
Yonnie Fung

to

Yoga and Movement Research Community

November 1, 2018 ·

So I'm thinking about ways we as yoga teachers and yoga therapists can unintentionally harm students - even when we mean well and these are some initial thoughts.

Some are real conundrums that can feel quite impossible either way. What else would you add to this list? What would you take off this list?

1. Passing on information that we believe might help them, but fails to consider their emotional needs, or undermines their sense of agency in the process.
2. Offering advice on nutrition - juicing/ fasting/diets when we are unqualified to do so, or have not been asked. Not realising that our relatively powerful positions as yoga teachers means that some people will make the assumption that we know what we are talking about and take that advice to possible harm.
3. Advertising techniques that suggest the most physically demanding yoga asana is the most 'advanced' thereby encouraging practitioners towards attaining these postures as the goals of yoga. Our advertising could also reinforce the view that certain body types are 'yoga bodies', at the exclusion of other body types, or encourages feelings of inadequacy.
4. Offering advice as to where others should put their bodies in a way that sounds like a top down instruction, or direction - reinforcing a top down power structure which excludes a student from the decision making process as to what they might do with their own bodies.
5. Participating in power structures where students believe that the right to practice certain yoga postures is one that belongs to a teacher, and that teacher has absolute authority over what you may or may not physically practice.
6. Encouraging fear in a student by cautioning them to not move in certain ways we might believe are detrimental to their specific conditions - and undermining their trust in themselves.
7. Offering practices in class that are beyond the abilities of students without options for modification, silently encouraging them towards injury.
8. Teaching physically demanding classes that are very large, setting the stage for higher injury risks by being unable to monitor what is going on and being unable to offer helpful modifications.

9. Encouraging people to explore the edge of their physical limits without equally encouraging the validity of backing off, at best short changes people from discovering the depths of subtler sensations, at worst, fosters a mentality that will inevitably lead to injuries.
 10. Omitting to provide an appropriate opportunity for participants to refuse physical adjustments in a class where adjustments are present.
 11. Claiming our classes are for the general public without equipping ourselves with the means to accommodate the general public.
 12. Touching students, when the effect of that touch is experienced as harmful or by not touching students, when the effect of that non touch may be perceived as also harmful.
 13. Persistent marketing and overt pressure to sell products to students.
 14. Suggesting to students how to feel - ie, to 'be positive' to 'stay happy' etc, which negates their actual experiences.
 15. Acting beyond our scope as yoga teachers and yoga therapists. Diagnosing or leading students to believe that we are competent to diagnose if we don't hold professional licenses to diagnose health issues. This opens the gateway to a range of problems that compromises a person's wellbeing (misdiagnosis and mistreatment, discouraging them to seek medical attention when it's needed).
 16. Praising and encouraging so called 'advanced postures' or 'success' which fosters an attachment to certain outcomes, impeding detached observation of present moment experiences.
 17. Not providing relevant information in teacher bios and being unclear in our teacher bios in relation to our teaching experience and qualifications making it difficult for the community to make informed choices.
 18. Promising particular outcomes through yoga practice - ie, that yoga will 'fix your back', 'change your life forever'.
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Hi Shannon

Thank you for your invitation to appear on The Connected Teacher podcast. This is very exciting.

Here is my list of ways we can unintentionally harm our students.. it was born out of a morning's reflection on the meaning of ahimsa. The list comes from my previous experience as a student of Ashtanga, as an observer of how the yoga marketplace has evolved here in Beijing as well as other place and my experience as a yoga teacher.

If you could let me know how to proceed with preparing for this interview, or how I could assist, that would be great.

Looking forward to speaking with you!

All the best

Yonnie

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