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2021

Balance and Bloom: Encouraging Self-Regulation and Resilience Through Yoga and Mindfulness

Kayla Previti
A. T. Still University

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Recommended Citation

Previti, Kayla, "Balance and Bloom: Encouraging Self-Regulation and Resilience Through Yoga and Mindfulness" (2021). *OT Student Capstones*. 25.
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INTRODUCTION

ACEs, trauma and toxic stress have a lifelong impact on an individual's physical, mental, and emotional health. Yoga is a multidimensional occupation consisting of various therapeutic practices and has been used to enhance self-regulation, resilience and self-efficacy.

PROGRAM SITE: A New Leaf

Homeless shelter and low income housing with a variety of social services, supports and programs.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Create a yoga and mindfulness program to promote resilience through improved self awareness and self-regulation for children.
- Implement a yoga and mindfulness program at A New Leaf afterschool program that results in decreased challenging behaviors in participants.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- Total of 20 sessions of breathwork, yoga, meditation, affirmations, and social emotional themes.
- Social emotional modules: introduction and insight, putting tools in the tool box, getting to know yourself, creating connection with others, collaboration with others and having a healthy mindset

Session Format

Beginning: take shoes and socks off and roll out yoga mats

Calming: rain stick game

Development: mini lesson or mindfulness based game

Sequence:

Introduction: breathwork, affirmations, set up theme

Warm up: floor poses to warm up body

Fire: most active poses, fluid/dynamic flow

Cool down: floor poses to cool down body

Relaxation: meditation/savasana

Plenary: open discussion, provide feedback.

Ending and Exit: put on socks and shoes, clean up mat

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Behavioral Developments

- Initial staff indicated challenging behaviors: noncompliance, hitting, pushing, difficult transitions, not asking for help, unable to wait a short time, difficulty being redirected, lack of empathy towards others, negative peer to peer interactions
- Initial author observations: difficulty modulating volume of voices, sensory seeking behaviors, aggressive sibling interactions
- Throughout program staff and author observed: Smooth transition to activity directly following yoga, less frequent challenging behaviors, responsive to behavioral redirection, with prompting were able to identify how actions impact others, showed ability to ask for a break, space and seek support from staff when needed.

Context of Experience

- Participant reactions: Initially, participants expressed inconsistent reactions towards program. Prior experiences caused them to view meditation as punishment. As more engaging meditation techniques were introduced, participants showed less resistance.
- Development of skills: Initially, participants relied on exaggerated verbal and physical modeling to perform poses and initiate breathing exercises. Overtime participants were able to perform yoga poses and breathwork with traditional use of cueing. Eventually older participants could interpret familiar sequences and "flow".

Purposeful Regulation Through Routine and Sequencing

Fire:

- Active part, adjusted based on participant fatigue
- Participants more likely to talk, get off mat, disrupt flow of class
- Consistent verbal cues essential to reinforce positive behavior, sustain attention and encourage challenging self

Cool Down:

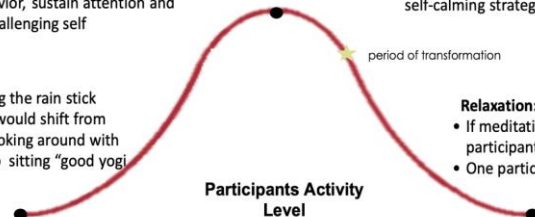
- Transitioned with ease into cool down
- Needed less frequent verbal cues at this stage
- Demonstrated motivation to use self-calming strategies

Introduction:

- When hearing the rain stick participants would shift from talking, and joking around with each other to sitting "good yogi seat"

Relaxation:

- If meditation was not active, some participants would fall asleep
- One participant typically restless



DISCUSSION

Self Advocacy

- Participants showed the emergence of self-advocacy skills by seeking support such as asking for a break, or space when needed.
- Participants needed to self aware enough to be able identify their needs, understand what kind of support they need, and be able to communicate their needs in a developmentally appropriate way.

Regulation

- The routine and sequencing of each class provided a therapeutic outlet for children to self-regulate and widen the window of tolerance, where resilience and healing occur.
- The program fostered coregulation by creating cospace for mutual connection, and safety enabling participants to regulate collectively.
- Participants showed improved self-regulation and improved behaviors following each session.
- Meditation length and style should be based on developmental needs. Consider using sensory based meditations to keep kids engaged.

Background as a yoga instructor provided necessary verbal cues for participants to regulate behavior, initiate participation, and encourage challenges. Framework for format of each class and pose sequencing was due to authors background.

FUTURE PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

Trained OTs can provide sensorimotor arousal regulation techniques as well as trauma release exercises for individuals with trauma. Future programs within this site should aim to include the whole family.

REFERENCES Available upon request