Hey all, it's Amber here. I wanted to talk to you in this presentation about the foundations of a Yoga For All class. What are some of the principles that we really believe are at the basis of creating a true body-positive, accessible, multi-level class where all your students are invited to practice together?

Ahimsa is the highest ideal. It is meant for the brave, never the cowardly. I like to bring up Ahimsa at the beginning here because I think it is at the foundation of everything that we try to do with Yoga For All, that idea of non-harming or non-violence, I think which also can be summarized by the word love, love and consideration and community is really that proactive form of ahimsa, of non-harming.

Self-love I think is at the basis of a lot of what we teach in Yoga For All, that we have a less rigid way of practicing and a more flexible way of being with bodies that are constantly changing and circumstances that are often beyond our control. And so, I always like to come back to ahimsa. What are the principles of a Yoga For All class? There's three that I want to talk about in some detail.

Number one is the concept of agency, reminding their students that their practice is their own, and that they are the ones that hold the power, the power to choose what they want to focus on that day, the power to decide what gets to happen to their bodies, all of that kind of stuff. Consent, especially around physical touch, is paramount and again goes back toward agency, reminding students that their body and their practice and their choice belongs to them. And we'll dive more deeply into each of these.

And then permission, creating this culture of permission, encouraging students to give themselves permission to be okay with where their body is today. Let's look at each one of these. Like I said, each of these go back and checks against ahimsa. That's what I always want to do when I'm asking, like, "Is this the way that I want to conduct my class?" Is that, do they check against this yoga principle of ahimsa, of non-harming?

In the yoga sutras, it says, "In the presence of one firmly established in non-violence or non-harming, all hostilities cease." And so, what we're striving to do with the Yoga For All class is really create a space where students can be safe, but also feel safe. They can feel safe and welcome, and the hostilities that they've often faced in other fitness environments cease. When you intend to create an environment of non-harming, that extends to the expectations that the students have for the class and the way that they treat themselves in the practice.

I like to introduce this concept of a ceasefire zone with my body. There's a few videos where we'll talk about during the course. But I like to share with my students that we like to cultivate an attitude of non-judgment, that rather than being in judgment, it's much more useful to be in curiosity. And so, right now, no matter what kind of body you have, no matter what you think and feel about it, when you're in the borders of your yoga mat, you're in Switzerland, you're a neutral territory. We're going to have a ceasefire zone with your body.

We're not going to have a love affair and love our bodies. We're also not going to be thinking hateful thoughts and mean things if our bodies aren't showing up the way that we want them to. And so, the yoga mat is really about staying present with the experience you're having, staying in a place of curiosity rather than judgment, and also being able to take up space. We can encourage our students to do that both physically and to be able to embody their own personal power and really feel into that agency, that sense of safety based in choice and based in knowing what's going on and what to expect.

Creating a safe container for agency looks like the following, students get to take ownership of their practice and their bodies, so that's creating a culture of consent, which we're going to dive into in a moment. They understand and learn what is going on inside their own bodies. This really furthers that concept of agency. If agency is defined as understanding what's going on in your own body, and by extension your life, and really feeling like you have some choice or some say or some control over that.

And so, in the yoga class, this looks like not only having a choice about whether or not they participate in a posture or receive hands-on touch or something like that, but also learning these self-sensing skills of interoception, the sense of all that stuff we look for in a body scan. Can you feel your own heartbeat? Can you notice a hot, cold, pressure, tension, pain, stuff like that?

Proprioception, do you have a sense of where your body is in space? Can you move well? If I ask you to squeeze your shoulder blades together, can you do that? Nociception, understanding what the nociception, noxious input. Nociception is things like when your tag on your shirt starts bothering you and you reach back to adjust it. Then the discernment to know, like, what is all this information that's coming into my body? What do these sensations mean? What should I do about them? Should I worry about them? Teaching all of those self sensing skills, teaching students the skill of learning to listen to their bodies is paramount.

A safe container for agency means that our students' identities are honored, that no parts of themselves have to be left outside the door in order to belong here. Maybe you have a marginalized identity or multiple intersecting identities. You feel like a space that you might have to go in, you might need to leave your queerness outside, that it's not okay for you to talk about your sexuality in a certain space, like maybe a church or your family or something like that.

That really doesn't feel like you belong when you have to do that, when you have to forsake part of yourself to really be able to fit into a community. And so, what we are here to do is honor the wholeness and the fullness of all of our students' lives and identities, that they don't have to change anything about themselves in order to build. You already belong. You're already good enough the way that you are.

Students have permission to give themselves permission. We are not the permission, grantors, but kind of we are. Students sometimes need to hear that it's okay for them to take a break, to be where they are today, to have an experience in their body that just is about learning, or being curious, or observing and not striving or attaining, to push themselves if a challenge would benefit them. Saying these things out loud, normalizing the idea that choice is at the core of what we're doing with this practice.

The responsibility for the practice lies with the students, that they have the permission not only to choose what works for them, of the options that you're going to give them, but also that the practice belongs to them. That the responsibility for their practice lies within their own hands, A safe container for agency means students can choose where they want to focus or work, rather than competing with the person next to them or feeling like they need to keep up with the class.

And then, finally, it means that they have the tools to personalize their practice for their own bodies. They actually understand, what can I do to find a better way to breathe in this pose? How can I adjust my own body to make more space in the posture? What props might I use to help me in this different practice than I might be doing?

This is a question for reflection, and I encourage you to take maybe five minutes for each question. Go ahead and pause the video after this slide and take some time to write this down. How do you know that a space is safe or that you belong there? How do you know a space is safe for you to be yourself or that you're welcome there? At the bottom, I have some considerations. What about the physical space tells you that? What about the language that's being used in the space?

What about the other people that might be in the space? What else that's not here? How do you know when you belong? How do you know that a space is for you? The other question is how do you know when it's not? And so, I encourage you to take about five minutes for each of these questions. Go ahead and pause the presentation and just take some time to think about that. Think back toward experiences that maybe you've had with community or different gathering spaces that you've been a part of.

When did you feel welcome? What was it about that space that told you it was safe for you? When were you not welcome? When did you not feel like you belonged, and what were the attributes that contributed to that? We're going to move toward this? One of the founding principles is creating a culture of consent. And so, I want to just dig into that a little bit.

I think before we get into the conversation about hands-on touch or how we can obtain consent, it's important for us to be in inquiry around this question as a teacher, about adjustments and hands-on touch in the first place. And so I just want to throw out a bigger question, which is, as yoga teachers, as asana teachers, should we really be touching or adjusting our students at all? I think toward other modalities and disciplines, like massage therapy, for instance, where you have to have sometimes a thousand hours of training before you're ever allowed to put hands on a student or on a client.

In yoga teacher training, we might get as few as zero hours, or maybe we get a few hours worth of a workshop about physical touch. Maybe we have a teacher that really goes above and beyond and wants us to mentor or shadow or observe. But oftentimes, we get a handout about this and that's about all that we get in our teacher training. And so, I think it's worth being an inquiry with yourself as a teacher, like, "Do I feel like I know enough about how to offer clarifying, nurturing touch that's specific to a body, that's specific to a posture? Do I really know what I'm doing here?"

Not in the way of like, "Do I know enough to be an expert?" But do I know when I put my hands on someone, that I'm communicating the thing I want to be communicating? I think it takes a lot of practice to be able to do that. And so, I just want to zoom out a little bit and say we need to be in inquiry about this bigger question with ourselves. If you don't feel like you have the information you need, or the experience you need to be able to offer assistive touch, and that's important to you, I encourage you to seek out a workshop about this, to seek out a mentor who may be able to work closely with you and give you some of this information and this experience.

But I like to ask a few questions. When I feel the impulse to go in for the touch, have I exhausted other ways of teaching? There are some things about putting your hands on a student that will change the learning experience for them. It becomes less of a closed loop system at that point, and you're introducing another stimulus, which can pull them out of that embodied experience. I think that oftentimes it's easier or more effective in the long run to demonstrate and mirror and let students follow along rather than actually move and position their body.

Are there other ways of teaching that I could maybe get the student to do what I'm asking them to do? Is this touch necessary? Is it necessary for safety that I make an adjustment in some way? If a student is in an unsafe position, maybe you need to go and offer support until they can get into a safer position or something like that. Is it clarifying in some way? Maybe I've used all the verbal cues I can think. I've tried to do mirroring. I've tried to describe it in lots of ways and the student can't squeeze their shoulder blades together. It's just not happening with their brain.

A fingertip between the shoulder blades, "Squeeze my finger," that can be really clarifying, and suddenly aha, the body gets it. So there are some adjustments, some assists that I think can be very clarifying in that way. Is it nurturing, would be another question. There's something to be said for a really nurturing, caring, platonic non-sexual touch. There's not a lot of opportunities for that in our society, outside of these bodywork modalities.

And so, many times when our students come to class, that may be the only time in their week that they're receiving that touch. I think especially with the pandemic, that's changed a lot of yoga teachers' approach to touch, and folks that really come to class and come to yoga experiences to receive that nurturing energy are not getting that. That is a good reason to do assists sometimes. But I think it's

important to be in inquiry with, why am I offering it? Is it because I want to give that nurturing touch to people who opt into it, or is it because I want to feel good about something I did?

Just being an inquiry with ourselves about why we're offering touch in the first place. Finally, do I have consent? Which we're going to jump into. The ethical burden really is on us as teachers to obtain consent around touch, not on the student. Giving consent I think puts the student's practice back into their own realm of responsibility. I think that a lot of yoga culture has centered on this idea that it's assumed that your teacher has permission at any time to adjust or correct your posture.

I really like to debunk that in my classes. I like to outright just say like, "I know a lot of classes you go to, yoga teachers might come up and just adjust you or put their hands on you. I'm not going to do that." And then I'll explain whatever we're going to do around touch or how the consent process works in my class. But really just normalizing the idea of like, "No, you shouldn't just let any yoga teacher come up and put their hands on you, even if it seems like that's the way it's done," that your practice is your own responsibility and your body belongs to you, and people need permission to interact with that body.

This really gives students that sense of agency. I think it happens both on and off the mat. It centers the practice in their realm of responsibility, but also I've had students come up to me and say after class, like, "When you asked if you could put your hands on me and give me that adjustment, it was weird you asked at first. But then I thought about it and no one's ever asked if they could touch me before. They're just like, 'I'm a hugger,' and they come in or whatever. It made me think about the fact that I could say no, that actually my body does belong to me."

And so, when we normalize those things in our classes, we really can help foster this sense of agency that goes far beyond just the yoga postures. Finally, creating a culture of consent in your classes keeps everyone safer, not just your students, but also you as a teacher. When we know for sure that we have permission to touch someone, we don't have to worry about miscommunication or a student who's maybe opted in feeling some sort of pressure.

We do our best to get that real affirmative, enthusiastic yes. And then, we can move forward as a teacher too and feel better about that. Right. We want to get that consent because I don't want to touch anyone that doesn't want me to touch them. I want to be able to have that answer too and really be able to trust that I've done my level best to make sure that students feel safe enough to say no if what they mean is no, or to opt out and take a different variation that doesn't include hands-on touch from me.

A model of consent that I like to refer to, and I've definitely borrowed heavily here from queer community, sex-positive community. A lot of communities that fall under those categories use this type of model of consent that has three parts. The first is embodied or enthusiastic consent. Enthusiastic is the word that used to be used. Now I like to use the word embodied because sometimes it's not always a "Heck, yeah, or like a, "Yeah. I want to do that thing."

I might not want to sweep the studio after I'm done teaching, but I do consent to doing it because it's a responsibility that I have or whatever. I might not be like, "Yeah. I definitely want to do it," but I am able to say yes and fully mean it. So embodied. Are they present? Are they fully able to say yes? Are you getting that affirmative eye contact, a nod, the word yes? The absence of no, or looking to the side, or shrugging the shoulders is not the same as a yes. We really want that clear answer.

Number two, it needs to be ongoing. It's not saying at beginning of class, like, "Do you want adjustments or not?" And then assuming that's going to hold through the whole class. There needs to be a way that you're checking in as you go throughout. Think about a yoga class where maybe you started out feeling good, but then halfway through, you tweaked your back, or you got a period cramp, or you, I don't know, thought about something upsetting and all of a sudden it didn't feel that great to have a teacher

coming up, wanting to put their hands on you. And so, it's important to have an ongoing way of checking in.

And then, finally, consent should be informed. Does the student know what they're saying yes to? If I stand at the front of the class and just say, "During this class, I'll be giving adjustments. And so, if you want adjustments, raise your hand." Now, if the student doesn't know that adjustments means I'm going to come over and put my hands on your body, they can't really consent to that. So you want to be able to give more specific details about what you're doing.

I want to talk about consent in person, and then we'll talk about consent online, because I think they're slightly different. Consent in person, it's important to set expectations at the beginning of class. Will there be hands-on touch in the first place? I like to really say whether or not that's going to be happening. And if it is happening, how are you going to obtain consent? You'll want to talk about that policy and that procedure.

I'll talk about some ideas for obtaining consent in just a moment. But let your students know if you'll be offering that or not. Some folks might be antsy wondering like, "When are they going to come over and correct my posture?" And so, just setting expectations at the beginning is a great way to mitigate some of that stress. Letting folks know if you'll be walking around or not. This might not be appropriate, depending on...

The pandemic has changed a lot of things. I think if I was practicing in person, I would tend to stay put on my mat, just to reduce the risk that's inherent to being in a room and breathing together these days. So will you be walking around? If not, saying things like, "I'll be staying on my mat, but I may offer verbal cues to help you find more freedom in a posture or to be able to assist you to go deeper or whatever the thing is.

What about masks? Masks are something that I definitely think should be discussed, and hopefully your website or your studio's website has a clear consent policy and a clear COVID policy around masks and vaccinations and things like that. But setting that expectation at the beginning of class. If masks are required, say that. Say that the mask needs to be covering your nose and mouth.

Say that you'll remind people if you see a mask come down and people shouldn't feel weird about that because we're just here to take care of each other and keep everybody safe. Say the information that you think your students might need to have around these things.

And then, don't forget to update your waivers. Hopefully you have a waiver that's being signed at the beginning of your class, or your studio probably does. Make sure that your COVID policies and your consent policy go inside of this waiver. If you have any questions or need help coming up with wording, the Facebook group is a great place to troubleshoot and see what other people have done. I think that'd be a great thread for somebody to start.

Ideas for obtaining consent during classes. The first idea I'd like to toss out there is the idea of consent cards. This would be a little card, I don't know, about the size and shape of a drink coaster. On one side it says some variation of yes, and on the other side some variation of no, like, "Yes, I'd like hands on adjustments." "No, thank you. Not today," or something like that. It's a physical card, or coaster, or chip, or whatever, a little object.

Everybody gets one and it all goes... Every one of them goes on the top corner of the mat or wherever you designate. Everybody needs to put them in the same place. And so, if I'm going to set up the room ahead of time, I set up all the mats and I put a consent card on all the mats, usually with the no side up, so then they have to opt in by flipping the chip over. You need to explain what it is and how to use it. And then, that at any time you can give a revoked consent for assists and adjustments by flipping up the yes side or the no side.

And then you as a teacher have that embodied consent. You've got a very clear yes or no. You've also got an ongoing way to check in. That hits two of those things that we really want in the model of consent. I used to, at retreats, have folks make their own consent cards. I'd pass out the little cards and some markers and give them some instructions. And then it's literally like they're writing their own permission slip.

And so I really like to emphasize and normalize the idea that, "You get to decide when you get touched and what you do with your body in this class, not me and not anybody else." Another idea is just to ask every time. This is another one that I've used in a lot of my classes, just because I don't really offer that much hands-on touch in the first place, and probably certainly won't after the pandemic, depending when I go back to teaching in person.

And so, if I'm going to offer a hands-on assist, I'll often just step into the person's space and say, "Hey, I'm wondering if I can reposition your arms so it's a little bit more comfortable in this pose. Would you be okay if I tried that?" And then if they give me a yes, then I can come in and put my hands on them. Let your students know that you'll be stepping into their space, if you do decide to give them an assist and they opt into that. Don't ever sneak up on a student.

Make sure that they can see you coming, that you maybe make eye contact with them and get the thumbs up or whatever the ascent is going to be. Even if you have a consent card saying yes, that's not free range to go up and just sneak up behind somebody and do the old hip-adjusting down dog. We've all probably had that one when we didn't want it from a yoga teacher. And so, the sneaking up can really pull you out of being embodied in a pose.

I think when you offer a hands-on assist, find a way to ask for feedback that allows the student to have some choice. So instead of saying something like, "Doesn't that feel better?" or, "Oh, doesn't that feel good?" Ask something like, "Better or worse?" Or like, "Good or go back to doing it the way you wanted to?" Like go back to how you were before. Give the students some choice to opt in or out.

And then, depending on whether you're walking around or not, whether you're going to be able to come up to individual students and give them individual instruction or not might depend on your studio's policy as far as COVID goes, or what's safe for you to do. And so, I think that it's worth considering, like are you giving global instructions or are you going to give specific instructions?

And so, for example, if you're not going to be walking around offering individuated instruction in a more one-on-one way, I like to set that expectation at the beginning of class of like, "Hey, I won't be going around and offering hands-on touch, but I do want to give some cues that might be helpful to make some little adjustments to your posture. And so, when I do that, I'm going to probably call your name and say like, 'Oh, I see what you're doing over there. What about trying X, Y, or Z? Anybody else experiencing that can try it as well.'"

You make it something where the whole class can benefit, rather than just the individual person. But I like to really say ahead of time that I may be calling on people. When I do that, I'm not correcting you. I'm offering something that the whole class might be able to learn from, and something that I think will help you to find a little more freedom in this posture, a little more connection with your body.

So then you say what it's about. It's not about correcting a posture, that you didn't get it. It's really about creating more possibility for you as a student. Consent online. Again, we want to set expectations at the beginning of the class. How are you going to handle assists? Are you going to call out individual cues? What's your plan to not make it feel like a call-out? Like I said, maybe you need to say out loud, "Hey, I'm not in the room, so in order to get your attention, I do have to say your name.

And so, if I see anybody doing anything that looks unsafe, or maybe if I see you doing something that I think you could be a little bit more comfortable, I might offer instructions. Just know that even though I

say one person's name, they could apply to the whole class. So really listen for that and see if that can apply to you too." Give that explanation that says like, "This is not a call-out. This is not a correction."

Dialogue with your students about what they need to be supported in class. What do your students need from you as far as feeling safe? Do they need to be able to come on the microphone and ask a question since you're not there to keep eyes on them the whole time maybe. Just ask questions about like, "What do you need to feel more supported in this class?" And see if you get any feedback that way.

Will you be asking students to come on the video or the microphone? If you are, let's talk about that. What is the purpose of being on the video? Some students might not want to come on video because they think you're judging them or trying to figure out who's doing the best pose. And so, I like to say out loud, "Hey, the reason it's great to share video is for a couple reasons. Number one, I can see you, and if I can see you, that means I can help keep you safer. I can give you suggestions about how to be safer or be more effective in the way that you're practicing. Also, I think it's amazing to show all different kinds of people in different shapes and sizes and ages and abilities, practicing yoga. And so, actually being on camera, moving with all these other people in class, is really another form of representation. And so, you're changing the face of yoga just by showing up here."

I like to say things like that, just to make students feel A little more comfortable. Also, will the class be recorded? Where will it be distributed? I think those are some of the concerns that people have when they don't want to share video or audio, is like, "Oh, well, I don't want other people seeing or hearing that. This class is fine, but I don't really want to be out there on YouTube. So say where it's going to be posted.

How will it be distributed? Will other people have access to it? Is it going to be recorded? Just saying all this stuff either at the beginning of your class or having it on your webpage so that people can know what your community norms are, I think is a really good way, and letting them opt into the experiences that they want to have.

When you're teaching online, I think cueing versus demonstrating, it's really important to strike a balance there. I know some teachers that do a great job of sitting close to the computer and just using verbal cues so that they can keep their eyes on their students the whole time and watch all the other little video screens. I know some people that stay on the mat the whole time and demonstrate every pose, and they're not going to be able to keep an eye on their students, but they're just there to hold space for the class.

I think striking a balance between the two is important. I like to spend most of my time at the computer so that I can see what students are doing. But I also often will back up from the computer and demonstrate something and then come back. Oftentimes, you'll have to switch back and forth, especially if you're cuing and you see a student who's maybe not getting it, or maybe your cues aren't landing with the class. Using your body as a teaching tool can be very effective too.

And then again, don't forget to update your waivers or emails about these things, like how we offer assists in class, when I call you out, it's not to correct you, what it means when you come on the video, what it means when you come on the microphone, will it be part of a recording? All that stuff should go into your waiver and into the emails that go to your class before they meet.

Setting expectations in class. I think the exciting thing about being a yoga teacher is that we really are the culture makers of this yoga world, this yoga industry. We get to set the expectations one class at a time about what this yoga practice is all about. And so, these are a few things that I think can go a long way in creating a safer space for our students. Number one is, yes, we should ask about injuries. But I think that there's a better and worse way to ask.

If you've ever been like, "Is anybody here have an injury?" And nobody said anything. I don't know. To me, sometimes that sounds like, "Does anybody here have something really messed up about their body that they want to share? Any painful injuries or memories you want to share with the whole class?" People might be a little bit hesitant to do that. So I always like to ask a little more info, like, "Are you struggling with any injuries? How's your neck? How's your back, ankles, wrists, knees? Anything going on you're concerned about?"

Having those conversations one-on-one is great. But also when you ask in a bigger class, maybe you don't have the opportunity to go to each student one-on-one, just asking for a little more information like that does two things. A, you're probably going to get some info, and B, it's just lets our students know that it's okay to talk about bodies, that's normal, and that bodies don't have to be in perfect working order, whatever that means, to come to class.

"We get injured, our bodies change. We have higher and lower energy levels, and that's normal. That's all fine. You're welcome here." I think, "Listen to your body," is too simple. Sometimes the way safety is handled or a personal choice is handled is like, "Okay, we're going to do this next part. And just don't push too far. Just listen to your body." There might be a lot of reasons why the student is not attuned to their body sensations.

Sometimes injuring ourselves doesn't hurt when we pushed you far. It doesn't hurt till later. Maybe they have a relationship to pain that's different than yours. If you think about women's relationship to pain, as opposed to men's relationship to pain, oftentimes, I think women are more accustomed to painful things. We have the experience of childbirth, that many women go through, and men don't have that experience.

But even with the same gender or something, people have different relationships to pain. Some people tend to push into it. Some people tend to completely avoid it. So, "Listen to your body," is a very individual pursuit, right. Some folks have ego or baggage around pushing through or wanting to please a teacher, or feeling peer pressure to keep up. All of those things can keep us from listening to our body. That goes nothing towards saying, what about people who, let's say, have been on diets most of their life?

There's a certain amount of disconnecting from what your body is telling you that you have to do in order to be successful on a diet. You have to ignore hunger signals or things like that. And so, that type of disconnection can often go into other areas like this, where we say, "Listen to your body." But people don't even really have an idea how to notice the sensations that are going on in their body, much less know what to do with that information.

And so, just knowing that we're going to find other ways of communicating and teaching those self-sensing skills of how to actually know what's going on inside of your body and how that can go toward a sense of personal power. And then make community agreements. I think it's important to consider like, what are the community norms in your classroom? What are the agreements that we're going to be explicit about when we're here together practicing?

For me, these are the ones that I usually use in my asana classes and when I teach at retreats. The first rule is no suffering, and I talk about sensations. I don't say, "Listen to your body." I say that the first rule is no suffering. There's plenty of places in the world where you've got to push and strive and take it to the max, and we're not here to do that, that you may feel different stuff throughout this practice.

There's some sensations that we want to move toward, maybe a stretch, maybe feeling your heartbeat quicken, your breath, that change. That stuff might happen. That's fine. If you're feeling pinching, burning, stabbing pain, that's something we want to move away from. You can talk about body sensations in this way.

No judgment is another really good community agreement to have. I hope you'll land on your own, but these are some that I like to use. Don't compare yourself to others, your practice is your own. And so, what we try to do here is, when you're on your yoga mat, stay in a place of inquiry, stay in a place of curiosity, rather than judgment, rather than making a big story about why things are the way they are, rather than trying to get too wrapped up in the identity of something or other.

What about, can we be curious? Can we say like, "Oh, that's really interesting, that thing that I'm feeling. I wonder what that's about." That's different than, "Oh, this really hurts, and that person over there has a peaceful expression. They must be really good at this. Why can't I be like that? Why is it always harder for me?" Then we get into the story and that takes us out of the experience.

Finally, giving this environment of permission. I like to say something like... Maybe during the first challenging posture, people are moving or they're catching their breath, like, "I just want to let everyone know that there's no medals given out at the end of this class for doing every pose or everything I say. So I want you to know that it's really normal to take a different variation, to opt out, to go to the bathroom, to get a drink of water.

Please address your critical needs and know that everybody's practice is going to look a little bit different. And you have the permission to do what works for you based on the body that you're in today." Just saying stuff like that out loud can help students relax so much rigidity around what they think this practice is supposed to be like teaching.

I want to talk about what the heck is going on, especially with folks with larger bodies. What is happening in asana? Why can't they just step their foot forward from down dog into a lunge? What's going on? Why does it seem more difficult for these students? And so, I just want to start to get you looking for this stuff in bodies, when you're watching your students move, when you're seeing students in larger bodies who come to your classes.

Not so that you can diagnose, not so that you can point it out, but just to get better at understanding, what is going on with this person's body mechanics, where's their center of mass? What's happening here? That will help me to get a little bit more intelligent and a little bit better at guessing, what can I offer? What prop? What adjustment to the posture is going to help them to be more comfortable and really experience it in a better way?

I just want to start offering this so that you can start looking for these things in your larger bodied students. Oftentimes, this applies to students of all sizes. But the first few definitely apply to folks in larger bodies. For many of us, what's happening is we're running into ourselves. Stuff is running into other stuff, especially in forward bends and twists. So when you're someone who has a lot of abundance in the front of your body, maybe you have a larger chest, or a bigger belly, or bigger thighs, a bigger butt. Then you're going to run into yourself, especially in forward bends and twists. This can be an issue.

And so, if you think about the idea of someone in a larger body folding forward from standing, let's say, in like a standing forward bend, for someone with not very much going on in the front of their body, maybe they'll forward all the way over until their chest rests against their legs. But when I fold forward, my belly meets my thighs long before my chest will.

For a lot of larger students, we are a lot more flexible than we're able to demonstrate, if that makes sense. I never really experience, most of the time, a forward bend as a hamstring stretch, because I can't actually get my chest or my torso and my legs close enough together to really put that tension on the back body and give me that hamstring stretch, because I've got a lot going on in the front of the body. I just don't fold up as easily as a smaller person.

And so, there are some ways that you can encourage your students to work with that. I have a technique called take space, make space, which you're going to find here in your student portal. If you

haven't come across it yet, it's coming in a later module. There are ways to do that. In a standing forward bend, I take space by bringing distance between the feet. I take a wider stance, and then I make space by actually moving my belly out of the way with my hands, tucking it up and back towards the pelvis as I fold forward.

That gives me a lot more space in the posture to find my breath and to be able to actually experience all the things that we want to have in a forward bend. So just know that in forward bends, in twists, a lot of times our larger students are going to have to make some adjustments for themselves to be more comfortably in that asana, and to actually be able to feel the stuff we want them to do, what the point of the pose is, and not just cram themselves into a shape.

The second thing that might be happening is that my center of mass is different than yours. This shows up for me in things like downward facing dog, where I've got a lot of weight in my lower body. I've got a big belly, and big hips, big butt, big thighs, and a smaller upper body. I also have really long legs and really short arms. So when I'm in down dog, I feel like I've got all this weight in my hands and arms and my legs can't even participate.

My center of mass is too far forward. I need to get that back a little bit so my legs can take some of the weight out of my arms. What that looks like is putting blocks under the hands. But you might not know that unless you've been in a body where you're like, "Oh wow, I can't sit my hips to my heels on child's pose, no matter what I do." And it's not a flexibility issue. It's really not. It's about the center of mass being in the wrong place so that you're fighting against gravity, if that makes sense.

Another thing that might be happening is that I'm still building strength or skill or muscle memory. This is broadly applicable to any student. It could be happening that maybe it's the second or third time I've ever transitioned from plank to downward facing dog. That in and of itself is a skill that can be taught. Those types of transitions, holding a posture for a long time, any of that stuff is something that I think students need to be able to build capacity in their nervous system, in their muscular system, all of that stuff, to be able to do what we're asking of them.

And so, just keeping in mind that it takes time to build strength and skill and muscle memory in these postures. Remember how it was the first 10,000 times you did a downward facing dog. Maybe you still haven't made friends with that pose. Remember that oftentimes it takes a little time to... Students take different amounts of time to get to a similar place in their practice.

Maybe what's going on and the reason that I can't do a pose or something's not coming very easily, is that my nervous system is activated or guarded because of trauma in fitness environments. Plenty of people of all shapes and sizes have had this issue, but definitely your bigger students have faced fat phobia in fitness environments, and maybe even in yoga environments before.

And so, oftentimes it's not that the student is unable to do something, but that the nervous system is just not there. It's not relaxed enough to be able to be able to be in learning mode, and it's more like in a survival mode. And so, I think this is where it comes in, teaching self-sensing skills, teaching the skills of self-regulation that we have through yoga, with breath, with meditation, with mindful movement, and really getting the students to a place...

This might not happen in one week where they can relax and trust you enough and trust that the environment is safe enough for them to actually practice the yoga, and not just be there to cram themselves into shapes. Maybe there's some other things going on, like limb proportion. Like I said, in downward facing dog, I have really long legs and short arms and a short torso. And so, stepping my foot forward through my hands, it's just not physically possible because I don't have enough room to bring my leg forward.

My shinbone is longer than my forearm bone, so physically it's not possible. Maybe there's some height issues going on that make one student able to do something easily and one student not. And that's nothing to do with larger bodies specifically, but I just want to draw attention to the fact that oftentimes when teachers look at a larger body and say, "This pose isn't working in this body, it must be because they're a larger student and they can't do it."

That bias shows up, that oftentimes it's an issue that many of your smaller bodied students have also had, that maybe that's just showing up in a bigger body, but you're not noticing it because you may be looking at body size or maybe thinking about other things instead.

Here's a few strategies to try when working with bigger bodies. Find alternatives to sitting on the floor. This is broadly applicable, and lots of students have trouble sitting on the floor. So I really like using a chair, a bolster, or a stack of blankets under the hips at the very least. Finding ways to maybe do seated poses that are not as demanding of sitting on the floor with nothing.

There's no medals given out for being able to do that. What we want is for the hips to be a little higher than the knees. And so, depending on the body you're in, it might be more appropriate for you to actually sit up on something. Slow down transitions and teach transitions as a skill in and of themselves. I think that oftentimes maybe it's the way we learn, maybe it's that we have the ability in our bodies, so we don't really think about it.

But transitions, for example, going from plank to downward facing dog, stepping from the back of your mat to the front of your mat, standing at the front of your mat and stepping one foot back, like for warrior two or something like that. All of these types of transitions, you can teach actually as a skill. If you think about the last one I mentioned, standing at the front of the mat, and then we're going to take a big step back with the right foot, like we're coming into warrior two, teach that skill.

When I stand at the front of the mat, and we're going to step the right foot back, the first thing we need to do is shift the weight into the left foot. Everybody shift your weight to your left foot. Good. Now with the weight in the left foot, put a little bend in the left knee so you've got some control, and then take a big step back, hands on the waist, with your right foot, and plant that right foot on the mat. Then you can start to do the adjustments of the angle of the foot and come into the rest of the pose.

But actually, taking the time maybe to do a few step forward step backs and teach that transition skill of being able to shift the weight, where is the gaze, where are the arms, really thinking about teaching it as a skill. Same for stepping forward and back in the sun salutations. The same for getting up and down off the floor. I actually think that is a skill worth teaching, just like a yoga posture.

Have a little workshop, a getting up and down off the floor workshop where maybe you have a chair and you talk about different strategies for moving from maybe getting up and down off the floor of the wall, getting up and down off the floor using a chair or a couch. What do you do if you don't have any props? Really workshop that together and maybe break it down in your own body and figure out like, "Okay, if I just do this automatically without thinking about it, what's actually a better way to do that?"

Maybe I can step-by-step say, "Where am I putting my weight? How am I shifting my body? How can I teach this as its own posture?" And then, finally, if you have people who have stuff running into other stuff, they're feeling crowded in poses, try the take space, make space strategy. The video is in this module as well. That will get you a long way in being able to offer poses for lots of different body types, but especially for folks in bigger bodies.

I find that this is really a game changer, this strategy. So offering that to your students is a great way to get started and set them up for success. All right. Thanks for being here for this presentation. We'll see you in the next one.