



it's yoga kids

by jeanine hays
 photography by jamie grenough

family style meets yoga style

Tucked away in San Francisco's historic Presidio Park is the most fun and innovative yoga studio you'll ever attend - *It's Yoga Kids*. Immediately as you walk up to the front door, there is something ultimately fun about this studio. The sign with big purple dots is kid friendly, and gets you excited for the class you're about to take.

Soft lilac walls, colorful art, and a playroom that is as inviting to the parents as it is to their pre-school and kindergarten-aged children, *It's Yoga Kids* makes it clear that families come first. Before the Saturday morning family class, little ones begin to come in, one, two and three-year olds, pulling their moms and dads along, eager to begin the fun.

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It's Yoga Kids was founded by elementary school educator Kate Roades and Michelle Wing, a working mom formerly in Corporate America who was searching for something new and different for herself and her daughter. Started only a year ago, *It's Yoga Kids* offers an innovative yoga experience where kids, parents, grandparents - the whole family - can find a unique space to develop, explore and engage in yoga practice together.

Developing a curriculum that spans age groups from pre-school aged children to tweens and teens in Bay Area schools, their style of family yoga is a unique blend of asana, imagination and just plain fun for kids and families. Here you will find yourself meditating not to the outward silence, but to the giggles of

little people and the pitter-patter of tiny yogis and yoginis.

The style of teaching at the studio is a mix of pre-school methods with basic asana practice, breathing techniques and a world of imagination. The result is something like a kindergarten ashram. Kids and parents are encouraged to be imaginative in class, moving from poses like cow to cat with "moos" and "meows," hissing like little snakes in cobra pose, and taking off like airplanes as they go into plane pose.

Classes never begin with a stiff uncomfortable air here - no need for silence - instead kids are immediately making friends and sharing a mat with the person next to them. Class starts with a question: "What is yoga?" and the children

review what they learned last week, expressing their own thoughts about what yoga means to them. Laughter and noise are never forbidden.

Kids are encouraged to help their mommy and daddy as they go into a forward bend, lying on their backs to help them stretch. As they go into boat pose, parents and kids hold hands and sing "Row, row your boat...life is but a dream." Entering into tree pose, kids and their parents begin shoveling and planting a seed to turn into whatever they desire, some are trees, some tomatoes, and then one dad yells out, "I'm a Snicker Bar!" It is truly a place where parents seem to have just as much fun as their children (and sometimes a little more).

As class winds down, children are encouraged to grab a blanket and eye pillow for their parents. Moms and dads enter Viparita Karani (legs up the wall pose), and children wind down by reading a story with Rosey, the teacher. Then everyone gets prepared to float off like a cloud. As the children are wrapped in their blankets for meditation, Rosey spreads some gentle lavender over each family, all of whom have experienced something special together. They have breathed together, pushed and stretched together, they have imagined together, and finally, each has been rewarded with a deeper peace because of the communal nature of the class. It is expressed in the final song for class as everyone sings "the more we get together, the happier we'll be" and then ends with a big group hug.

When you ask Michelle and Kate why the studio works so well, they describe the bond between the children and their parents - that union that brings families back each week. Yoga means union, and it's even better when it's a family affair.

It's Yoga Kids
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