

Drew Teller Yoga

The Safe Space

8 Elements To Consider In Creating A Safe Space
As A Yoga Teacher

What is a Safe Space? [Part 1]

A safe space starts with acknowledging that it's impossible to create an entirely 'safe space' for everyone. What may feel safe for one person may not for another. As teachers, we aim to make the space as safe as possible by acknowledging that we don't know everyone's history or triggers.

A safe space is a space where human beings can do what they were born to do: To Feel.

A safe space is an environment where humans are able to naturally feel their emotions without judgment or moral evaluation. Feelings are not wrong or right. They just are.

Therefore, a safe space is where humans are able to show up and drop into a space of embodiment where they can feel their own experience.



What is a Safe Space? [Part 2]

Creating a safe space to authentically feel whatever is coming up without judgment or moral evaluation leads to opportunity. What opportunity?

In the absence of judgement and moral evaluation, human beings are able to create the opportunity to practice self-acceptance, self-compassion, or self-love.

Therefore, a safe space is an environment where human beings are able to, without negating emotions, feel any emotion through practicing self-acceptance, self-compassion, or self-love.

In other words, creating a safe space results in the opportunity for humans to feel the presence of Being.



As a Yoga Teacher Ask Yourself:

How can I create the opportunity of a safe space?

Creating the opportunity to allow people to feel without judgment starts with understanding the barriers towards the safe space. A few major barriers that get in the way of making a space feel safe:

- Judgment
- Perfectionism
- Worry

Teachers have tools (some more than others) that can be used to help eliminate judgment, perfectionism, and worry. With each element (next page), try to relate back to these barriers. As space holders, we cannot force self-acceptance, self-love, or self-compassion. However, we can try to eliminate all the obstacles that get in the way of practicing them.

Remember, it's impossible for create a safe space for everyone because we do not have a shared experience with everyone's history and triggers,



8 Elements To Consider:

1. My Health
2. The Physical Space
3. Teaching Language
4. Yoga Sequence
5. Music (Sounds)
6. My Physical Body
7. Physical Touch
8. Professional Demeanor



1. My Health

Questions To Ask Yourself:

How am I physically, mentally, or emotionally today?

Is there a possibility someone may think I am sick or contagious?

Have I done all I can to show up present to teach, setting aside any disturbances from the day?

Things To Consider:

If you are sick, maybe consider no hands-on assists or staying home. Students will not feel safe to practice if they believe you are contagious. If you are not emotionally grounded, work on getting grounded. Your responsibility to show up healthy is for your students' best interest. Remove the possibility of a student's worry about you during their practice so they can feel their own emotions.



2. The Physical Space

Questions To Ask Yourself:

What are the dimensions of the room? Is it indoor or outdoor yoga?

How open is the yoga space? How much free space is there for humans?

What are all the ways you can lay out the yoga mats?

How much open space is there between people?

Is it brightly lit, dimly lit, or dark?

Things To Consider:

The majority of yoga teachers do not have full control over physical space. Nonetheless, there are plenty of elements that are in your control. A few common barriers to a safe space are when students feel too close to their neighbor, too dark to see their own body or yours, and your own space to walk around freely. Students should feel protected from all corners of their yoga mat. Self-judgment and worry may increase with your students if there is not adequate space for them to practice. If you do not have control over certain aspects of space, be transparent and remove the elephant from the room by stating it before class.



3. Teaching Language

Questions To Ask Yourself:

What verbiage do you use to explain the yoga posture? What words do you choose?

How do you explain a posture?

What is your tone of voice? Is it dynamic?

How fast/slow are you speaking?

Things To Consider

Not every students will receive your teaching language equally. However, teachers can do their part by making the language as clear as possible so students don't feel worried about if they are doing it correctly. Teachers should use mindful language - choosing words that you can enunciate and be accessible for even the beginner in the space. Ensure you speak from a place of accessibility because students may drop into a sense of perfectionism when trying to access the pose. Consider the speed at which you are speaking. A yoga teacher's voice can be dynamic: speaking soft and slow during a cool down/warm-up and fast and strong during a heated build up. A dynamic speaking language allows teachers to be flexible in trying to create the safety of the space.



4. Yoga Sequence

Questions To Ask Yourself:

Is your yoga sequence accessible for everyone in the space?
Are people able to connect to your flow?

Things To Consider

You are there to serve your students. If every student cannot access the yoga sequence you are guiding, then students will not feel safe or protected. This may lead to fear about getting injured or worry about the way they look. As teachers, you may not know until after class has started that some may have trouble accessing your sequence. Be mindful in your flow - maximize your ability to help students feel a connection to the yoga. Making yoga accessible helps prevent students from feeling a sense of perfectionism. Sometimes, it's best to focus your attention on the beginners in the room. Often, making beginners feel safe leads to the majority of the room feeling safe throughout the yoga practice.



5. Music (Optional Sounds)

Questions To Ask Yourself

Consider the volume? Can your students hear you from all 4 corners of the space? Are you outside?

Is the volume of music dynamic? Does it change throughout the yoga class?

What is the purpose of the sounds you are using?

Things To Consider

Any sounds within a yoga space should always be chosen with an intention. Understand the 'why' before you make the decision to play or to not play music. One of the biggest barriers to feeling a safe space is the volume of music. If music is too loud, students cannot hear you. Often times, teachers don't even know they cannot be heard because students rarely feel comfortable telling a teacher. Therefore, you should be extra mindful of how your music competes with your voice. One or the other should always be emphasized at any given moment. Set the intention to have your music add value to the practice. If you choose not to have music, consider any awkward silences. Students will worry about their own connection to the practice if sounds become a barrier.



6. Your Physical Body

Questions To Ask Yourself

Do you do the yoga with your students?

Are you walking around during class? How fast/slow do you walk?

How is your tone of voice affected while traveling throughout the space?

What are your physical boundaries? Do you notice a student's space before approaching it?

Things To Consider

You have a body. Notice it. If you choose to practice the yoga you are teaching, make sure every student can see you. Choosing to demonstrate a posture while some students cannot see you could create an increase in self-judgement. Walking around in large yoga spaces will require the inflection of your voice to change as you walk. Notice the consequential affects between the physical space and your physical body. If you walk around throughout the class, notice your physical boundaries. Be mindful of how much space you give your students and how you enter their bubbles. Walking with intention lets the students know you are there to maintain the safety of the space and increases a students feeling of being seen.



7. Physical Touch (Optional)

Questions To Ask Yourself

Are you in contact with your students?

Do you ask for consent? How do you ask?

How do you approach your students? How do you leave a student's space?

What kind of adjustments are you performing?

How do you breath while adjusting?

Things To Consider

If you are a yoga teacher who adjusts students or touches students for support, help, and or to prevent an injury, you must consider the approach. Creating a safe space while physically touching a student must be done with mindfulness and awareness. Depending on the philosophy or approach around asking for consent, you still are responsible for leaving students feeling seen and safe to the best of your ability. Ensure that by asking for consent, you do so in a way that does not create the illusion of consent or makes people feel scared to speak up. Injuries are prone to occur before or during an adjustment. A student's fear of being touched or getting an injury is a common barrier to being in a safe space. As a yoga teacher, make sure breathing is apart of your approach to physical touch. Students will feel safer when they sense you are completely present in the action of touching them.



8. Professional Demeanor

Questions To Ask Yourself

When you are not teaching, but in the yoga space, how are you speaking?

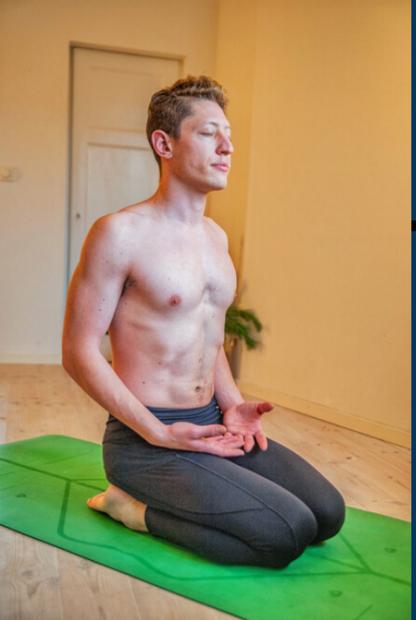
What kind of language do you use?

Are you being mindful, aware, and professional?

Things To Consider

Teachers are leaders in the yoga space. You are being listened to at all times. Before and after the yoga class, be mindful of how you speak to students. Being mindful and aware of what you say is important because students want to feel comfortable with your personality before class starts. Any lack of professionalism or unkindness in the yoga space will create a sense of worry or judgment in your students. Use kind and professional language at all times in a yoga space.





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Safe Space Takeaway

A safe space is a space where human beings have an experience to feel any emotion. Furthermore, a safe space creates an opportunity for people to practice self-acceptance, self-love, and self-compassion. The ability for a human being to acknowledge that they are in a safe space is 100% subjectively different for everyone. As a yoga teacher, we must consider and evaluate all the elements possible to help maximize our ability to create a safe space. There is no single or perfect right way to create a safe space, but there are hundreds of ways to help eliminate worry, judgment, and perfectionism.

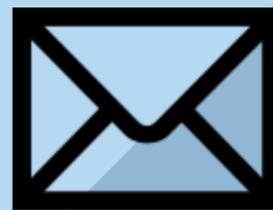
The purpose of this safe space presentation was to speak from personal experience and to hope that you, as a teacher, finds some of this useful when showing up in the yoga space.

Creating a safe space is a practice and no one holds it perfectly for everyone. Even though as yoga teachers we all make mistakes and misunderstand each other at times, but it's how we respond, listen, and learn that matters.

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