



ACUPUNCTURE & ACUPRESSURE

Teaching Qi Gong to Children

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Many of us have come to embrace Qi Gong or Tai Chi practice as a regular part of our lives. Qi Gong has been a stabilizing factor in my life for the last twenty years. My desire is for children to experience the benefit of this amazing system all their lives, so I've been working with them for the last five years. My takeaway message is to make it fun, easy to learn and memorable.

Children today have a plethora of challenges and it seems only prudent to give them a skill set that allows them to thrive in many situations. Qi Gong requires no equipment, only a mindset that is open to imagination. Children are usually good at that. Useful in the classroom, at home or almost any situation, Qi Gong is a valuable take-along tool to facilitate calm focus.

To share with children, you must first have the basics down yourself and really want to work with kids. You don't have to be a master, but being able to feel Qi in your body and stand as an example is important. Treating children with respect is imperative. Qi Gong is something to share from a place of happy well-being, never forced. Adults may choose to stand while the child is standing, but kneeling or sitting is better to enhance eye contact and connection.

Ideally done outside in nature with bare feet touching the earth, children can absorb the energy around them easily and have their imagination reinforced by what they see. While outdoors is the preferred place, even in a classroom with shoes on, there is a potential for increased group cohesion and relaxed awareness for all.



Very young children may still be belly-breathers, but asking a child to breathe in and make his belly big sometimes elicits pushing the belly forward while arching the back. Another way to encourage slow, deep breathing is to take a deep breath and then sing a sound like "o" as long as possible without taking another breath. It is amazing to realize that even the young may have great breath control.

Mimicking is a way of life with preschoolers, so just asking the child to move like you do may be a great start. Using specific directions is more important as children age, but even then, using imagination of what it feels like to be a tree with deep roots, waving in the breeze gives more substance than just directions of how to move. Beginning with tree imagery helps children keep their feet planted as they move.

Say what you want the children to do rather than what you don't want them to do. You may ask them to keep standing up while bending over, instead of telling them not to fall down. All they may hear is "fall down" and follow that. Use images that children understand, like a bird flapping its wings slowly up while breathing in and floating slowly down while breathing out. When getting a child to feel the energy between his or her hands, you may choose to use the word "ball." I tried calling it a balloon with a group of 3-year-olds. One boy promptly clapped his hands together to "pop" his "balloon!"

Younger children (especially 2 - 5-year-olds) love repetition, so a song with a repetitive chorus may be well received. Check out www.books.donnahenderson.net for an example of a song with a video doing the movements. Practice time generally grows with age and interest. A two-year-old may only stay with it a couple of minutes, whereas a five-year-old might be fully engaged for five minutes or longer.

Children age four and up may enjoy using their imagination to create their own moves after the basics

have been realized. The child chooses something in nature to imitate and shows how he or she would imitate that doing Qi Gong. The instructor has a chance to modify their suggestion before everyone follows the child leader to do that move. In one group, a child suggested being an earthworm, which sponsored some interesting spinal movements!

Other strategies I have found to work include:

- Standing in a circle to allow everyone to see the "leader," even if it is one of the children.
- Doing movements using opposite sides of the body to help right and left brain activity. Such a move could be raising the right hand (and lowering the left hand) while raising the left knee.
- Rubbing the hands together and then rubbing the face helps bring more Qi to the face. Other areas for brief self-massage may include the head, neck, arms, right shoulder to left hip and vice versa, legs, and feet. If the children are barefoot, rubbing Kidney 1 can be relaxing. Appropriate self-touch is often soothing.
- Feeling Qi sensation in their own hands has produced a wide-eyed response from some children. Describing this feeling elicits various descriptions, like "soft," "fluffy," "tingly," "warm," and so on. Everyone is right, since they are describing their own experience.
- A child may partner with a friend to place their palms at a distance apart and slowly decrease the space between until each feels something.
- Children may discover Qi in pets, trees and other plants, the earth and whatever interests them.

After only one session, the results for children may be memorable and reproducible even away from the group. While it is true that some take a lifetime to perfect their Qi Gong practice, giving a child beginner skills can be life changing. Qi Gong has the power to bring one physical ease, mental clarity, emotional stability and spiritual awareness. That is worthwhile at any age.

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