

Module 2

Yoga For All: Creating Body Positive Yoga Classes for All Shapes, Sizes & Abilities

Diane: Welcome to Module 2. In this module, we'll talk about the importance of language in your yoga class creating a culture around consent and teaching progressively, including how we use the Bus Stop Method to help people move into the asanas safely and successfully. We look forward to getting started. Let's take a look.

Welcome to the power of language. One of my absolute favorite quotes is by Benjamin Whorf. "Language shapes the way we think and determines what we can think about." I think that is incredibly important in the context of the yoga class. How we use the language of cuing, what we determine we are going to talk about through theming our classes, can often set the stage for how our students feel within their own bodies and their own yoga practices.

As yoga teachers, we want to always leave a positive impact on our students. We're all about supporting them and making them feel safe. We want to manage expectations and keep them absolutely realistic. Here's where I think we fall away from the ability to empower our students through language with the expression, the full expression of the pose. I find this so problematic because there really is no such thing.

We can explore the idea of traditional expressions of the pose, so if you're leafing through Mr. Iyengar's book, *The Power of Yoga, Light on Yoga*, any of those types of texts where they have pictures that show you very specific ways to get into poses, or very specific alignment in poses, those are great reference texts, but know that those aren't the only way that we can approach the practice. We have to give students the power to express their own unique way of approaching a pose. As we know, this varies on any given day.

Students usually come to classes that fit best with their schedules, so sometimes you might get a student in the morning class who ordinarily comes in the evening or an evening participant early in the morning if they happen to be off or on vacation or need a class. From day to night, from minute to minute, from hour to hour, our body is changing and evolving and receiving new information from outside stimulation that can affect our yoga practice. Because you are able to get into one particular pose on one day and not another day can start to make a student feel like they are not advancing in the practice and through the power of language and observation, we want to let our students know that your body changes from day to day. Your poses and your asanas and your practice are going to change from day to day.

Using the phrase, the full expression of the pose, can often create triggers and defaults to unrealistic images often seen in mainstream yoga culture and media. Whenever I think of, the full expression of the pose, I always think of some acrobatic pose on the front of Yoga Journal that I, A, have no desire to do, and B, I don't think my body bends that

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way. I do not want to start to create that kind of imagery in my students. I often want to ask them to take the pose and make it their own. What I often like to say in my yoga classes is let's customize this pose for ourselves. Let's feel what the pose feels like in our body when we do it to the best of our ability. I always like to use phrases like, come to your own individual expression of the pose. Give your students permission and agency to have their own practice without us as a teacher projecting what we think their practice should look like.

Let's always remember, your yoga student is their best yoga teacher when it comes to figuring out how their body works and how their body feels. Encourage your students to come to know themselves by choosing positive words like feel, explore, experience, engage, accept, and my personal favorite which is embody. I always do a pose that I'm teaching a student or I'm teaching a class that's a particularly new pose. I like to come to the pose three times. The first time I'm going to invite them to explore what this feels like and get a feeling because we are not really sure where we are going. The second time, we have an idea what the pose shape is looking like or where we are going in the Asana, so we have an opportunity just to experience it here. The third time I present the pose, I ask them to embody it. I ask them to make it their own. That's a great way to empower your students to feel good and safe in their own bodies. Give your students the opportunity to explore their yoga in their own way, in their own terms.

Here's a few do's and don'ts that I've come across in my 15 years of teaching yoga. I have to stress, avoid placing judgments and expectations on your students with making statements like, you should feel it here, or you should feel it there. Every body is different and everybody has different limitations, different privilege, or physical privilege in their body. They are not always going to feel the poses where we think they are going to feel the poses or where we have been taught to believe these poses are most effective. These poses are most effective in the bodies of their students, wherever they are feeling it and however it serves them. Instead of saying things like, you should be feeling it here, say things like, explore the sensations that you are feeling. If you want to add more sensation, maybe you want to go a little deeper. If you don't want to add more sensation, stay where you are. Allow the students to stay with their first sensation and add more sensation on their own. This, again, comes back to the idea of customizing their practice and giving them agency to move in a way that feels best in their body.

A big thing you don't want to do is make comparisons. Comparing students to each other, comparing practices day to day. Some days yoga is great for you. Your physical asanas practice rocks and other days it just doesn't. Comparing those two sides can often make a student feel discouraged. Let them know if they are doing the comparison themselves, that every day is different and every day is a new opportunity to learn how yoga changes for you. This is a big one for me, TMI, too much information. I'm a big talker and I talk a

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lot and I share a lot of my personal experiences, but I'm always careful to know who's in the room when I'm sharing a personal experience and where it's appropriate to share a personal experience and not to make the class about me and what I'm feeling but about your students and what they need.

Also, when you are cuing, you want to give the students room to listen to their bodies and their breath by not talking too much or over-cuing things. If you see individual students in the room need a little more help, you can quietly go over to their mat, offer props and suggestions, and just keep the chatter to a minimum, once we have gotten everybody safely into the pose so your students have an opportunity to feel it and breathe with it.

Be open and adaptive to receiving feedback. This is a big one. When your students come to you with concerns or perhaps don't like the music you are using or find poses particularly difficult, don't take it personally, take it professionally. Use this information to refine and develop your class to be more accessible to your students. The worst thing you can do is get defensive and not listen. The power of language only works when we listen to each other and we adapt and we change and we support each other.

Remove gender-specific language from your teaching, so making references to certain body parts or certain clothing options that people may be wearing, using landmarks like bra-straps, or head-lights, or things like that that are maybe female-specific or men-specific. Gender-specific language is problematic in your teaching because you don't know who's in front of you and you do not want to make assumptions on people's gender.

Stay away from slang or stereotypes that cause offense. This is a big one. Popular culture uses slang all the time and if you are going to use slang, know your audience. I just prefer not to use it at all. There is a lot of slang that goes on in different cultures that has a lot of powerful meaning and history behind it. If you are using that slang from a different culture without knowing the context and you have people of that culture in your class, it can make them feel uncomfortable and alienated and it makes it really difficult for people of that culture to relax in that class. Using neutral language, peaceful language, and inclusive language is always best.

You also want to be really clear about the music we are using. I once had a student come up and tell me that they were in a class where a particular rap song was being used and it had a really strong cultural reference for them and the teacher who was teaching the class had no idea and it made them sad and uncomfortable and they didn't end up going back to class. I think you should use peaceful, lovely music. If there is a song that you like, listen to it and understand the context in which it's presented and see if it's appropriate for your class. You're welcome to use that music when you have your own personal

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practice, but when you are teaching to a broad audience in a yoga class, keep it simple. Keep it inclusive. Keep it universal.

One other tip I'd like to share is to avoid the word, can't, or you should. Stop "should-ing" all over yourself is one of my favorite sayings. I don't like the word can't. We always want to speak in the positive when we are giving our students tips for getting into Asana or strategies for creating the asana or making the asana more accessible. The word can't can often be a trigger. I can't do this practice. This practice is not for me. I use words like, if it is available to you, come here. Or, do this pose until you feel first sensation. I just offer two or three variations of the pose and ask people to pick one that they would like to try. Be open to having your class be a little more interactive if you want it to be more accessible and inclusive. Always remember, students are either empowered or devastated by the language we choose as teachers and we need to be really clear about what we're saying and not honestly say the first thing that comes to mind or have repetitive phrases that we use all the time.

We also want to be very clear with our instructions. When we use directional instructions, use landmarks in the room. Be clear and concise with your language. Speaking slowly and breathing can help your students have a successful experience.

Re-framing the language around what modifications of the poses involve. I like the word modifications and for some people that could possibly be a trigger. Know your audience. I also like to use the word enhancements or refinements or if you want to make the pose a little more luxurious. Those are the kinds of words I use when describing enhancements. When describing props, I always use props in a positive light. Props are the creation of Mr. Iyengar. In order to help people find optimal alignment of the poses, or better alignment in their bodies. It is a way of creating asana or refining asana so that it can fit your body as opposed to blaming your body for not being able to get into the asana. None of that is allowed in your class. You don't want to be body-blaming or body-shaming in your class, saying things like, "Oh, I have my mother's thighs," or, "I have too much skin here," whatever the case may be, the idea is that the body is perfect as it is and that we are adjusting the poses to fit the body. We are not adjusting the body to fit the poses. Really be positive in your language around speaking about the body.

I often like to tell my students that this is the only way in which you have to experience this incredible miracle called life is through this body that we criticize. It's through this body that we abuse. It's through this body that we shame and it always steps up out of sheer love for us, no matter what we do to it. How about we flip the script and start treating it with the respect that it deserves and that's what we are doing through the process of our yoga practice.

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Here are some points for contemplation. This is a big one for me; I'm working on this all the time. Listen more and talk less. Ask your students how you can serve them better, especially students who may have big limitations or have challenges in your class. This is a great conversation to have before class. As a yoga teacher that's making your classes more accessible, you need to arrive at least 15 to 30 minutes before your class starts and be available to interact with your students so you can serve them better. Slow down if you are cuing breath and actually take the breath with your students. I often hear the complaint that we were supposed to hold this asana for three breaths and by the time I got through my first breath, the asana started moving forward.

Here's my suggestion: you take three long deep breaths, knowing full well that everybody's breathing pattern is different and slowly move through the asana and then give the cue to the students who may be already at the top of their mat, or maybe already have completed their asana, to take some time to come to their breath and allow the rest of the class to catch up. I would also encourage people to actually examine while they are standing there waiting why they feel the need to rush through their practice. Here is a little moment for self-reflection or a teaching moment around self study.

Allow your students to express themselves without judgment or attaching your personal feelings to what is being said or expressed. What do we mean by this? Your students are going to bring you information about how their body received the class, how they're feeling in class, what is accessible to them, what they had trouble with and it is our opportunity as teachers to learn how to become better teachers for our students when we let them talk to us about what's working for them. It also gives you an opportunity to refine your classes and get a better understanding of how the body works and maybe some of the things that you are doing that aren't being useful or helpful within the class.

Do you remember that saying, don't take it personally, take it professionally. I would honestly contemplate that when you are teaching your yoga classes and your students come to you with questions or concerns. Not everybody is going to like all of your classes. You can't be everybody's teacher, but if you are listening to your students and taking into consideration their feelings, its okay for you to direct them to other teachers that may be better suited to them. Also, making sure their needs are being met within the classes by listening to what their needs are. It's really important to not get into our feelings and not to take the criticism, reflections, or feedbacks personally, but as information that will make us better teachers.

We're going to talk about next the topic of hands-on adjustments and creating a culture of consent around touch in our yoga classes. Offering hands-on assist and adjustments to our students, whether we should be touching people at all, who's qualified to touch, how we should touch, and when it's dangerous to touch is a hotly argued topic within the yoga

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community. Let's be honest. Depending on our teacher training program, the amount of time we spend learning adjustments can be vastly different, from spending a mere couple of hours on it to requiring new teachers to shadow, assist, or mentor other experienced teachers for a time. Many massage therapists are required to go through upwards of thousands of hours of training before they are allowed to put their hands on someone. As yoga teachers, especially 200 hour teacher training graduates, I don't think it's unfair to ask if we are qualified to touch people at all, especially with no regulation whatsoever around our understanding of individual anatomy, physiology, body reading, movement assessment, or apprenticeship and physical adjustments. Now, I'm not suggesting that every awesome new teacher should stop adjusting their students. Many hands-on adjustments are helpful, nurturing, and clarifying and lots of students find comfort and better body awareness through physical touch. However, I propose that as teachers we stop and think before we physically touch. Before I touch my students, I try to offer verbal cues first to correct alignment, something like, let the palm face the floor, bend deeply through the knees and draw the hips back, and so on. It forces me to be clearer in my instructions and work on my verbal communication skills as a teacher. If we still want to touch, we can ask ourselves a few questions. Do I have consent to touch? Is this adjustment helpful? Is it necessary? Is it nurturing?

If you are going to offer hands-on adjustments, I believe that it is unethical to do so without obtaining consent. One school of thought places the burden of giving or withdrawing consent for the touch on the student, such as, you should come to me before class and let me know that you don't want to be touched. Another popular technique for obtaining consent is asking students to raise their hand at the beginning of class if they prefer not to be touched. This can become a problem because just because I'm okay with you touching me at the beginning of class doesn't mean I might be okay with it throughout the entire class. Sometimes, if we have a large class, we can just forget who said yes and no. Unless you are in a profession, like a massage therapist, physical therapist, a priest, a doctor, or a chiropractor, where you are given a license to touch, then I'm of the opinion that the ethical burden is on you, it's on me, and it's on us as teachers to obtain consent every single time.

Why do we want to obtain consent? First of all, it empowers the student to keep their Asana practice in their own hands. There's a big difference between walking over to a student and adjusting the rotation of their arm in Parvswic Anasana versus approaching them and asking, "Is it alright if I help your arm become more comfortable in this pose with a hands-on adjustment?" Allowing the student the permission to say, "No, thank you" or simply adjust their own arm at your verbal cues, which most of them will, empowers them to remain in control of their own practice and their own body. It also signals to the student that their body belongs to them. Their body is their own and that they have agency in other areas of their life to consent or withdraw consent around touch.

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This is a new concept for many people and I've had more than one student tell me, in tears at a later time, that nobody had ever before asked if they could touch them. They would just reach out, they would grab them, and they would touch them whenever they wanted and that when I asked their permission, it made them realize that they could set those boundaries around touch with other people in their lives. Many of us have issues around touch because of trauma, because we are having a crappy day and we don't want to be touched, because we are on our periods and we want to kill everything in sight, because it triggers unpleasant memories, because we are in pain – there's lots of reasons why someone might not want to be touched at any particular moment. No matter the reason, obtaining consent before touch keeps everyone safer, both the students and you as a teacher.

Some ideas that I like for obtaining consent are consent cards. I first heard about these being used at Coola Annex in Toronto which created a positive space initiative to make their community an anti-racist, fat, trans, and peer-positive yoga studio. These cards say yes on one side and no thanks on the other side, and they're handed out to each student at the beginning of class. Each student places a card at the top corner of their mat and at anytime throughout the class, consent for touch can be given or withdrawn depending on the student's mood or comfort level, asking every single time. Most of the time I use this in my own classes. I, honestly, don't offer a ton of hands-on adjustments. I don't find that my students need them. The asana that we do is therapeutic and very slow and we pay a lot of attention to alignment and getting there safely and most of the time, the students are fine and they can do it on their own. Sometimes, I do need to make an adjustment. It's not very often, so I can use this and just ask every single time.

Just because I touched a student at the beginning of class, doesn't mean they want to be touched near the end. Again, it's just about agency, so I'll ask the student, "Can I offer you a hands-on adjustment?" If that doesn't make sense to them, you can even be clearer. "Could I offer you a hands-on adjustment to help you find some length in your spine?" If they pause and they don't say anything, or if they say "I'm not sure" or if they just don't answer, then I just step away and just let them take care of themselves.

Here are a few more ideas that Diane sometimes employs in her classes. You could set up consent at the beginning of class. Say something like, "Sometimes I go around and I'll give hands on adjustments, I'll touch you to be able to re-position your body. When I step into your space to offer an adjustment, please just nod yes or no. If you see me step into your space, just yes or no." Finally, during class, you can step into their space where they can see you and just allow them time to say "I'm okay" or decline your assistance. If their body language is receptive, then you can proceed.

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Never sneak up on a student. Never come behind them or grab them or touch them without them seeing you coming. Even things like head massages during Savasana, which some yoga teachers just love to do for some reason. I want to be left alone during Savasana so I can rest. It can be very jarring if you don't realize that a teacher is coming and then suddenly someone is grabbing your body, especially if you have any issues around trauma or anything like that. It can be traumatizing for a student. It can bring up serious triggers and serious issues.

Around asking for feedback, I like to, after I've offered an adjustment, to ask for feedback. There is kind of a good way and a bad way to measure feedback. The good way that I would recommend and that Diane would recommend is asking better or worse? That is pretty neutral. A student can say better or worse and then if it's worse, then you can step away or maybe you want to try a different adjustment if it is better, great, then it improved.

What we don't want to say is does that feel good, or did that feel good, or oh, I bet that feels better, because this puts the student on the spot and they might say yes just because they want to please you as the teacher. Better or worse, not, oh, doesn't that feel good.

Let's talk about teaching modifications. You are working with students in bigger bodies, older bodies, or injured bodies. You are going to need to learn to teach modifications. We are going to discuss some foundations of that and also some ways to use language when teaching modifications.

When we are teaching to a mixed level class we want to feel out how to find modifications or variations on a pose, we can ask ourselves, what is the point of the pose. Why is the pose beneficial? For example, Sun Salutations are pretty ubiquitous in yoga classes. They can also be extremely frustrating for students who are stiff, injured, or in a larger body. As a result, many students who are new to yoga become frustrated almost immediately when Sun Salutations are introduced without modifications because this is the first thing that they are exposed to in a yoga class. This is the warm up. Everybody has to use the Sun Salutation to warm up and so they can't do it. They can't get their hands to the floor. They can't fold because their belly is in the way. They can't step the foot forward. This sparks this inner dialogue of self-loathing that sounds something like, "Oh, I should be able to do this. Look around, everyone else is able to do this. I know my body is too fat, too old, and too stiff to be doing yoga. Everybody else is doing it. This doesn't feel good. I knew it. My body is not right for yoga." On and on. These students leave the class feeling wrong, feeling like their body is a problem, and they don't come back to class.

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When we are teaching Sun Salutations, we can ask, “What is the point of the Sun Salutations?” Here are a few possible answers: open the front body, open the back body, build heat in the body, and learn to coordinate the movement with the breath. It is that first Vinyasa that everybody learns. Prepare the hip, shoulders, and spine for other standing and seated postures. Look at this list of answers.

What else could we do to address those needs? Maybe it is a Sun Salutation. For students in larger bodies, maybe it’s a modified Sun Salutation using blocks under the hands to make more space. Maybe for students who are building strength to bear weight in their arms, it’s leaving out certain poses like downward facing dog. You could try table top or puppy pose instead. Maybe leaving out the lowering down and taking the backbend and instead just substituting a cat cow stretch. Right? It’s getting the same benefit, but it’s just a different pose to address a different ability or a different body size. You could use the Bus Stop Method that Diane teaches about in this course to group related poses together for your students and you can see more about that in other parts of this course.

Maybe it’s something else entirely, like a different series of poses. There are as many Sun Salutations as there are yoga teachers. We have some videos in Module 4 that are going to show you how to teach Sun Salutations in lots of different ways. Nobody is going to call you out for not doing the real, classical Sun Salutation passed down from the ancient yogis if you tailor the sequence to fit your student’s ability. They’re just going to have a good experience in your class. You could apply this what is the point of the pose test throughout your class. You want to have variations on poses in your back pocket so you can pull them out depending on who shows up that day. If you build a class around Sun Salutations and your peak pose is Vashistasana and someone walks in who’s recovering from shoulder surgery, you have a choice. You can teach your perfect planned sequence and you can leave this person feeling left out, feeling frustrated, maybe even hurting themselves, or you can pick a different approach. You can say, okay, what is the point of what I was trying to do today? Right? We are going to build heat, we are going to build strength, and we want to try challenging our balance. Whatever it was, you can pick a different sequence. You can pick a different approach.

Let’s talk about some language that you can use while you are teaching modifications to communicate to your students and to present these modifications in a positive way. We want to talk about the notion of personalized practice. Again, this gives the student agency. You can say things like “make this pose your own”, or “take back your yoga”, or “this is your unique practice.” There are lots of phrases that you can use that will empower your students to have their own personalized practice.

Your language will clue your students in to whether modifications are things that people who can’t do the real yoga, or people that are beginners or losers do, or whether

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modifications are just neutral. They are not beginner or advanced. They are just a variation on a pose. Your language is important when you are teaching this to your students. We want to emphasize permission. Students really know best for themselves what to do and not to do and we need to, as teachers, give them space to trust their instincts. I often will ask my students, “Who is the most important instructor in the room?” The answer is not me at the front of the class, it’s them.

Another tactic for teaching modifications is that at the beginning of class, instructing every student to get the same props. If a student is not educated as to why props are used, which is to enhance alignment and find more space in a pose to make it safer and find more freedom in the pose, then they may view props as a crutch or a cheat or not doing the real yoga. Often, this will cause them to opt out of using a prop or just not ever choosing to use one. Also, if you offer them and only them a prop during a class, that can make them feel self-conscious and less than in comparison to the rest of the class. When you start your entire class out with the same props, you can avoid creating shame in your students by singling out that one student that needs a prop. If the student needs a prop, when you introduce the prop and how to use it, they can choose to use it if it is nearby, without feeling self-conscious about getting up and walking across the room and fetching a prop in front of the whole class.

Just knowing how to modify poses is not enough. We are going to teach you guys a ton of stuff about modifying asana later in this course. That’s not the be-all, end all. Modification introduced in a positive way can be empowering, clarifying, and nurturing to our students. On the other hand, teaching modifications without a critical examination of our language and presentation can leave students feeling singled out, less than, and ashamed. Here are some tips for teaching modifications in your classes and creating a body-positive environment of inclusivity.

When you introduce a pose, first focus on the foundations of the pose: rooting, grounding, the energetic actions of the pose. Then, introduce variations like taking the foot higher, lifting the arms, a bind, all that fancy stuff. That means starting everyone out in the same place and then introducing variations without assigning values, like beginner or advanced, to them. Don’t glorify the full expression of the pose.

Diane has already talked about this in the course and now it bears repeating. We hate this phrase. If we were in person, you’d see me going, full expression of the pose with scare quotes. I don’t use this phrase or the phrase real pose in my classes. I offer variations on a pose and folks get to pick what they want to work on. I get a lot of students in larger bodies and none of them, me included, are ever going to be able to do that thigh, wrappy, tuck your foot thing in Guard Asana. Does this mean we never practice eagle, we never practice Guard Asana? Heck no. When I introduce a pose, it goes something like this.

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Next, we are going to work on Guard Asana. There a lot of places to work here and all of them are going to be hard work, so try one of them and judge where it falls on the balance of effort and ease that we have talked about before. If it feels easy, please maybe try another. If it feels like hard work, then you could work there or pick another variation. No prizes will be given out for picking whichever you think is the hardest or most advanced, so let's go to the wall and start working on eagle. You want to find language that can work for you, but avoid using expressions like "full expression of the pose". Encourage your students to pick their individual, unique variations that the pose is embodied within their own bodies.

You want to find the language that works for you and your audience. For some people, modifications is a perfectly fine word. For other people, it's not going to work as well, so some of us, variations, enhancements, stuff to work on, or places to work. These phrases – this language around modifications – gives students agency to take back their yoga and to pick their variation, their enhancement, their chosen area to work.

I am a big fan of this "places to work" thing. I use this all the time in my classes. When I introduce a difficult pose, one technique is to talk about places to work. That is what we are going to go over. Then you let your students pick. For example, an extended hand to big toe pose, where you are balancing on one leg, and you have the other leg extended with either a strap or you are grabbing onto your foot, you can introduce the pose and tell your students. Usually what I'll do is I'll do the pose myself. I'll say, "Everybody gather around, come off your mats, get close so you can see". I'll demo and then when I send them back to work on it, I'll say, "Okay, you get to pick where you want to work. You can either take it to the wall and you are going to work on finding the shape of the pose, getting really strong through your standing leg, finding more freedom to bring the lifted leg a little higher because you don't have to worry about balance so much when the wall is supporting you. Or, maybe seeing what it's like to take the toe with your peace fingers instead of using a strap.

You could even keep your leg bent with the foot flexed or start to straighten the leg. It's a completely different sensation holding the toe versus holding the strap. Or, you can stand on your mat and work on focusing on your balance, finding your drishti, finding strength and stability in the standing leg and maybe keeping the other knee bent with the foot flexed. Finding an energetic lift from the standing foot all the way up to the crown of the head." You can see, with this technique, you give the students lots of choices. For students who can't do the full expression of the pose and you know I'm putting that in scare quotes. For people who can't do that traditional way that Mr. Iyengar did the pose, or however, they can listen to this list of options that you give them to work on and latch onto one that really speaks to them and say, "Okay, today I'm going to work on finding my drishti. I'm really going to pick a spot to gaze at. I'm going to narrow my focus. I'm

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really going to drill in on that. It keeps them on their mat. It keeps them in their bodies. It keeps them from looking around the room and seeing someone else that is maybe easily throwing themselves into whatever this complicated pose is and gets them into that negative spiral of shame and judgment because their body doesn't do whatever thing. This gives them their agency to claim the part of the practice that they want to work on. I love this technique.

A couple of other things we want to talk about with teaching modifications. Be mindful of body landmarks. If you want to encourage body diversity in your classes, please keep in mind that no two bodies are the same. Using body landmarks as alignment cues can be problematic or confusing for lots of different bodies, but especially for larger bodies. For edification, here are a few common cues that I've heard over the years followed by reasons why I just can't do that in my large body. I've heard stand with feet touching. When I stand with the inside edges of my feet together, the size of my thighs makes my legs internally rotate and my knees knock together. My alignment is not correct. Fold forward until the chest is resting on the thighs. When I fold forward, my belly rests on my thighs, but my chest probably never will. Fold forward and place the hands flat on the floor in Uttanasana. My hands will not go flat on the floor when I just fold forward because my belly hits my thighs. I just can't get down there unless I widen my knees, come forward onto my toes, then really, really deeply through the knees.

You can see these are just three really common examples, but it can be extremely frustrating, problematic, or confusing for students who have non-normative bodies. Then they start to blame the body. They start to think, okay, I'm too big to do this, I'm too stiff, I'm too old, my body isn't right and that is not what we want. Body dysmorphia, or poor proprioception, a sense of the body and space, can play a role here as well. I've cued students to step the feet hip distance apart and seeing more than one student stand with feet as wide as her mat. Now, no one's hip bones are the width of a yoga mat. Either I need to get more clear on my instructions as a teacher or sometimes body dysmorphia is going to come into play with this. Instead of queuing body landmarks think of other reference points you can use to queue alignment. Such as measurements, three feet six inches, places in the room: the ceiling, the front of the room, where the ceiling meets the wall, or the short or the long side of the mat or the body in reference to itself.

Welcome to progressive and inclusive yoga teaching. This has always been the model for yoga for all: making this class accessible, making the practice accessible, and creating tools and strategies for our tool belt as yoga teachers. Let's get started.

One of my favorite ways to teach is called the Bus Stop Method. I learned this method from one of my teachers, Miss Christina Sell. The very first time I encountered this method I felt really, really empowered because I didn't feel pushed to go beyond what

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was available to me. The Bus Stop Method is a great way to teach progressively by offering different shapes and stages of each pose.

Here's how it works: I usually use the analogy of getting on the bus, so inviting your students to get on the bus and letting the first stop on the bus be the easiest or the most available presentation of the pose. To the second stop on the bus we add a little more intensity or a little more sensation, all the way up to the last stop on the bus. This could be anywhere from three stops to ten stops depending on how complicated the pose is and what you want to offer in the pose. Allowing the last stop on the bus to be your final destination or where you're supposed to get to within the pose. This is a great way for making poses accessible in a unique and exploratory way.

Here's the thing with the Bus Stop Method, it requires some planning ahead. When I'm going to offer a new pose in my classes – if I'm teaching a progressive six-weeks series or even if I'm not, if I've created a pose of the week which we often do in the studio where I teach – we offer the pose of the week across all classes. The pose of the week will be offered in the beginner, in the mixed-level classes, in the intermediate classes, and in the advanced classes. A variation of this pose will be offered across-the-board. Sometimes we throw up on our Facebook page, “What are you curious in learning in the yoga practice?” They'll say something like Vasisthasana, or side plank. Trying to figure out how to try to teach that pose progressively or in numerous steps is your challenge as a yoga teacher.

The first thing you want to do is take a look at the pose. We're talking about side plank. There's lots of ways you can create variations of this pose for your students: being the first stop on the bus, being even downward-facing dog, or a three-legged dog, or just hands and knees and one knee down in your Vasisthasana or your side plank variation. Coming to table extending one leg behind you, stacking one hip over the other, keeping your toes on the floor, and reaching your arm to the sky – there's lots of ways to break this down. That's what we want to do when we're getting on the bus.

First of all we want to group similar poses together. For example, here's how I would progressively teach a small asana grouping or a small vinyasa of seated poses: let's say Baddha Konasana or bound ankle pose or butterfly pose, as it's known, is almost a diamond shape made with the legs, you can go from that to extending one leg out and making it Janu Sirsasana which is head-to-knee pose. You can extend both legs out and make it Paschimottanasana, that's a seated forward fold pose. You can ask students to take their legs out wider and make it a wide-legged forward fold. We've gone from butterfly pose all the way to seated wide-legged forward fold pose. You can see how that slowly progresses with the first stop on the bus being Baddha Konasana and the last stop on the bus being Upavista Konasana.

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Here's how I would work triangle: I'm going to go backwards and up instead of coming to full triangle as the final pose. I would start my students off either in a wide-legged forward fold or a Virabhadrasana II, a Warrior II pose. Those two are interchangeable, you can easily transition from one side to the other. From that I would move into Parsvakonasana which is extended side angle either using something as enhancing as a block or the wall. From there I would move into Trikonasana or triangle pose. For me that's the series of difficulty going from Bus Stop I to Bus Stop IV. You're free to experiment with whoever's in your class. Experiment within your own practice to see how you want to approach getting on the bus.

Here's another example for standing poses: starting in Tadasana and then perhaps moving to Virabhadrasana I or Warrior I, or even starting in Tadasana and stepping back to lunge pose. There's always a way to work with that. Anjaneyasana also can slowly be transitioned into a runner's pose or a prep pose for Hanamanasana. You can use blocks to get there. You can encourage people to transition from Anjaneyasana even to a wide-legged forward fold. That's a nice way to do a transition slowly.

I find another way to transition on the bus is Utkatasana or chair pose. The idea here is to group like poses together. The idea also is for me when I'm creating a class for all – for people who may want to move more slowly or may have challenges or in older bodies – is grouping like poses together. For example, I will start in a seated pose for meditation and grounding or I'll do that from a lying position. From lying we might come up to seated. From seated, we will do a lot of our seated poses that are in our warm-up all grouped together. When we come to standing poses, I group all my standing poses together. I will group lunges, forward folds, and Warrior series all together so that we're doing all of our standing poses together. Then I will group all of our balance poses together so that there isn't a constant up and down for people which can be exhausting and can be limiting to some people. It can also be overwhelming to some people.

I've worked with a lot of seniors and people who have had vertigo and the constant up and down can sometimes trigger those types of reactions in their body. When I've done all my standing poses we come back to kneeling poses, we come back to seating poses, and then we come back to lying down. I really make it a priority to group all my like poses together. All standing poses, seated poses, reclining poses, and twists are grouped together in little sections within my asana. I do that by planning my classes and using templates to plan my classes. Well get to that a little later in the slideshow.

Here's an idea of the Bus Stop Method illustrated a little better. We can see in the first bus stop we're either doing a tree pose or a knee-to-chest pose. When I say knee-to-chest, I mean lifting the leg in to the chest or holding the back of the thigh or using a strap to

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modify that pose. We also have the idea that you can place your toes on the floor with your heel at the inside of your ankle. Both feet are on the floor in tree pose and people can work with sensation or work with ideas around that.

Here's another way: from tree pose we can go into Warrior III or standing split with blocks. How I progressively teach that is that we do tree pose and then we rotate the knee forward and take the toes out behind us either using our arms out to the side like an airplane or our fingertips down to the floor for a standing split or Warrior III series. From there I give people the option to either stay at Bus Stop II or move to Bus Stop III-IV which is a standing split with blocks or with both sets of fingertips on the floor or even to start rotating in to half-moon pose. If you let the students take their time, breathe through it, and offer these variations they can choose how they want to customize their practice.

Here's a quick tip for you: make sure you have at least two or three variations for each pose. Work out these variations before you teach them in class so that you can break them down. It's always nice to come to class with a class plan and to have some variations on that class plan but not to be married to the class plan. If it doesn't work out for the class that you had in mind for today, you're easily able to say, "Okay, I'm switching gears." Remember to have two or three variations for these poses and work them out before you come to class.

Here's another way that we can use down dog in a number of different ways. Down dog can be table. Down dog can be child's pose. Down dog can be done at the wall. These are ways that you can create progressive variations for your poses. Now we'll look at breaking those down again in the video portion of this course.

To keep classes flowing continuously while maintaining accessibility, try to minimize the movements of up and down. We spoke a little about this already. Try structuring your classes as I said before. The beginning of the class is all seated or reclining poses. The body of the class is all standing and balance poses. The cooling down returns back to your seated and your reclining poses, as opposed to the constant up and down. I always tell my teacher-training students once we sit down after our pinnacle pose we're not getting up again. There's lots of poses that you can play with and that you can explore while seated or laying on your back.

Class structures and examples of poses, of course we'll look in more detail about this when we come to our video series. Here's technically or generally how a yoga-for-all class looks. We start with the centering in shavasna or seated, then I move to a reclining twist. Perhaps a bridge modified with the block or enhanced with the block. Happy baby, either using a strap or a half-happy baby, alternating these to chest, reclining pigeon, and perhaps half-happy baby, which I already mentioned.

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The body of the class can now move into cat cow; a spinal balance; a downward-facing dog; lunge pose; mountain; chair; chair-twist is always fun; a forward fold; warrior two; wide-legged forward fold; extended side angle; triangle; and then peaceful warrior. You see that you can use all those classes to create a flow. The thing I want you to remember when you're putting these classes together in a flow, slow down.

I remember when I was in teacher-training, one of the things that my teacher-training mentor had said to me is we rush through every part of our lives. Why do we also need to rush through our yoga practice? Give your students time and permission to get into each of these poses.

The cool down, again, we return to what we know. We can return back to cat cow; seated twists; butterfly pose; and all the variations that we spoke about in the previous slide from butterfly pose or body konasana; head to knee pose; forward fold bridge. We've talked a lot about these. Then of course, one of my personal favorites, legs up the wall or a supported inversion, which we'll get to in the video portion of the course.

Here is a class template that I created for myself. I've taken my inspiration from a few different classes I've taken about creating progressive teaching classes and some of the things that I've worked in my own practice. You'll be able to download these templates as part of your extras portion of this course. I really like the idea of theming my classes. I know it's not for everybody and there's always that anecdote to theme or not to theme.

I find theming brings a universal quality to the class. It gives people an opportunity to develop a skill that they may be able to use off their mat. Theming the class around breath or availability to do the poses or about letting go, or things that are really universal. You want to take that common experience and apply it to the group, so that they can identify the yoga practice, not only within their bodies but outside in their everyday lives.

Then if I'm going to be teaching progressively a mixed level yoga-for-all class, I always find an apex or pinnacle pose. I'm traditionally trained as an Anusara teacher and that's one of the greatest lessons I took away from that practice. It's really nice to lead or to go somewhere; that I'm actually going somewhere. It's not necessary, and it's a personal preference for you, but I honestly encourage try and teach a themed class and teaching a class without a theme and see what it feels like. I often get a better response from students who have been to a class that I've themed.

I always have personal notes or anecdotes, or I create a playlist, which I've listened to ahead of time. I have kids so whenever I download tunes from iTunes, I always pick the

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family-friendly version because I never know where this song is going to show up. Then I sequence poses. I write out my sequence to make sure that it works. I practice it on my mat at home, and I have notes for class length.

When do I want to be at pinnacle pose? In a 60-minute class, I want to be exploring pinnacle pose, probably at 30 or 35 minutes into the class, to give people 5 or 8 minutes to actually embody and play with the pose. Where do I want my warm up to end? How long do I want to take for shavasna? What is the messages that I want to impart on my students.

I found the class wave really helpful. If you look to the bottom right of your screen, you'll see a wave there and that's something that you can play with. At the top of the wave is going to be zero minutes and you're grounding and your meditation. At the peak of the wave, a little bit before the peak and a little bit after, is I think the time for people to explore and experience their pose.

What I do is I set a timer for five to eight minutes and I allow students to play a little bit in that apex or pinnacle pose. I call that yogi playtime and I'm going to talk more about it throughout the course. About giving your students permission just to play, and you walking around and offering suggestions and being there to support each other.

What I also find in the yoga classes that I teach is once I give people individual time to play, I find those people who are really interested in playing will take an opportunity to do poses that they're working on. Students start to reach out and help each other, which I think is really interesting and have conversations around what's going on in the practice or what challenges they're having. It really becomes this communal experience, and we can talk about that later. I really always like to give students an opportunity to take their time and their breath and experience the pose.

I've just offered here some templates I've found on Etsy or Pinterest, and I thought these were really interesting templates. You can go to Google and Google yoga templates. If you have any of the Mark Stephens textbooks for teaching yoga, his textbooks also offer templates as well for creating a class, or you can just grab a blank piece of paper and a pencil and set up your own template.

These are just some ideas for creating a class, and for giving you a clear vision of what you're presenting and how you're presenting it. Giving you an opportunity to understand that planning a class makes you look professional, prepared, and helps you to have a class that is more accessible to all. Coming in and winging it a lot of the times, unless you're a super-experienced teacher, for a mixed level class can sometimes be problematic, if you don't have variations or back-ups for the poses that you're teaching. I think the biggest

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lesson here is to come prepared and know what the variations are by sitting on your mat and working them out.

Diane: Welcome to Yogi Playtime! I love yogi playtime. It was a concept that was taught to me by one of my teachers who created the concept of yoga at the wall. She always gave us a few minutes in class to explore, and I thought that was really, really a great way to approach a yoga class. You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation. Play doh, I think that's so true.

Your students get an opportunity to know about themselves, the asana they're working on, how they feel in their bodies if they're given some time to explore. I think it's a really great way to allow students of different abilities to actually do the poses that feel best for them, and to challenge themselves in a practice that may be slower or a little easier than what they're used to.

How do you create yogi playtime in your own yoga classes? It's really very simple, and you have to be okay with people in the room doing different things and you being the monitor or the person holding the energy for safe and effective play. Adding a few minutes of experimental playtime to your class allows your students to really explore their practice on their own. I always love yogi playtime. I love it!

What I usually do is I have a timer on my smartphone and I set a timer for about 6 to 8 minutes, depending on what's going on in my class. I invite students to ask questions and have fun. The only time that yogi playtime becomes a little bit confusing for my students is if A, somebody's never been to my class before and they're not familiar with the concept; B, it's a brand new student and they have no idea what they should be doing during yogi playtime; or C, people aren't actually working on anything, and that makes it actually a little bit easier because I invite them to take an extra-long shavasna instead.

Here's how I set it up. I teach my class. We come to pinnacle pose and then, just maybe a few minutes we start heading to Shavasna or our floor work, I say to people, you're completely warmed up. You've had an opportunity to do a structured flow, now if there's anything that you are dying to do in yoga class. You were sitting at your desk all day at work, or you were at school all day or wherever you were during the day, you were looking forward to your yoga class because there was a possibility you were going to be able to do pigeon, then go ahead and take that opportunity.

If I have newbies in the class or people who are struggling getting into any poses, this is my opportunity to have some one-on-one time with my students and help them achieve the poses that they were looking for. Help them achieve the poses that they're trying to get into and being part of the conversation around how this practice works for them. It's a

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really great time for me to bond with my students, to offer my more advanced students time to play on their mats. An opportunity for me to help a student that may need a little more help without the context of slowing down the flow or bringing attention to them during the middle of class.

What I usually do and what I usually see in yogi playtime is a little bit of everything. Some people take an advantage to do an inversion, which I don't always teach, like a shoulder-stand inversion. I usually teach something that's a little more accessible to people. If people are practicing shoulder stand, it's an opportunity for them to go ahead and do that.

Inevitably, somebody is always working on handstand. We'll see a bunch of people in class doing handstand, and a bunch of people in class just resting. I ask people, if they're going to participate and yogi playtime to keep their awareness on their mat. Keeping in mind that some people are simply inspired by watching other people get into really difficult poses and that can also be educational for them.

What also happens during yogi playtime in my classes is camaraderie. I do have a lot of teachers at my studio that come to my classes. When yogi playtime is presented, sometimes they set up little groups and help students, which in no way makes us feel less than a teacher. It gives them an opportunity to connect with students, and students an opportunity to get to know the teachers in the room.

It doesn't always happen but I'm really grateful when it does. I really make sure that everybody feels supported. Students actually start helping each other I've noticed, with blocks and blankets and bolsters and props, and being encouraging to students who are struggling. I find yogi playtime is a great way to create community.

What you are doing during yogi playtime is that you're being attentive, you're walking around, you're answering questions, and you're letting people just experiment with poses and their body. I did yogi playtime in my class last night and there was a student who was interested in learning how to flip their dog. If you're familiar with a three-legged down-dog into a side plank variation, or a Vashistasana variation and I was able to give them some one-on-one attention with learning that and they were very successful with achieving that. It just gives people an opportunity.

I make sure at the beginning of yogi playtime that I say I am here for you and questions. Again, I use the term, and I've said this before, I'm a full service yoga teacher. I'm here to assist you, so let me know what I can offer you.

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Amber: Avoiding triggers. The greatest weapon against stressors are our ability to choose one thought over another. I know we are all working on this and we are all triggered in our lives one way or another. It's hard to not use language that's triggering, in a yoga class. We come to this practice with all our insecurities and all our baggage that we're working through. Sometimes a simple phrase that you use in the everyday can be hurtful and triggering.

I wanted to just discuss some of the triggers that, perhaps, are a little more common for people to understand. The truth of the matter is you ever never what can be triggering for people, you just don't. It can be songs. It can be language. It can be a smell. It can be a sound. Acknowledge that that may happen, and here are some strategies for working through the triggers.

Some of the common ones for people in bigger bodies is putting focus on their size. There's a whole idea of body shaming and size shaming. People who are in bigger bodies know that they are in bigger bodies and don't need to be constantly reminded of their size. The yoga practice that we are teaching in a yoga-for-all platform or an accessible-yoga platform is not focusing on weight loss and not focusing on changing the size of their body, but focusing on feeling comfortable and active and healthy and loved within that body.

We want to take away this constant focus on size and weight loss during a yoga class. We can get that messaging outside yoga class in everyday culture but it's nice to have a break when you're on your mat, to not be constantly reminded that you are in a bigger body or you're fat or you're curvy. Just to be reminded to come to your breath and stay focused in the practice.

Here's a few things to avoid. Negative language and blaming the body for not being able to achieve certain asana. We've already talked about the full expression of the pose. We are not adjusting the body to fit the pose; we are adjusting the asana to fit the body. Body or fat-shaming language. The example that I use consistently, and I may have already used in this presentation, is people will say things like, "I have my mother's thighs, or my butt's really big or I have a flabby stomach." Things like that, where we're pointing out things we don't like about our body and speaking about our body critically.

We're not here to do that; we're here to have a spiritual experience of self-love. We want to set aside that body-shaming language. I'll give you a few examples of that. Encouraging people to feel the burn. I've had yoga teachers say to me when we're in Utkatasana or chair pose to feel the burn in our thighs, things like that. We don't want to encourage that.

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If you're encouraging people to feel sensation in order to determine if they're going too deep into the practice, then you can say that, but using it as a reference to creating a certain outcome in your body, is not optimal in a class. It's not something that we want to do in a yoga-for-all class. Again, focusing on their size or their shape, that's not something we want to do. We want to focus on what they can do and embrace that and encourage that.

Here's a big one for me. Referencing bikini season. Okay, let's get our arms in shape; let's tone up whatever it is we're toning up because bikini season is right around the corner. That instantly sends me personally into an intense panic. I do not like to be reminded about bathing suit season; there's lots of shame and trauma around not having a bikini-ready body. I'm asking you, in the context of your yoga class, of your yoga-for-all class, of your accessibility-to-yoga classes that we leave our bathing suits for the beach and our talk about bathing suits at the beach and not in reference to doing yoga.

Another one that actually I find problematic too is offering fasting as a healthy weight loss. Unless you're a nutritionist or a dietician, you should not be dispensing nutritional information advice. If people are looking for a weight-loss solution, you need to direct them to the appropriate professional that can help them. We are yoga teachers. We are not doctors and we are not experts in all things yoga, health-related or weight loss.

I have a big problem with offering fasting as a healthy weight loss option. If people want to lose weight, I would encourage them to seek other professionals who are specialized in weight loss. We are not here for weight loss. We are here for spiritual growth and we want to make people feel good in their bodies. If they're seeking out yoga for weight loss, that's another conversation to be had for another day.

Here's a few things to avoid saying in your yoga classes. Bye-bye lumpy, you can fill in the blank here. This will get rid of muffin top. This will target gross flabby arms. These are the things that are body shaming or fat shaming. Can you feel the fat melting away, revealing the real you. Gross is all I can say. The real you is always present and available and we embrace that. Get right of that disgusting pooch or flatten your belly. That's not what we're here for.

We're here to help people get into the poses and feel good about themselves. This type of language has been used in fitness classes since the beginning of time with fitness classes. We don't want to continue to perpetuate that stereotype in our yoga classes. We're creating a space that feels safe and comfortable for all of us. Let's target cellulite. There's no need to hide those legs. These are honestly things I've either heard or seen or witnessed in a yoga class.

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Things you can say in your yoga class. Let's honor our body by breathing deeply. We're here to celebrate who we are and what we can accomplish and how our body feels. When we feel better, we do better. We get stronger through our practice, both physically and mentally. This is true. I think this is a great way to frame what we're doing. Especially if you're holding people maybe in more difficult poses and they may be having a hard time, I encourage you to use that phraseology.

Poses can help relieve back pain or sciatica. I think it's really important when you're teaching your yoga classes to talk about what the poses are doing and how they can help the body. I find when I do that, students are more apt to give the pose a try or they like that information. Giving that information can be very empowering to a student, telling them why they're doing the poses, not simply because you asked them to.

This is my favorite one and I use it all the time. You are exactly where you need to be. I think that's a really powerful statement. It helps people to know that whatever it is that they're doing is exactly right, and we don't have to shame them into trying something they're not ready for.

Grounding yourself to teach effectively takes some time. What I usually do is, I have a whole ritual around teaching, where I get to my class at least 20 minutes early. I set up my meditation cushion in a place where my students can see me, and we always sit for three minutes of meditation. For some people that's absolutely excruciating, and for others it's not long enough, but I feel like it gives students an opportunity to get a little bit of a taste for what they're doing.

I often always say a prayer for my classes before I come to class. I often sit out in front of the studio in my car for a few minutes and say my prayer. When we're having three minutes of meditation, this might be actually what I'm saying in my meditation. I encourage you to set up a little ritual to get yourself, effectively grounded, so that you can offer a really great yoga class and that you're open to seeing everybody, and you're open to the challenge of teaching progressively.

This is the prayer for my classes that I got from one of my teachers and I really love it. Feel free to read it for yourself but I'm also going to read it out loud.

May my vision be tuned enough to know what each student needs.
May my vision be large enough that I can see everyone and help everyone.
May I be a channel for grace to come through me and bless this class.
And may it be an event that changes people's lives and lifts the cloaks that prevents them from knowing their greatness.

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I think that that's an amazing way to set up your class. My yoga teacher, Amy Ippoliti called this [beslafying]. I thought that was really opening yourself up to receiving information, to sharing information, to seeing your students. I find that this prayer almost keeps me accountable for my actions. That I'm actually being a channel to help people find their own greatness and to find this practice that can fit them and that can enhance their lives. I'm here to really lift up a mirror to help them see their own greatness, and I take that very, very seriously, as should you if you're sitting in the seat of teacher. This is something that I find really helpful when I'm getting myself grounded for my classes.

Diane : Congratulations! You've made it to the end of another lesson. Now it's time to reflect on your learning. Something to think about. Why is consent around touch important in your classes? What methods will you employ for obtaining consent around touch? Please visit the forum to share your reflection with other teachers. We also have lots more reflection props that are part of this lesson that will help you to take your learning further, if you like.

Now it's time to take action. Here's a scenario for you to work on. Let's say your student can't bear weight in plank pose and is really discouraged so they start talking along the lines of, "Oh, I'm so weak; I'll never get it. My practice sucks." What can you say to this student? How can you turn this into an empowering moment for the whole class?

Feel free to share your reflection in the forum thread for this lesson. We'll see you in Lesson 3, Creating a Yoga for All Class Part 1. We're going to start putting it together. We're going to talk about setting up for class, warm ups and sun salutations. We'll see you in the next lesson.