

Hey, everyone. Welcome to the power of language module. So, this one has been one module that really is near and dear to my heart, because language is everything. It determines our point of view. And I want to share with you how language can really inspire our students, make them feel welcome, create equitable spaces, and that we want to be mindful, consistent and intentional with our language. So language is power, in ways more literal than most people think. When we speak, we exercise the power of language to transform reality. Why don't more of us realize the connection between language and power?

So the topics we'll cover in this module are, why speech matters, creating a cease-fire zone. And I had a moment, like a pause with the word cease-fire when I think of everything that's going on in the world, but it still resonates with me. I still think it's useful language in that we want to really talk about the battle that we have with our bodies, the fight that's forever going on internally, externally for our bodies not showing up in a way that we expect them to show up, or our limited views of how our bodies perform. Our impact versus our intent, and I've got great stories for that because our impact is always way more detrimental or inspiring than our intent, right? We intend to do this, but our impact was that. Limiting beliefs and setting expectation, empowering language, do's and don'ts, what you say is important, and reframing our language. And then at the end, reflections and contemplations. There's always that.

Okay. The power of language. So we want to create a brave, impactful space that inspires and lifts people up. My first experience in a commercial yoga space, forever I was practicing here in my home, actually upstairs, practicing in what I would call non-traditional yoga spaces. So I was practicing at the community center. The very first time I stepped onto the mat, which I think in a public space was like 1999, I want to say, maybe 1998, somewhere in and around there, like in a actual yoga space. Prior to that, I had been practicing at home. So that was the very first time.

But my subsequent time in like an actual yoga studio was met with some pretty negative language. I stepped up to the front desk, about six weeks postpartum, very emotional, first time away from both of my children, a much needed break. I remember my husband said to me, "Go out and take a break. You're tired and you need to do something for yourself." So I went out and took a yoga class only to be treated as if I didn't belong there and I wasn't welcome. So I went to sign in at the front desk, the teacher who was signing us in, gave me the once-over and said, "You know this is going to be hard, right?" As if to imply that because of the size of my body, that I wasn't going to be able to keep up. And it wasn't the size of my body that kept me from keeping up, it was the fact that I wasn't familiar with the practice I signed up for.

I picked a class that fit into my schedule, that my husband could manage the kids for a couple of hours. I had fed my baby because I was nursing at the time, and I had like a two-hour window. And this was the only thing that fit into that two-hour window that I could do. And that whole reaction to me, and the way in which that person spoke to me was a powerful force to let me know that I wasn't welcome here simply based on what I looked like. And then when I stepped into the space, they were teaching some kind of Short Form Ashtanga that I wasn't familiar with. I had been practicing very gentle practices. I had been practicing more of a Sivananda Hatha-based practice. So I wasn't 100% up to the flow part of it, and I didn't know what the primary series was. And that made the teacher incensed.

And as I'm practicing in class and trying to keep up, because it had been a solid probably six or seven weeks, probably longer since I had been on my mat, and I wasn't familiar with Short Form Ashtanga, the teacher was saying things in class like, "Your practice isn't just your own, it influences and impacts other people and if you don't know what's going on, you shouldn't be in this class." And she was saying all these really horrible things. And I was the odd person out in that class, right? I was the one person who wasn't a regular. And so I knew that language was directed at me. So being emotional, being

postpartum, all those things, my practice wasn't one about healing or feeling good or getting time away. It felt very shaming. And I remembered that experience because that was the experience that catapulted me into teaching a more equitable and connected practice.

So it's whenever I think of it, I always get triggered, but it was a really hard thing to go into a yoga class to heal and to run into a teacher that was more concerned about an aesthetic than how people were feeling in the practice, and really verbalize that with language. So consider the powerful force of words we speak when interacting with each other through vulnerable spaces. We want to choose words and speak carefully, right? So that was a vulnerable space for me. And the words that they chose for me were very hurtful. So I didn't go back to that studio until I had my own studio several years later to see if anything had changed. Because whenever I go to a studio, I'm looking for the ways that we interact with each other and how we're treated especially if we come from historically excluded identities, how we're treated in these spaces.

To create a cease-fire zone, our language must be clear, thoughtful, concise, and helpful. Right speech is important. Be kind to all, speak words that are beacons of inspiration, enthusiasm, and encouragement to all. Kind and sweet words are always music to the listener's ears and it helps us connect with our humanity and our empathy. So there could have very well been a way to make me feel less out of place, but I think the intention was for me to never come back to that space, and they fulfilled that intention through their language.

So as teachers, we want to leave a positive impact on our students, we want to support our students and make them feel seen and welcome, and manage expectations and keep them realistic. So what is our impact versus our intent? And I'll tell you a story I had. Earlier in the year, I did a workshop for an embodied social justice program. So it was a program helping people to figure out how to find their way through the world of social justice. And I was invited with my friend Melanie to speak on body image. And I've used part of that presentation in our presentation around body image, in the conversation around body snarking and body shaming. So that was part of our conversation. And we were speaking in broad terms about people being shamed in their bodies. They didn't have to be a particular gender. And I made the mistake with my own language because I was unclear and unsure. So when I started speaking, I was talking about how women are often harder on each other around body image. Like there's a lot... That was the body snarking and shaming.

And I was also talking about how the media picks apart celebrities. And at the time, an unedited photo of one of the Kardashians had managed to hit the airwaves. And they were pretty upset that it had hit the airwaves and they were threatening to sue anybody who had hands on this particular picture, which really was not a bad picture. It was a real picture, right? It was an unedited picture. But of course that was a problem in the current world of social media and reality TV. And so, I use that example of how impactful body image is and how much it rules our lives. It's what other people think of us. And so, when I was speaking at this conference, I was using the terms women and people who identify as women. In my own brain, I thought to myself, great. I am being really inclusive in my language. I am making sure that I just am not talking to women, because that was the topic of the day, but I was also talking to trans women, see my trans sisters. I'm out here for you. I think we're all sisters, whatever, whatever.

And then as I'm going through this, I'm getting all these comments in the Zoom feed. And when I do a Zoom presentation, I generally don't look at the comments feed just because I get distracted from what I'm talking about. I get caught up in the comments and I get off track and all the things. So then in the comments, this comment kept coming up and coming up and coming up. And so, finally the person un-muted themselves and said, "You need to saying women and people who identify as women, because it's low key transphobic." And I was like, oh, I felt my heart just like drop out of my chest, because it was not my intention. My intention was to make the trans community know that I see them and I

understand the impact of body snarking and shaming and all the things that that is part of the human experience. And so that's why I was saying that. And I didn't realize that my intent to make sure that everybody was included, turned out to be impactful in a way that was negative.

And so, whenever that happens to you, when you get called in, called up, or called out in these situations, I really want you not to personalize it. You made a mistake. Somebody is educating you on that mistake. You might not agree with the way that they educate you, but it would do you well to use your yoga practice and just pause, right? Take that moment to pause, close your lips and just listen to the person who's explaining to you why this is not the right thing to do or why that this has a very difficult impact. And then you can say, instead of saying, "Well, I didn't mean it that way and you're picking on me and oh my gosh it's terrible." That's not what's happening. Somebody has gotten triggered and they're doing the hard emotional labor of telling you about that trigger and how you're showing up in the world where your intent is different than your impact. And what really counts in these moments is our impact more so than our intention.

So when you were called in, called up, set aside, don't take it so personally, right? Try not to take it so personally. I don't want to tell you what to feel and not to feel, but I want you to remember that people who are sharing their lived experiences with you or who are directly impacted by this work, have had to wait a long time to be able to express themselves, have had to wait a long time to feel in a brave or safe space to say, "Hey, wait a minute. That's not how we want to be referred to as. This is not the narrative we want to set. And people who are at outside of that community don't get to read or set the narrative for us. That time has changed." So I want you to remember that, so when you were told that your impact was problematic or was not received well, but your intention was from the right place, that doesn't actually matter anymore, because your impact matters more than your intention.

So I took the opportunity to listen, I apologized profusely, and then I made a second mistake. I said, "I must admit, I have a lot of blind spots around this content. And my intentions were to make sure that I wanted everybody to feel seen." So I said blind spot, and of course you can't say that either because that also is considered not right speech, not proper speech, derogatory speech, it's not appropriate. It's not an appropriate term anymore. So what I can say is, I didn't have a full understanding of this situation, I'm uneducated in this moment, or I lack understanding, instead of saying blind spot, because that's now language that we're no longer using.

Having said that, language is changing so rapidly. As I share this language module with you today, September 2021, whenever you have an opportunity to listen to this, language may have changed again. Language may change next month. Language may change next year. So this is a topic that is completely and always evolving. So we have to take it upon ourselves to stay informed, to stay connected, and if are not sure how somebody wants to be addressed, you ask them. They get to make the determination of how they want to be addressed and they get to write their own narrative. No matter how your feelings arrive, they get to be their own person because for so long, they haven't been included and now they feel powerful to speak their truth.

And if we are good yoga teachers, good yoga practitioners, good yoga communities, we walk in Ahimsa, nonviolence. And that's allowing people to be referred to and identified the way they want to be identified or referred to. And they have their own set of language that makes them feel comfortable that we may not be aware of because we're not part of that community. Or that language might be reserved for that community, and as an outsider to that community, we are not entitled to use that language. I know this is going to be hard for folks who have never had limits on how they can interact with folks, just because that has never been on their radar. And I know that's hard for people, but the world is changing and people are looking for equity and this practice is about creating that equity. So

your impact versus your intent is important and it happens with the most powerful force we have known to humankind, which is language.

All right. Here's a few things I would like us to stop saying in yoga classes. Using the phrase, the full expression of the pose. I was just recently in a yoga class and somebody used this, and I could feel my face utterly cringe. I'm one of those people that everything that happens shows up totally on my face. And what that often envisions for me when I hear the full expression of the pose is somebody very able-bodied, very physically attractive, and young and hypermobile doing some kind of performative pose on the front of a magazine cover. So let's be honest, when we've been looking at yoga books throughout the world and throughout time, I'm looking for yoga books here. I have all like accessible and adaptable yoga books.

So I don't have a typical yoga book that we've seen in the past where everybody is the same size, everybody has a very similar body aesthetic, everybody is either able-bodied or incredibly flexible or incredibly mobile or a lot of people, you very rarely see a person of color represented in these, seminal textbooks that we've been using in 200-hour teacher trainings, probably for the past 40 years. They all look very much this same, right? When you look through the poses and when the poses are being cued, when there's the list of instructions on how to cue the poses, we're queuing poses for flexible, smaller bodied, sometimes hypermobile, usually women, right? Usually women, not always, but usually women.

So the language we use to cue those postures are very specific to a particular body type. And that full expression of the pose is always the most hyperextended or the most powerful version of this pose. And so what bubbles up when I particularly hear a phrase like that is, oh, I will never be able to do that, or I could do that 10 years ago, or what am I supposed to do now, or I shouldn't be here, or look at that person over there doing that pose. It becomes a whole what I call downward spiral into my own insecurity on the mat. And what I would like us to do is start saying, try to explore this posture in a way that feels good in your body or come into your own individual expression of the pose, because that is going to change from day-to-day, from moment to moment. There is no full expression of the pose. There is your expression of the pose. There is a traditional expression of the pose and it's going to look different in all kinds of bodies.

Some people are going to use walls and chairs and blocks. Some people are going to do it on the floor, seated. Some people are going to do it standing. And as yoga teachers, we want to be okay to use encouraging language to allow people to have their experience of the practice, not to have what we think they should be doing in the practice, right? Not setting up our own expectations on them. So we want to give our students access to their own bodies to explore it, explore asana in their own way, through the power of language. And that's where phrase is like, come to your own individual expression of the pose comes from. Do what feels best in your body. Take this opportunity to explore of this asana. Let's take a deep breath and start again, as opposed to, and now come to the full expression of the pose. That doesn't work anymore and I think that creates an unrealistic expectation for most people in the class, when perhaps 2% or 3% of the class could maybe do that expression of the pose.

So here is a friend of mine, Shannon known as Fringe-ish on the Interweb. So you can find her on Instagram she's a big TikTok star. And she was very gracious in letting me use her photo, which I pulled right off her Instagram, showing you the full expression of the pose versus your expression of the pose. So in the top illustration, the top photograph, we have Shannon in what is traditionally thought of as warrior two, right? I like that she's got a wider stance in her feet, because if you look at where her front heel is, I think that's her left heel in relationship to her right foot, she's moved her body a little wider to give space. She's got her arms floated out into T. She's bending her knee over her ankle. And so, when we're looking at this pose in a bigger body, the knee over the ankle is where the alignment point is, as

opposed to saying to people, "Bend your knee into a square." That's going to look different in bigger bodies. Bodies that have fuller thighs or fuller calves, it's going to look a little bit different.

But what I love about this pose is how strong she looks in the pose and how it's adapted for her even though it's the traditional representation of this pose. You can tell by the way her feet are slightly staggered, that right foot's a little bit more further. So now when we look down into the bottom two photographs, the one on the left, where she's using both a chair and a block, and I even see that her hands back toward the wall a little bit. So even if she was using her hand on the wall to steady herself, that's fantastic. So we see what a pose looks like. If you have a student that doesn't have the strength to hold themselves up or stand for long periods of time, or may need a chair for stability, or maybe they're dizzy, or you're teaching a chair flow.

So that's what it looks like in the chair. You can see that front knee, which I still think is her left knee is still over her ankle. It's elevated with the block. I would even go so far as to put a block underneath the back leg, but this looks fantastic and looks really supported. And then a third option is to sit on the ball. And what I like about this option is the ball gives you the opportunity, and this is the language I use, the opportunity to play a little bit with balance, because the chair is going to be stable, you can even press the chair up against the wall for more stability, but the ball is going to give you a little bit of wiggle room. So it's still challenging for the practitioner who may not be able to stand up for long periods of time to have the ball as an option. And even if you notice that front knee's in a little bit different of a bend in both the chair and the ball, and it just gives you a different range of motion.

Another way that you could present this particular pose is to have your student closer to the back of their mat, closer to the wall, because sometimes standing in front of something like a wall or a tree or a chair, something that's really grounded and heavy, can give you a sense of steadiness. And so, this is what I love about exploring the pose in your body and giving your students the language, whether it's a visual language or a verbal language of how to show up in the body. And this gives me lots of joy when I look at this type of photograph.

So when we are working to encourage our students to come to know themselves through possible phrases, I like to say, feel, when you're stretching your fingertips out, feel the air between your fingers. Let's explore muscle energy by pushing down and wide into the legs. Feel the experience you're having in your shoulders. Engage your breath as you're breathing. Accept that this is good enough right here, that there's no need to push further. So these are all wonderful words. Embody. Be curious about what your body can do. I invite you to fold forward. When you fold forward, find first sensation. This is your adventure, so choose it.

So choose your own adventure was a phrase that I borrowed from Kylie Wagner, who is a handstand coach on TikTok and on Instagram. "And I took a handstand class with him at the beginning of the pandemic, with my intention to do a handstand by the time I was 50. Well, I'm 51 now and I still haven't done a handstand like in the middle of the room. I can do it at the wall and things like that. That was in my intention during the pandemic and I'm still working on it. And maybe I'll get it. And maybe I won't. And that's my santosha. I'm okay if I never do a handstand in the middle of the room. But anyway, I love the phrasing when he was training us how to do a handstand and encouraging us to feel what feels right in the body was, choose your own adventure. So what happens is when you offer your students a number of different opportunities to play in the pose, it becomes their own adventure. It becomes their own customized practice.

Another one I've been using a lot lately is, here's an opportunity to explore whatever it is you're exploring. So often if I'm inviting students to come to the wall for balance, I will say, "If you want an opportunity to work on your balance, let's come to the wall. If you feel like you want to stay on your mat, this is great." So it's very invitational to allow people to come to the wall and it feels less like, "Oh,

you don't have great balance? Well, maybe you should go to the wall." Instead of, "We have lots of opportunities to be at the wall and to play with asana."

Learn empowering words that encourage your students to feel good and safe in their own bodies, because this is a lot of the work that we're doing in the asana practice in the 21st century in a modern postural yoga is undoing or unlearning some of the language that has been taught to us for the last 40 or 50 years around not trusting our bodies, around seeking a perfect aesthetic, around our bodies not being good enough because they're a certain size or a certain shape or a certain or on a gender spectrum or whatever it is that alienates us from what is considered the norm, is that we are shifting what is norm, right? We're removing that kind of language so people get the opportunity to explore who they are without judgment and without confusion hopefully. Not from us anyway.

Avoid placing judgements and expectations on your students. And so, often we'll say in like a wide legged forward fold, you should be feeling stretch in your hamstrings, maybe your calves, maybe your low back. You may have a student that has a lot of hypermobility in their hamstrings. I do. I have a lot of hypermobility in my hamstrings, but not a lot of strength. And so when I fold forward, I don't necessarily always feel it in my hamstrings. I most definitely always feel it in my glutes and in my low back, but we set the expectation that I should be feeling it there. So because I think I should be feeling it there, I'm now looking for ways to engage sensation that might not always be correct for me or safe for me, like taking my feet out wider or pushing my hands out wider, trying to figure out how to feel that stretch, when maybe that's not what I need to be feeling, right?

Maybe that's not the best way to explore something. So what I say to my students when they do these poses, I say, "Tap into where you're feeling sensation. Give yourself the opportunity to breathe into the space. Notice how this feels in your body. Please stop at first sensation." And it allows your students to have their own experience of the asana, okay? And that's what I say here. Allow your students to stay with their first sensation and if they want to add more tiny increments, it's like step by step slowly we're moving through the practice. Remember, as teachers and practitioners, we're holding the space, we're in community and collaboration with our classmates, whether we're online or in person, allowing them to grow and learn in their own way, without us pushing our expectations on them or making judgements about them or allowing them to make judgements about themselves.

And this is something that happens for me a lot of the time where I'm in a pose, I'm like, oh, 10 years ago, I used to be able to this, that or the other. And it's currently a battle I have going on with myself when I'm running. There was a time in my life when I could run 6.2 miles in 55 minutes. Those days are sadly gone. I think the most I can run is probably about 8K in an hour. And I have to be okay with that, right? I have to be okay with that because our body's still moving, my body's still showing up for me, but things are slightly different. And this idea that we have to stay youthful forever, that we have to hack age, that we're supposed to look like we are like 39 for the rest of our lives, it's a ridiculous notion. So it's important that we don't compare ourselves to our previous practice, whether that happened a day ago or 10 years ago, or comparing our older self to our younger self can always have this downwards viral effect.

So, I'm always telling myself that it's not a competition. So it's important that we're not making comparisons to ourselves at different stages in our life or even comparisons to each other, right? Not putting out the most flexible person in the room and comparing ourselves to them when we don't know that they've had a gymnastics background or they've had a skating background or whatever the background that they have might be, we really, really want to make sure that we are giving our students the tools, if you will, to have their own practice, right?

All right. This is a big one. Don't overshare. And I'm still working on that, but I want you to remember that your students are not your therapist. So I once had a yoga teacher who was going through a divorce

and she would come into class and like dump her whole life at the feet of her students. And her students loved her so much that they would be giving her advice and counseling. People are coming into the yoga space for their own healing and it's not up to you to be sharing too much about your life. If you want to share an antidote or an example, or a metaphor that will help them find the pose in their body better, or a funny story that makes them feel less embarrassed about falling out of a pose, that's relatable and that's cool, but sharing elements of your personal life in a yoga class or cutting up other teachers or anything like that is not appropriate and doesn't create an equitable space. It puts the pressure on your students to be there for you, where you should be there for your students.

Here's the other thing that's kind of hard, be adaptable and open to receiving feedback. People always have something to say, and it's actually the nature of the human being to complain, right? And that's fine. So people have feedback for you. I always take it and figure out if it's useful to me, like your music is too loud or too fast, I had a hard time getting into a pose from here, I couldn't hear you clearly. I always like to take whatever feedback I get and see where I can apply to my class.

If it's feedback that's not useful, then I just let it go. But if it's feedback that I think can help make me a better teacher, I always am open to hearing it and I don't get defensive or upset. I was like, "Oh, thank you for sharing that." I'll take that under consideration whether I do or not. I just think people are mostly trying to be helpful, some people just want to complain, but I want you to give yourself an opportunity to hear what your students might be offering you that can help make you a better teacher in your queuing, in your listening, all the things that help you connect with your students.

Okay. What you say matters. This is a big one. And as we continue to evolve with gender and the world continues to learn about all the different narratives that we haven't had an opportunity to be exposed to, we want to be careful to remove gender-specific language from our teaching. We have learned so much about gender over the past five years, how much that has changed and how that binary gender norm has been something that we've been taught and it doesn't serve us, right? And for so long, people have been living in a place where they feel they can't be themselves. And now we're inviting them to come to yoga and be themselves. So we want to be very careful that we're not using gender-specific language. If we step into a classroom and everybody looks to be a woman and we go, "Hey ladies," or whatever it is that we say, we are not being sensitive to who might be in the room, who may not identify under those terms.

One thing I'm having a really hard time watching in my language is saying, "Hey, you guys." So lately, I don't know about anybody else, but where I grew up in Ontario guys was not a gender term. It was a non-gender term. It just meant everybody in the room. And we used it interchangeably with any gender. I've heard a lot of people say that it is specific to the male, somebody who identifies as male, or it feels like a gender conforming language. So, I've had a really hard time catching myself in Hey, you guys. I've had so many people say how much they hate it. And so, now I'm always trying to find better ways to express, identifying and including people. So I say things like, all you all, which I got from Amber. I don't know that I do it justice because I don't quite have the Southern accent that makes it sound so warming and welcoming. So I always say, "Hey, good people." That was something I borrowed from the comedian, Tony Baker, or "Hello, beautiful and wonderful humans. Hello, beautiful stars. Hey, everyone. Hey, everybody."

So really we want to be sure that we are using gender neutral language when we're speaking, and that we know that everybody can do anything they want, and we want to be really cognizant of allowing people to be exactly who they are and not pigeon-holding people with old language that no longer represents everyone who's in the room. We also want to stay away from slang or stereotypes that cause offense. And I'll never forget, I took a yoga class in Minneapolis with a friend of mine, Carrie. And the yoga teacher got up at the front of the room and said, "All men have tight shoulders." Well, my friend

Carrie was a long distance swimmer in college and she's always had tight shoulders and powerful shoulders from swimming. And she found that term really offensive implying that women don't have tight shoulders, right? And making a very specific generalization about a specific gender. Anybody can have tight shoulders. And I've seen men with flexible shoulders. So let's move away from those problematic stereotypes, all people do this, all people do that, right?

And we also want to stay away from slang we do not understand, right? We don't want to be using colloquialisms from other people's cultures or linguistics that we don't understand. If we are not a part of that culture, we don't want to insert ourselves there and then make reference to things we don't understand, because it really makes us look like we don't care. It minimizes the person from within that cultural group or that ethnic group. And it really makes us look entitled, that we can just slide into people's heritage and pick up their colloquialisms or pretend to be part of that culture when we're not, right? It's not right and it's actually pretty cringy. So be careful, right? We want to make sure that we're honoring and not appropriating things as we move through these spaces of healing and vulnerability.

Know your music you're using and what messages are expressed in the music. Yeah. So make sure, if people are actually listening to the music, you want to make sure that the music isn't sexist or homophobic or racist or any of those things. I actually did a playlist for my power and flow class last week, and I put Justin Bieber's song Peaches in it. And there's, I guess there was a clean version for the radio, and there's the version on Spotify that I just clicked on it and put in my list. And as I'm listening to him sing, I'm thinking, perhaps not the best version of a song to put in a public class with all kinds of different people in that class. I just thought, well, Justin Bieber, it'll be a nice pop song.

And so, it was really important for me to realize that and I had my son put together a really cool R&B playlist for me. And then I had to go back and make sure that it wasn't explicit and it wasn't peppered with the N word, because that can be extremely uncomfortable for me and anybody else in the room. And I just think it's banned all around. So make sure when you're listening to your music that it's appropriate and that we're not using music that might be harmful or we're not using artists that have done crappy things, that you're in the middle of a downward facing dog and you hear the song and you're triggered into a situation that takes you away from your peace. So let's remember that peaceful and equitable language is best.

And that's something I've been working on to change. I'm not really sure I'm a fan of the word inclusive anymore. Inclusive to me still feels like they're gatekeepers deciding who gets included and who doesn't get included. So I really prefer the language equitable language, right? Things that you're interacting with people in the way they wish to be interacted with. That you are not making assumptions about their gender or their culture or their likes and their dislikes. That if we don't know how to refer to somebody, we simply ask them how they would like to be referred to, how they would like to be called, what they would like to be called. And that we're very sensitive to what it is that they need in this moment, right?

Words you can also avoid is can't and you should. And that goes back to, you should be feeling it here. The can't phrase I'm often curious about in terms of when we're teaching asana saying things like, "If you can't reach the floor, if you can't do this, if you can't do that, if you can't do that," when we're trying to create these more equitable classes in addressing poses that might be difficult in certain body types. When I start hearing can't, can't, can't, can't, can't, can't, can't several times in a class, then I start to feel like I shouldn't be in that class, right? If I can't do through or four of the poses that people are instructing me to do, then maybe I don't belong in this practice and maybe this practice isn't for me.

So instead of using the word can't, you can say things like, try exploring using blocks under your hands to bring the floor closer to you. Or you can try adding this to your practice, placing your foot on the wall to give you more stability. And perhaps you're feeling this particular stretch here and here, but you may



also be feeling it in other part of your body, and I want you to take an opportunity to breathe into those spaces. I often say things that I've learned from Louise Green of Big Fit Girl, and she says, "It's not all or nothing, it's all or something."

And I find that phrase really resonates with my students when I tell them, here's some opportunities to explore this pose. You're okay to explore whatever part of this pose you want. And even if you just do it a little bit, it completely and utterly counts. We're here to appreciate the bodies that we're in and the yoga asana practice to me is more of a celebration and a love song. If you will, to my body for showing up for me today in whatever way it's able to connect with me. And I'm just grateful for whatever movement I can get. And that's something that always think about, that it's really a privilege to be able to ask your body to do certain things and for the most part, to have it do those things with little pain or little effort. And that's something that I think we take for granted, but we are so quick to dismiss our bodies when they don't look a certain way and they don't perform a certain way.

So I would like to change that narrative, that language, that internalized language that we have with our bodies around being upset that it doesn't look this way and doesn't perform this way and start being joyful for the things that it does do for us and the experiences it allows us to have. So always remember, students are either empowered by your language or devastated and shamed by it. And we get to choose as teachers how we want to show up for our students.

Okay. Reframing the language around modifications of poses involves, looking at those modifications as enhancements or refinements. If you are okay with the word modification and your classes are okay with those words, then by all means, share those words. But often people feel less than with the word modification, that perhaps they're not really doing the practice, they're only doing the modified and they're not as good as the others, that's sometimes something that shows up in the practice. And what we want to do is really reframe our feelings around modifications or variations. I've heard modifications referred to as boundaries. And I don't know about you, but I can always use more boundaries. That's something I'm constantly working on in therapy. And it's a long journey into creating boundaries that help you feel safe and protected and allow you to operate in a way that feels free. Believe it or not boundaries add freedom, right? And the freedom not to harm yourself, the freedom to enjoy the posture in a way that's accessible to you, and a freedom in a way that gives you reinforcement and strength.

So boundaries, in a sense are cool, right? So those modifications or boundaries to keep your body safe and enhance the practice that you have. We'd also like to see props as a tool, a tool like... You wouldn't use a ballpoint pen or an ax to... Or sorry, a ballpoint pen or a baseball bat to cut down a tree, you would be more advantageous to use an ax. So when we're looking at how do we find a more accessible place to explore triangle, for example, or even child's pose, which can be very, very difficult for a lot of people, adding props to those kinds of poses can give us more opening in triangle. Especially if you have arms like me, which tend to be a little on the shorter side. My proportions are, my arms are a little bit shorter than my legs. So when you see of those open poses like Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana, it's impossible for me to perform that pose because my arms and my legs don't have that same proportionality. And of course, there's my torso that speaks to that.

And so, if you ever do see me in those poses, it doesn't look as elegant or regal as people whose proportions are a little bit higher and their toe is all the way up here. It's just not going to happen in my body. And if you do see my toe up there, I'm like leaning way to the side in order to create that space or that length. And I can assimilate into that pose through using the wall, putting my leg on the wall and having that experience or using a strap, and I own the fact that my arms are just not long enough and no amount of yoga is going to make my arms longer. So there's no point in blaming my body for not doing

the pose the way it looks in the book or the way it looks on somebody else who has different proportions than I do. And it's important to name that when we're teaching.

So whenever I'm teaching and I demo splits, which is very rare and I easily get into the splits, I tell people, "Don't be impressed by this. I have flexible hamstrings because my dad and my mother have flexible hamstrings and their parents have flexible hamstrings." I come to this posture from genetic privilege, right? And so what I really do need to work on is more strength. As much as my hamstrings are flexible, they're not very strong. So to stop blaming our bodies, that's a big thing to work around because we've been trained not to trust our bodies. We've been trained to look for an idealized body.

And when we don't see our bodies living up to that idealized creation that is mostly framed around marketing and media and pretty pictures, we start blaming our bodies for not showing up in those ways, instead of appreciating our bodies showing up as they are. So we have to talk about that, we have to name that, we have to encourage people to understand that blaming your body is not allowed, that everywhere else in the movement world there's some kind of shaming or blaming that's happening in moving the body, or that has been that case in the past. We have seen that in the past. I think it's changing now, but we need to tell people, or we need to some way articulate that kind of language into our teaching so people can stop blaming themselves and start enjoying the movement that they can in their bodies.

So changing your language around talking about the body, no blame and no shame, that we're all in this and learning together. I have the gift of the gab, so this first point was something my yoga teacher said to me in my first 200-hour teacher training. She said, "What are some of the things that Dianne can leave out of her instruction?" And as an accessible and adaptable yoga teacher, you are going to talk a lot more in your poses, right? But you also need to listen more. And sometimes that listening, and this is going to sound strange, sometimes that listening's going to come with your eyes. That watching and listening for people's reaction to certain poses, listening to how people are breathing in those poses and waiting for opportunities to offer refinement in those poses.

So once you've gotten people into the pose, you can start talking a little bit less and looking for that feedback from them, right? Looking back and forth to see what's going on. And then ask your students how you can show up for them, how you can support them in their practice. And what I do is I arrive at least 15 minutes early, I let people into the room 15 minutes early, and I always stay after. I say, "If you have any questions about anything that we did today, I'm going to be here packing up my mat for the next 10 minutes. I'm happy to stay after. There's no class afterward, or I can meet you out front of the studio if you have any questions about anything we did today." Right? So I always give students an opportunity to communicate with me before or after the class. And I'm on social media. So I say, "You can always find me on Instagram and message me on Instagram."

Another thing that makes your classes more equitable is also slowing down if you're cuing breath and actually take the breath. Often we say, "Breathe in, do this, breathe out, do this, breathe in, do this, breathe out, do this." I would say, "Breathe in, extend your arms out." And then I would take a breath. And then on the exhale, and I would take that breath and move your way into the next pose. Try slowing things down. I actually had a student who had a disability in which they couldn't use their hands. And I asked them when they came into the classroom, "What are some ways that I can help you through this practice?" And they said to me, "I'm able to do a lot of the practice. I know how to change it up or customize it for myself, but what I do need from you is to slow the practice down."

So that's what I started doing. I started taking a few breaths and I slowed it down and brought the focus to the breath for my students, because sometimes we're just kind of powering through stuff mindlessly. We are maybe not paying attention. Maybe we're doing a row, we've taught the same sequence over and over, and it's just like almost row in second nature, but taking the same breaths as my students

actually makes me slow down. And slowing down the pace of it can help a great deal in creating equity for bodies who might need a little bit more time to get where they're going.

Okay. Encourage time for asking questions either before or after class and allow your students to express themselves without judgment or attaching your personal feelings to what is being said or expressed. And that's a hard one, right? Nobody likes to be told what to do and nobody likes to be criticized. None of us like it. But if we can take it as opportunities to grow our understanding around equity in class, it could be really helpful. And of course, some people are going to tell you things that are completely useless and other people are going to tell you things that are completely insightful.

So it'll be up to you to use your reasoning skills to figure out what is going to work and what you can apply to your teaching, but communicating with your students is key because you are there to teach for them. You're there to share with them what they want to do. It's not us choosing the poses that our students want to do. I would say that it's more along the lines of having communication with your students and figuring out how you can help them dive deeper into their practice, how you can help them feel more safe in their practice. And that's something I would encourage you to consider.

And then we come to the big one, triggers. I'm going to tell you this. I'm triggered all the time, all the time, all the time, all the time. The world is one big trigger for me. Sometimes I love it when I don't have anywhere to go during the day because I don't have to roll out in the world and deal with microaggressions, which pretty much happens on the daily. So what can we do to minimize triggers? Here's the thing. You never know what's going to trigger somebody. It could be a sound, it could be a smell, it could be a color. So it's really hard to figure out what will somebody, but here, I'm going to talk about some of the most common ones.

So this is a graphic that I pulled off of Instagram. For those of you who know me, I spend a lot of time on the Gram. And this is by Yoga And Mahogany. And she's got a beautiful site. She happens to be a civil rights attorney and also a 200-hour YTT in a bigger body and a woman of color. And I just, I love, love, love her content. And so, when I saw this, these are some of the things I'm thinking about when I move into the yoga space. People who come from traditionally excluded populations and are coming to yoga in what feels like very white spaces, can be very triggering. I've come into yoga studios that are very white spaces and have felt very unwelcome. I've had people move their mats. I've been in a super busy yoga class before the pandemic, and nobody would roll their mat out for me. I mean, people were on top of each other, there's space next to me, and nobody wants to roll out their mat next to me.

So there's a lot of these kind of microaggressions and triggers that happen when we're coming into a yoga space that doesn't allow us to relax into the yoga space. And that's why you see a lot of classes being developed for BIPOC folks only, black, indigenous people of color. I'm not really crazy about that classification, I've been using... or marginalized communities, I've been using the language of historically excluded communities. I think BIPOC is initially kind of to give an umbrella term for everybody who's not white. People of color also for people who are not white. I prefer to say people who are not white instead of people of color, because we don't really say, as it comes back to language, people of whiteness, do we? That's not a thing. We don't run around saying, "Well, people of whiteness blah, blah, blah," but we say people of color, blah, blah, blah.

And I just think there's an inequity in that language. And that's just my personal opinion. You're welcome to have your opinions on that as well. But when people who are historically excluded from society in a myriad of ways and are also excluded from yoga spaces and wellness spaces, find their way into their wellness space, we come with a little bit of trepidation, because you know you're going to have somebody who's going to be really interested in your hair. I get this all the time. I just got my hair done. And I had to go to the gym for orientation for my new job. And I think I was at the gym for maybe

five minutes. And the person who was signing me into the system was like, "Oh my God, your hair is so cool." And I could just see that person reaching to touch it, right?

And for some of you, you may not understand that touching the hair of black folks has a historical pain, right? When we came across the ocean in as enslaved Africans, our heads were shaved. Our culture was stripped from us. So our hair is a big part of our culture. And for so long, we've been told it's unprofessional, and it's not right, and it's not this, and it's not that. And we had to cover our hair at some point. So there's a lot of stuff going on with hair and especially black women's hair. And what may seem like a compliment to you can often be an insult to me. So what people want to hear when you go, "Wow, your hair is really cool." Not the next thing is, can I touch it? Because what happens when somebody touches it, "Oh, it's different than I thought it would feel like. Oh, it's really soft. Like, do you wash it? And like, how do you wash it?"

And it becomes this whole othering experience. And it has a generational trauma to it. Don't ask to touch black folks' hair or black folks' body at all. I know that sometimes this is seen as a way to connect with people, but it can be extremely triggering when you are trying to come to a space and have a healing practice to be outed or centered out for your hair or your clothing or whatever it is. And that's why we create these spaces for traditionally excluded communities, because you're with people who understand that, and you're less likely to be mistaken for another person of color, or have your hair touched, or have somebody say something inappropriate to you, or have people just be snobby. Sometimes there's this weird hierarchy that happens when you go into spaces and people feel superior to you, white supremacy, when you step into the space and there's a certain way they speak to you. And that happens in the yoga space all the time.

So it's really interesting to have a space where you're in the majority and these types of things do not happen. It's a place where you can really relax. And if we want to make our spaces, when everybody comes to me saying, "I have this yoga studio that I've been teaching at, or I own a yoga studio I've been teaching at and like 99.9% of my clientele is white. What can I do to encourage diversity?" It's going to be a hard sell because if people can find classes where teachers look like them, in their neighborhood, who understand their experience of walking through the world, we're going to be hard pressed to go into a space where you might be the only person of color and roll up on whatever microaggressions are waiting in the wings for you. Just some thoughts.

Okay. What are triggers or triggering language? Triggers can be very difficult to avoid and they can be very difficult to process when they happen. Negative comments that focus on the body like, feel the burn. Like, yeah. The burn that we're talking about is the buildup of lactic acid in your muscles, and it's often that buildup of lactic acid in your muscle that tells you to stop doing what you're doing. So if you've been to the gym or been in the gym space and people are working to the point of muscle failure, that's what we're doing, right? It's that burn that stops you. That's not what we're here to do in yoga, right? We're here to connect with the breath. Some people might be feeling the burn, but that's not the way we want to center our classes. We don't want to use that fitness language that may be triggering to people who are looking to reconnect with their body outside of that fitness bubble, focusing on shape or size.

I was in a class a while, a while ago, not too long ago, maybe, I don't know, before the pandemic anyhow, and somebody was talking about making your peach, which is your booty, your butt, your gluteus maximus, making it rounder and firmer, whatever, changing the shape and the size of the peach. And it was because it was going to be aesthetically pleasing. Now, I talk about working the peach in my class, in my Pilates class mostly, not in my yoga class, because the modalities there are completely different and the reason for doing those things are completely different. I talk about why it's important to have strong glutes, that these are supporting muscles, right? That these help support our back, that

glutes are the muscles that propel us through the world. So if you're walking or cycling or running, you're using those muscle groups and they can help us climb stairs. They can help us lift and lower from the couch. The things that we are going to be doing every day that get harder with time, right? So as we get older, certain things get harder.

And so, these are the things we want to focus on, right? Are the functional movements as opposed to the aesthetic outlook or outcome or image, right? We're not focusing on aesthetics, we're focusing on functionality. We want people to feel strong in their bodies so they can continue to live successful lives. As everybody is aging. Or we want to help reduce stress and focusing on toxic fitness language and toxic fitness principles that move its way onto the mat is not helpful. Offering fasting or cleansing for weight loss, unless you're a registered dietician, you should not be giving any kind of weight loss advice. And that's not what we're here for, okay? Everywhere else, every other movement and modality in my lifetime has always been about burning calories and doing this and doing that, trigger warning, talking about weight loss. We are not here for that.

So let's leave weight loss culture out of the yoga space. If people want to seek that, that's not our job, that's not what we're here to do. We're here to have people make peace with their bodies, and I don't feel that having these kinds of conversation in open classes is appropriate for creating an equitable space, right? And reminding people that movement practices can be done for the joy of movement, they don't need to be done to change a body aesthetic and an aesthetic meaning the way the body looks. We can use our exercise to change the way the body functions, so if you're having back pain and you start building your abdominals and you start building your legs, that take the weight off your back, then that changes how your body feels. And that's far different than changing how your body looks.

So focusing on size and shape of the body or body part, that's no good. Referencing bathing suit season. "Let's get bathing suit ready." You are bathing suit ready right now. Put on a bathing suit and go to the beach or the pool or whatever speaks to you. There is no yoga body, right? If you do yoga with your body, then that's a yoga body. So keeping that in mind, these are some of the bigger triggers that floated in from toxic fitness culture. Some of the common ones for people in bigger bodies is focusing on shape and size and changing their bodies to fit a certain aesthetic. So let's leave all that old technology, old way of accessing the body, old way of being a part of the body, let's leave that all behind. I don't think it's relevant in how we are moving forward in the world today.

Phrases to avoid. And honest to God, I have heard all these phrases and that's why I shared them. I also did a little Google poll, not a Google poll, Instagram poll, not too long ago to find out what people had heard in their class. Let's work on toning our flabby. You can fill in the blanks. Let's get rid of muffin tops. I happen to think muffin tops are the best part of the muffin. So I don't know why we're trying to get rid of those. Let's get your pre-baby body back. I hate this idea that we are supposed to snap back like an elastic band. That for some reason that your body is supposed to maintain its look from the time you were 16 or 17 or a teenager through the extension of your life. That's not how it works. Your body changes from minute to minute, from day-to-day, from hour to hour. And so, that's okay and we have to start embracing it's okay for your body to be different.

I'm going to tell you something, your pre-baby body didn't leave. It's still with you, okay? There's nothing to get back. There's something to appreciate. Your body built a whole nother human being. I think that's incredible when I think about it. I don't give it a lot of thought, I give it a little bit of thought, but it's really quite interesting. So honestly, we need to get rid of that language and stop taking pressure off of people who are having babies to look a certain way within six weeks of giving birth. I don't understand why that's important. That looks good on you. And I know that seems like pretty benign, but I've come to realize it's giving the dress, like it's good that you can fit into that dress as opposed to that dress

needs to fit you. So I like to change the language to, you look great in that. So the focus is on you and not on the dress.

And this one drives me up a wall. You look good. Did you lose weight? Did you lose weight? You looked so good. I didn't look good before? That's ridiculous. And that's something I've heard a lot in the past six years. I have been on a journey with my thyroid for the past six years and I've lost some weight because of my thyroid issues. And so, when people are constant commenting on my weight, that's happened a lot less lately because I get on social media and I write blog posts and I complain at nausea and finally people are getting it, that we shouldn't be commenting on people's weight ever, ever. And I remember a lot of people getting nervous as things began to reopen, as the pandemic keeps evolving, people getting really concerned about how they looked or the weight they gained and a lot of very toxic messaging around losing the weight that they've gained over the pandemic. And I'm just really disappointed in our focus on weight still.

So in the cease-fire zone, where everywhere else in the world people are hassling you about your weight and your body, we want to make sure that we have a place where we can find peace, right? Another thing that comes up a lot is if we're having yoga classes after major holidays, like let's work off that Thanksgiving dinner. Welcome to our detox class. No, okay? Twisting to is not detox the body. Twisting is good for lubricating the joints, especially any kind of spinal twisting is really lovely for lubricating your spine, helps with osteoarthritis, but detoxing, okay? Detoxing happens with your liver, your kidneys and your lungs. When you inhale deeply and exhale completely, you're detoxing the body. Your liver and your kidneys filter toxins out of your bodies. No special teas, no special diets, no special twisting, no hot glasses. These things are not true and let's stop spreading misinformation, which I know is really hard because we live in the golden age of misinformation.

I shared this. You're not fat. You're so pretty. I recently had this happen. I'm working with a new clothing brand and the owner has their own feelings around the word fat. And it's not a word that I'm hurt by or triggered by, but other people are. So I don't use it in public settings. I usually say, "If you are in an abundant body like myself." I'm abundant in the gift of gab, as you know from any of the videos you've been watching, I'm abundant in personality, I'm abundant in body because all of those things need to come together to make me the person that I am. So I don't have a problem with the word fat. I really don't. Fat is just a descriptor to me and I'm okay with it. But she had a problem with it. And what she said is, "You're not fat. You're so pretty." I never said I was ugly. I might have a problem with that word. Like you have an ugly soul. I never said I was ugly. Fat and ugly don't have to go together, okay?

And for me, fat is just a descriptor. She's not there yet. And that is okay, but I really need to focus on removing the sting and the pain of that word and describing that sting and that pain as we remove it from that word, because I know it has a very heavy meaning for a lot of people. Doing yoga will help with your cellulite or congratulating people for coming to class and assuming they're coming to class to lose weight. Stop it. And if you see that happening in your class, if you're a teacher or a student and you see people coming up and congratulating the bigger person in class for coming to class and being so brave and all that, that's very triggering. And we need to stop that and encourage people that one of the most spiritual things they can do is mind their own business, right? Looking at big people and giving them diet and movement advice is not why they come to class.

If they ask you for it, that's a different story. But you to insinuate yourself into a person's experience is super triggering. And so when we see it happening, I call it out. I'm like, "Okay, everybody. Not everyone is here for the same reasons. Although you are here for the same reasons, which is to find peace and connect with your breath. So I really encourage people not to make comments to each other in class about body size." And I'll do a whole class around how to be kind to each other and I'll call it Ahimsa,

and I'll use that as a specific example. Okay. People are here for their own particular healing and they don't need to be triggered when they're in a vulnerable space.

Words and phrases that are affirming and empowering. So one of them is, let's take this opportunity to honor our body by breathing deeply. Or, this posture can be helpful and you can insert tasks. So if we're doing maybe long stretches, reaching up, it can help us reach things on top shelves. If we're sitting into chair pose, that strengthens us so we're able to get up and off the couch or up and off the chair. The practice can make us both physically and mentally stronger. I think those are great things to illuminate. This pose can help relieve back pain and sciatica. So that's threading the needle. I heard that from my physiotherapist. You're exactly where you need to be. So there's no need to push any further. If you're feeling it here, stay here.

Remember that this is your practice and your body takes... Take a moment to be kind to yourself. Take a moment to customize your practice. When you create custom variations and modifications, you're creating an opportunity for your body to feel stronger, for you to be in your breath, for you to be your own best yoga teacher. And again, I've mentioned this already, creating modifications is creating a boundary and boundaries are important for our safety.

All right. Working on our next module. So some contemplations that you have here, or what are some of the ways in which we can use language to inspire and what are some phrases you can let go? Okay? What are some phrases that you are using in your teaching that tend to be problematic that can go by the wayside? So I want you to give that an opportunity, sit with that opportunity, and I will see you in the next video.