions in numerous bodily processes.

Neurotransmitters relay signals between neurons related to movement, sensory perception, cognition, emotions, and more. Different neurotransmitters play specific roles in modulating these functions, and their balance is critical for maintaining overall health and well-being.

### GABA (Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid)

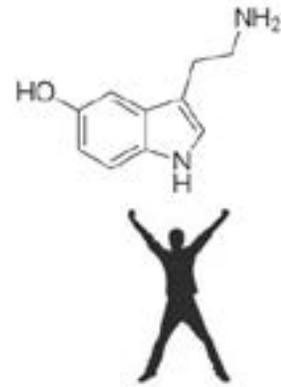
- GABA is a calming neurotransmitter in the brain and plays a role in converting short-term to long-term memory.
- Low levels of GABA are often associated with PTSD, depression, and anxiety.
- A randomized study in 2012 showed that a yoga group exhibited 27% higher GABA levels after one hour of yoga compared to a control group who read a book for the same duration three times a week. Similar results were observed in a control group who walked for 12 weeks. (Streeter et al. 2010, 2012)
- Another study conducted by the same research team in 2018 found low GABA levels before the study in participants with severe depression and major depressive disorder (MDD). After twelve weeks of yoga and consistent breathing, significant increases in GABA levels were observed, accompanied by reductions in depressive state and anxiety.
- Yoga leads to a short-term increase in GABA immediately after a session and a long-term rise within eight days. A regular yoga practice (at least once a week) is needed to maintain these elevated levels. (Streeter et al. 2020)



**Practices in this program that potentially increase GABA include slow breathing, guided relaxation, mindfulness-based instruction, and interoception.**

## Serotonin

- Serotonin is a neurotransmitter associated with feelings of joy and well-being.
- Serotonin levels increase during yoga's physical movement, especially when combined with conscious breathing.
- Serotonin levels rise when we feel relaxed, safe, physically active, and connected with others.
- Produced in the brainstem and intestines, serotonin affects appetite, sleep, concentration, memory, and learning.
- Serotonin levels also influence sleep through its role in producing melatonin. Yoga and regular exercise have been shown to increase serotonin levels and alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety. (Varambally, George & Gangadhar 2020)
- Cortisol negatively impacts serotonin levels, potentially leading to dysregulated behaviors.



Practices in this program that potentially increase serotonin include movement, regulating heart rate and rhythm (HRV), relaxation, and breathing exercises to reduce cortisol levels.

## Endorphins

- Endorphins are a type of neurotransmitter that relieve pain, reduce stress, and induce a sense of calmness and well-being that are produced during exercise and pleasant experiences of connection with others.

**Practices in this program that potentially increase endorphins involve the movement and physical postures of the yoga practices.**

## The Body Keeps The Score

Stress is a natural response to life experiences, including daily responsibilities and relationships. While short-term stress can help cope with difficult situations, persistent stress, anxiety, or ongoing difficult emotional states have numerous harmful effects on the body.

### **Harmful Physical Effects of Prolonged Stress**

As mentioned previously on the topic of “The Stress Response,” when you perceive a threat or challenging situation, your hypothalamus sends a signal to your adrenal glands to release adrenaline and cortisol, known as “stress hormones.” This response increases heart rate, breathing, and muscle readiness to react. While this stress response is normal and usually brief, chronic stress or frequent activation of the stress response can negatively impact health.

Chronic stress is a major contributor to hypertension, which is most often caused by high blood pressure. Constantly elevated blood pressure due to the heart working harder for prolonged periods increases the risk of heart disease and diabetes.

During stress, breathing quickens, which can lead to chronically strained breathing for individuals with asthma or other respiratory problems. Additionally, the rush of hormones, increased heart rate, and faster breathing during stress can also disrupt the digestive system.

**Sleep Difficulties**

Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep.

**Muscle Pain/Chronic Pain**

Tension and inflammation leading to chronic pain.

**Rapid Breathing**

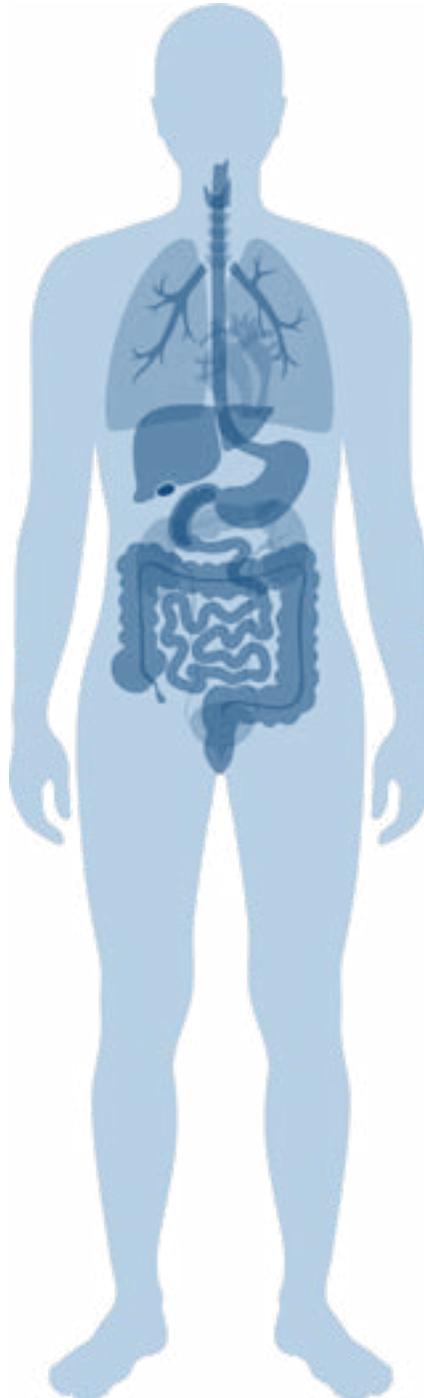
Breathing speeds up and creates tension in the breathing muscles.

**High Blood Sugar**

Increased risk for diabetes.

**Immune System**

Lower immune function, making you more prone to illnesses and lengthening recovery time.



**Brain**

Trouble concentrating, increased anxiety and depression, poor impulse control, and mind fog.

**Heart**

Faster heartbeat, increasing the risk of heart disease.

**Digestive Issues**

Constipation, diarrhea, bloating, and pain in the digestive system.

**Fertility Problems**

Low sex drive, infertility, and hormonal imbalances.

**Skin Issues**

Rashes, dry skin, and acne.

## Discharging Fight, Flight and Freeze

Yoga poses can reproduce the muscular engagement experienced during Fight/Flight/Freeze responses to perceived danger. Holding, moving, and breathing through these dynamic routines can bring a sense of relief.



### **“Fight”**

Transitioning from Plank Pose to Low Plank can be powerful for someone feeling upset and aggressive. Imagine pushing away irritations while slowly guiding yourself toward the floor, controlling the movement, and exhausting the “fight muscles.” Breathe steadily through the challenge to achieve a sense of release.

*You can also do this with your knees to the ground or against a wall.*



### **“Flight”**

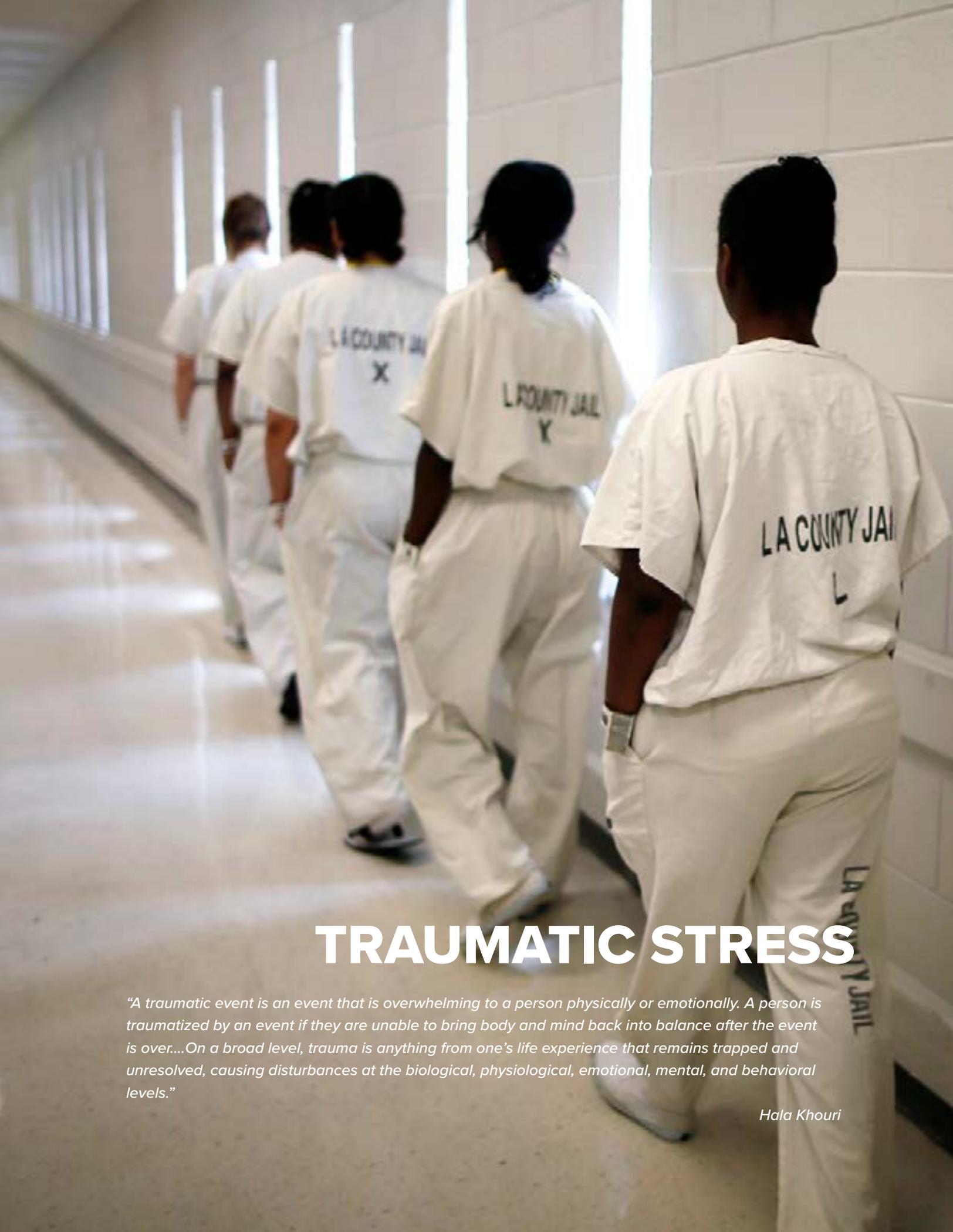
Dynamic standing poses, like Chair Pose and Warrior Poses, activate hip flexors and the muscles that would be engaged when fleeing. These poses reduce anxiety and hyperactivity by fatiguing the “flight response” muscles. See if you can practice relaxed belly breathing with long exhalations while engaged in this Chair Pose.



### **“Freeze”**

Shake, jump, and move in various directions to release the frozen body language of a “freeze” reaction.





# TRAUMATIC STRESS

*"A traumatic event is an event that is overwhelming to a person physically or emotionally. A person is traumatized by an event if they are unable to bring body and mind back into balance after the event is over....On a broad level, trauma is anything from one's life experience that remains trapped and unresolved, causing disturbances at the biological, physiological, emotional, mental, and behavioral levels."*

*Hala Khouri*

## What is Traumatic Stress?

The term “trauma” originates from Greek, meaning “an injury or a wound.”

A traumatic event is characterized by situations that overwhelm an individual, rendering them powerless to influence the outcome. Trauma can arise from a single catastrophic incident or a pattern of recurring events over a period of time, such as abuse or neglect. One’s interpretation and experience of the event define its traumatic nature, making seemingly less dramatic events, like divorce or job loss, traumatic for some individuals.

The interplay between protective factors and stressors determines whether an event can be traumatic. Many individuals in treatment facilities have experienced repeated trauma from childhood into adulthood. Even the loss of freedom itself can be traumatic. (Teplin, L., Abram, K., McClelland, G., Dulcan, M. and Mericle, A. 2002)

### Unresolved Trauma

Unresolved traumatic stress alters brain chemistry and structure by triggering hormonal changes and increasing adrenaline and cortisol production. Individuals raised in stressful environments without adequate support may develop a constant state of readiness to “fight, flee, or freeze” when past trauma remains unresolved.

People with unresolved trauma often experience overwhelming emotions, hopelessness, and a lack of direction in life. They maintain a tension in their bodies that hinders the release of trauma and verbal expression. Creating safe external conditions is important but is insufficient to address a sense of security.

## Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD)

- PTSD arises after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event and can cause multiple debilitating symptoms due to chronic stress originating as a means of self-preservation from the incident. The symptoms can persist for more than one month.
- PTSD can develop from direct involvement in an event, after witnessing one, or from experiencing an it indirectly (such as having it recounted or the traumatic details repeated through professional exposure). People who experience threats to psychological integrity can suffer as much as those traumatized by physical injury or life-threatening events. Women are more prone to PTSD than men.
- The diagnosis of PTSD Type 1 includes symptoms like flashbacks, intrusive memories, emotional distress, avoidance, negative alterations in cognition and mood, arousal, reactivity, and dissociation.
- Complex PTSD Type 2 (C-PTSD) results from prolonged repeated trauma, often involving relationship trauma. Trauma leaves an imprint on the mind, brain, and body, affecting a person's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and reactions to the environment.

*“It’s important to remember that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is a stress-related experience that leaves an imprint on the mind, brain, and body that can have a constant effect on the way a person thinks, feels, behaves, and reacts to their environment.”*

Bessel van der Kolk, MD  
The Body Keeps The Score

## Other Types of Trauma

Understanding the origins and diverse forms of trauma is crucial for comprehending its impact and providing appropriate care for survivors. These are various types of trauma:

### Complex & Developmental Trauma

Exposure to chronic interpersonal trauma in an environment of prolonged maltreatment, particularly early in life, often results in a more profound and wide-ranging impact than a singular, definable traumatic event. A common type of this Complex Trauma is called Developmental Trauma, which involves multiple traumatic events early in life that can disrupt many aspects of a child's development, including the formation of a sense of self. Studies have shown that chronic neglect has the same impact on the brain as chronic abuse. And childhood trauma has a cumulative effect that is associated with a much higher risk of developing serious substance abuse, depression, criminality, and suicidality in adulthood.



### Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma (also called transgenerational trauma) can be transferred from one generation of trauma survivors to a second and further generations via complex post-traumatic stress disorder mechanisms. Intergenerational trauma has five means of transmission:

1. Children's vicarious identification with their parents' suffering,
2. Intuitive responsibility assumed by children to compensate for their parents' suffering,
3. Patterns of parenting demonstrated by survivors learned by their offspring,
4. Styles of communication between parents and their children, and
5. Epigenetics, which involves changes in gene expression influenced by environmental factors and traumatic experiences.

## Compound Trauma

Compound trauma results from the combination of unresolved past trauma and exposure to ongoing trauma. Compound trauma is like “trauma on simmer.”

## Secondary Trauma

Secondary trauma can be experienced by being exposed to the traumatic experiences or recountings of others. Those in a professional capacity including mental health and other prison staff who witness the trauma of others or work in a trauma-inducing environment can be vulnerable to experiencing secondary trauma.

## Incarceration and Trauma

Most incarcerated individuals have experienced Complex Trauma due to backgrounds of poverty, neglect, abuse, violence, racism, and criminality. This often becomes exacerbated by alcohol and/or drug abuse. Compound Trauma develops for incarcerated people for multiple reasons. Living in a prison environment and adhering to prison politics can further disconnect a person from a healthy relationship with their body, mind, and emotions. This is often amplified by being confined and in circumstances lacking safety, predictability and control.

**Trauma recovery involves:** (a) overcoming dysregulation, (b) coming to terms with traumatic memories, (c) reintegration and moving on.

## Hurt People Hurt People

It’s a fact that hurt people hurt people. If one has been harmed and the psychological effects of that harming have not been addressed, then it is common to express that pain by inflicting pain on others.

One of the most common impacts of trauma is dissociation: a disconnection from self, others and reality. A symptom of dissociation is emotional numbing, which can become a way of life for many people who have experienced severe or multiple episodes of trauma and seek to avoid feeling further emotional or physical pain.

From years of experience providing yoga and mindfulness practices for incarcerated people, we have seen that addressing the dissociative tendencies resulting from the harm of Complex and Developmental trauma (self as victim) – as well as the additional harm caused oneself by perpetrating violence – is paramount to healing and preventing further harm to others.

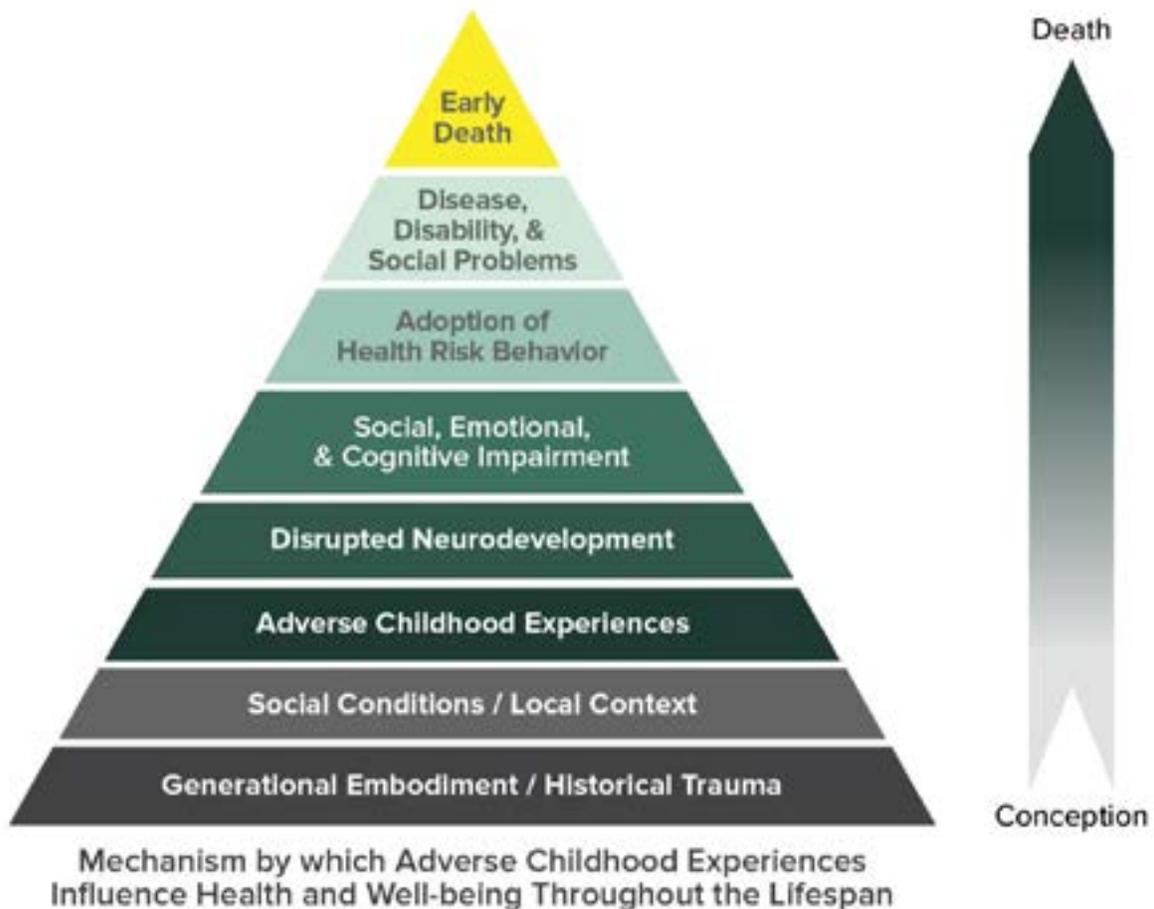
## Childhood Trauma at the Core?

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is a landmark research project that explores the relationship between childhood trauma and long-term health outcomes. Conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente, the study revealed a strong correlation between adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, and a wide range of negative health outcomes in adulthood, including mental health issues, chronic diseases, and risky behaviors.



Individuals with higher ACE scores are more likely to experience mental health problems, substance abuse, and behavioral issues, all of which increase the risk of engaging in criminal activities and being incarcerated. The study found that the impact of ACEs is cumulative, meaning the more adverse experiences a person has in childhood, the greater their risk of experiencing severe negative outcomes later in life.

Understanding the impact of ACEs is crucial for developing effective intervention strategies. Trauma-informed approaches, such as those used in the Prison Yoga Project, aim to address the underlying trauma that many incarcerated individuals have experienced. By integrating trauma-adapted yoga and mindfulness practices, these programs help to mitigate the effects of unresolved trauma, promote mental and emotional well-being, and support rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.



## The ACE Study and Addiction

According to ACE studies, experiencing at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) can double, and sometimes quadruple, the likelihood of using drugs or alcohol at an early age. Individuals with four or more ACEs have almost double the risk of heart disease and lung cancer and are 700% more likely to become alcoholics. Those with five or more ACEs are seven to ten times more likely to use illegal drugs and become addicted. The studies indicate that the specific type of trauma experienced is less important than the cumulative number of ACEs, as different combinations of ACEs result in similar statistical health consequences.

33% report no ACEs	51% report 1-3 ACEs	16% report 4-8 ACEs
<b>With 0 ACEs</b>	<b>With 3 ACEs</b>	<b>With 7+ ACEs</b>
1 in 16 smokes	1 in 9 smokes	1 in 6 smokes
1 in 69 has alcoholism	1 in 9 has alcoholism	1 in 6 has alcoholism
1 in 480 injects drugs	1 in 43 injects drugs	1 in 30 injects drugs
1 in 96 attempts suicide	1 in 10 attempts suicide	1 in 5 attempts suicide

### ACE Scores and Health Risks

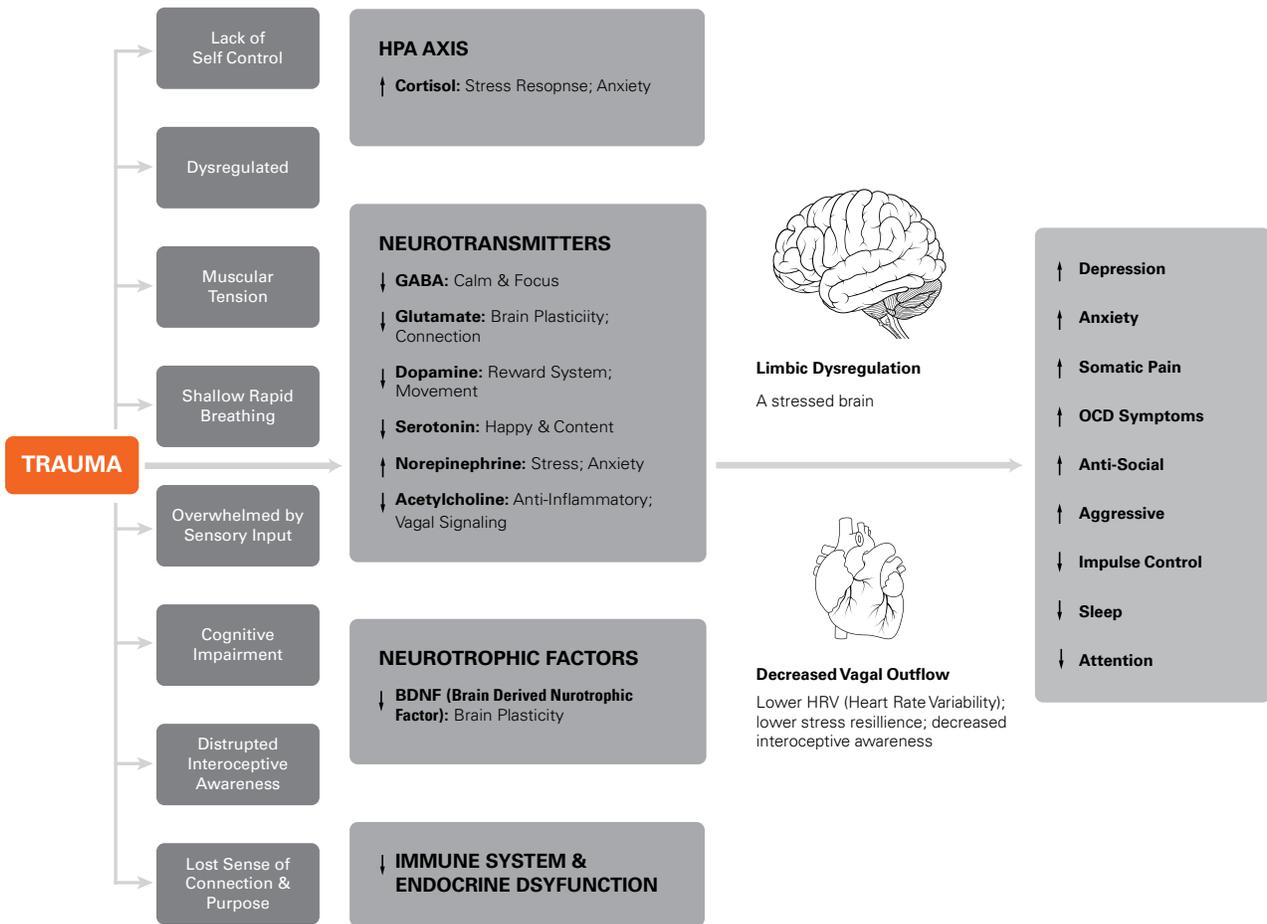
- Earlier introduction to alcohol use
- Higher risk of psychiatric illness and drug abuse as an older adult (50+ years): Child abuse and violence (physical, sexual, psychological) and parental abuse are associated with a higher risk of developing a psychiatric diagnosis and substance abuse later in life (Choi, DiNitto, Marti, & Choi, 2017).
- Increased prescription drug prescribing: For each additional ACE score above 1, prescription drug prescribing increases by 62% (Forster et al., 2017).
- Increased risk of illegal drug use and addiction: The use of illegal drugs and the risk of developing a drug addiction at an early age increase 2-4 times for each ACE score, according to a study of childhood abuse, neglect, and dysfunctional home conditions (Dube et al., 2003).

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## Impacts of Unresolved Trauma

*Developmental trauma and prolonged traumatic stress can be a contributing cause of physical illness, substance abuse problems, and psychiatric illnesses.” Bessel van der Kolk, MD, The Body Keeps the Score*



### **Symptoms of Unresolved Trauma**

- Avoidance – prevents trauma sufferers from committing to heal
- Negative alterations in cognitions and mood: blame of self and others; persistent negative emotional states; guilt, responsibility, and shame; feeling of being permanently damaged; a sense that nobody understands
- Intrusion, flashbacks, and reliving – can be triggered by any event or occur at anytime
- Hyperarousal and hyperactivity: a state of increased and regular psychological and physiological tension (chronic fight or flight) marked by anxiety, exaggerated startle, insomnia, fatigue, reckless or destructive behavior. (Source: National Center for PTSD, U.S. Dept. Veteran Affairs)

### **Behavioral Effects**

- Lack of a sense of safety
- Depression, suicidality
- Alcoholism and drug abuse
- Hyperactivity or lethargy
- Guilt or shame
- Lack of sense of purpose





**TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA  
IN PRISON SETTINGS**

## Trauma-Informed Yoga

Trauma-informed yoga offers individuals an opportunity to strengthen their nervous system and enhance resilience to stress and unresolved symptoms of trauma. It cultivates self-awareness and self-regulation in a safe, calm, and supportive environment, focusing on personal exploration rather than competition with others. These are key aspects of trauma-informed yoga (TIY):

### 1. Activation of the Parasympathetic Nervous System

- Through specific yoga asanas, mindful awareness, breathing techniques, and moments of stillness, individuals with an overactive sympathetic nervous system can activate their parasympathetic nervous system.
- By becoming attuned to bodily signals and sensations, individuals can learn to differentiate between perceived danger and actual safety, enabling them to move from survival mode to a state of calmness and rational decision-making.

### 2. Providing Life Skills

- TIY goes beyond traditional yoga practices offered in public spaces by integrating certain methods from yoga and other embodiment practices to address symptoms of trauma consciously.
- TIY practices strengthen mindful awareness and involve meditation (often referred to as centering), conscious breathing, movement, and deep relaxation, focusing on slow, steady pacing and modulation between active movement and stillness to balance the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.
- TIY aims to regulate the autonomic nervous system, strengthen self-regulation, and provide skills for calming states.

### 3. Other Core Concepts

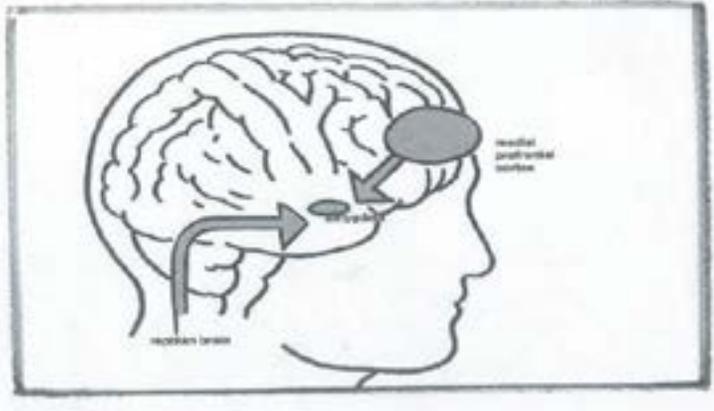
- Provide options for safety and increased agency.
- Count down in challenging poses to provide predictability, safety, and control while increasing impulse control.
- Focus on interoception to guide individuals to experience bodily sensations, aiding in self-regulation and self-care.
- Invitational instruction equalizes power dynamics and enhances program participants' sense of safety and choice in the practice.

## PYP's Trauma-Informed Approach

PYP's trauma-informed approach utilizes bottom-up and top-down regulation techniques to address the mind's stress response and mitigate symptoms of unresolved trauma.

**Bottom-up regulation** of the brain's limbic system, its emotional center, is enacted through specific movement, regulated breathing practices, and touch.

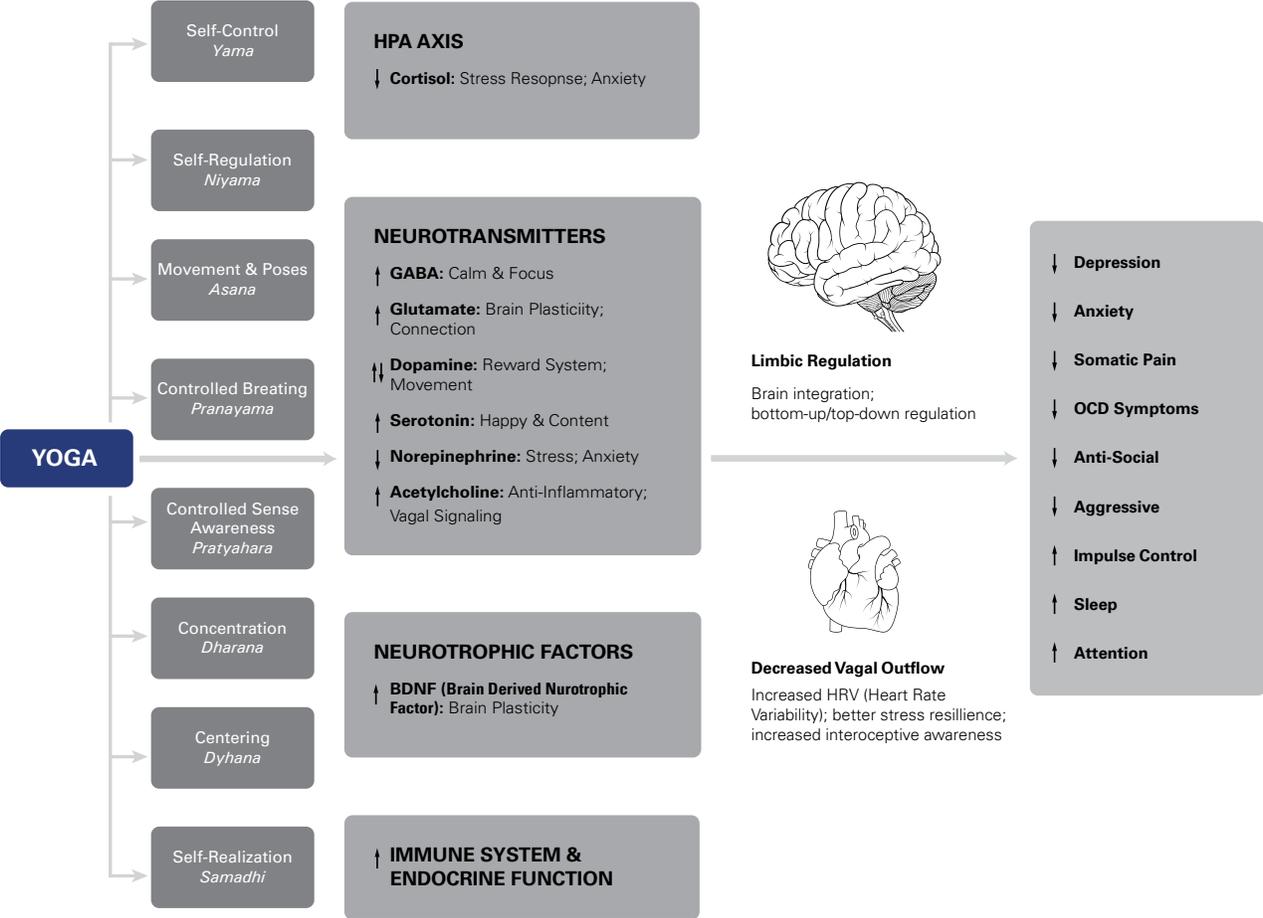
**Top-down regulation** is accomplished by engaging the prefrontal cortex in concentration, meditation, messaging, and breathing practices.



### Other Key Aspects of PYP's Approach

- **Mindfulness Practices:** Cultivate self-awareness of thoughts and emotional states, enabling practitioners to overcome automatic, reactive behavioral patterns. These practices also lay the groundwork for developing interoception and embodiment skills.
- **Specific Breathing Practices:** Provide tools to help regulate anxiety levels, increase heart rate variability (HRV), strengthen vagal tone, and enhance the parasympathetic nervous system.
- **Longer Holding of Poses:** Encourage the self-discipline necessary to strengthen impulse control and promote resilience.
- **Modulating SNS-PNS Practices:** Regulate the autonomic nervous system (ANS), strengthen impulse control, and build resilience by balancing sympathetic (SNS) and parasympathetic (PNS) nervous system activation.
- **Invitational Instruction:** Foster an environment of inclusivity and empowerment by eliminating hierarchy within the group, offering freedom of choice, encouraging self-awareness, and placing control in the hands of the practitioner. This approach allows for self-determination, creating a nurturing space of respite within the prison environment.

# PYP's Evidenced-Based Rationale



PYP adheres to an evidence-based approach to address various aspects of trauma and its effects on individuals. Here's how it achieves these outcomes:

- Addresses the dissociative effects of trauma by promoting a healthy connection between mind and body.
- Discharges accumulated stress to reduce anxiety and reset the ANS.
- Engages the brain's attention network, including the prefrontal cortex, enhancing discernment, rational decision-making, and "executive functioning."
- Strengthens the parasympathetic nervous system, including vagal tone, thereby increasing resilience and promoting regulation of internal states and impulse control.
- Supports addiction recovery by producing neurotransmitters (GABA and serotonin) as well as dopamine that strengthen impulse control, reduce cravings, and produce a natural feel-good state.
- Increases emotional stability and mitigates aggression, anger, depression, and despair.
- Encourages self-acceptance and self-worth through practices focused on self-awareness and mindfulness, counteracting feelings of unworthiness and shame-based identity.
- Promotes pro-social values and behavior, leading to less violent incidents and infractions within prison custody settings.
- Reduces healthcare costs by providing complementary physical and mental health practices supported by a significant body of research.
- Addresses recidivism and public safety concerns by equipping individuals who reintegrate into society with tools for managing stress, regulating emotions, and making rational decisions.

## Supporting Research

Symptom/Behavior	Supported Research
<b>Self-Harm &amp; Dissociation</b>	Yoga can help with emotional regulation (Shafir et al 2016) and contribute to a more secure and positive relationship with one's own body (Greenwood & Delgado, 2013)
<b>Anxiety</b>	Yoga is effective in lowering high levels of anxiety (Javnbakht, Hejazi Kenari & Ghasemi, 2009; Menezes et al, 2015; Uberlacker & Broughton 2016)
<b>Depression</b>	Yoga is a valuable adjunctive treatment for depression. (Da Silva, Ravindran & Ravindran 2009, Lavey et al, 2005; Streeter et al, 2020)
<b>Trauma</b>	Yoga helps to reduce the negative symptoms of PTSD and strengthens affect regulation for addiction recovery. (Kolk, 2014, Reddy, Dick, Gerber & Mitchel, 2014; Spinazzola, Rhodes, Emerson, Earle, & Monroe, 2011). Yoga demonstrates significant trauma symptom reductions compared to CBT (Kelly 2021)
<b>Addiction</b>	Yoga has been shown to be supportive as complementary to other medically oriented treatments for addiction. It can be of help for both short-term (detoxification) and long-term management of substance use. (Sarkar S, Varshney M. 2016)



**CDCR  
PRISONER**

# MINDFULNESS & EMBODIED AWARENESS

*"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom"*

*Victor Frankl*

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness originates from a 2,500 year old meditation technique called Vipassana, which is Sanskrit meaning “to see things as they truly are.” The practice became known in the West as Insight or Mindfulness Meditation.

Mindfulness is a powerful practice that cultivates self-awareness and involves paying close attention, on purpose, with a non-judgemental attitude to one’s moment-to-moment experience. This self-direction of attention entails viewing thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations with openness and acceptance without judging or evaluating them as positive or negative.

Mindfulness is a skill for developing an expanded sense of awareness in which one shifts out of an “ordinary state of mind” of being preoccupied and governed by thoughts and thinking.

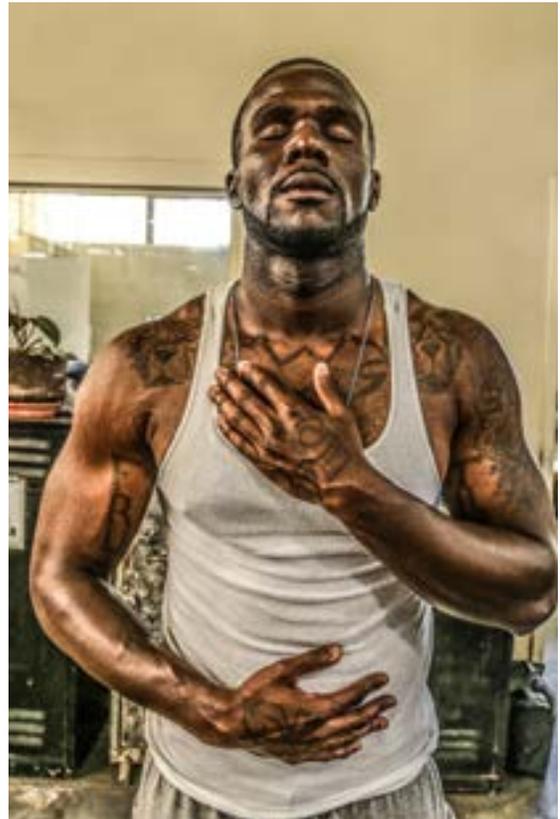
- Mindfulness practices can help shift from reactive to responsive behavior, thereby strengthening impulse control.
- Creating behavioral change begins with mindfulness, shifting out of habitual unawareness (unconsciousness) or automaticity to an attentive, in-the-moment state of self-awareness (consciousness) in which clearer, more conscious choices can be made.
- Mindfulness is often used in psychotherapy for people who suffer from stress, anxiety, and depression.

## Embodied Awareness

Embodied awareness builds upon mindfulness by incorporating a deeper connection with the physical body. It involves the ability to feel and consciously experience physical sensations and bodily movements. When practicing yoga, embodied awareness allows individuals to feel the coordinated movement of their limbs and the subtle sensations within their bodies as they transition between poses or use different breathing techniques. There are a couple of different technical terms used to describe embodied awareness.

**Proprioception** is the ability to be aware of where your body is in space or to have a clear sense of the movement of its parts at any given moment. For instance, awareness of the felt sense of your feet in your shoes and pressing into the floor would be an example of proprioception.

**Interoception** is a more subtle embodied awareness. It involves being able to feel sensations inside your body, such as your heart beating or the movement of your belly as you breathe. When you can actually feel your body becoming upset, such as the tensing of your muscles or heat rising, this is interoception.



*Behavioral change begins with increased self-awareness—a raising of consciousness.*

## Why Is Embodied Awareness Important?

Embodied awareness is important because it reconnects us with our bodies, which can often be neglected or overlooked in our fast-paced, distracted lives. Many people experience a sense of disconnection from their bodies, often as a coping mechanism for dealing with stress or unresolved symptoms of trauma. This disconnection can manifest as mindless eating, numbness, or feeling like living in a fog.

By cultivating embodied awareness, we become more present in the moment without being hijacked by mind chatter and better able to attune to our physical sensations, emotions, and surroundings. This increased presence allows us to experience life more fully, slow things down, and make conscious choices rather than reacting automatically. It empowers us to maintain a healthy balance between mind and body, reducing the likelihood of reactive behavior.

### Yoga Strengthens Embodied Awareness

Yoga is particularly effective in strengthening embodied awareness because it encourages us to focus on the sensations of our movement and breathing as we practice. Through yoga practice, we learn to let go of distractions and self-criticism, fostering a clearer sense of self-awareness.

When performing physical practices, it is important to establish steadiness and stability with the effort being expended and responding with self-care rather than simply pushing through the challenge.

Balancing poses can be challenging because of the need to maintain focus and stability. By sensing contact with the floor and bringing awareness to breathing, balance can improve, and frustration can be eased. With consistent practice, the ability to be present in any posture can increase, translating to being more present in life.

Conscious breathing, or pranayama, is a key component of yoga that helps regulate breathing and promote emotional calmness. By paying attention to our

breath during practice, we can identify areas of tension or discomfort and make adjustments as needed. This mindful approach to breathing can translate into greater emotional stability and resilience both on and off the mat.

Overall, embodied awareness through practices like yoga offers a pathway to personal empowerment, emotional calmness, and a deeper connection with ourselves and the world around us.

### **Practicing Embodied Awareness**

Tensing and then releasing muscles creates sensation that can help you connect to embodied awareness. It also activates a relaxation response, as the contrast between the tension and relaxation helps the muscles let go more completely. This process allows for a deeper state of relaxation, making you more aware of bodily sensations and reducing stress.



1. Tense all the muscles of your body, arms, hands, legs, pull your belly in, even tense your entire face
2. Then relax all the muscles as much as you can, around your eyes, the jaw, your shoulders, your arms and hands, your belly. Can you feel the difference?
3. After doing this 5-10 times, sit or stand still and place one hand on your belly and the other hand on the center of your chest. Can you feel the breath moving under your hands? Maybe you can even feel your heartbeat under the hand on the chest? Can you feel the warmth from your hands on your chest and belly? This is the practice of interoception, tuning into the felt sense of your body.

## Effortless Effort

An essential theme we embrace and advocate in yoga is 'effortless effort.' This concept involves recognizing and appreciating the effort exerted during physically demanding poses and movements, while simultaneously fostering a sense of relaxation and stability in our mindset. This principle, a cornerstone in Taoist non-aggressive martial arts practices such as tai chi, qigong, and aikido, emphasizes conserving energy to tap into its reserves when necessary. Effortless effort is crucial for developing stronger impulse control and maintaining an inner calmness and ease during physically challenging moments. This skill extends beyond our yoga practice, equipping us to manage difficult emotional states and triggers in our daily lives.

Consider a challenging situation, like a confrontation, where tension, a rapid heartbeat, shortened breaths, and rising heat may overwhelm you. This physical response can also unsettle your mental and emotional state. In these situations, see if you can acknowledge and feel the turmoil you may be experiencing while balancing it with deeper, slower breaths, releasing tension with each exhale. Strive to let go of any aggressiveness and remain present in your body. Often, a few conscious breaths can be enough to restore balance and prevent a knee-jerk reaction that could be detrimental to both yourself and others.

### Practicing Effortless Effort: Chair Pose - 5 minutes

1. This practice can be done from a seated or standing position. To begin, raise your arms alongside your ears. If you're seated, press your feet into the ground to activate your leg muscles. If you're standing, bend your knees to lower your seat toward your heels.
2. The amount of effort you put into this position can be varied by how firmly you press your feet into the ground or how low you sit into the squat position. You can also vary how strongly or loosely you engage the muscles of your arms.
3. Try to remain in this posture for 10 breaths. Conduct a scan of your body from your feet up to your head. Are you holding unnecessary tension in your face, shoulders, hands, or belly?
4. While your body puts forth the effort to stay in the pose, see if you can maintain a state of calm and focus. Direct your attention to your breathing and your body, cultivating interoception. Feel your arms extended and sense the contact of your feet with the floor.
5. See if you notice changes in the intensity you feel as you hold the position longer.
6. To conclude, take a moment to sit or stand and observe what you feel when not having to put effort into holding the pose. With consistent practice, you will enhance your capacity to be fully present in any posture, a skill that can extend to being more present in your daily life.

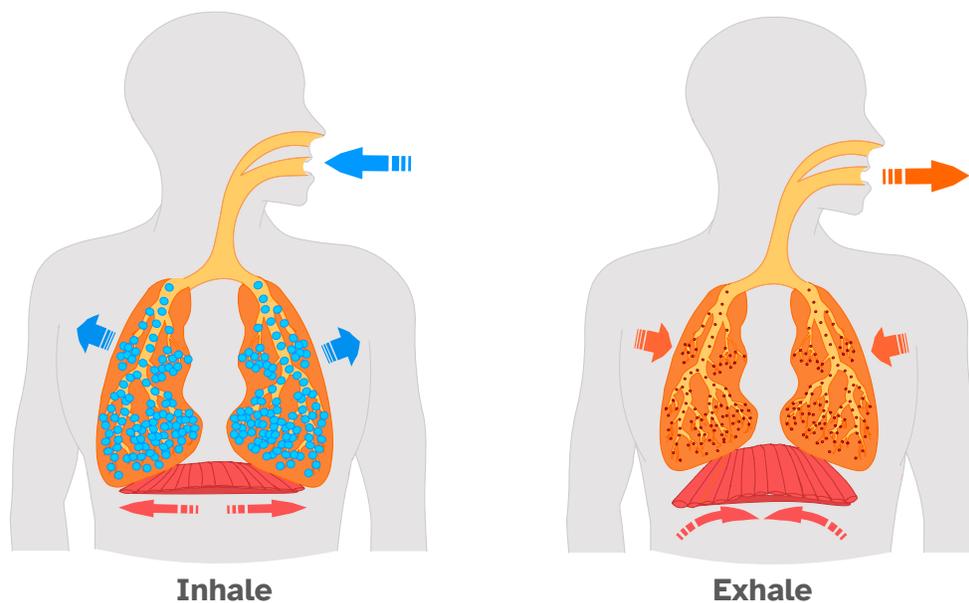






**THE BREATH**

## The Breath



The lungs are surrounded by the ribs and muscles, which aid in the expansion of the lungs during inhalation and their contraction during exhalation. The diaphragm, a dome-shaped muscle located directly below the lungs, plays a critical role in breathing by flattening to make room for lung expansion on inhale and returning to its dome shape to facilitate lung relaxation on exhale. Inhalation is initiated in the brainstem through the diaphragmatic nerve, while exhalation is a passive process.

The diaphragm is directly connected to the vagus nerve, which plays a key role in the practices outlined in this manual. These practices promote relaxed, full breathing to reduce muscular tension around the chest, allowing for deeper inhalations and complete exhalations. By counteracting the rapid and contracted chest breathing that can reduce oxygenation capacity and activate the sympathetic nervous system, these techniques help to alleviate stress and anxiety.

## Breathing Practices and Mental Health

How we breathe is closely associated with our emotional state and can be an indicator for someone struggling with a mental condition. For instance, with panic disorder, when experiencing panic, breathing becomes restricted. For someone with freeze/collapse-related reactions, slow breathing that engages the parasympathetic nervous system can be frightening and trigger a reminiscence of the collapse reaction to a traumatic experience. It is also common for someone who has lived with chronic stress and mental illness to have a reversed diaphragmatic breathing pattern, i.e. they pull their stomach in upon inhale causing a restriction of full, relaxed breathing.

A key aspect of our program is creating a supportive and nurturing environment where participants can explore the connection between breath, body, and mind. This is fostered by incorporating synchronized breathing with movement practices. By doing this we create a more integrated and holistic experience allowing participants to become more aware of their breath and its connection to their physical actions. This approach facilitates relaxation, stress reduction, and increased self-awareness, ultimately empowering individuals to cultivate a deeper sense of well-being and resilience.

Although nasal breathing is taught as a traditional yoga practice, we encourage participants to inhale through the nose and exhale out the mouth, especially during high-stress situations. Nasal breathing does have several benefits, including filtering and humidifying the air, as well as activating the parasympathetic nervous system for relaxation. Longer or extended exhales either out the nose or mouth accomplish this also. What is most important is for participants to become comfortable with breathing practices and choose what works best for them. This helps them to manage stress and anxiety more effectively and enhance overall oxygenation capacity, leading to improved physical and mental health.

### The Effects of Yoga

- Improves oxygen uptake with various breathing techniques, providing an antidote to low oxygen levels, which can contribute to chronic stress, anxiety, and other symptoms.
- Stimulates the lungs and increases their capacity.
- Strengthens the diaphragm.
- Activates parasympathetic lung fibers called SARS (Slow Adaptive Receptors), which send calming signals to the brain.

## Breathing Practices in this Program

Consciously focusing on breathing can calm the mind, relax the body, and enhance our ability to discern our inner state and signals from our body. The yogic breathing practices introduced in this program are primarily for regulating the autonomic nervous system (ANS) principally for engaging its parasympathetic division (PNS). the autonomic nervous system. This is because these practices create balance in the body's various systems, improve concentration, reduce stress and anxiety, calm the mind, and increase oxygen levels in the body. The exercises on the following pages introduce those core practices.

### Mechanisms of Breathing

- The lungs oxygenate blood and release carbon dioxide via exhalation.
- The blood traverses through the pulmonary veins to the heart and then is carried out into the body.
- Breathing is controlled and influenced by the autonomic nervous system.
- Breathing slowly and calmly engages the parasympathetic nervous system sending signals of safety to the brain and promoting cognition and social engagement.
- Relaxed, rhythmic breathing increases “feel good” chemicals in the brain such as calming neurotransmitters GABA and Serotonin.

An overall fact to consider is that prolonged exhalation has a calming and restorative effect on the brain and heart. Additionally, it has a beneficial effect on high blood pressure, anxiety, hyperactivity, stress and tension (Brown R.R and Gerbarg 2012, *The Healing Power of the Breath*).

Caution: Breathing exercises need to be introduced with caution because certain breathing patterns can cause panic or initiate memories of traumatic experiences.

## Diaphragmatic Breathing - Relaxed Belly Breath



- Begin by placing both hands on your solar plexus just above the navel, or one hand on your solar plexus and the other on your chest. Inhale slowly and progressively, filling your torso by starting with expanding the lower abdomen, then the chest, and finally up to your collarbones. Exhale slowly, releasing the breath and relaxing the torso from top to bottom (from collarbones, to chest, to lower abdomen).
- Continue to focus on your hands as they rise and fall as you breathe; this will help maintain awareness of your body.
- If you struggle to feel the movement in your belly, try lying down and placing a light object on your solar plexus. Imagine gently lifting the object as you inhale, and feel it lower with the exhale, all without tension.

### **Diaphragmatic Breathing**

#### **Possible physical benefits:**

- Activates the parasympathetic nervous system
- Reduces stress hormones
- Increases oxygen intake
- Reduces stress-related symptoms
- Activates the relaxation response
- Increases the vagal tone

#### **Possible emotional benefits:**

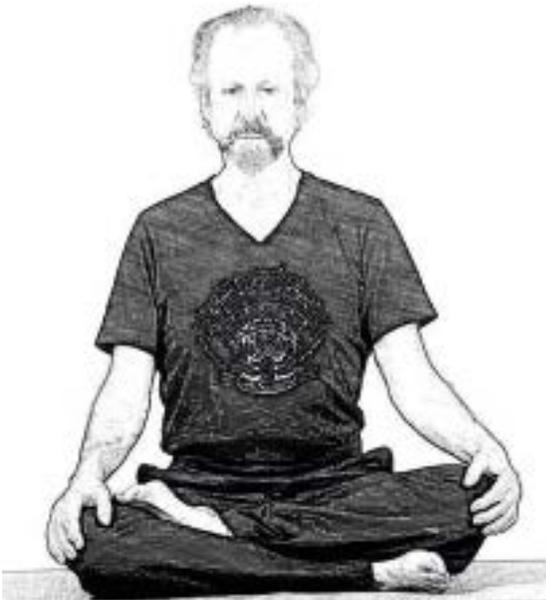
- Reduces anxiety and stress
- Improves sleep and relaxation

#### **Tips for guiding:**

Since breathing practices can trigger memories of trauma, when guiding awareness of breathing, go slowly, step by step, using calm invitations such as, "if it feels OK to you, see if you can breathe a little deeper and lengthen your exhale."

## Coherent Breathing/“Same Rhythm Breath”

- Begin by engaging in relaxed belly breathing (diaphragmatic breathing).
- Inhale to a count of four, five, or six seconds, and match this count with your exhale. This would be one breath cycle.
- Aim to continue this exercise for five minutes, and practice two to three times a day, or as often as desired.
- By breathing at this rate of approximately five to six breath cycles per minute, high-frequency signals from the vagus nerve become prominent in comparison to those from the sympathetic nerve. This interaction results in significant variations in heart rate, leading to maximum levels of heart rate variability (HRV) and potentially higher GABA release. This breathing process strengthens the autonomic nervous system and enhances resilience toward stress.



## Uneven Rhythm Breathing

**Longer Exhale:** If you are feeling stressed, count 4 seconds for the inhale, and 6 to 8 seconds for the exhale. Longer exhalations provide greater parasympathetic (PNS) activation. Do this for 10-15 breaths, then rest and feel the effect of the practice. Repeat again if you wish.

**Longer Inhale:** If you are feeling tired or with low energy, count 6 to 8 seconds for the inhale, and 4 seconds for the exhale. Do this for 10-15 breaths, then rest and feel the effect of the practice. Repeat again if you wish.

## Cyclic Sighing Breathing

Cyclic Sighing Breathing is a controlled breathing exercise that emphasizes long exhalations. This practice can take as little as five minutes to release stress or anxiety, improve your mood, and provide an overall feeling of calmness.

### Instructions

Take an easy inhale through your nose filling your lungs about half way and pause for a count of two. Then inhale the rest of the way through your nose filling your lungs entirely with your breath, pause again for a count of two, and then slowly exhale out of your mouth making a soft sighing sound. See if you can exhale completely as you do this because your exhalation activates the parasympathetic nervous system, slowing down your heart rate and having a calming effect on you.

After a few of these breaths with deep sighs, you may already begin to feel calmer. However, to completely experience the benefits of this practice it is recommended to do it for 3-5 minutes (30-50 breath cycles).

### Cyclic Sighing Breathing

#### Possible physical benefits:

- Activates the parasympathetic nervous system
- Reduces stress hormones and stress-related symptoms
- Increases oxygen intake
- Activates the relaxation response
- Increases vagal tone

#### Possible emotional benefits:

- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Creates calmer temperament

#### Tips for guiding

See if you can feel your lungs expanding as you inhale? As you exhale making a sighing sound, see if you can extend your exhale so that you're exhaling completely.

## “The Breath of Strength”

The Breath of Strength/Mudra Breathing is a breathing technique that is combined with movements in the hand. This exercise can be helpful for someone who feels hyper-aroused and has difficulty concentrating, and has the additional benefit of activating both halves of the brain.



### Instructions

1. Choose a position that allows you to relax either sitting or laying down.
2. Bring your awareness to your breathing trying to soften your belly as you breathe.
3. Start with both hands open. When you inhale, close your right hand tightly into a fist keeping your left hand open; as you exhale, open and relax your right hand and close your left hand tightly into a fist. Repeat this 5 times.
4. Change to your other hand. Inhale and close your left hand tightly into a fist keeping your right hand open; as you exhale, open and relax your left hand and close the right hand tightly into a fist. Repeat this 5 times.
5. Now do both hands, inhaling and closing both hands tightly into a fist, and exhaling and opening and relaxing both hands. Repeat this 5 times.
6. This breathing practice is intended to increase the connectivity between the two halves of the brain and can be beneficial for high anxiety levels and ADHD.

Reference: Staniak, A. (2003). The Size of Corpus Callosum Correlates with Functional Activation of Medial Motor Cortical Areas in Bimanual and Unimanual Movements.



**YOGA FOR  
ADDICTION RECOVERY**

**502WR**

## Yoga as Complementary for Addiction Recovery

While yoga cannot address the social factors related to addiction, it can serve as a valuable component of substance use disorder prevention and recovery. Mindfulness-based interventions, including yoga, possess solid conceptual foundations and are increasingly supported by empirical evidence for enhancing treatment. Addiction comprises two main aspects: physiological and mental cravings for substances and an individual's capacity to tolerate rather than act on these sensations.

Meditation and yoga can alleviate both factors by providing tools to regulate the stress response and cultivate the ability to observe experiences with equanimity. American Addiction Centers recommend yoga as a beneficial adjunct to traditional substance abuse treatment methods.

- Developing self-confidence, impulse control, and self-reliance is crucial in addiction recovery, qualities often fostered and complemented by yoga. Multiple studies suggest that mindfulness activities like yoga assist individuals in overcoming substance addiction when combined with conventional treatment.
- Another advantage of yoga is its ability to increase levels of GABA (Gamma-aminobutyric acid), a neurotransmitter that reduces anxiety and stress (see page 22 for more details). Stress and anxiety are common during drug withdrawals.
- A randomized controlled study conducted in Sweden among individuals battling alcohol dependence compared a group receiving physical exercise alone with one receiving exercise combined with yoga.
- Yoga has also been recommended for individuals with heroin addiction. Studies indicate that female heroin users who underwent drug detox experienced significantly improved mood and overall quality of life after practicing yoga. Overall research suggests that yoga can serve as a supportive element in heroin addiction treatment.
- A systematic review examining the efficacy of yoga in substance abuse recovery found that seven out of eight studies demonstrated improvements in primary outcomes such as anxiety, pain, or usage. The review also highlighted significant results when yoga was used alongside other pharmacological treatment modalities like opioid substitution therapy.

**References:**

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Walia N, Matas J, Turner A, Gonzalez S, Zoorob R. "Yoga for Substance Use: A Systematic Review." *J Am Board Fam Med.* 2021 Sep-Oct;34(5):964-973. doi: 10.3122/jabfm.2021.05.210175. PMID: 34535521.

The Minded Institute. Retrieved from [www.themindedinstitute.com](http://www.themindedinstitute.com).

Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile, January 2023. Retrieved from [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk).

## The Yogic View of Addiction

### Behavioral “Seeds”

According to yogic philosophy, the Sanskrit term “samskaras” refers to impressions or behavioral traits left on a person from past intentions and actions. They could be likened to psychological imprints. Negative samskaras denote negative behavioral patterns or changes often resulting from unconscious responses to stressful conditions or environments. These negative patterns typically originate as coping mechanisms in response to early-life trauma or suffering but can evolve into behaviors that harm both oneself and others. Examples include addictions to drugs or alcohol, which alter the body’s chemistry, and persistent angry states leading to violent behavior.



### Transformation

Conversely, positive samskaras are healthy behavioral patterns usually made by conscious choice. They are habits formed or adopted for personal healing. A key aspect of transforming negative samskaras into positive ones involves developing “self-regulation” (or self-control), often referred to as “impulse control.” This process starts with increased self-awareness regarding what is harmful and is followed by disciplined practices aimed at change.

## Dopamine

Dopamine is a type of neurotransmitter and hormone that plays a crucial role in various functions of the brain and feelings of pleasure, satisfaction, and motivation. It is essential for survival, as it motivates behaviors necessary for basic needs such as reproduction, seeking food, and maintaining energy levels.

In the brain, dopamine is responsible for creating feelings of pleasure and motivation, primarily through the reward system. When dopamine is released, it binds to specific receptor molecules on nerve cells, stimulating pleasure sensations. This encourages individuals to seek out activities that result in pleasurable feelings, such as eating, sex, or solving challenging tasks.

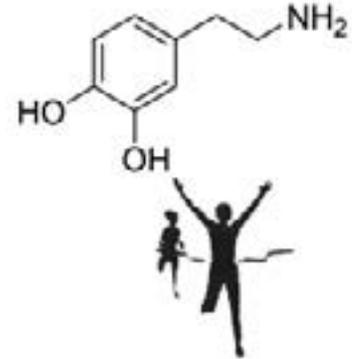
Dopamine is also involved in regulating other functions such as motor skills, alertness, joy, enthusiasm, and attention. It plays a role in the learning process, influencing how we anticipate rewards and seek out new experiences.

### Potential Problems with Dopamine

The same reward system dopamine promotes related to survival can also lead to harmful behaviors. Alcohol, nicotine, addictive drugs, gambling, and overeating can all cause a surge in dopamine levels, reinforcing the desire to repeat these actions. This cycle of seeking pleasure can lead to addiction, as the brain associates unhealthy behaviors with feelings of well-being.

Low levels of dopamine have been associated with mental health conditions like depression, PTSD, and ADHD. Therefore, maintaining a healthy balance of dopamine is crucial for overall well-being.

**Certain activities may help boost dopamine levels and contribute to a sense of motivation and well-being. They include engaging in yoga practices that raise heart rate, promote deep relaxation, and improve motor coordination.**



## Creating New Habits

### Rewiring The Brain

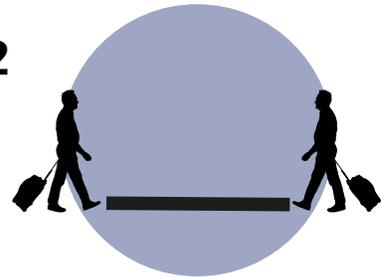
Imagine your thoughts and behaviors like a well-traveled highway.

1. Your highway of thoughts and actions begins as a small pathway
2. The more you walk the path, repeating the same thoughts and actions, the more it becomes a familiar (maybe even comfortable) pattern.
3. However, if you could train yourself to shift and redirect your attention to your body and breathing, you can interrupt old patterns of thinking and behaving, and establish new positive supportive ones.

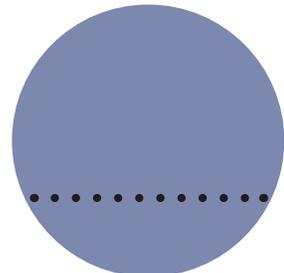
1



2



3



*"I used drugs and alcohol for many years to numb the pain of my life. Yoga has helped clear my mind, confront the pain, live in the present, and embrace myself and who I am."*

*J.B., PYP Program Participant*

## **Habits and Addictions**

We create habits and addictions in different ways, whether it's a cup of morning coffee, checking social media, having a daily cocktail, or consuming sugary snacks. Mindful awareness is the first step towards making a change.

## **Ride the Wave**

One of the most potent mindfulness tools for recovery is a skill called "riding the wave" or "urge surfing." In other words, noticing when cravings arise, being with them without acting on them, and allowing them to naturally subside. Each time you resist acting on a craving, you strengthen your ability to abstain.

## **Practical Exploration**

Explore the thoughts and feelings that arise when old patterns resurface. Notice the physical sensations in your body and allow the craving to pass naturally. With practice, you'll become more adept at managing the intensity of the cravings.

## **Self-Regulation**

Self-regulation, or self-control, involves managing your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors for positive outcomes. Mindful awareness helps you to pay close attention in the present moment to your thoughts and emotions. It helps you to identify triggers and/or cravings by allowing for a pause between a feeling and action so that you can respond thoughtfully rather than reactively. **Yoga offers an ideal practice for developing self-regulation because it necessitates concentrating on what you are doing in the present moment while paying attention the felt sense of your body and your breathing.**





**YOGA FOR  
INCARCERATED WOMEN**

## Women and Trauma

A large national mental health study in the USA showed that just over half of all women experience at least one traumatic event in their lives. The most common traumas for women are sexual abuse, violence in close relationships, and abuse in childhood. About one in three women will experience sexual abuse during their lifetime – a significantly higher rate than for men.

### Women and PTSD

- Oestrogen, a hormone primarily affecting the female brain and behavior, may play a role in women's increased vulnerability to and severity of PTSD symptoms.
- Women may experience greater activation of neural networks involved in fear and anxiety during low-estrogen phases of the menstrual cycle, potentially exacerbating PTSD symptoms.
- Women are more likely to report symptoms of depression and anxiety during periods before menstruation, postpartum, and pre and post-menopause when estrogen levels are relatively low.
- The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which regulates the body's stress response, may be more sensitive in women, particularly during certain phases of the menstrual cycle.
- Traumatic stress may contribute to accelerated cortical aging of certain brain regions, such as the insula, in girls who develop PTSD.

**References:**

Estrogen-dependent association of HDAC4 with fear in female mice and women with PTSD (SA Maddox, AK Smith 2018)

Differences in brain development gender- Stanford University: <https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2016/11/traumatic-stress-changes-brains-of-boys-girls-differently.html>

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/08/violence-and-trauma-in-childhood-accelerate-puberty/>

**Incarcerated Women and Trauma**

Incarcerated women present significantly higher rates of PTSD than male prisoners. They also report more complex histories of interpersonal sexual trauma (Komarovskaya et al., 2011). This fact may help to explain why incarcerated women have more difficulty benefiting from cognitive-based rehabilitative programs, exhibit reduced impulse control (Cauffman et al., 1998), and have higher recidivism rates (Kubiak, 2004).

## Women and Yoga

When facilitating yoga for women, there are some things to take into account regarding their body's structure and functions.

### Menstruation

- Take it easy for the first three days of (or during heavy) menstruation.

Recommended Practices for Menstrual Pains: See *Freedom from the Inside*, page 70

### Menopause

- During menopause, it is recommended to engage in fewer practices but for longer periods. Focus on practices that engage the parasympathetic nervous system, such as relaxed belly breathing, equal length of inhalation and exhalation, longer exhalation, and longer meditations and relaxations.

Recommended Practices for Menopause: See *Freedom from the Inside*, pages 67-69

### Pregnancy

#### Considerations:

- The possibility of pregnancy and if it is wanted
- Perinatal depression (the period just before and after giving birth)
- Blood pressure changes.
- Risk of psychosis.

Recommended Practices for pregnancy and after birth: See *Freedom from the Inside*, pages 73-82

### Hyper-mobility

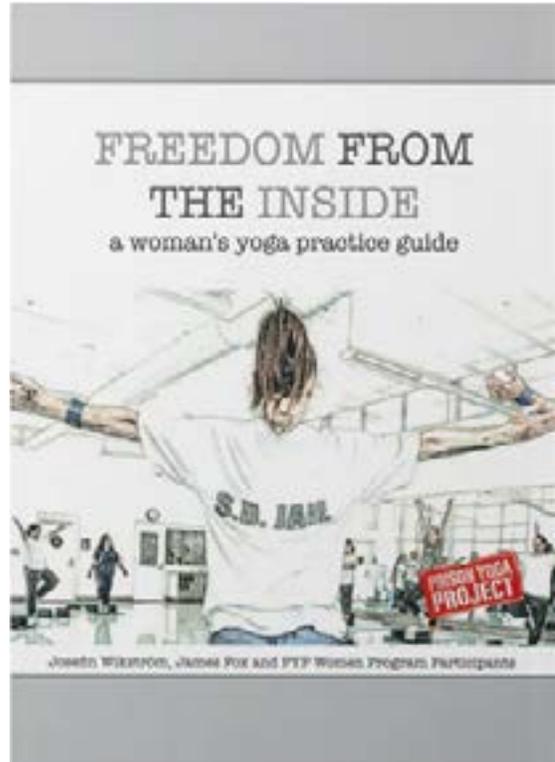
Many women are hyper-mobile around the joints. This is due to several factors that can be hereditary or due to weakened muscles. In such a case, these women can be advised to bend only slightly around the knee joints and arm joints to avoid overload.

## Osteoporosis

### Considerations:

- After menopause bone density plunges.
- With good diet and weight bearing exercise, women can build to maximum bone density around the age of 21.
- Stress and chronic HPA activation contributes to bone loss
- Anti-psychotic drugs can contribute to loss of bone density

Recommended Precautions: See *Freedom from the Inside*, page 68



## Yoga for Incarcerated Women

### A Multi-layered Complexity

- Many incarcerated women come from complex backgrounds of trauma, drug abuse, poor diet, and a lack of regular exercise. For these reasons they may never have reached peak bone density.
- Emotional overwhelm with incarcerated women is common. Because of this along with experiencing the chronic stress of being confined, it is critical to provide practices for physical and emotional regulation skills.
- Because of experiences with multi-layered trauma, often sexual, a number of yoga poses can be triggering for incarcerated women, such as reclining poses that open the legs and hips (e.g., “Happy Baby Pose”).
- Additionally, because many women are separated from their children, it’s best to call “Child’s Pose” “Relaxation Pose.”

### Shame-based Identity

- It is common for incarcerated women to suffer from shame-based identity and low self-esteem.
- Shame typically originates in childhood in the context of relationships and comes from experiences of being dishonored and/or humiliated, and messages inferring that you are not a worthwhile human being.
- Shame creates and maintains a false identity of who you are, strongly influencing your self-perception and how you believe others perceive you.
- Try implementing “power poses” and movements that evoke strength and courage that allow for personal expression.

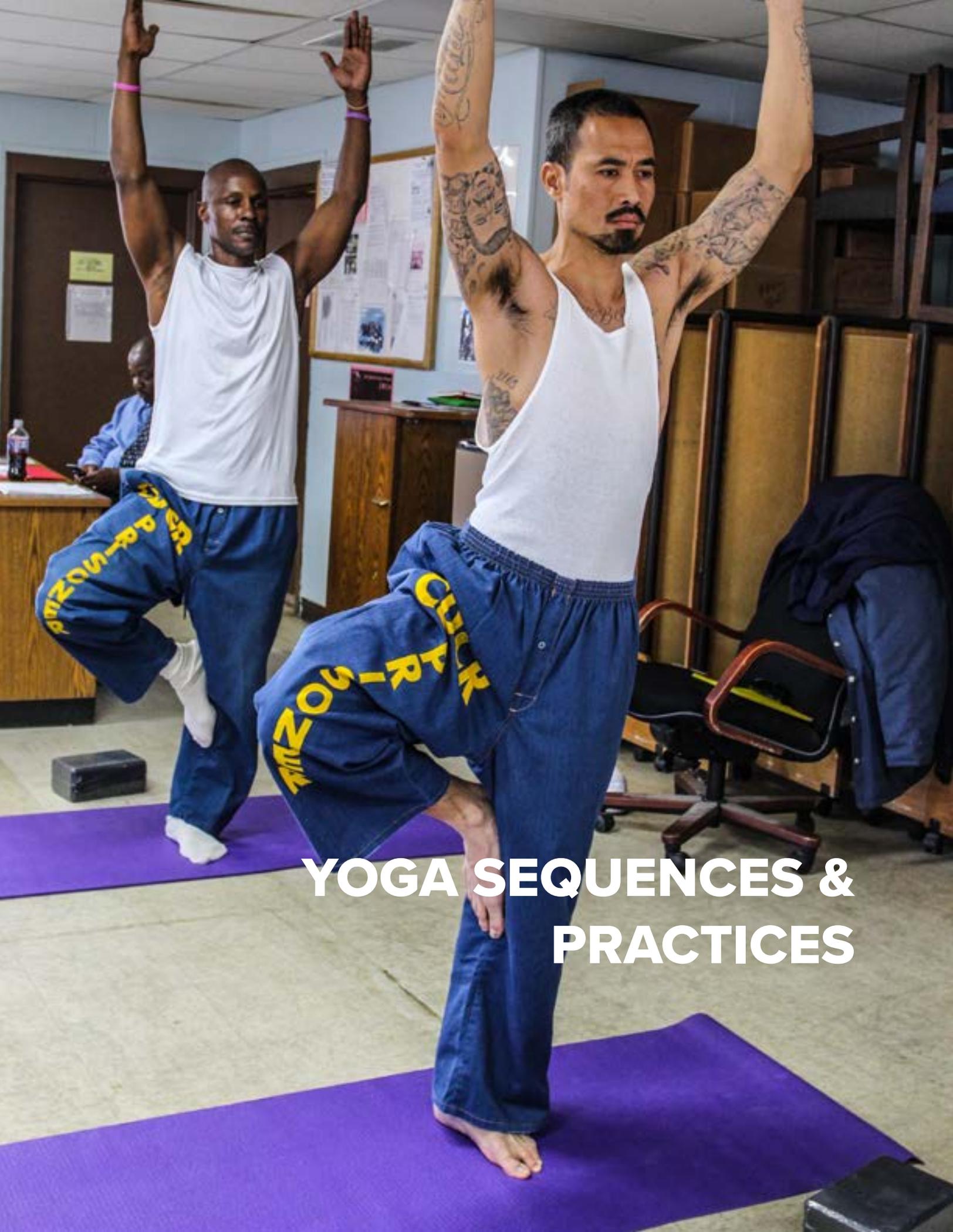
### **Inspiration and Motivation**

- If possible, incorporate music with movement in classes.
- Set goals and something to look forward to (such as a certificate at the end of the course).
- Use encouraging language.
- Use rhythm to synchronize movement with the group.

### **Strive To Build Connectedness among the Group**

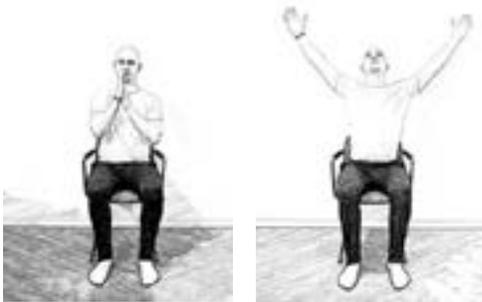
- Set a group agreement regarding disturbances.
- Encourage using the “Secret Angel Practice” (See Freedom from the Inside, page 101)
- Try encouraging the women to separate their mats from friends and practice next to people they do not know as well.
- Suggest sharing feelings, journal writing, or drawings about yoga with one another.
- Share a favorite yoga sequence with a friend.





# YOGA SEQUENCES & PRACTICES

## Foundational Trauma-Informed Yoga Practice



Rub your hands together; then shake them out with big or small movements with arms and hands. Breathe in, tense all muscles, breathe out, release and relax. Right and left as well as the whole body.



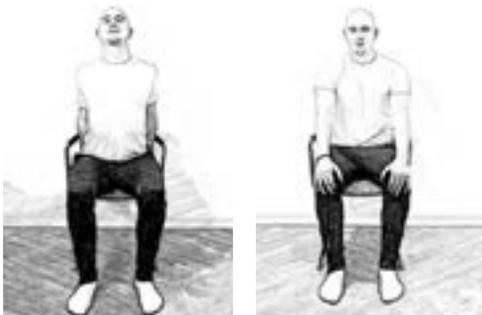
Massage the jaw, temples, top of the shoulders, and arms. Tap around the collarbone and chest. Feel the feet in contact with the floor and parts of the body in contact with the chair.



1) Shoulder rolls, backward and forward. 2) Neck stretch, drop ear toward shoulder, both sides. 3) Head rolls, large or small circles.



Make large circular movements with the upper body from waist to head in both directions.



Spinal movements: Inhale, lift the chest, draw shoulder blades together. Exhale, round the back and draw the belly in. Repeat 5 times.



Side stretch: Reach arm over ear, straight or bent, opening the side body. Right and left, 3-5 breaths.



Inhale and stretch arms overhead; exhale and fold forward onto legs. Repeat 3 times. On the final time, stay in forward fold, relax shoulders and neck, 3-5 long extended exhales.





Chest opening: Lift the chest, draw shoulder blades together. 3-7 breaths.

Dynamic movements seated (alternative standing, see next page): 1) Gently twist side-to-side while feeling feet in contact with the floor. Repeat 5 times. 2) Press hands together. 3) Stretch arms and hands wide, creating space. 4) Inhale, stretch arms overhead; exhale, stretch arms and hands outward and down. Repeat 5 times.

Lower the pulse. Hand on belly and chest. Inhale through the nose; 5 long, relaxed exhales out the mouth.



Dynamic movements standing: 1) Swing upper body side-to-side while feeling feet in contact with the floor. Repeat 5 times. 2) Press hands together. 3) Stretch arms and hands wide, creating space. 4) Inhale, stretch arms overhead; exhale, stretch arms and hands outward and down. Repeat 5 times.

Standing side stretch: Start standing. Inhale raising an arm and stretching to the side. Exhale and come back up to standing. Repeat 3 times each side. Shake things off - feet, legs, arms, hands.

Bend your legs and interlace your hands. Inhale between your shoulder blades and exhale, pressing your palms forward, lengthening your arms. Repeat 3 times.

Lower the pulse. Hand on belly and chest. Inhale through the nose; 5 long, relaxed exhales out the mouth.

## Foundational Trauma-Informed Yoga Practice



Inhale and reach up high. Exhale out the mouth and imagine you're throwing something away with your arms and hands. Repeat 3 times.

Tree pose on each side, counting down from 5 to 1. Use a chair for support if needed. Exhale out the mouth making any sound you'd like as you imagine throwing something away. Repeat 3 times.



Center yourself and lower the pulse. Hand on belly and chest. Inhale through the nose; 5 long, relaxed exhales out the mouth.

Balance in Warrior 3 with the support of a chair. Alternatively, release hands along sides and balance freely. Count down from 5 to 1. Relax between sides, centering yourself with long exhales.

## Prison Yoga Project



Warrior 1 with support of a chair or bending leg raising arms overhead. Count down from 5 to 1. Relax between sides, centering yourself.

Warrior 1 with motion: Inhale and straighten both legs, drawing the arms alongside the body. Tense arms and hands, then as you exhale, bend the front leg and push the arms and open hands forward in a slow, dynamic motion. Repeat 3 times on both sides.



Throw away, shake off, then rest and lower the pulse.

# Foundational Trauma-Informed Yoga Practice



Boat Pose- core strengthening exercise. Choose an option either in the chair or on the floor. Hold pose and count down from 5 to 1. Repeat 3 times. Alternate with chest opening and rest.



Lying down or seated: Rock and massage the back against the chair or floor.

Modified Pigeon: Seated or lying down, cross an ankle over the thigh. If seated, fold forward. If lying down, draw the lower knee in slightly toward the chest. It may be uncomfortable but avoid it becoming painful. Take 5 relaxed breaths on each side.

Seated or reclining twist: 5 breaths on each side. Rock and massage the back before the final guided relaxation.



## Basic Trauma-Adapted Yoga Practice

Start bringing awareness into the body by massaging hands, face, and feet. Then do gentle shoulder rolls, side stretches, and circles with the upper body.



**Shoulder Rolls:** Roll your shoulders backward and forward, then raise shoulders to ears, tensing arms, neck, and facial muscles. Make a forceful “haaa” sound out of your mouth as you exhale and release. Perform neck stretches by dropping each ear to each shoulder.

Make several large circular movements with the upper body while seated in both directions.



**Side Stretch:** Place a hand on the outside of the opposite leg for 3-5 breaths. Repeat on both sides. Notice the feeling in the side body and ribcage.

**Spinal Movements:** Lift your chest, then round your back while pulling the belly in. Repeat 5 times.



**Boat Pose:** Lean back until you feel your belly muscles activating; try to lift the chest slightly upwards. You may be on the floor or on a chair.

Lift your chest as far as it feels okay. Take 5 full breaths or count down from 5 to 1.



Stretch your arms overhead, then fold forward, relaxing your shoulders, neck, and head. Stay for five breaths, making long, extended exhales. Then come back up.



Dynamic Movement: Swing side-to-side, feeling the contact of your feet with the floor. 1) Lift your arms overhead. 2) Bring your arms to shoulder height, extending them out to the side. 3) Release your arms alongside your body. 4) Do gentle shoulder rolls to end. Repeat 5 times. Synchronize your breathing with movement. You can do this standing or seated in a chair.

Side Stretch: Inhale, raising your arm. Exhale and reach overhead and to the side. Repeat 3 times on each side.

Bend your legs and interlace your hands. Inhale between your shoulder blades, and as you exhale, press your palms forward, lengthening your arms. Repeat 3 times.

Lower your heart rate by exhaling long out your mouth while hands rest on your abdomen. Repeat 5 times.



Tree Pose: Try keeping your balance in Tree Pose. You may keep the toes to the floor, foot on the inner shin, or on the inner thigh. You could also use the wall for support. Stay for 5 breaths.

If you feel stable in the pose, try raising your arms overhead or to the sides, creating branches for your tree.

Come back to standing, hands on abdomen and chest, and release tension in your face, shoulders, and belly. Keep your knee joints soft. Feel the connection of your feet to the floor. Take 5 long exhales.

## Basic Trauma-Adapted Yoga Practice



**Warrior 1:** From a standing position, step one foot back, straightening that leg, and then bend the front leg. Keep the knee of your bent leg over the ankle. Feel your feet grounded with the floor and raise your arms overhead. Stay for 5 breaths before moving on to Warrior 1 Flow with the same positioning of your legs. Then switch legs and repeat.

**Warrior 1 Flow:**

Inhale and lift your arms to shoulder height while bending the front leg. Exhale, straighten the front leg, and bring your arms to your side.

Inhale, and as you bend the front leg, lift your arms overhead. Exhale, bring your arms first to shoulder height, and then straighten the leg as you bring your arms to your side. Synchronize the movement of your arms with your leg.

Come back to standing, hands on abdomen and chest, and release tension in your face, shoulders, and belly. Keep your knee joints soft. Feel the connection of your feet to the floor. Take 5 long exhales.



**Warrior 2 Flow:** Place the right foot forward, opening your hips to the side, and bend your knee directly over your ankle. Raise your arms to shoulder height, extending them out in front and in back of you. Gaze at your front hand and stay for 3 breaths. Then lift the right arm up, noticing the stretch in your side, and stay for 2 breaths. Then bring the arms back to shoulder height for another 2-3 breaths. Synchronize your movements with your breath. Repeat 5 times. Then switch legs/sides and repeat.

**Extended Side Angle Pose:** From Warrior 2 Pose, place your forearm on the thigh while pressing the back foot into the floor. Then lift the back arm over your ear and head. Feel the stretch in your side. Stay for 3-5 breaths before coming back to Warrior 2 and completing. Repeat on the other side.

Come back to standing, hands on abdomen, and release tension in your face, shoulders, and belly. Keep your knee joints soft. Feel the connection of your feet to the floor. Take 5 long exhales.



Inhale: Lift and cross your arms at the wrists overhead. Keep your toes pointing out.

Exhale: Draw the crossed wrists in front of your chest while bending your legs, knees towards toes, strongly pressing your hands and arms out to the side.

As you fold forward, inhale, gathering energy up from the earth with your hands and rise, bringing arms and hands overhead. Then exhale while standing and bring your hands down to rest on your lower belly (the Dan Tian).

Building & Releasing Energy: With legs bent and arms alongside your body and hands open, exhale, and press your arms and hands strongly forward. Then, as you next inhale, imagine you are pulling energy in toward yourself, and as you exhale, strongly press out again, making the sound "haaa." Repeat 3-5 times or as many times as you wish.

Come back to standing, hands on abdomen and chest, and release tension in your face, shoulders, and belly. Keep your knee joints soft. Feel the connection of your feet to the floor. Take 5 long exhales.



Sphinx Pose: Lying on your belly, pointing the toes back and releasing your weight into the floor, place the elbows directly under your shoulders with forearms parallel to each other. Gently lift your chest and drop your chin slightly. Try to stay still in the pose for 1-2 minutes. If there's too much tension in the neck, shoulders, or upper back, you can relax your head toward the floor.

Relax your shoulders and neck. Fold forward over your legs and stay for 5 breaths.

Stretch your legs out and lift your chest as much as it feels okay. Stay for 5 breaths.

## Basic Trauma-Adapted Yoga Practice



**Reclined Twist:** Cross your right leg over the left. Relax both knees over to the left, keeping your shoulders to the floor. Take 5 deep breaths with long exhales. Repeat on the other side, left leg over right.



Lying on your back with legs bent and knees over your waist, draw the knees in toward your chest as you exhale completely out your mouth. Repeat 3 times.

Here you can try adding a breathing practice or simply focus on taking long, extended exhales.



**Deep Relaxation:** Make yourself as comfortable as possible. Arms and hands can rest alongside your body or anywhere on top of your body. You can bring your lower legs and feet onto a chair or bed to release the lower back if you wish. Eyes can be closed if that feels alright. Relax your whole body and feel the weight of it sinking into the place where you are lying, particularly as you exhale. You can place a thick blanket over your lower belly to keep warm. Stay for 5-10 minutes.

## Moving Emotions

Here are a few practices you can use to “move energy out.”

### Discharging Frustration, Anger, and Strong Emotions

1. Begin by placing your hands on the floor, engaging your arm muscles as you push the floor away.
2. Incorporate deep breathing and make sounds as you practice.
3. Perform this movement slowly and with control for as long as you desire. You can keep your knees on the floor if needed.



**Alternatively,** you can do this exercise against a wall, pushing the wall away from you with your hands.

### Discharging Restlessness and Hyperactivity

1. Stand and establish a strong connection between your feet and the ground.
2. Bend your legs and turn your toes outward, tracking your knees towards your toes.
3. Extend your hands forward while exhaling completely, releasing your breath through your nose or mouth.
4. Repeat this sequence as many times as you can until your leg muscles feel tired.
5. Afterward, fold forward and shake your head, exhaling for as long as possible.
6. For additional support, lean against a wall.
7. Return to a standing position and gently “shake things off” by moving your shoulders, arms, hands, and legs.



### Warrior Poses

Yoga features various “power poses” that can influence your emotions and state of mind.

1. Experiment with the Warrior poses to see how they make you feel.
2. Reach your arms upward and outward while creating a sense of space and energy towards the ceiling.
3. Focus on releasing tension in your face, shoulders, and belly while observing how you feel in these poses.



## Yoga for Anxiety



**Shoulder Rolls:** Standing, lift your shoulders to your ears as you inhale, then roll the shoulders backward and down with a long exhale out your mouth. Do this 5-10 times. Then stop, and standing still with your hands on your belly, take 10 full breaths. Feel your belly rising and falling under your hands as you breathe. Try inhaling through your nose and exhaling longer out your mouth, whispering a “haaa” sound (like fogging up a mirror with your breath).

**Chair Pose:** With feet hip-distance apart, bend your legs and raise your arms. Stay for as long as you can to tire out the leg muscles. Try pushing your hands forward slowly as you exhale, engaging the arm muscles. Then fold forward with knees bent, hands on elbows or released. Take 5 long exhales. Do this pose 3 times.



**Relaxed Belly Breath:** Feel the movement of the breath in your belly and the warmth from your hands. Feel the connection of your feet to the ground. You can rock slightly forward and back to activate feeling in the feet. Imagine that you are inhaling from the ground into your belly and exhaling back down to the ground. Take 10 full breaths. Try to empty your lungs as you exhale. Then shake things off. Shake your legs, your arms, your hands, your shoulders; create big movements. Make any sounds that feel natural to release tension in your body.



**Balance:** Lift one knee up as high as you can. Try to raise your arms overhead. If you need to, you can support yourself by leaning slightly against a wall or placing a hand on it. Take 5-10 slow breaths on each side.

## Prison Yoga Project



**Warrior 1:** Step back with the same leg that was lifted, feet hip-width apart. Bend the front knee, and the back heel can be lifted. Feel your feet connected to the floor. Imagine you are drawing your breath up from the ground and sending it back. Stay for 10 slow breaths.



**Forward Fold:** Fold forward, keeping your legs bent. Relax your neck, face, and shoulders. Stay for 5-10 breaths, with long exhales making the "haaa" sound. Repeat 4, 5 & 6 on the other leg.



**Relaxed Belly Breath:** Feel the movement of your belly breathing and the warmth in your hands. Try inhaling through your nose and then exhaling longer, whispering the "haaa" sound for 5-10 breaths.



**Star Pose:** Place the soles of your feet together, allowing the knees to fall out to the sides. Slowly begin to fold forward until you reach your limit. Rest your chin on your chest. If you have pain in your knees, stretch your legs out but keep them bent. Deepen your breathing. Feel your inhale moving into your back and belly, then exhale slowly and completely. Try doing this for 10 breaths.



**Chest Opener:** Place your hands behind your back, lift your chest as high as comfortable. Count 5 slow breaths, breathing into the center of your chest.

## Yoga for Anxiety



Reclining Twist: Lying on your back, bend your right leg (knee over your waist) and move it over to the left. Keep your upper back against the floor and reach your right arm out to the right. You can look up or turn your head to the right. Take 10 full breaths, feeling your ribcage expand. Then switch to the other side. When done, draw your knees into your chest, maybe rocking side to side or making small circles with your knees to release tension in your lower back.



Relaxation: Find a comfortable position lying on your back and completely relax your body. Release the weight of your arms and legs. Inhale and tense your right arm, exhale and release. Continue doing the same with your left arm, then right leg, and left leg. Then tense and release both arms, then both legs. Finally, tense your entire body, and as you exhale, completely relax.

Closing- Deep Relaxation Breathing: Continuing lying on your back, eyes can be closed if that feels OK. See if you can relax your whole body and feel the weight of it sinking into the place where you are lying, particularly as you exhale. As you relax, just let your body breathe itself without controlling your inhale and exhale. Then, focusing on your exhale, let it be long and breathe out completely. On your next breath, at the end of your exhale, pause to the count of 3 before inhaling deeply and repeating four more times. If it feels comfortable, increase your pause to a 5 count and repeat five times. If thoughts arise, see if you can let them go and concentrate on relaxing as you extend your exhale. If for any reason this feels uncomfortable, just relax and let your body breathe how it wants. Stay here as long as you wish. You may naturally fall asleep.

## Body Scan

*The body scan practice is a great way to release muscle tension and calm your mind, especially before going to sleep. Here's how you can do it:*

1. Find a comfortable position, either lying down or sitting. You can place your hands at your sides, on your stomach, or on your chest.
2. You can choose to close your eyes or keep them partially open without focusing on anything specific.
3. Bring your awareness to the parts of your body in contact with the surface beneath you. Feel the weight of your body and how it is supported in that position.
4. Take a few deep breaths, inhaling through your nose and allowing your belly and chest to expand. Exhale out your mouth. Once you've taken a few intentional breaths, let your breathing return to its natural rhythm.
5. Bring attention to your feet. Wiggle your toes or rotate your ankles to establish a stronger connection with them. Notice any sensations in your feet. Are they warm or cold? See if you can consciously release any tension held in the muscles of your feet.
6. After spending some time with your feet, move your attention to your lower legs. Observe how they feel and make slight movements to connect with them. Breathe comfortably and release any tension you may feel in your lower legs.
7. Continue this process as you progress through each body part: knees, upper legs, hips, lower back and stomach, upper back and chest, hands, forearms, upper arms, shoulders, neck, and head. Take a few breaths with each part, exhaling to release any tension you discover.
8. Once you have scanned your entire body, bring your awareness to your whole body from feet to head. Spend a few moments feeling the overall sensation of your entire body as you breathe. Notice how your body naturally breathes without any effort on your part.
9. To complete the practice, if you're not doing it before sleep, start with gentle movements of your fingers and toes, then gradually extend to your arms and legs. You may want to finish by flexing your feet or stretching any other part of your body. Take a full breath in and exhale completely.

## Self-Regulation Practices

You can lean your back against a wall for these practices if you want more support.

1. Place one hand on the chest and the other on the abdomen with slight pressure.
2. Notice how it feels to have your hands there, such as any warmth or pressure. Notice the feeling of your clothes against your hand.
3. Take a few slow breaths relaxing your stomach and face. Try exhaling as long as you can releasing any tension you may be feeling. Imagine that you drawing breath up from the earth as you inhale into your body and hands, and then back to the earth as you exhale.



1. Place one hand on the forehead and the other at the back of the neck.
2. Notice how it feels to have your hands there such as any coolness, warmth, or pressure.
3. Notice the feeling of the skin against the hands.
4. Take a few slow breaths relaxing your stomach and face. Try exhaling as long as you can releasing any tension you may be feeling. Imagine that you drawing breath up from the earth as you inhale into your body and hands, and then back to the earth as you exhale.





1. Place one hand around your shoulder and the other hand at the side of the ribcage.
2. If it feels okay, try to deepen your breath so that you feel movement in your hand at the ribcage.
3. Breathe slowly and consciously. Try exhaling as long as you can releasing any tension you may be feeling. Imagine that you drawing breath up from the earth as you inhale into your body and hands, and then back to the earth as you exhale. Try making a sigh or humming sound as you exhale.



1. Place on hand at the center of the chest and the other hand on your forehead.
2. Notice how it feels to have your hands there, any coolness, warmth, or pressure.
3. Notice the feeling of any sensation in the chest under your hand.
4. Take a few slow breaths relaxing your stomach and face. Try exhaling as long as you can releasing any tension you may be feeling. Imagine that you drawing breath up from the earth as you inhale into your body and hands, and then back to the earth as

you exhale.

## Loving Kindness

Finding a quiet and private place is recommended for this practice. You can choose to be seated or lying down, as long as you remain awake and attentive. Follow these steps for 5 to 10 minutes, repeating the phrases in Parts 1-3.

Start by taking a few deep breaths and becoming aware of the sensations in your body. Gradually shift your attention to your heart center, located at the sternum. With each breath, imagine that you are breathing in and out through your heart. Take your time and stay focused on your breath and the sensations in your heart, allowing any feelings to arise along with the words.

When you begin, you may experience conflicting emotions such as irritation or even anger. If this happens, accept these feelings without judgment and be kind to yourself. Practice this meditation regularly for several days, weeks, or even months, and observe if it strengthens your connection to your heart and brings more peace within you.

### Part 1:

May I be kind to myself.  
May I be healthy in mind and body.  
May I be safe from internal and external harm.  
May I be truly happy and at peace.

### Part 2:

May you be kind to yourself.  
(Think of a loved one, friend, or someone you find challenging)  
May you be healthy in mind and body. (or May you be well.)  
May you be safe from internal and external harm.  
May you be truly happy and at peace.

**Part 3:**

May I be kind to myself and to others.

May I and others be healthy in mind and body.

May I and others be safe from internal and external harm.

May I be truly happy and at peace.

Feel free to adjust the words and images to suit your personal preferences and open your heart to kindness. When practicing Part 2, begin by visualizing someone in your life who has genuinely cared for you. As you say “you,” connect with the feeling in your heart as you send these words to them. Once you’re familiar with the practice, you can even choose someone with whom you have a difficult relationship when doing Part 2.

Once you become comfortable with this meditation and its phrases, you can practice it anywhere, whether waiting in line, walking, or during any part of your day.





PRISON YOGA  
PROJECT  
BY THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE

# APPENDICES & REFERENCES

## Vocabulary for Feelings & Physical Sensations

When people ask, “How are you feeling?” we often respond with a customary, “I’m good” or “I’m cool.” That might be the right answer for casual conversation. But, when we are working with ourselves, it’s helpful to dig a bit deeper.

Our feelings, whether we have the language to describe them or not, drive our behaviors. So if we feel “angry,” we may shout, throw things, or attack someone. Conversely, if we feel “happy,” we might be grinning from ear to ear and greeting everyone we meet with warmth. The better we can understand our emotions, the better we can understand our behavior.

### Expanded Vocabulary

Having a more expanded vocabulary for feelings can dramatically improve our insight into how we respond to situations and circumstances. Consider the word “angry.” Anger might take many forms. You might be “irritated” if you have to wait in a long line, you might feel “betrayed” if a friend has said unkind things about you behind your back, and you might feel “enraged” if someone attacks you. How would your behavior be different for each of these feelings that might generically be described as “angry”?

### New Feelings

As you study this list, you may notice yourself experiencing feelings you weren’t previously aware of, especially if they are positive feelings, like “patient” or “engaged.”

Another benefit of having a more extensive vocabulary for feelings is that it could help you to better understand the feelings of others, particularly those around you. This could help you to avoid unnecessary conflict or prompt you to help another person when they are suffering.

Having a deeper understanding of your own feelings as well as others is an important aspect of what is called “emotional intelligence.”

Remember, when considering feelings, take some time to identify the physical sensations you experience in your body that accompany the feeling. For example, if you feel “excited,” you might notice your heart pounding and a tingling sensation in your body.

### **Physical Sensations**

Similar to our vocabulary of describing feelings, most of us could use some help with words to describe the physical sensations we perceive that accompany our feelings. You might notice that some of these describe sensations that are fairly common for you, and others not so much. Maybe having more words available can help you to better identify the physical sensations you experience. Finally, you might have words- even words you make up- that may work better for you to describe the physical sensations you are feeling.

## Wheel of Emotions



## Vocabulary for Sensations

Achy	Flexible	Ravenous	Uncomfortable
Airy	Floaty	Raw	Vibrating
Bloated	Floppy	Relaxed	Warm
Blocked	Fluid	Rigid	Wet
Boiling	Fluttery	Saggy	Wobbly
Breathless	Frozen	Satisfied	Woozy
Bruised	Full	Sensitive	
Bubbly	Giddy	Shaky	
Burning	Grounded	Shivery	
Bursting	Heavy	Short of Breath	
Butterflies	Hollow	Shuddering	
Buzzy	Hot	Sick	
Calm	Hungry	Sore	
Clenched	Hurting	Spacey	
Closed	Icy	Spacious	
Cloudy	Itchy	Spongy	
Cold	Jabbing	Squashed	
Comfortable	Jittery	Squirmy	
Congested	Jumpy	Stinging	
Constricted	Knotted	Stretchy	
Contracted	Light	Stuffed	
Cool	Lightheaded	Suffocated	
Dark	Limp	Sweaty	
Dehydrated	Nauseous	Taut	
Disconnected	Nervy	Tearful	
Dizzy	Numb	Tense	
Drained	Open	Thick-headed	
Dry-mouthed	Pounding	Throbbing	
Dull	Pressure	Tickly	
Empty	Prickly	Tight	
Energised	Pulsing	Tingling	
Exhausted	Queasy	Tired	
Expanded	Quivering	Trembly	
Faint	Radiating	Twitchy	

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