

YOGAMINDED

Keeping Yoga on Your Mind



### An Inspiring Teen Yoga Community in Missouri: Megan Sappington's Story



*Megan Sappington wrote to me about her class in Jefferson City, MO. She had just received the Yoga 4 Teens DVD and wanted to express her "gratitude for more insight on teaching teens." She described her class with such inspiring detail that I wanted to share it with all of you. What follows are Megan's words describing the teen yoga community she has helped create.*

I teach a group in Jefferson City, MO, that continues to inspire me. A year ago, I approached all the teachers at Show Me Yoga studio with my idea to offer a class for teenagers. They all loved the idea and I've been teaching ever since. As these teens embrace Yoga, their gratitude, strength, flexibility, and empathy shines.

My current class is 16 teens (12 girls, 4 boys). They range in age from 12 to 18. I have found that age difference is not relevant...If the teacher thinks and acts like everyone is so cool and valid, then the teens do as well. All are interconnected and grateful for each other.

I also teach Girl Scouts regularly (they have a Yoga badge. Isn't that cool!), and will begin a Phys. Ed. course at our local 9th grade center. The principal there is supporting Yoga for Teens!

I teach a lot, but my favorite class has always been teenagers. They are energetic, open, courageous and fearless. They are also stressed, perhaps more so than adults.



## Class Description

I always begin classes by bouncing on balls, and with a Kriya of "HAH". I ask what they have heard, been told, or told themselves that is not true, gather it into the belly, palms out, deep breath in, expel with force- YELL!!! We repeat for a while a rhythmic Kriya, and I give a count-down, so no-one yells unexpectedly...I really try hard to avoid any kind of shame.

From there, we practice *pranayama* (breathing exercises), have a long *vinyasa* (yoga pose flow), and then, a pinnacle pose. Teens love outrageous poses. The feelings of accomplishment and courage flood into a healthy self-esteem, so I try to sequence classes that lead to this. A pat on the back, a feeling that they are strong and courageous, speaks volumes to my teens...I encourage "jumping off the edge", with a healthy dose of *ahimsa* (non-violence). For example, I sequence a *vinyasa* with lots of hip openers and mini-backbends to prepare for *Natarajasana* (King Dancer's Pose). I try to not let them see, visually, what my plans are, but lead them into *asanas* (poses) with mini-steps, and voila! There they are! And the smiles! High-Fives all around!!! They leave class feeling validated and worthy. Everyone is able to do some form of a pinnacle pose, as I use props for those that are having difficulty.

Restorative *asanas* have been for them a life-saver. I have one student who is working very hard in AP programs at school who says:

"Yoga has allowed me to let go of expectations and just be me."

Teaching teens is a commitment. It requires a consistent and familiar approach...these teens know that class will always begin and end the same way, with a funky asana in the middle.

I teach an adult class immediately after the teens and have had to delay class several times because the teens wanted to show mom and dad what he/she accomplished. We all want and crave validation and especially teens who are thrown into such a tumultuous world. For the teens to hear from those that love them, "WOW", it is huge.... they feel real.

Yesterday we had a reporter from the local high school taking pictures and interviewing the students. They were so proud of themselves! We also had a Health Fair recently where the teens choreographed and performed asana on the street in front of our studio and for the crowd at the Fair. I dare say I have never heard silence like I did when these teens performed...awe-inspiring.

## Getting to Class

The teens work hard to be at class every week. Some car-pool, some walk (about 2 miles), and others get a ride from parents (who also hang out and watch class!). I pick a few of them up from school, too.

## Marketing

As far as marketing the class, it's all word-of-mouth with teens. We tried the ad-campaign, did fliers, etc., but what it has really come down to is teen-yogis talking with other teens. If the yogi loves it, then he/she will convince a best friend to join. I started with perhaps 3-4 students, and based on consistency and word-of-mouth, the class has grown.

### **Teen Yoga Intensives**

We did our first teen-intensive last year, and it was beautiful! Three days of asana, meditation, pranayama, and chanting led to several personal breakthroughs. The teens walked away with an astounding tool-bag for life.

We will soon begin our 3rd teen intensive. I try to offer Intensives based on feed-back from the teen-yogi's....for example, I'll ask:

"Hey, when do you all want to kick it up a notch? When are you available?"



I also do questionnaires, asking what they loved or hated... I've found that most teens are readily available for an intensive immediately after school ends for summer, and a one day seminar is best. Teens are BUSY...getting a one-day intensive is feasible, and affordable. We also include hand-outs, gifts, and pizza!

### **Creating "Interconnected-ness" Among Students**

Interconnectedness....this really is the same principle that applies to building a "Sangha", or community...Teens rely on the guide to show them how to relate to other students, just like adults. I introduce every new teen to everyone else and try to relay a common interest.

I try to come at least an hour early to talk and chat with the teens and their current issues, and I give out my phone number and email to encourage dialogue. I encourage dialogue between the teens...for example, a teen may have an issue with, say, a school teacher, and I try to engage another teen that has experienced a similar dilemma, saying "Wow, Julie had this Same problem!" or "Ashley, would you be interested in sharing what happened with you and how you dealt with it?"

Of course I don't speak this grammatically correct...it's more like:

### **Encouraging Teens in Their Language**

"Dude! This is so the same as Ashley! Ash what did you do?"...And pretty soon, those two are talking like best friends.

I really point out Shri with the teens...

- "WOW Jordyn, that alignment is amazing!!"
- "Rock on Yogi!"
- "You are really expressing yourself!!"
- "You guys are SO beautiful!!"
- "You are SO much stronger than you think!!"
- "Take A Picture Quick!"
- "Dudes!! OFFER IT UP!!!"

### **Incorporating A Recent Death into Class**

In today's Teen Class, we did something very special. A dear friend of some of the classmates died Monday from injuries from a car-wreck. At the last minute I chucked my syllabus and decided to make the class a devotional remembrance in honor of Jordan Ordway, the young man who died. We spoke of the quest to live in the moment and of equanimity and awareness. Then, the teens choreographed a group vinyasa (yoga pose flow) to devote to Jordan . It was beautiful.

Afterwards, a dear friend of Jordan said she felt better than she had the entire week. My head and heart are still reeling from this wonderful gift I have been given...these teens. They are a testament to pure, unadulterated truth. They live in *anahata*, their hearts, where we all strive to be....

### **Teen Scholarship Fund**

Money too has been an issue for our teens so we established a Scholarship Fund for Teen Yogis. Adult students at the center donate back their unused credits for this scholarship, and we give free class cards to teens who cannot afford to pay. If they want yoga, we figure out how to make it work. I'm very proud of our program.

## Megan's Background

I watched my grandmother perform *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Salutation) on her balcony in Phoenix when I was 8-9 yrs. old, and she was so beautiful, graceful and joyous...

I was re-introduced to yoga in college at KU while studying for my BA. In Graduate school, yoga was part of our curriculum for a Masters of Arts in Theatre Performance.

My mother and aunts, as well as my grandmother, study yoga, and when I first became a mother, I decided it was time to dive in. I soon graduated from an amazing teacher-training program here in Jefferson City, conducted by Anusara-Affiliate Kevin Perry, and began teaching at Show-Me Yoga.

Kevin was my first mentor and inspired me to teach. He encouraged studying the philosophical side of Yoga, including Patanjali and the Vedic texts.

I think teaching yoga is a calling...I cannot imagine doing any other endeavor. It consumes, inspires, and leads me to levels of living I've never experienced. It is an amazing gift to be able to teach yoga, and I try really hard to not take it for granted.

As for me I am a single mom of two amazing yogi's....Annika Kaela, 8, and Skylar Jon, 6.

## Final Comments

I really believe that those of us who reach teens and do it with integrity and passion can change the future. These guys/gals are amazing!

Teens are mentally so available to changing the worldview of scarcity to a world-view of abundance...They know they have all they need, but adults keep telling them they don't... that the world won't take care of them.



If we can change the mind view of "not enough for everyone", to "YES! It's all around for you, and everyone, to embrace!", then wouldn't it follow that the world can change?

I plan to continue inspiring teens to be fully themselves. It's what this world needs.

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### **Upcoming Trainings for Teaching Teens Yoga**

Join Christy and others passionate about teaching teens yoga at one of our upcoming trainings:

- April 21-23, Washington D.C., Spiral Flight Yoga
- May 5-7, Laguna Beach, CA, Neighborhood Congregational Church

Training hours count towards Yoga Alliance Teacher certification programs. YogaMinded teaching certificates will be awarded.

### **Have an Inspiring Class Story to Share? Top Story Wins Six Yoga 4 Teens DVD's**

Teaching teenagers yoga is filled with rewarding moments, many non-vocal. YogaMinded is collecting stories of special learning moments that occur in the teen yoga classroom. Let others know about those moments to be cherished! Length of submission is not a criterion; it may only take a few paragraphs to explain.

YogaMinded will send six DVD's to the first place winner and two DVD's to the runner-up.

**[www.yogaminded.com](http://www.yogaminded.com)**

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