

# Foundations of a Yoga For All Class

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YOGA FOR ALL TRAINING



*Ahimsa* is the  
highest ideal. It is  
meant for the brave,  
never the cowardly.

-Ghandi

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# Principles of a Yoga For All class

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- **Agency** - reminding the students that their practice is their own, and they are the ones that hold the power
- **Consent** - consent (especially around touch) is paramount, and goes toward agency
- **Permission** - encouraging students to give themselves permission to be okay with where their body is today





# Check against *ahimsa*

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- These foundations are all based in the yogic principle of *ahimsa*
- *In the presence of one firmly established in non-violence (non-harming), all hostilities cease.*
- We are striving to create a space where students can be safe, welcome and where hostilities they face in fitness environments cease
- My yoga mat is where I have a cease-fire zone with my body
- We need to be able to take up space, and we can also encourage our students to embody their own personal power



# Creating a culture of agency and permission

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- When working with students (but especially marginalized students), agency is paramount, and in my opinion, is a required prerequisite for “practicing the Yoga” (as opposed to just stretching together for an hour).
- Agency is understanding what is going on in your body (and your life), and believing that you have some control over what you do with your body (and by extension, your life). Agency = personal power
- Agency creates a sense of safety in the body. Feeling safe means we can start the journey of turning inward (practice Yoga). The way we build community in our yoga classes gives us the ability to create safe containers for folks to feel into their agency and learn to listen to their bodies.

# Creating a safe container for agency

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- Students take ownership of their practice and their bodies (culture of consent)
- They understand and learn what is going on inside their own bodies (interoception, proprioception, nociception, DISCERNMENT)
- Our students identities are honored: no “parts of themselves” left outside the door in order to belong here
- They have permission to give themselves permission (to be where they are today, to have an experience in their body without striving or attaining, to take rest if needed, to push themselves if a challenge would benefit them)
- They can choose where they want to focus or work (rather than competing)
- They have the tools to personalize their practice for their own bodies

**How do you know that a space  
is safe / you belong there / it's  
safe for you to be yourself /  
you're welcome there?**

**And how do you know it's not?**

Physical space / language / other people / something else?

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# Creating a Culture of Consent

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# Inquiries around adjustments and touch

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Should we be touching or adjusting our students?

- Have I exhausted other ways of teaching?
- Is it necessary for safety?
- Is it clarifying in some way?
- Is it nurturing?
- Do I have consent?

# Creating a culture of consent

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- The ethical burden is on us as teachers to obtain consent (not on the student)
- Giving consent puts the student's practice back into their own realm of responsibility
- Gives students agency both on and off the mat
- Keeps everyone safer



# Consent should be:

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- Embodied / enthusiastic: the absence of no is not the same as yes
  - Ongoing: how are you checking in throughout?
  - Informed: do they know what they're saying yes to?
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# Consent in person

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- Set expectations at beginning of class
  - Will there be hands-on touch?
  - Will you be walking around?
  - What about masks?
  - Don't forget to update your waivers
- Ideas for obtaining consent
  - Consent cards
  - Ask every time
  - Step into space / no sneaking
  - Ask for feedback (better or worse?)
  - Global vs. specific instructions



# Consent online

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- Set expectations at beginning of class
  - How will you handle assists? What's your plan to not make it feel like a call out?
  - Dialog with students about what they need to be supported in class.
  - Will you be asking students to come on the video or microphone?
  - Will this class be recorded? Where will it be distributed?
- Cueing vs. demonstrating
- Don't forget to update your waivers or emails



# Setting expectations in class

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- Ask about injuries and ask for more info: It's okay to talk about bodies, bodies don't have to be in perfect working order
- “Listen to your body” is too simple
  - Students might not be attuned to body sensations
  - Sometimes injuring ourselves doesn't “hurt”
  - Relationships to pain
  - Ego, baggage around “pushing through”
  - Wanting to please a teacher
  - Peer pressure to “keep up”
- Make community agreements
  - No suffering: talk about sensations
  - No judgment: don't compare yourself to others
  - Permission: no medals are given out for doing every pose, normalize opting out or taking a variation





# Larger bodies in asana: what's going on?

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- I'm running into myself (especially in forward bends and twists)
- My center of mass is different than yours
- I am still building strength, skill, or muscle memory (just like some of your smaller-bodied students)
- I need more time for transitions
- My nervous system is activated or guarded because of trauma in fitness environments
- Limb proportion, height





# A few strategies to try

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- Find alternatives to sitting on the floor
- Slow down transitions and teach transitions as a skill
- Teach the skill of getting up and down off the floor
- Stuff running into other stuff? Take space, make space will get you a long way

