

# YOGA: A TRAUMA-FRIENDLY WAY TO HEAL

“Yoga became a major cornerstone in our understanding that it is imperative to befriend one’s bodily sensations to overcome the imprints of trauma.”

-Bessel van der Kolk-

As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, you may have certain anxieties about attending a yoga class. That’s completely understandable. It’s worth your time to find one, however, because yoga can offer you a greater connection with yourself – both bodily and emotionally – and is well worth the effort of finding a trauma-friendly class. It’s important to find a class and instructor who can and will cater to your individual needs.

Some yoga classes are trauma-friendly – they’ll say it in the title or description of the class. If you can’t find one that is specifically advertised as trauma-friendly, that’s okay. There are still options for you. Here are things to consider when you search for a yoga class:

- **An instructor who is willing to understand your needs.**  
Talk to the instructor beforehand and let him or her know your boundaries. If you don’t want to be touched, if you need to be able to leave at any time, or if you are uncomfortable with the use of straps, these are all things to explain before a class starts. Look until you find an instructor you think will be willing to work with you.
- **A location that makes you feel safe.**  
Scout out the location ahead of time. How does it make you feel? A small amount of anxiety about a new thing is normal, but if the place is triggering you should look elsewhere.
- **You can stop at any time.**  
There is no rule that says you have to keep pushing, that you have to stay in discomfort, or that you have to do something that makes you uncomfortable. Give yourself permission to stop if it’s too much for you – physically or emotionally.
- **Leaving is an option.**  
It’s okay to leave if you need to do so. Pick a spot by the door that will give you an easy exit if you think you’ll need it.
- **Counting can help.**  
Timing what you’re doing can help you stay grounded in the moment. It can stop you from dissociating as you go through different poses. If the instructor doesn’t count, do it for yourself. It could make it easier.
- **Pace yourself.**  
Sometimes instructors will encourage you to keep pushing yourself. For trauma survivors this can lead to pushing too hard and getting hurt. Make sure you’re staying in contact with your body and mind.
- **Do what’s best for YOU.**  
Keep checking in with yourself. Sometimes that means trying something new and sometimes it means walking away. Yoga is, ultimately, about healing. Find an instructor and class that will help you on your healing journey.