

'Mindfulness' a new option for kids in Cottage Grove



Antra Renault practices 'mindfulness' in a new class for children

By Caitlyn May
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Once a week for 90 minutes, the studio at Crescent Moon Yoga in Cottage Grove is not full of downward dog or warrior poses, but of two children learning to sit and breathe.

"Right now I have two students but I'd like to get up to six or eight," says Antra Renault, the instructor for the studio's new mindfulness class.

Renault, a licensed therapist, said she was looking for a way

to head off the issues she saw in her office every day when she decided to teach a mindfulness class. According to Renault, teaching children how to breathe consciously and assess their emotions in a healthy way could be seen as a preventative measure for future mental health and behavioral issues.

"When you tell someone to calm down when they're already in the reptile brain, the fight or flight kicks in and you might get punched in the face," she jokes.

The "reptile brain," she says, is a person's natural fight or flight response. By teaching children how to recognize their emotions and be mindful of their reactions, Renault says harmful or violent outbursts can be controlled or avoided.

"The goal," she says, "is to be mindful before the explosion."

Each class varies but they always begin with the children pulling their yoga mat to the studio floor and mindfully

breathing. Renault uses teaching aides to explain complex ideas to little minds including two blue bottles; one with clear liquid, the other with blue glitter.

"Sometimes you're the bottle with the clear liquid and you can see right through. But when you have passion and anger and creativity floating around and out of control," she says, shaking the glitter-filled bottle, "it's hard to see through. But if you just sit and breathe for a few minutes, eventually, it will calm and you can see," she says as the glitter slows and settles.

Her methods, she says, allow students to think beyond their emotional moment. Being mindful had children asking whether a bully had a bad day before reacting to provocation and acting out violently.

Other activities include acting out tantrums which, Renault says, usually ends with students laughing and rolling on the floor. They also practice breathing with handmade pinwheels and play "Curious Alien," which allows children to explore their five senses.

"They pick something out of the bag and put it behind their back and we go through the senses. Even if they know it's a rock, they have to go through

the senses and it just has them slow down and be mindful," Renault says.

The favorite activity, however, is simply running around the studio.

"They'll run and tumble around," Renault says, "But then I'll shut the lights off and they have to freeze and assess."

'Ok, my breathing is fast and my heart is pounding,' and really, that's no different than fear. So they learn to go through that emotion."

The class runs every Wednesday and is priced on a sliding scale from \$8 to \$15.

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Opal Center to put on student show

Student applications due March 10

By Caitlyn May
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Leah Murray had an idea. What if she could get local teens involved in theatre and help them pay for extracurricular activities at the same time? The answer

came to her after recalling her own high school experience.

"We always did lip sync every year," she said. "We'd sing a song and do a skit and the audience would vote."

The idea for the performance at Opal Theatre in Cottage Grove doesn't differ much from Murray's own experience. Students will choose a song, dress up and put on a show. The winner will earn \$250 to use for the school group of their choice whether it be cheer-leading, football, the arts department or somewhere in between.

"It's about helping kids do the activities they want to do. I grew up without a lot of money and I hated the fundraising part of doing those extracurricular activities," Murray said.

On March 31, students will put on the "Lip Sync" show and compete for the grand prize. Second place can earn \$175 and third place will take home \$100.

The skits do not have to be elaborate but Murray, who will be directing the action on March 31, said the more imagination, the better.

"For instance," she said, "When I was in school we did 'Blue Suede Shoes' and one kid was Elvis and the rest of us acted like we were at Kmart for the Blue Light Special."

Students can mirror Murray's approach or they can closely follow the example set by the television show "Lip Sync Battle" in which celebrities lip sync popular songs in costume.

"It's about using your imagination," Murray said.



While top priority is for students involved in a group, Murray says she would consider individual students who want to take part in a theatre experience who would be willing to donate their winnings to a school organization. However, individuals would not be permitted to keep their winnings should they take home first, second or third place in the competition.

"It really is to help pay those fees so students can do the activities," Murray said.

Applications for Lip Sync Battle are available through the Opal Center and are due by March 10.

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