

The Kids are Watching: Your Balance Matters

By Matthew J. Taylor, PT, PhD, RYT



Q: How can Yoga therapy create focus, patience and attention in my family?

A: Western culture maintains the view that each person is an individual identity responsible for who they are and how they behave. Classical Yoga philosophy has said for thousands of years that the individual is an illusion and that consciousness is all one entity (asmita). Each perspective dramatically affects how we view health within not only our family, but our community and our world.

Consider how we answer the question of what the autism spectrum is? The Western view attempts to find the gene, the immunization, the environmental toxin, birth order, etc. to point to both the source and solution. Find what causes the defect and eradicate it, replace it or medicate it. It is just that easy, right?

You might be surprised to learn that much of modern neuroscience and Yoga now share a similar view of health. Rather than pointing to a single mechanistic source, both acknowledge that health is a complex, interwoven changing state. That is, something like the autism spectrum almost certainly

has many interacting systems that produce the symptoms diagnosed as such. The same can also be said for childhood anxiety, eating disorders, learning challenges, vocalization (see King's Speech as an e.g.), and allergies.

So why does your balance or health influence your child's health, as the title alludes? Without getting New-Agey or just wishing it were so based on lore, science has now demonstrated some very exciting facts in the past decade that give us all a shared respon-

sibility in one another's health, especially within families...the Yoga "it's all connected stuff." Consider the following findings and how they impact your family.

Mind is both within individuals and between them. This comes from Dr. Daniel J. Siegel, MD at the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center. What they have discovered there and at other leading research centers is that the state of balance/ease of one individual affects that of others, especially in parental, teaching and therapeutic relationships. Therefore my level of anxiety and focus can influence yours and vice versa.

Attunement and entrainment happen. Related to the above, humans adopt or "attune" to one another, not existing as separate isolated beings but interconnected and influenced by one another. If mom and dad are frazzled in the home, guess what the little ones do? If the parents are content and at ease, how in general do the children appear? This science reflects broad trends within behavior, not specific situations as any parent knows! It also doesn't "blame" every bad or good behavior, but does participate in influencing behaviors/health. Beware the habit of looking for "the" cause!

Yoga therapy can be used pre-conception to the grave. Research has demonstrated that severe stressors to the mother can influence the type and number of nerve receptors in children up to 3 months pre-conception (not pre-birth, but conception!). Hence the stress-related chemistry of the potential mother affects quite literally how the new person is "wired" neurologically. Obviously the father when present also influences that internal maternal environment as well. If both have a practice of Yoga that restores ease and relaxation from both the big stresses and the daily load of life, then the science shows the child will be bathed in a very different environment. This environment continues after birth as noted above. More recent research is demonstrating this continues all the way to death, as the way visitors breathe when visiting the dying affects how the dying person breathes, even when non-responsive.

Mirror neurons exist. The popular literature is picking up on that there exist groups of nerves in the brain that appear to fire and activate behavior in primates that causes observing members of a group to mirror or mimic the goal-directed behavior of others. Be careful, the science is early and hasn't been demonstrated in humans yet, yet writers are leaping at this phenomenon as one more mechanical cause. We will have to wait to see more studies, but certainly it appears that "do what I do, not do as I say" may end up being true!

The kids are watching. In summary, it appears that they are indeed watching and influenced by the broader family behavior as well as the community behaviors. From eating in front of the TV to texting under the covers in bed, humans constantly strive to overcome the discomfort of the misperception of being separate or isolated, leading all of us to some pretty unhealthy behaviors. Yoga therapy is the science that empowers you to better understand all of these interrelated behaviors and modify them. Gain the skills and then share them. Together we can change the health of our family and community.



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