

By Olivia Mayer

Fitting In

How to find the yoga class that's right for your child.

Solis suggests you observe a class, meet the teacher in advance and answer the following questions:

- Is the teacher certified in a least one adult yoga style?
- Will the instructor's style and approach mesh with your child's?
- Does the instructor have control over the class?
- Does the teacher bring creativity and playfulness to the class?
- What is the student-to-teacher ratio?
For elementary-age students, Solis suggests 10 to 1

Yoga for Youngsters

Long before her sixth birthday, Lilly Jordan had decided she wanted a yoga party to celebrate her special day. Although the Parker kindergartner has been taking ballet since she was 3 and has had more traditional birthday celebrations in the past, she is in her second year of yoga and wanted to share her passion for yoga with her friends. Just a few days after her January fete in which her 10-year-old sister and 10 friends joined her at the Yin Yoga Center for an "Under the Sea with Ms. Roberta and Me"-themed party, Lilly proclaimed it her "best birthday ever." Lilly is among a growing number of children locally and

nationwide doing yoga. While interest in the ancient India-rooted practice of physical poses has grown among the adult population, so, too, has participation by the younger crowd.

Life-long yogini Sydney Solis of Boulder, who founded Storytime Yoga, an innovative children's yoga program that integrates yoga and literacy, credits the growing appeal to a number of factors. "I think it's a natural extension from parents to their children. The adults feel so good they start to realize their children need yoga," she says.

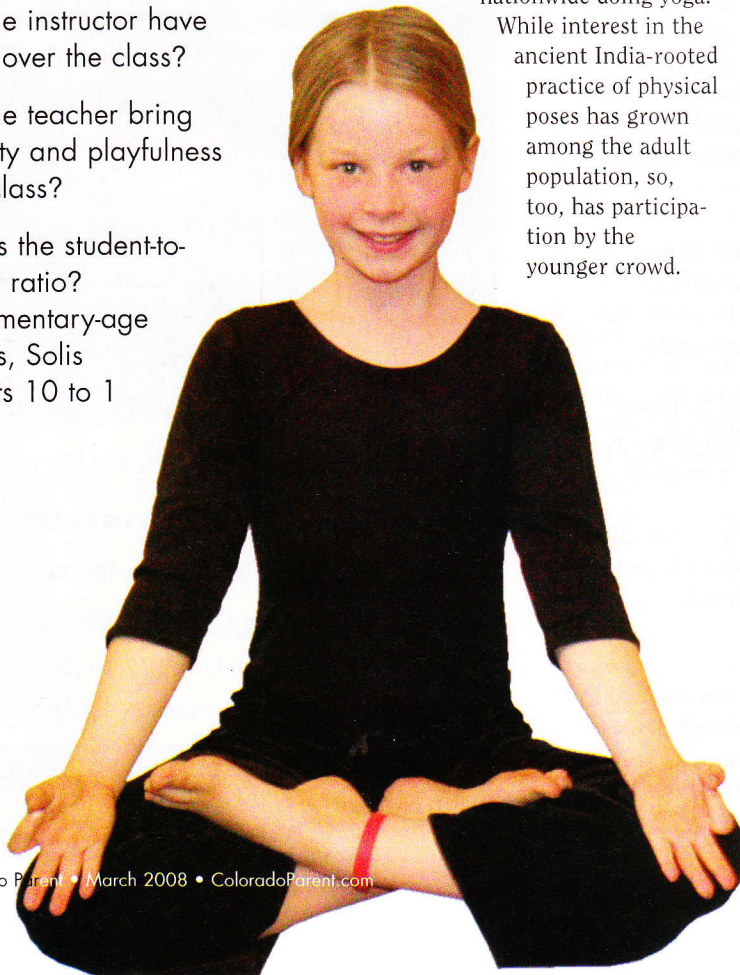
Other factors include a growing awareness of attention and behavior problems in children and a renewed focus on children's fitness, in part in response to an increase in childhood obesity. Yoga is a nice counterbalance with its physical benefits, such as increased strength, flexibility, coordination and balance, in addition to its mental attributes, says Solis.

"Yoga stops the mind's wandering," says Solis, author of *Storytime Yoga: Teaching Yoga to Children Through Story* and the upcoming *The Treasure in Your Heart: Stories and Yoga for Peaceful Children*. Through yoga, children are often able to improve their focus, practice self discipline, engage in self-discovery, learn calming strategies and be less stressed, she adds. "They really learn to control their bodies and become aware of their space."

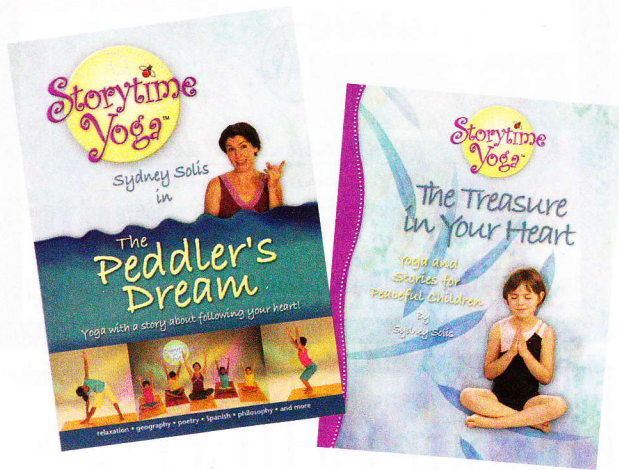
Adult yoga classes are usually presented in various styles. Among the popular styles are *Hatha*, which stresses classical postures and deep breathing and mindfulness; *Ashtanga*, a more vigorous form with an emphasis on strength and flexibility; *Iyengar*,

Yoga's physical benefits include increased strength, flexibility, coordination and balance.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STORYTIME YOGA



YOGA FOR YOUNGSTERS



which is most concerned about body alignment and often uses props, and *Vinyasa*, characterized by a more flowing presentation. Children's classes differ in that they are not about the style but the approach. The hallmark of a good kids' yoga class is its playfulness, Solis says. Most children's classes also tend to be cross-curriculum and may incorporate music, crafts, games and storytelling.

Lilly was introduced to yoga at an after-school pro-

gram where her teacher, Roberta Hughes, like Solis, uses storytelling and some animal imagery as part of her method. For Lilly, who has since interested her mom and sister in yoga, the main draw isn't the stories but that you "get to do the moves." Lilly's mother, Tamara, recognizes a host of benefits, including its gentle approach to stretching and emphasis on peace. "To have an interest in something that's about replenishing, not competitive, makes yoga a lovely balance to offer your children."

Ross Rainaldi, 9, also likes the poses and being more flexible. Ross, who does yoga at the Logan School with Deborah Baker of Park Hill Yoga, initially became interested because his parents do yoga weekly. "I thought it would be kind of fun," he says. An avid soccer, lacrosse and squash player, Ross says besides gaining strength and balance, he has also learned about clearing his mind through yoga and being more aware of his breath. "It just calms you down." ♦

Olivia Mayer is a freelance writer and mother of two teens who has had the privilege of practicing yoga with her cousin, a certified instructor in New York.

Resources

Classes

City of Englewood, Recreation Center, 1155 W. Oxford Ave., Englewood. 303-762-2680. www.englewoodgov.org. Yoga for Youth, ages 3-11.

Eldora Yoga, 2881 County Road 67, Boulder. 303-494-3051. www.eldorayoga.org. Children's summer art/yoga camps and periodically schedules kids' yoga classes and an array of family classes.

Inner Connections Yoga, Spa & Wellness Centers, 19563 E. Main St., Parker, 303-840-1881; and 821-A Park St., Castle Rock, 303-688-8598. www.innerconnectionsyoga.com. A range of classes for infant through teens.

Park Hill Yoga, 2072 Ash St., Denver. 303-377-3508. www.parkhillyoga.com. In-school programs and kids, teen and family classes in studio.

South Suburban Parks and Recreation, various locations in the south metro area. 303-347-5999. www.sspr.org. A variety of yoga classes for youth and families.

Vital Yoga, 2727 E. 2nd Ave., Denver. 303-316-8265. www.vitalyoga.org. Weekly kids' yoga class.

The Yin Yoga Center, 19555 E. Parker Square Dr., Suite 102, Parker. 303-840-0411. www.theyinyoga-center.com. In-school programs as well as kids' yoga camps, classes and birthday parties.

Zenergy Yoga & Pilates, 5996 S. Holly St., Greenwood Village. 303-770-9277. www.zenergyyaps.com. Weekly kids' yoga class.

Books, CD's and more

• **Storytime Yoga**, www.storytimeyoga.com. An innovative children's yoga program that integrates yoga and storytelling. Founder and author Sydney Solis has also written several related books, including *Storytime Yoga: Teaching Yoga to Children Through Story*, and the upcoming *The Treasure in Your Heart: Stories and Yoga for Peaceful Children*.

What Color is Your Butterfly, Carol Webber, Mamayos, 2007; \$10.99; www.mamayos.com. This DVD, led by a certified yoga instructor, uses color, sound and yoga postures to stimulate the body's energy centers.

Sasha and Mishoo, Little Yoga Warriors, by Jeffrey Mix, illustrated by Katherine Homes, 2007; \$18.95; www.littleyogawarriors.com. The first in a series of interactive books that explore yoga poses while telling a story.

