



Kids Yoga Teacher Certification Program

Section 6: Seated and Lying Postures

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Introduction

Sitting postures are generally calming and nurturing, although some are more active, requiring a stronger engagement of certain muscles. Sitting poses fall into two categories: 1) forward bends (or otherwise flexing the hips), whereby the trunk and legs come towards each other; and 2) spinal twists, in which the spine rotates to both the left and right. When practiced with proper alignment of the spine and pelvis, seated postures promote vitality, improve circulation, reduce fatigue and soothe the nervous system. They stretch the entire back, creating more flexibility and often relieve sciatic pain due to pressure on the sciatic nerve. The stable base created by sitting frees you from the concerns of balancing or supporting the body, leaving you more energy to devote to the stretching. However, due to such habits as slouching in chairs for long periods of time and not being in the habit of sitting cross legged, there is often some basic work to be done before students can fully enjoy these asanas.

Seated forward bends stretch the hamstrings and engage the abdominal muscles. Seated twists massage the abdominal organs and aid the digestive process. They also improve lateral flexion (side bending) of the spine and remove stiffness in the neck and upper back. Sitting poses are best done after standing poses – once the muscles are sufficiently warm.

To invert the body means to bring the heart above the head and to bring the hips higher than the heart (i.e. plow, bridge, shoulderstand, etc). Inversions have calming after effects, helping to quiet the body and mind. They also play a role in balancing the hormones. When you are inverted, blood flows more easily to the upper body. Endocrine glands, like the pituitary and the hypothalamus in the brain, and the thyroid and parathyroid at the throat, get bathed in blood, and cerebral function is aided due to this extra nourishment. However, many inversions are not appropriate for some kids (i.e. headstands). We've only included inversions in this text that are appropriate for the vast majority of kids.

Lying postures are divided into two groups: 1) prone (belly lying) positions; and 2) reclining and supine (back lying) poses. Prone positions are usually done shortly after standing and kneeling poses, while the muscles are still warm. Prone poses generally work on strengthening the muscles of the back and developing greater spinal flexibility. Some prone poses are quite challenging, so it is best to have students try the modification first, before progressing to the full pose.

Supine and reclined positions are generally done as a cool down at the end of a practice. They reduce fatigue, increase mental clarity and open spaces within the body that are generally closed by tension. The yoga poses in this part of the manual are ordered in the way that they would be sequenced in a yoga class. Make special note of this ordering when designing your own classes.

Superman



Benefits:

- Strengthens the back
- Improves flexibility of the spine
- Increases arm strength
- Relieves tension in the back

Steps:

- Start lying on belly with arms on floor overhead, palms facing each other
- Inhale, lift head and chest
- Exhale, lift arms and legs, bringing arms in line with your head
- Keep looking down towards the floor, keeping arms in line with ears
- Stretch arms and legs up and away from each other
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Slowly lower arms and legs back to the floor
- Counter with child's pose to allow muscles in the back to relax



Teaching Points:

Remind kids to squeeze their belly while they are in this position. This will help to develop their core strength, while also protecting their low back from any strain. Encourage kids to have fun with this posture by imagining that they are superman or superwoman, looking down over metropolis

Swimming



Benefits:

- Increases back strength
- Improves shoulder strength and flexibility
- Develops coordination

Steps:

- Start lying on your belly with hands out in front of you on the floor
- Inhale, lift your arms and legs
- Exhale, bring your arms back (level with your shoulder), then bend your elbows, bringing your hands towards your armpits and bring your feet together
- Continue this “swimming” motion – like swimming the breast stroke – 4-8 times

Teaching Points:

Remind kids to keep their belly muscles squeezed up towards their spine. This helps prevent strain to the lower back and develop more core strength.

Cobra/Snake (Bhujangasana)

Step 1



Step 2



Benefits:

- Strengthens the muscles in the back
- Increases spinal flexibility
- Strengthens gluteal muscles
- Develops arm strength

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)
- Press your chest forward and relax your shoulders away from your ears
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- 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

Counter with child's pose to relax the back muscles



Teaching Points:

Make sure to counter with child's pose after practicing this pose, so that kids can allow the muscles along their spine to relax before moving onto the next posture.

Bow



Benefits:

- Stretches the shoulders, thighs and spine
- Strengthens the spine
- Opens the chest and throat
- Aids digestion
- Energizes the body

Steps:

- Start lying in prone position (belly lying)
- Rest your forehead on the floor
- Bend your knees and hold the tops of your feet or ankles
- Inhale, lift your head and chest, squeezing your shoulder blades together
- Exhale, lift your arms and legs
- Try to raise your shoulders and knees the same distance from the floor, so they are parallel to each other.
- Breathe softly through the nose, staying in this position for 3-4 slow breaths
- Slowly lower back to the floor and release ankles
- Counter with Child's Pose

Explorations:

To enhance your sense of lifting in this pose, focus on the top of your sacrum (near tailbone). Press down here to lift up everywhere else. Let your sacrum be stable as the rest of your body flows into the position.

Teaching Points:

One way to help your students in this pose is to remind them to lift up and not just backwards. Describe how the knees and shoulders should move up in a straight line, so they are equal distance from the floor. This helps students avoid overarched either the cervical spine or lumbar spine.

Remind your students to breathe softly in this position, as many people have a tendency to hold their breath in this posture. Also, remind students to bring their focus to a point just in front of their mat. This will help keep their head and neck in a more neutral position, rather than over extending or straining their neck.

Modification

Use Superman or Cobra (Snake) as a modification for those who find it difficult to reach their feet for Bow.

Counter with Child's Pose

Child's Pose (Balasana)



Benefits:

- Relieves stress and anxiety
- Gently stretches the back
- Alleviates headache
- Stretches the ankles, knees and hips

Steps:

- Sit on heels
- Fold forward, bringing chest towards thighs and forehead towards floor
- Keep hands at sides with palms turned up
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths, breathing into back
- Raise head and chest to come back to sitting

Variation:

Students may also like to extend their arms in front of them. This provides a deeper stretch to the back. To increase the stretch in the upper back or neck, suggest that students tuck their chin towards their chest.

Modification:

Some students may find it uncomfortable to fold forward in this position, finding it more difficult to breathe. Suggest that students spread their knees apart to make more room for their belly, making breathing easier.

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to breathe into the bottom part of their lungs, so that the belly presses against thighs on inhale, and belly relaxes on exhale. This provides a gentle massage to the internal organs and helps to strengthen the diaphragm.

Rabbit



Benefits:

- Stretches the upper back, neck and shoulders
- Strengthens the hips
- Relieves headache and tension

Steps:

- Start in Child's Pose
- Place hands around the soles of the feet
- Inhale, lift hips, while keeping hands on feet, trying to bring knees to a right angle
- Exhale, tuck chin to chest, bringing the top of the head to the floor
- Continue to actively press up through the hips to stretch more through the shoulders and upper back
- Stay in this position for 4-5 slow breaths
- Exhale, slowly bring hips down, sitting back on heels – back to Child's Pose

Exploration:

This position provides a strong stretch for the upper back. To enhance this stretch, pause slightly after inhalation, rounding the back a little more while holding the breath in. Only hold the breath in for a second or two, then allow shoulders and hips to relax a little during the exhale.

Teaching Points:

Remind students to strongly tuck the chin to the chest, so the top of the head can be placed on the floor, while fully lifting their hips. If a student finds it difficult to do this while holding the soles of their feet, encourage them to hold their ankles or calves instead. Lifting the hips and tucking the head are more important for stretching the upper back than maintaining the hold of the soles of the feet.

Crocodile



Benefits:

- Relieves headache and anxiety
- Relaxes muscles of neck and upper back
- Stimulates digestion
- Strengthens diaphragm

Steps:

- Start lying on belly (prone) with feet turned out
- Bring arms in front and hold opposite elbows
- Press elbows away, so they are slightly in front of shoulders (not directly underneath)
- Drop forehead to forearms
- Check that neck and shoulders are relaxed and chest is off the floor, while bottom ribs still touch the floor
- Breathe deeply through the nose, breathing into the belly, so belly presses into the floor on inhale and relaxes on exhale
- Stay in this position for 5-6 deep breaths
- Lift head and chest, place hands under shoulders and press back to child's pose

Exploration:

As you exhale, imagine any tension exiting your body. First, allowing your neck and shoulders to relax more with each exhalation, then allowing the hips and legs to let go with each exhalation. Imagine you are a sleepy crocodile, lying out in the sun.

Teaching Points:

Give students time to find the right position for their forearms to help their neck relax most effectively. Remind students to breathe slowly into their belly. This helps provide a gentle massage to internal organs, while also working and strengthening the diaphragm. Have them imagine themselves lying outside on a warm sunny day, completely relaxed.

Anchor



Benefits:

- Improves shoulder flexibility
- Opens chest
- Stimulates digestion
- Relieves headache and tension

Steps:

- Start sitting on heels
- Clasp hands behind the back with fingers interlaced
- Exhale, fold forward, reaching head forward as belly drops towards thighs
- Bring forehead towards mat
- Reach hands up and away from tailbone
- Breathe deeply through nose
- Stay in this position for 4-5 deep breaths
- On next inhale, slowly sit up, dropping hands behind back

Modifications:

If students can not clasp their hands behind their back, give them a strap to hold between their hands, so they can work on bringing their hands closer together.

Teaching Points:

Remind students to reach forward with their head as they fold forward. This will help to lengthen their spine and help them fold from their hips, rather than rounding their back too much.

Easy Seated Position



Benefits:

- Improves hip flexibility
- Stretches the knees
- Brings awareness to posture

Steps:

- Start sitting with legs extended
- Bend the right knee, bringing the right foot in close to the body (to the point in the center of the hips), keeping the foot on the floor
- Bend the left knee, bringing the left foot just in front of the right foot, so the heels of both feet are lined up with each other
- Stay here and focus on breathing for 4-5 breaths
- Repeat on the other side

Variation:

From easy seated position, have students walk their hands forward, reaching forward with their head and chest. This will increase the stretch in the muscles in the back of the hip.

Teaching Points:

Some students with limited hip flexibility may find it uncomfortable sitting in a cross legged position. Have these students sit on a block or rolled blanket, with their sitting bones on the block/rolled blanket and 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 blanket) and then eliminate it completely.

Also, it's important for students to switch sides, so each foot has a chance to be in the inside position. This helps bring balance to hip flexibility. Many students (especially older kids) will have only practiced the cross legged position on one side and will have their favorite side. Encourage them to practice sitting cross legged with their other foot in close to bring more balance to their hip flexibility.

Seated Twist



Benefits:

- Opens the chest and shoulders
- Stretches the muscles surrounding the hips
- Improves spinal flexibility
- Stimulates digestion

Steps:

- Start in easy seated position
- Place right hand on the floor just behind your right hip
- Place your left hand on your right knee
- Inhale, sit up tall
- Exhale, twist to the right and look over your right shoulder
- On every inhale, sit a little taller. On every exhale, twist a little deeper
- Work into this position for 4-5 breaths
- Turn back to center and release left arm
- Extend both legs out
- Repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

It's easy for students to simply hang out in this position. Encourage students to actively work into this position by continually stretching up as they inhale and twisting more as they exhale. Also, remind students to hug their top leg close to their chest and to keep both sitting bones on the floor. This will help increase the stretch to the hip rotator muscles.

Boat (Navasana)



Benefits:

- Builds core strength
- Improves balance, digestion and circulation
- Strengthens the legs, hips, abdomen and arms
- Improves posture

Steps:

- Start sitting with knees together and bent towards the ceiling and feet on the floor
- Place hands under thighs and draw shoulders back to open through chest
- Keep focus forward (not up or down)
- Lean back towards tailbone, while keeping chest open and shoulders back
- When ready, lift feet off floor
- Exhale, extend legs up and away from body
- Release hands from thighs, bringing hands to sides
- Stay in this position for 3-4 soft breaths
- Slowly come back down
- Counter with Cobbler's Pose, then with Inclined Plane

Variation



This variation of Boat helps students to practice flexibility more than strength. To get into this pose, have students place their hands around the soles of their feet rather than place their hands under their thighs. As they exhale, they extend their legs, while still holding their feet.

Teaching Points:

Check that students keep their shoulders back and chest open. Many students have a tendency to round their backs as they attempt to keep their legs up. Encourage students to continue holding under their thighs if necessary. Remember to have students do Cobbler's pose after Boat. This brings the pelvis in the opposite position and stretches many of the muscles that were previously contracted in Boat Pose.

Cobbler's Pose



Benefits:

- Opens hips
- Stretches muscles of the back and hips
- Relieves stress and tension

Steps:

- From sitting, bring soles of feet together
- Press feet forward until legs make a diamond shape
- Hold onto shins or ankles and pull shoulders back
- Exhale, fold forward, bringing chest towards feet
- Relax head and neck, and drop elbows out to the sides
- Stay in this position for 4-5 long, slow breaths
- Slowly raise head and chest and come back to sitting

Exploration:

Try Cobbler's Pose first with feet only out to the point where they are in line with the knees. As you fold forward, you'll notice more of a stretch in the inner thigh. Raise head and chest back to sitting. Then press your feet out a little further away from your body. As you fold forward, notice how the stretch changes. You will most likely now feel the stretch more in the back of the hips and back of the upper thigh. As you press your feet farther away, notice how the stretch is felt increasingly further down the back of the thigh.

Teaching Points:

Many students familiar with butterfly position automatically bring their feet in close. Remind students to press their feet forward to bring the stretch into their thighs. Also remind students to fold forward from the hips by pressing back through their sitting bones and tipping the pelvis forward rather than only rounding the back.

Sun Worshipper



Benefits:

- Relieves tension in upper back
- Stretches shoulders and chest
- Opens throat and enhances breathing

Steps:

- Start sitting with legs crossed or sitting back on heels (from kneeling)
- Bring hands back, placing hands on the floor with fingertips pointing back
- Inhale, lift up through chest and squeeze shoulder blades together to open chest more
- Exhale, let head fall back
- Breathe deeply through nose
- Stay in this position for 4-5 deep breaths
- On inhale, relax shoulders, rolling them forward and lift head, coming back to starting position

Teaching Points:

Check that students' wrists are directly under their shoulders and that students keep squeezing shoulder blades and open through the chest. For any students with neck problems or just a stiff neck, have them look forward, rather than let the head fall back, but encourage them to still squeeze their shoulder blades together and lift up through the chest. This will allow them to still stretch the shoulders and chest and relieve upper back tension without compromising their neck.

Sandwich/Make a Sandwich (Paschimottanasana)

Step 1



Step 2



Benefits:

- Stretches shoulders, back, hamstrings and calves
- Strengthens torso and front of thighs
- Develops imagination
- Improves digestion

Steps:

- Have kids sit in a circle and bring their feet out in front of them (legs together)
- Make sure kids have enough room, so their feet are not touching each other
- Stretch arms overhead
- Imagine you are reaching up grab a slice of bread to begin making your sandwich.
- Fold forward, first bringing hands to shins (placing bread down), then sit back up bringing hands back towards torso
- First person in the circle says what they want to add to the sandwich (i.e. peanut butter, tomato, etc). Everyone reaches up to grab the ingredient and then lower arms to spread it onto their sandwich legs
- Continue until everyone has had a turn, then reach up for the top piece of bread
- “Close” the sandwich by reaching forward with your arms, head and chest, as your belly drops towards your thighs
- Relax your shoulders and stay in this “closed” position
- Breathe deeply through the nose, focusing on the exhalation for 4-5 breaths
- Inhale, come back up to sitting

Teaching Points:

Many students desire to get their head to their legs – more than keeping proper alignment for a safe and beneficial stretch. Remind students to keep reaching forward with their head and chin as they press back through their sitting bones. This will help lengthen the spine and tilt the pelvis, so they are folding from the hip joints rather than rounding down from their back. Also, encourage students to bend their knees to start and slowly begin to straighten their legs once they are in position. This helps them bring their pelvis and back into proper position first and then focus on gradually developing more flexibility in their hamstrings.

Seated One-Leg Forward Fold (Janu Sirsasana)

Step 1



Step 2



Benefits:

- Stretches the calves, hamstrings and lower back muscles
- Improves digestion
- Strengthens low back
- Alleviates headache and stress

Steps:

- Start seated with legs extended
- Bend the left knee, placing the sole of the left foot next to the right thigh
- Scoot back, so you are on the front part of sitting bones
- Sit up tall
- Raise arms forward and up to shoulder height
- Exhale, reach forward, as belly drops toward thigh
- Keep reaching forward with head and chin, while pressing back through the hips
- Relax arms, shoulders and neck
- Breathe deeply through the nose, focusing on the exhalation, staying in this position for 4-5 breaths.
- Inhale, slowly come up to sitting
- Extend left leg next to right leg and shake out legs
- Repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

Sitting forward bends with one foot tucked in are among the most useful hip flexibility stretches. They do not place as much stress on the lower back and sacroiliac joints as keeping both legs straight, and are helpful for working on right-left imbalances. However, many students are more concerned about getting their head to their leg, rather than maintaining proper alignment to create a more beneficial stretch. Remind students to keep their chin away from their chest and to press back through the hips. Keeping the chin away from the chest helps prevent the upper back from rounding too much. Pressing back through the hips helps tilt the pelvis, so students are bending from the hips rather than rounding from the back, which can strain the low back.

Rock the Baby



Benefits:

- Stretches hips (especially rotator muscles)
- Improves balance
- Develops arm strength

Steps:

- Start in Easy Seated Position
- Lift right leg off the floor, keeping your right knee bent to the right and placing your right foot near the bend of your left elbow
- Sit up tall – you can place your right hand on the floor behind you if you need extra support
- Gently rock your leg back and forth – like rocking a baby
- Stop rocking and bring the calf of your leg close to your chest – stopping at the point where you feel a stretch
- Stay in this position for 3-5 breaths
- Release your leg and shake it out
- Repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

Remind kids to sit up tall by lifting up through the top of their head and pressing their chest forward. Sitting up tall will help prevent any strain to the back.

Flying Butterfly (Little and Big Butterfly)



Benefits:

- Stretches hips and knees
- Increases circulation to hips and legs
- Improves balance and coordination
- Stretches hamstrings (big butterfly)

Steps:

- Start seated
- Bring the soles of your feet together, bringing your feet in close towards your body
- Hold onto your feet with both hands
- Begin moving your knees up and down, like a butterfly flapping its wings
- Imagine yourself as a butterfly, flying in the air - think about what color you are and what you see below you
- Flap your butterfly wings for a minute, then close your eyes, use your hands to pull against your feet – sitting up tall – and gently press your knees towards the floor
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths

Option: Be a big butterfly by holding onto your feet and straightening your knees. With your feet raised, move your feet together and then apart (back and forth)

Teaching Points:

For younger kids, have them tell everyone what color butterfly they are. Have all students spend a minute with their eyes closed, sitting still in butterfly posture. Remind students not to push too hard when pressing their knees towards the floor.

Flower



Benefits:

- Improves hip flexibility
- Stretches knees
- Improves balance
- Improves posture awareness

Steps:

- Start sitting
- Bring soles of feet together
- Bring your hands in close to your body and tuck your forearms under your calves
- Slowly lift your hands and feet off the floor
- Focus on one point in front of you
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Slowly lower your hands and feet back to the floor

Teaching Points:

If some kids have difficulty balancing, encourage them to move more slowly and to focus on one point to become more aware of their balance and working with their body. Also, make it fun. Show kids how to roll onto their backs if they start to lose their balance.

Straddle/Stir the Pudding



Benefits:

- Increases flexibility in the back of legs
- Improves hip flexibility
- Stretches and tones lower back and waist
- Uses imagination

Steps:

- Start sitting with legs in front of you
- Spread your legs into a straddle position
- Sit up tall, reaching up through the crown of your head to lengthen your spine
- Place your hands in front of you side by side
- Keeping your hands together, begin making big circles on the floor in front of you
- Imagine what you are mixing and making (soup, a cake, pudding, etc)
- Make about 8-10 “mixing circles”
- Repeat in the other direction making something different
- After kids go in each direction, have them place their hands on their thighs and gently stretch forward, reaching forward with their heart. Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths.
- Bring legs together and shake them out

Teaching Points:

Encourage kids to reach around “the edges of the bowl” to stretch their arms around in a big circle. Also remind kids to try to keep their backs flat (rather than rounded), bending their knees if they need to. This will help to prevent any strain to their low backs.

Turtle

Step 1



Step 2



Benefits:

- Stretches the legs, hips, back and shoulders
- Relieves tension in neck and upper back
- Strengthens the legs
- Works abdominal muscles and improves digestion

Steps:

- Start seated with knees bent and feet on the floor about hip width apart
- Bend elbows, bringing hands up next to sides with palms facing out
- Inhale, sit up tall
- Exhale, reach head and chest forward, as you drop the tops of the hands to the floor between the legs with your fingertips pointing behind you
- Begin pressing your hands under your legs and behind you with palms up
- Bring hands behind the back, clasping hands behind the back
- Bring feet towards each other and drop head towards feet
- Breathe softly in this position, staying in this position for 4-5 breaths
- To come out of the pose, release hands and press down with hands to come back to sitting

Teaching Points:

Many students will have a difficult time clasping their hands behind their backs. Have them focus on simply reaching back with their hands, as they press back through their hips and reach forward with their head. This will help them to lengthen the spine and go further into the stretch.

Table Top



Benefits:

- Improves balance
- Opens chest, shoulders and throat
- Stretches the wrist, shoulders and ankle joints
- Increases arm strength and core strength
- Energizes the body

Steps:

- Start seated with legs together, knees bent and feet on the floor
- Place hands behind back with fingers pointing either forward or back
- Inhale, lift up through chest, look up and squeeze shoulder blades together
- Press down through heels and lift hips as high as possible
- Stay in this position for 3-4 deep breaths
- Slowly lower hips back to floor and look forward, coming back to sitting

Teaching Points:

Remind students to place hands directly under their shoulders before lifting hips. This will help reduce any strain on the wrists.

Bridge (Setu Bandhasana)



Benefits:

- Strengthens the erector spinae muscles in the midback and lower back
- Strengthens muscles between the shoulder blades
- Stretches chest and abdomen
- Improves flexibility of upper back and shoulders
- Counters the effects of sitting for long periods of time

Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position), with hands at sides – palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart and parallel – not turned out
- Inhale, lift hips up as you press down through hands and feet
- Exhale, begin rolling shoulders under, lifting up through chest and bringing hands towards each other (if possible, you can clasp your hands together on the floor)
- Check that knees stay fairly close together and that feet stay parallel
- Stay in this position for 3-4 long, deep breaths
- Slowly roll back down
- Bring knees to your chest and rock side to side to relax your back muscles

Counter Pose (Knees to Chest)



Teaching Points:

Often when students begin to practice this bridge, they turn their feet out. This happens because of the action of the glutei maximus. These powerful muscles have two actions: hip extension, which facilitates the extension of the hip joint during back bending, and external rotation of the thigh, which causes the feet to turn out. When a student uses the glutei maximus to help in extension, they also get the secondary action of external rotation. When you teach your students to keep the feet parallel and the knees bent over the feet, you are teaching them to stabilize the pelvis in the backbend, because the external rotation of the thighs will no longer interfere with that movement. This will help them develop more core strength.

Wheel/Upward Bow Pose (Urdhva Dhanurasana)



Benefits:

- Keeps the spine strong and supple
- Stretches the wrists, forearms, shoulders and spine
- Opens the chest
- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, shoulders and wrists
- Increases stamina
- Increases lung capacity

Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position), with hands at sides – palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart and parallel – not turned out
- Inhale, lift hips up as you press down through your feet
- Bring your hands next to ears with placing your fingertips on the floor pointing towards your shoulders
- On exhale, press down through your hands and feet, while lifting hips up
- Bring your head in line with arms, looking straight back
- Stay in this position for 3-4 deep breaths
- Slowly come back down, tucking chin to chest, so head does not bump the floor

Teaching Points:

Make sure that students are thoroughly warmed-up and have practiced other backbends (bridge, cobra, camel, etc) before practicing wheel pose.

Encourage students to stay relaxed as they lift into the pose. This helps many students use their muscles more efficiently and find the strength to press into the pose.

As with bridge, students often turn their feet out as the muscles that allow hip extension also may cause external rotation. Students can neutralize the external rotation by activating the muscles of the inner thigh.

Counter Pose (Knees to Chest)



Lie on back, bringing knees to chest and gently rock from side to side. This helps to relax the back muscles that are contracted in the back bend.

Reclined Hip Opener



Benefits:

- Stretches the rotator muscles of the hip
- Improves knee flexibility
- Relieves stress and tension

Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position)
- Bend knees, placing feet on floor about hip width apart
- Place right ankle on left thigh (just above the left knee)
- Wrap hands around left thigh
- Exhale, gently pull left thigh towards chest
- Use right elbow to press right knee forward (away from body)
- Stay in this position for 5-6 long, slow breaths
- Place left foot back on floor, uncross legs and repeat on other side

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to relax into this position as much as possible. Remind them to relax their head/neck onto the floor and to focus on creating a deep and smooth breath, while relaxing the muscles in their legs. Relaxing the muscles will help make this stretch more effective.

Plow (Halasana)



Benefits:

- Relieves backache
- Stretches the shoulders and spine
- Stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands
- Strengthens the spine
- Stretches hamstring muscles

Steps:

- Start lying on back with knees close to chest
- Place arms at sides and bend elbows
- Press elbows into floor to lift hips off the floor, keeping hands on hips
- Swing legs over head towards floor behind you
- If feet do not reach floor, continue supporting hips with hands
- If feet reach floor, then drop hands to floor under back, bring hands towards each other, clasping hands together if possible. From here, the student can begin rolling shoulders under, opening chest
- Toes should remain curled under, pressing heels back to stretch calves and hamstrings

Modification:

Legs in the Air or Legs Up the Wall



Legs in the Air Modification:

- Have students begin with their knees to chest
- Place hands at sides with palms down
- Straighten legs, pressing the soles of the feet up towards the ceiling
- Breathe fully through the nose, staying in this position for 4-6 breaths

Teaching Points

It is critical to protect the student's cervical spine. Check with all students before teaching this pose. For any student who has any problems with their neck, it is best for them to simply extend their legs in the air, without lifting their hips off the floor. This will still give them the benefits of being inverted, without placing undue pressure on their neck.

Fish (Matsyasana)



Benefits:

- Opens hips, abdominal cavity, chest and throat
- Stretches hip flexors
- Aids digestions
- Improves posture
- Strengthens the muscles of the upper back and neck

Steps:

- Start in Dandasana (Seated Staff Pose)
- Drop elbows to the floor behind you and lean back on your elbows
- Point your toes forward and place your palms next to your hips
- Lift up through your chest, squeezing your shoulder blades together
- Drop your head back and begin pressing your hands down your legs slightly as you continue to lift up through the chest
- Breathe deeply through the nose
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Lift your head and chest and slowly roll down onto your back
- Bring your knees to your chest and counter with a reclined spinal twist

Teaching Points:

If a student has problems with their neck, encourage them to not drop their head back, but to keep looking forward, while the continue to squeeze their shoulder blades together and lift up through their chest.

Reclined Hand to Foot (Supta Padangusthasana)

Benefits:

- Improves digestion
- Stretches hips, hamstrings and psoas muscles
- Relieves sciatica and low backache
- Relaxing – relieves stress

Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position)
- Bend knees, placing both feet on the floor about hip width apart
- Bring right knee to chest
- Exhale, extend right leg, placing hands around right thigh, calf, ankle or foot
- Gently pull leg towards head
- Stay in this position for 4-5 slow breaths
- Release left hand, placing left hand on floor out to side in T position
- Still holding right leg with right hand, drop right leg to the right side
- Keep hips square to the ceiling and both shoulder blades on the floor – do not roll onto right side – to allow hips to open more
- Stay in this position for 4-5 deep breaths
- Bring both knees to chest and rock from side to side
- Repeat on the other side

Option: Students can extend the left leg on the floor for a deeper stretch. This can place some strain on the low back, so remind students to notice if they feel any strain and return to the bent knee position, if necessary.

Teaching Points:

Stretching the hamstrings while in a supine position is both safe and effective because the hip joints are not bearing any weight of the body as a whole. Remind students to let gravity help them into the stretch and to simply relax their leg muscles while gently pulling their leg with their arms. Students often want to pull their leg closer to their head and, as they pull harder, their leg muscles tend to tighten in opposition to the stretch. Relaxing the leg muscles lends itself to a more effective stretch. Remind student to breathe slowly and deeply to help their muscles relax.

Dead Bug



Benefits:

- Increases hip flexibility
- Improves circulation in the legs
- Relaxes the mind and body

Steps:

- Start lying on your back with your knees at your chest
- Raise your feet towards the ceiling, so that the soles of your feet are facing the ceiling – knees still bent
- Hold onto your shins, ankles or soles of your feet
- Slowly pull your knees down towards your armpits, keeping your shins vertical (perpendicular) to the floor
- Stay in this position for 4-5 slow, deep breaths, focusing on your breath

Teaching Points:

Encourage kids to keep their shins vertical to the floor. It's easy to drop the feet down or out to the sides, but keeping the feet directly over the knees will improve the stretch to the hips. Have kids close their eyes in this posture, so they can relax and focus on their breath in the stretch.

Lying Twist/ Reclined Spinal Twist (Jathara Parivartanasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches the spine and shoulders
- Improves digestion and circulation
- Relieves lower backache and sciatica
- Opens the hips and chest

Steps:

- Start lying on back, arms out in T position with palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart
- Lift right leg and cross right leg over left leg
- Drop knees to the left and look towards the right hand
- Keep both shoulder blades down (may need to scoot to the side to keep shoulder blades down)
- Stay in this position, breathing deeply into the open space on the side of the body
- Let the weight of legs pull you deeper into the stretch
- Bring knees back to center and uncross legs
- Repeat on the other side