

# Module 11 Empowerment & Changing the Narrative

## Methodology:

### Instructing Youth

- **Youth-specific modifications:**

- When offering trauma-informed yoga to youth, programs must be modified to meet the unique physical and mental needs of younger generations.

- **Structure and pacing:**

- Youth classes often feature shorter time spent on individual activities to support focus and attention.

- **Pose adaptations:**

- Poses should be modified to accommodate growing bodies, with an emphasis on safety and accessibility.

- **Incorporating games and activities:**

- Games that foster leadership, compassion, and prosocial behavior are strongly encouraged to build engagement and life skills.

- **Benefits for youth:**

- Increased strength and flexibility
- Enhanced immune system function
- Improved stress resilience
- Boosted self-esteem and accomplishment
- Growth in compassion, empathy, and hope for the future

- **Creative teaching tools:**

- Explore provided images and videos for youth posture variations and chair practice examples.
- Consider using creative names for poses to enhance engagement and memorability.

- **Preparing your final sequence:**

- Integrate youth-specific variations into your teaching plan.
- Adapt the practices to align with your authentic voice and teaching style.

### Neuroscience of Yoga / Impact of Youth Trauma

- **Differences in youth needs:**

- Youth brains are still developing (pre-frontal cortex), leading to:
  - ◆ Focus on risk-taking and thrill-seeking
  - ◆ Difficulty considering consequences
  - ◆ Increased impact of trauma on emotional regulation and focus

- **Common trauma responses in youth:**

- Dissociation to survive, needing more novelty to feel emotions
- ADHD often linked to childhood trauma
- Growing, unfamiliar bodies can make balance and coordination difficult

- **Yoga practice for youth should:**

- Promote concentration but avoid asking for long sustained focus
- Include novel, joyful experiences in a safe environment

- Support emotional, physical, and developmental healing

## Research-Backed Benefits of Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth:

- **Increase sense of control and agency:**

- Trauma takes away bodily autonomy.
- Yoga empowers youth through choice and degrees of participation, supporting confidence and self-worth.

- **Rewire the stress response:**

- Trauma keeps the brain stuck in fight-or-flight.
- Yoga's repetitive, rhythmic movement builds new, healthier neural pathways, supporting executive functions like focus, decision-making, and emotional regulation.

- **Improve self-regulation and behavioral control:**

- Trauma often leads to hypervigilance and impulsivity.
- Yoga, meditation, and breathwork help calm the nervous system, improving emotional resilience and impulse control.

## Establishing a Class Theme

- **Purpose of a Theme:**

- Connects the movement, breathwork, and message of the class.
- Provides emotional and philosophical support beyond physical practice.

- **Uses of a Theme:**

- Share aspects of yoga philosophy (e.g., Yamas, Niyamas).
- Focus attention on emotions like strength, healing, patience, or self-compassion.
- Inspire deeper connection to the participants' healing journey.

- **Your Theme Is Your Voice:**

- Themes should reflect your personal experiences, passions, and healing journey.
- Sharing authentically makes your offering more impactful and relatable.

- **Examples:**

- ◆ Ahimsa (Non-harm) if it resonates personally.
- ◆ Themes of Inner Strength, Patience, Transformation, or Personal Truth.

## Yoga Philosophy:

### Svadhyaya

- **Meaning:** Svadhyaya means self-study or study of sacred/supportive texts.

- It invites you to reconnect with yourself and catch up to who you are becoming.

- **Emotional Journey of Yoga:**

- Practicing yoga can sometimes feel like an emotional rollercoaster.
- Feeling disconnected at times is natural and part of the growth process.

- **Perception and Conditioning:**

- Personal history shapes perception, often leading to assumptions and decisions based on incomplete understanding (Avidya – ignorance).

## Synonyms for Self study

self education

self instruction

self learning

self teaching

self training

- Past experiences create emotional scars (Samskara) that can distort self-image and reinforce false beliefs about unworthiness.

- **Impact of Kleshas:**

- Fear, aversion, attachment, ego, and ignorance gain power when we lose touch with our true self.

- **Purpose of Svadhyaya:**

- It's an opportunity to investigate samskaras, reconnect with your true self, and choose healing.
- Encourages continual evolution, learning, and adjusting focus as passions and interests grow.

- **Your Practice is Unique:**

- There's no timeline; your path is yours alone.
- You are free to repeat, explore, and move at your own pace.

- **Encouragement for Growth:**

- Stay curious.
- When emotions are stirred by events, policies, or relationships—educate yourself.
- Learn from multiple perspectives, gather facts, and deepen your understanding.
- Pass these lessons of self-awareness and growth on to those you serve.

## **Yoga as a Path to Self and Collective Liberation**

- **Your Voice Matters:**

- Your history, experiences, and passion are your greatest gifts as a facilitator.
- Sharing authentically requires connecting deeply to what you teach.

- **Teaching from Authenticity:**

- It's difficult to teach what you don't understand or haven't lived through.
- Your personal practice and self-study prepare you to guide others with genuine purpose.

- **Unaligned Expectations Cause Harm:**

- Expectations placed on you (e.g., "You'll be the first to go to college") can create deep emotional wounds.
- Misalignment between imposed goals and personal truth can cause lasting trauma.

- **Connection to Social Justice:**

- Oppression of identity and rights still happens—politically and socially.
- Standing for personal and collective freedom is necessary for true liberation.

- **Self-Confidence as a Revolutionary Force:**

- Self-confidence disrupts cycles of generational oppression.
- True empowerment happens when individuals are supported to make choices aligned with their authentic selves.

- **Healing Through Empowerment:**

- Supporting your own healing—seeing, accepting, and empowering yourself—directly enhances your ability to support and empower others.
- Reduces insecurity, jealousy, competitiveness, and fosters true community.

- **On and Off the Mat:**

- Whether practicing yoga or participating in community, empowerment of self and others contributes to collective healing and transformation.

## Justifiable Rage

- **Start with Your Community:**

- Research local legislation, protests, meetings, and community actions.
- Notice what issues are active and who they impact.

- **Expand Your Awareness:**

- Research national, international, and historical events.
- Look beyond headlines... debunk propaganda, uncover deeper truths.

- **Reflection Prompts:**

- What inspires you to learn more or take action?
- What beliefs have been challenged or shifted through your research?
- Who is considered and who is left out in existing systems and policies?

- **Critical Observations:**

- Systems often claim equality but selectively serve or harm specific groups.
- Recent examples:
  - ◆ Divisions over Covid policies
  - ◆ Legislation against transgender youth
  - ◆ Changes to abortion laws
  - ◆ Inequality for LGBTQ+ communities
  - ◆ Criminalization of homelessness

- **American History Timeline Reflection:**

- Notice the gaps and biases in historical representation.
- Lack of recognition for:
  - ◆ Women's suffrage movement
  - ◆ AIDS epidemic
  - ◆ Mass incarceration
  - ◆ Stonewall Riots
  - ◆ Indigenous histories
  - ◆ Contributions of people of color and marginalized communities
- Overrepresentation of white male figures and selective historical events.

## Embodied Anatomy:

### The Cardiovascular System

- **Basic Function:**

- The heart acts like an engine, pumping blood throughout the body.
- It circulates oxygenated blood to nourish the body and accepts deoxygenated (toxic) blood to cleanse through the lungs with fresh breath.

- **Yoga's Heart Health Benefits (American Heart Association, 2019):**

- **Activates Parasympathetic Nervous System:**

- ◆ Yoga supports "rest and digest" mode through deep breathing and relaxation.

- **Promotes Mindfulness and Healthy Habits:**

- ◆ Increased self-awareness can encourage healthier lifestyle choices.

- **Chronic Stress and Heart Health:**

- Chronic stress keeps the sympathetic nervous system in overdrive.
- Prolonged stress leads to inflammation, high blood pressure, and elevated risk for cardiovascular disease.
- Stress sources include work, relationship challenges, anxiety, and depression.

## **The Heartbeat & The Breath: Instructing Self-Soothing**

- **How Yoga Supports Stress Management:**

- Yoga builds awareness of how trauma and stress affect body functions.
- Developing a personal centering practice is key for healing and regulation.

- **Facilitator Strategies:**

- Introduce practices that simulate rapid heartbeat and quick breath to mirror the Fight, Flight, Freeze Response in a **controlled environment**.
- Offer centering cues like:
  - ◆ Notice the beating of your heart.”
  - ◆ Bring your awareness to how your body is receiving and releasing breath.”

- **Goal of These Practices:**

- Help participants recognize stress patterns in the body.
- Teach how to slow the breath, focus on the exhale, and calm the heart rate.
- Build foundational tools for **self-regulation** off the mat.

- **Long-Term Benefits:**

- Improves impulse control, anger management, and ability to relax.
- Supports cardiovascular health by regulating blood pressure and nervous system balance.

## **A Comparative Look at the Nadis**

- **Scientific and Metaphysical Connection:**

- Just as the circulatory system moves blood, the **nadi system** moves **energy** through the body.

- **Understanding Kundalini:**

- Kundalini is spiritual energy resting at the base of the spine.
- Rising kundalini is associated with higher self-awareness and ego transcendence.

- **Nadis and Chakras:**

- Three main nadis interweave through the chakras:
  - ◆ **Sushumna:** Central channel along the spine.
  - ◆ **Ida:** Left channel; cooling, lunar (feminine) energy.
  - ◆ **Pingala:** Right channel; warming, solar (masculine) energy.
- Breathwork, movement, and chanting help “unblock” energy flow through the nadis.

- **Energy and Self:**

- Prana (life energy) flows through the nadis.
- Ida and Pingala balancing supports emotional, mental, and physical health.

## Posture & Sequencing:

### Guiding Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered Classes for Youth

- **Key Components of Youth Classes:**

- **Clear Boundaries & Expectations:**

- ◆ Create safety and predictability for youth.

- **Playful and Accessible Postures:**

- ◆ Use creative names (e.g., “Star Pose,” “Tree Pose”) and storytelling to engage.

- **Shorter, Dynamic Activities:**

- ◆ Quick transitions, mini-games, and rhythmic movements maintain focus.

- **Leadership Opportunities:**

- ◆ Allow youth to lead poses or create short sequences to promote agency and self-esteem.

- **Mindfulness and Self-Regulation for Youth:**

- **Breathwork and Guided Meditations:**

- ◆ Use cyclic sighing, creative visualizations, and short mindfulness exercises.

- **Developmentally Appropriate Tools:**

- ◆ Activities support emotional regulation and help manage impulses.

- **Neuroscience and Trauma-Informed Yoga:**

- **Adolescent Brain Challenges:**

- ◆ Prefrontal cortex still developing; dopamine levels drive risk-taking.

- **Impact of Trauma:**

- ◆ Trauma heightens hypervigilance and emotional dysregulation.

- **Benefits of Yoga:**

- ◆ Builds **neuroplasticity** (new neural pathways for focus and self-regulation).
- ◆ **Increases autonomy, rewires stress responses, and improves emotional regulation.**

- **Alternative Tools and Materials:**

- **Tactile and Creative Options:**

- ◆ Squeezing tennis balls, art activities, journaling prompts.

- **Benefits:**

- ◆ Build bridges to stillness for dysregulated or resistant youth.
- ◆ Support Integration & Relaxation phases in a non-intimidating way.
- ◆ Engage youth who are mandated to participate.

# Sequencing & Structure for Youth Classes:

## Key Principles:

- **Flexibility and Responsiveness:**

- Adapt class structure based on youth energy and emotional states.

- **Start with Active Movement if Needed:**

- Begin playfully if youth arrive stressed before moving to calming practices.

- **Centering and Somatics are Essential:**

- Use tactile tools, grounding activities, and meditative practices to support regulation.

- **Example Youth Class Structure:**

- **Energetic Awareness:**

- ◆ Grounding movements (jumping, stomping, rhythmic tapping).

- **Range of Motion Exploration:**

- ◆ Gentle stretches for shoulders, hips, and spine (e.g., shoulder rolls, hip circles, Cat/Cow).

- **Centering and Somatics:**

- ◆ Tactile activities or creative reflection for self-regulation.

- **Strength & Resilience:**

- ◆ Playful postures like Warrior poses, balance work, building confidence.

- **Concentration & Focus:**

- ◆ Rhythmic breathing, guided meditation, journaling.

- **Integration & Relaxation:**

- ◆ Restorative postures, visualization, tactile reflection tools.

- **Core Goals:**

- **Support Self-Discovery, Healing, and Empowerment.**

- **Foster Autonomy, Emotional Regulation, and Resilience.**

- **Ensure Accessibility and Engagement:**

- ◆ Use developmentally appropriate postures and creative mindfulness practices.

- **Create Safe, Playful, Supportive Environments.**