



Kids Yoga Teacher Certification Program

Section 3: Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Section 3: Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

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Section 3: Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Introduction

Taking time to practice warm-up exercises for both breath and body is important to help students properly prepare for yoga practice and prevent injury.

First, take a few minutes for warm-up breathing exercises before beginning class. This gives students a chance to not only focus on their breath and bring more oxygen into their bodies, but also gives them the chance to shift gears from whatever they were doing before coming to class to their yoga practice.

Warm ups are valuable because they reduce the risk of pulling a muscle or injuring a joint during a yoga practice by increasing circulation and loosening up the major muscle groups. Warm-ups prepare our bodies for the stress of activity. They help prevent or reduce muscle soreness, muscle strains, and the tearing of muscle fibers or tendons. It's important to warm up each major muscle group before beginning a yoga practice, since you use all your major muscle groups in a well-conceived yoga program.

Warm-ups get the muscles ready for the action by increasing the speed at which they contract and relax and by mobilizing a greater number of motor units within the muscles. Warming up the body raises the body temperature which improves the oxygen supply to the muscles, making muscles more elastic and flexible.

Warm-ups are low level dynamic exercises, which should be completed prior to stretching and more strenuous exercise. The objective of the warm-up is to raise total body temperature and muscle temperature to prepare the entire body for more strenuous activity. The warm-up period prepares the cardiovascular system, respiratory system, nervous system and the musculoskeletal system by gradually increasing the demand on those systems so that they are able to accommodate the demands of more strenuous activity.

Experts agree that the main purpose of a warm-up is to increase the blood circulation in order to raise both the general body and the deep muscle temperatures. This in turn helps to heat up the muscles, ligaments and tendons in preparation for more vigorous activity. A proper warm-up provides many benefits due to the elevated temperatures associated with it. After warming up, the likelihood of injury is reduced, muscle efficiency is increased, the potential for muscle pulls is reduced and ease of movement improves. Proper warm-ups can also help reduce the severity of post-exercise muscle soreness. The higher temperatures and increased blood flow resulting from warm-up are important for delivery of oxygen to the muscles and for prevention of build-up of unwanted waste products which can lead to muscle soreness.

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Besides preparing you physically for yoga, warm-ups (especially warm-up breathing exercises) can also help you prepare mentally for your yoga practice. To get the mental benefits of warm-ups, first start by taking a few moments to focus on your breath, breathing slowly and deeply through your nose. Then, begin your warm-up exercises, focusing on your breath and on your movements and connecting the two together. Done with mindful awareness, warm-up exercises provide you with rhythmic movements that helps to focus your attention on your body and your breath, letting go of the thoughts or concerns from your daily life. It helps you shift gears and bring your thoughts more fully to your yoga practice. The illustrated warm-up exercises in this section explain in detail how to breathe with your movements.

Warm-ups improve range of motion, so you can more easily move your arms and legs into proper position for yoga postures. If muscles are cold, they won't work as efficiently and move into place as easily, as they will if they are warm. Warm joints are more mobile and have greater range of motion. Joints are held together by ligaments and tendons. Ligaments in particular have very poor blood supply compared to muscles, so they are difficult to warm up. Muscles can help take the strain off the ligaments and tendons - but only if they are warmed up sufficiently.

In yoga, since we want to work and stretch all major muscle groups, it is important to include specific warm-up exercises that involve each part of the body. Also, once you are warmed up, it is important to begin a major activity while still warmed-up, so you reap the benefits of warm muscles.

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Warm-Up Breathing Exercises

Complete Breath (full yogic breathing)

This is a slow, deep breathing that fills the lungs, so that the abdomen, ribcage and upper chest expand on the inhale and relax back into place on the exhale.

Benefits:

- Exercises and aerates the lungs
- Quiets the mind
- Deepens relaxation
- Increases circulation

Steps:

- Start sitting or lying on back
- Exhale completely
- On inhale, first the abdomen expands with air, then the rib cage and finally, the chest (the inhale should feel like a wave of air rolling up the front of the body)
- Exhaling completely, allow muscles to relax and slightly drop
- Repeat 8-10 times

Teaching Points:

Have students focus on exhaling completely by pressing a little more out even once they think the exhalation is complete. This allows the lungs to be more empty for the full inhalation.

Encourage students to keep the breath smooth and deep, so it flows in a rhythmic motion through their nose.

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Shining Skull Breath (Kapalabhati Pranayama)

Benefits:

- Strengthens the diaphragm
- Increases energy
- Strengthens abdominal muscles

Steps:

- Exhale completely, pressing all the air out through the nose
- Allow the inhalation to happen automatically – let the air simply fill the void left by the exhalation
- Then, pull the abdominal muscles in quickly forcing the air out through the nostrils in a quick thrust
- Again, allow the inhalation to happen automatically.
- Pull the abdominal muscles in quickly, forcing the air out through the nostrils
- All your effort should be spent on the exhalation
- Repeat 8-12 times

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to breathe slowly and with control. As they exhale, students should press the air out through their nostrils in one smooth continuous breath. Breathing too quickly may cause students to feel slightly dizzy. Remind students to stop if they begin to feel any sense of dizziness.

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Lion's Breath



Benefits:

- Keeps tonsils and throat healthy
- Builds a strong voice
- Gives confidence in speaking and singing
- Relieves tension

Steps:

- Kneel on the floor and sit back on your heels
- Place your hands on your thighs
- Inhale through your nose
- As you exhale, open your mouth as wide as you can, stick out your tongue and let out a long, fierce roar, “aaaaggghhh.”
- Be careful not to strain your voice

Repeat 3-4 times

Teaching Points:

Remind kids to keep their throats open as they let out their roar. This prevents any strain on their voice and allows them to warm-up their throat.

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Cotton Ball Breathing



Benefits:

- Hand/eye coordination
- Strengthens diaphragm
- Increases energy
- Improves breath control

Steps:

- Have kids start sitting
- Give everyone a cotton ball
- Cup the cotton ball in your hands
- Do your best to blow the cotton ball around in circles within your cupped hands without blowing the cotton ball out of your hands
- Continue for 1-2 minutes

Teaching Points:

After having the kids blow the cotton ball around their hands, have them blow hard to pop the cotton ball out of their hands. Have them see how high they can blow the cotton ball out of their hands.

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Name Breath

Benefits:

- Warms-Up voice and throat
- Improves breath control
- Helps kids get to know each other
- Strengthens abdominal muscles

Steps:

- Start sitting in a circle
- Start with the child sitting to your left
- Everyone take a deep breath in through your nose
- As you exhale, say the person's name for as long as you can exhale without taking another breath in (for example, "Harry" would be said on exhale as "Hhhaaaaaarryyyyy")
- Repeat this process with everyone in the circle.
- Make sure that you have the chance to say the name of everyone in the circle.

Teaching Points:

Make sure that kids inhale through their nose before saying the name of the person as they exhale. Most kids have fun with this breathing exercise and start laughing a little more than focusing on their breath. That's fine.

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Warm-Up Exercises

Stretching Breath

Step 1



Step 2



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Ankles
- Torso

Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position) with legs extended
- Place hands on floor next to sides with palms down
- Inhale, reach arms overhead (palms up) and flex feet
- Exhale, press hands back down next to sides (palms down) and point toes
- Continue moving arms and feet back and forth, moving with your breath
- Repeat 6-9 times

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep their abdominal muscles engaged, so the back doesn't become overly arched as the arms are stretched overhead. Encourage students to focus on stretching long, stretching as far as they can in two opposite directions. Have students flex their feet as their arms come overhead, then point their toes as their arms come back to their sides. This helps to warm-up the ankles and legs as well as the arms and shoulders. Instruct students to connect their breath with their movement by inhaling until their arms are all the way overhead and exhaling until their arms are at their sides. Encourage them to focus completely on their breath and the movement, letting go of any other thoughts.

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Knees Side to Side

Step 1



Step 2



Warms Up

- Spine
- Hips
- Mid and Lower Back
- Abdomen

Steps:

- Start lying on back
- Bring your knees to your chest, holding your legs just below your knees
- Rock side to side, catching yourself with your elbows
- Rock side to side about 6-8 times
- Next, place your arms in a T position on the floor with your palms down
- Exhale, drop your knees to the right, inhale, back to center, exhale, drop to the left
- Repeat 6-8 times

Teaching Points:

Remind kids to move with control, smoothly moving their knees from side to side. Have them experiment with keeping their feet low and with raising their feet to the height of their knees. Which way is harder for them? What is the difference? Help them notice how small changes in the ways they move their body can create larger changes in how they feel. Encourage students to keep both shoulder blades on the floor, rather than rolling onto their side as they drop their knees to the side. This helps to warm up many of the deep spinal muscles and some of the anterior torso muscles (especially obliques).

Feet can be lifted higher and knees pressed slightly away from chest before dropping knees side to side. This will place more demand on obliques and abdominal muscles, so make sure that this variation is not the first warm-up of the set.

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Variation

Windshield Wipers

Warms Up

- Front of Thighs (Quadriceps)
- Knees and Ankles
- Hips
- Low Back

Steps:

- Start lying on back with knees bent and feet placed on floor – feet placed more than hip width apart
- Bring arms out to a T position with your palms down
- Drop your knees to the right, then back to center, then drop to the left
- Repeat 6-8 times

Teaching Points:

Remind kids to use control and move their knees smoothly from side to side. Have kids imagine they are actual windshield wipers, moving the water off the glass. Encourage students to keep their feet wider than hip width apart. This helps to better warm up the hip flexor muscles as well as the low back. Check that students are keeping their back flat on the floor, so that spinal rotation is achieved, rather than simply leaning onto one side of the body and then the other.

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Knee Circles



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs, Knees
- Low Back

Steps:

- From knees to chest, place hands on knee caps (right hand on right knee cap and left hand on left knee cap)
- Begin making opposing circles with knees by drawing knees to chest, then apart, then pressing knees away and back together.
- Make 5-8 knee circles this way
- Then, make opposing knee circles in the opposite direction (starting with knees together at chest, then pressing knees away, then apart, then back towards chest and together)
- Make 5-8 knee circles this way

Variation:

Knee Circles with Knees Together:

Knee circles can also be practiced by keeping knees together. First create circles with knees in a clockwise direction, then in a counter clockwise direction.

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to keep the movement smooth and easy (not going too fast or jerky). Remind students to focus on their breath, keeping it long and relaxed.

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Bicycle



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Knees
- Thighs

Steps:

- Start lying on back
- Bring your knees to your chest and place your hands at your sides with your palms down
- Begin moving your legs as though you are riding a bicycle
- Continue bicycling for about 20-40 seconds

Teaching Points:

Encourage kids to press down through their tailbone to help stretch more through their hips.

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Rock and Roll

Step 1



Step 2



Warms Up:

- Back
- Neck
- Spine
- Legs

Steps:

- Begin lying on back
- Bring knees to chest with hands under thighs and tuck chin to chest
- Begin rocking back and forth, bending knees as you come forward and straightening legs as you roll back
- Exhale as you rock back and inhale as you come forward
- Continue rolling back and forth for 6-10 times
- Come all the way up to sitting

Teaching Points:

Many beginning students may find this exercise uncomfortable on their back, especially if they are only using a thin mat on a hard wood floor. Encourage students to go slow, only rocking a few inches back and forth to start and to pay close attention to the feeling of the exercise, so they can rock a little further, as they become more comfortable with the exercise. As they go further, they can begin connecting their breath with their movement, exhaling as they rock back and inhaling as they come forward.

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Arms Reach and Stretch

Step 1



Step 2



Warms Up:

- Sides of body/torso
- Shoulders and upper back
- Arms

Steps:

- Start sitting in a cross legged position with hands on knees
- Inhale, reach both arms overhead
- Exhale, drop your left hand to the floor, as you reach up and to the left with right hand
- Inhale, reach both arms overhead
- Exhale, drop right hand to the floor, as you reach up and to the right with your left hand
- Inhale, come back to center, reaching both arms overhead
- Continue moving from the center to one side then back to center and to the other side
- Repeat 4-5 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Remind students to stretch both arms up overhead as they inhale before dropping to the other side and not to simply move back and forth from one side to the other. Some students with limited hip flexibility may find it uncomfortable sitting in a cross legged position. Have these students sit on a rolled mat, with their legs on the floor. Raising the hips while the legs remain crossed on the floor requires less hip flexibility than sitting on the floor with legs crossed. Eventually students can reduce the height of the prop (block/rolled mat) and then eliminate it completely.

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Open and Close the Door

Step 1



Step 2



Warms Up:

- Muscles of the shoulder girdle (shoulder joints, shoulder blades)
- Chest
- Upper back
- Arms
- Neck

Steps:

- Start sitting cross legged or with legs out in front of you
- Inhale, bring arms back, keeping arms lower than shoulder height and look up
- Exhale, clasp hands in front of chest at shoulder height and tuck chin to chest
- Continue bringing arms forward and back (horizontal adduction and horizontal abduction)
- Repeat 6-9 times

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to drop their chin and round their back as much as possible as they clasp their hands in front of their chest, and to look up, letting their head fall back, as they bring their arms back. This helps to warm up the neck and upper back.

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Cat Flexes

Step 1



Step 2



Warms Up:

- Entire spinal column
- Neck and shoulders
- Abdomen
- Breath

Steps:

- Start on all fours (shoulders over wrists, hips over knees)
- Exhale, round your back, lifting up through abdomen, as you drop your head and tailbone
- Inhale, drop your belly towards the floor and pull your shoulders back to open your chest
- Repeat 4-6 times

Kid Variation: as you exhale, try meowing like a cat

Teaching Points:

Encourage kids to breathe deeply through their nose and to move with their breath, doing their best to connect their movement with their breath. This helps to bring their focus inward and on what they are doing. Have them notice how each movement affects the way their body feels. Encourage students to really stretch through their back by having them imagine they are trying to reach the ceiling with their back as they round it. As students look up and arch their backs, remind them to draw their shoulders back and squeeze their shoulder blades together, so they can better warm up the muscles of their chest and upper back.

Variation:

Students can also do this warm-up by creating the movement in one direction. To do this, as students exhale, have them first drop their head, then round the upper back, then bring that rounding motion through the entire back, and finally tuck and squeeze in their tailbone. As they inhale, have them first release their tailbone and drop their hips, then drop their belly, lift their chest, draw their shoulders back and finally raise their head. This creates a wave of motion.

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Spinal Balance

Step 1



Step 2



Warms Up:

- Back and Spine
- Hips and Legs
- Arms and Shoulders

Steps:

- Start on all fours with wrists directly under shoulders and knees about hip width apart
- Look towards floor, keeping neck long
- Inhale, extend right arm and left leg out
- Exhale, back to all fours
- Inhale, extend left arm and right leg out
- Exhale, back to all fours
- Continue extending opposite arm and leg, 4-7 times on each side

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- Keep extended arm and leg parallel to the floor, lengthening through the spine (not arching)
- After completing the flowing spinal balance, students can also hold the pose, breathing softly for 3-4 breaths while extending opposite arm and leg.

Teaching Points:

Students often raise their leg too high when extending it and arch their back. Remind students to stretch long and lengthen the spine, rather than kicking up. Also encourage students to breathe slowly and really move with their breath, so they can fully feel the extension of their spine and notice if they begin to arch through their back.

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Hip Hinges



Warms Up:

- Back
- Hips
- Shoulders
- Knees
- Wrists

Steps:

- From extended child's pose, lift head looking forward
- Inhale, bring hips forward, then drop them down as you bring chest forward and shoulders back
- Exhale, press hips back, as you bend knees, coming back into extended child's pose
- Continue moving back and forth, flowing with breath
- Repeat 6-8 times

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep their elbows straight throughout the movement. This will help to better warm up their shoulders. Also, many students may find it difficult to drop their hips to the floor, while keeping their arms straight. Encourage them to drop their hips only as much as is comfortable, while keeping their arms straight.

Students should move slowly, connecting their movement with their slow, deep breath. This helps students become more mindful of their movement and notice when they may feel some tension. Paying attention to the signals of their body helps students avoid injury.

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Hissing Snake (Warm-Up)

Step 1



Step 2



Warm-ups:

- Back
- Spine
- Torso
- Shoulders and Arms

Steps:

- Start lying on your belly with your hands placed under your shoulders
- Inhale, lift your head
- Exhale, press down with your hands, raising your head and chest (picture 2)
- Inhale
- Exhale, slowly lower back to the floor
- Repeat 2-3 times

Kid Variation: As you come up (lift your head and chest) hissssss like a snake

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Down Dog/Walk the Dog

Step 1



Step 2



Warms up:

- Legs
- Ankles
- Arms
- Shoulders
- Back

Steps:

- Start in all fours (on hands and knees with hands directly under shoulders and knees directly under hips)
- Spread fingers wide, curl toes under and press hips up and back
- Press hips up and back and begin straightening knees (knees don't need to be fully extended – good to have some bend to the knees in the warm-up)
- Relax head and neck, looking back towards feet
- Pump heels one at a time towards the floor
- Shift hips from side to side

Variation (Walk the Dog):

Have students lift one leg up at a time (inhaling as they raise their right leg, exhaling as their foot comes back to the floor, then inhaling as they raise their left leg and exhaling as their left foot comes back to the floor) Kid variation: Have kids say “woof” like a dog as the lower their foot down. Repeat 4-6 times on each side.

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Teaching Points:

Many students keep their head lifted, remind them to look towards their feet and shake their head from side to side. This will help loosen the muscles of the neck and upper back. Many students are not able to straighten their knees much at all. Encourage them to keep their knees bent, as they work on pressing their chest towards their feet. It's better to have bent knees than a rounded back. As students press down through one heel at a time, encourage them to slowly pump their heels. Moving more slowly will help students focus on the feel of the warm-up and on loosening the muscles in their calves. Finally, bend and straighten knees together. As students bend their knees, have them press their chest towards their feet, and relax their chest as they straighten their knees. This will help warm-up the back, shoulders and chest, along with the legs.

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Child's Pose



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Hips
- Back
- Knees

Steps:

- From all fours, sit back on heels, drop belly towards thighs and head towards mat
- Place forehead on floor
- Keep arms extended, stretching hands forward
- Breathe into back, feeling back stretch and expand on inhale and relax on exhale

Teaching Points:

Some students, especially heavier students, may find it becomes more difficult to breathe with their belly pressed against their thighs. Have these students spread their knees apart, making more room for their belly.

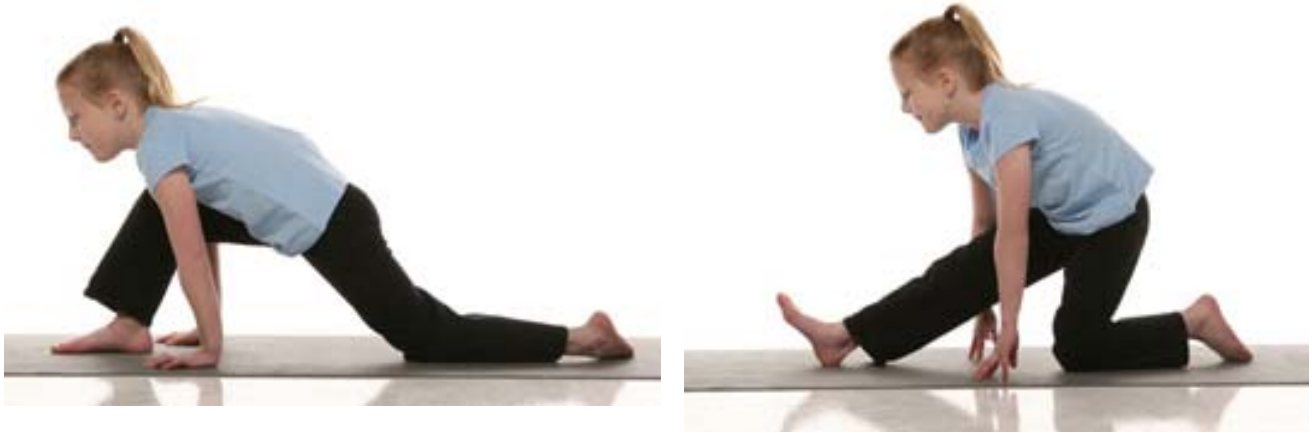
Variation:

Tuck chin to chest more, bringing top of head towards floor. This will help to better stretch the neck and upper back.

Instead of breathing into the back, breathe into your belly, feeling it press against your thighs as you inhale, and relax on exhale. This helps to exercise the diaphragm and gently massage the internal organs.

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Lunge/Runner's Stretch



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs (Hamstrings and Quadriceps)

Steps:

- Start on all fours (on hands and knees - shoulders over wrists and hips over knees) or start in down dog
- Bring right foot forward, placing right foot between your hands
- Check that right knee is directly over right ankle
- Scoot left foot back until gentle stretch is felt
- Inhale, straighten right leg as you bring hips back towards back foot (keeping hips raised)
- Exhale, come forward again, bending front knee and dropping down into lunge
- Continue moving back and forth 4-6 times

Teaching Points:

Have students move slowly and only drop hips or press back until they feel a gentle stretch. This exercise is to warm up the muscles in the legs, not stretch them too deeply, so it's important that students move slowly and simply focus on maintaining the back and forth movement, only going to the point where they feel a very gentle stretch. This warm-up is best used towards the end of the warm-up sequence, once students have already been moving their bodies through a few warm-ups.

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Chopping Wood

Step 1



Step 2



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Hips
- Arms

Steps:

- Start squatting with knees apart
- Reach your arms overhead and clasp your hands together
- Inhale, stretch up through your fingers
- Exhale, drop your head and chest and drop your hands to the floor (like your chopping wood)
- Repeat 6-8 times

Teaching Points:

Have kids keep their feet turned out to prevent any strain on their ankles. Encourage kids to stretch up through their arms as they raise them overhead to help stretch through their shoulders and back.

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Frog Jump

Step 1



Step 2



Benefits:

- Increases strength in the legs
- Improves hip flexibility
- Energizes the body

Steps:

- Stand with feet a little wider than hip width apart, feet turned out slightly
- Squat down, bringing your hands to the floor between your feet
- Imagine you are a frog in a pond
- Inhale through your nose
- As you exhale, say “ribbit” and jump into the air
- Come back down into your squat and repeat 4-6 times

Teaching Points:

Remind kids to stay on their mats, so they don't bump into others. Encourage them to really use the strength of their legs to spring up. Along with saying “ribbit”, have kids imagine they are catching flies with their tongues – sticking out their tongues.

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Windmill



Warms Up:

- Arms, Shoulders
- Neck
- Back
- Hips and Legs

Steps:

- Start in straddle forward fold (standing straddle with hands on floor)
- Bring feet into a forward/parallel position (not turned out)
- Place right hand in the middle of the straddle
- Inhale, sweep left hand up. Exhale, lower left hand to floor (next to right hand)
- Inhale, sweep right hand up. Exhale, lower right hand to floor.
- Continue moving arms one at a time up and down, moving with breath
- Repeat 4-6 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Remind students to turn feet in, so they are parallel (not turned out). This helps engage and warm up the muscles in the fronts of the thighs. Instruct students to press back through their hips and reach forward with their head to help lengthen the spine and keep the back from rounding. If students have a difficult time reaching the floor with their hands, encourage them to bend their knees, rather than round their back.

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Helicopter



Warms Up:

- Back
- Arms
- Torso

Steps:

- Start in a standing straddle position with feet pointing forward
- Raise arms out to the side at shoulder height
- Keep arms straight apart and begin moving left arm back as you bring the right arm forward
- Move back and forth about 6-8 times
- Relax arms down and shake them out

Teaching Points:

Remind kids to keep their lower body strong and stable while they move their upper body. For younger kids, encourage them to a whoooosh sound as they exhale (like a helicopter).

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Sun Flower

Step 1



Step 2



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs
- Arms
- Shoulders

Steps:

- Start in standing position
- Step feet a little wider than hip width apart
- Turn feet out (no more than 45 degrees)
- Inhale, stretch arms diagonally up and out with palms facing forward
- Exhale, squat down, sweeping hands towards the floor then crossing arms
- Inhale, come back up, stretching arms out
- Exhale, squat down, sweeping arms down and across
- Repeat 5-8 times

Teaching Points:

Many students bend forward as they squat down. Remind them to keep their head and chest lifted, so they are using their leg muscles and not placing any strain on their back.

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Check that students turn their feet out rather than keeping them facing forward. This helps ensure that their knees stay in the same direction and bend over their ankles, so there is no strain on the knee or ankle joint.

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Star/Moon God



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Upper Back
- Legs
- Hips

Steps:

- Start in standing position
- Step feet a little wider than hip width apart
- Turn feet out (no more than 45 degrees)
- Inhale, stretch arms diagonally up and out with palms facing forward
- Exhale, squat down, drawing elbows down and back (towards bottom ribs)
- Inhale, stand up, stretching arms up
- Exhale, squat down, bringing elbows down and back
- Repeat 5-8 times

Teaching Points:

Check that students turn their feet out rather than keeping them facing forward. This helps ensure that their knees stay in the same direction and bend over their ankles, so there is no strain on the knee or ankle joint. Remind students to squeeze their shoulder blades together as they bring their elbows down and back. This will help to better warm up their shoulders and upper back.

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Mountain Pose (Tadasana)



Benefits:

- Improves posture
- Increases body awareness
- Relaxes the mind and body

Steps:

- Start standing with feet a few inches apart and parallel (not turned out)
- Reach up through the top of the head to lengthen the spine
- Draw your shoulders back then relax them down
- Bring the palms of your hands in line with the seams of your pants
- Engage abdominal muscles and drop your tailbone down, so there is less sway in the low back
- Bring your chin level to the floor
- Find one point in front of you to focus on, then bring your attention to your breath
- Take 4-5 long slow breaths

Flow Variation:

- Inhale, reaching arms overhead
- Exhale, drop arms back to sides

Section 3: Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Explorations:

- Have students slightly shift their weight onto one foot and notice the changes that occur throughout the body because of that small movement.

Teaching Points:

Help students find their best posture in Tadasana by having them do the following:

- Roll back and forth on your feet (ball to heel) until you are over the center of your feet (neither leaning forward or back) and not on the outside or inside edges
- Imagine someone is pulling the top of your head towards the ceiling – this will help students lengthen their spines and not slouch
- Draw your shoulders back, then relax them down – this will help students bring their shoulders in line with the rest of their bodies, not rolled forward or squeezed back too far
- Imagine trying to drop your tailbone to the floor – this will help students bring their pelvis to a neutral position
- Have students focus on their breath in this positions for a minute – this will help them become more aware of how proper posture feels
- Because you want your students to create a balanced vertical line, look at them from the side. Draw an imaginary straight line with your eyes, beginning with the students' ears. That line should pass down through the center of the shoulder, hip, knee and ankle joints.

Note:

Many people in Western cultures habitually stand with the pelvis pushed forward. To help bring the pelvis to a neutral position, have students place their hands on their hips and tilt their pelvis forward and back until they feel the pelvic bowl is straight up and down, balanced over the hips.

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Sun Salutation (Surya Namaskar)

A sun salutation is a graceful sequence of positions performed as one continuous exercise. Sun Salutations (or Surya Namaskar) limber up the whole body in preparation for the asanas (yoga postures). Surya means the sun and Namaskar is a greeting of honor and respect. Sun Salutations are traditionally practiced at sunrise, when yogis believed the air to be rich in prana (cosmic energy). All the Sun Salutations are helpful in warming up muscles throughout the body before practicing and holding standing poses. Sun Salutations are an effective way to increase the suppleness of the spine and tone the entire body. Each position counteracts the one before it, stretching the body in a different way and alternatively expanding and contracting the chest to regulate the breathing. Eventually, as students become well-practiced in Sun Salutations, breath and movement become more and more connected, making this a breathing exercise as well as a set of physical postures. Practiced daily, it brings great flexibility to the spine and joints. Students should begin with two or three rounds and work up to twelve rounds.

Sun Salutation A

Steps:

- Inhale, sweeping arms overhead, bringing palms towards each other
- Exhale, fold forward, folding from the hips, keeping the chest open, spine long, bringing nose towards knees
- Inhale, hands to shins, look up slightly to lengthen through spine
- Place hands on floor, fingers spread wide and step back to plank (top of a push up)
- Exhale, lower chest towards floor, keeping elbows in and bringing chest down before stomach reaches the floor
- Inhale, lift head and chest, press down with hands until only hands and tops of feet are on floor (shoulders back)
- Exhale, press hips up and back to Down Dog. Take 3-4 long breaths through the nose
- Inhale, walk or jump feet forward
- Exhale, fold forward, nose toward knees
- Inhale, bend knees, sweep arms out and up, standing up
- Exhale, bring hands to heart, still standing

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