



Jonathan Lord MP, Chairman of the APPG on Yoga in Society, is delighted to invite you to the group's next meeting:

Yoga's Importance in Improving Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Monday 27th June 2022, 5.15 pm - 7.00 pm, Committee Room 8, House of Commons

Minutes

The meeting was opened by the Hon. Jonathan Lord MP, who welcomed those attending and fellow Parliamentarians Ben Bradshaw MP, Andrew Mitchell MP, Lord Desai, and Lord Andrew Stone. Just under 60 people were present at the meeting. Jonathan Lord expressed the hope that the APPG would go from strength to strength.

Heather Mason the Secretariat of the APPG introduced the evening's topic of the mental health crisis among young people. She spoke about the way in which yoga is bio-psycho-social and can have an impact young people in a multi-layered way – positively affecting the mind and the body. Yoga promotes self-care, mindfulness, and a deep sense of connectedness. Heather spoke about her own childhood and adolescent mental health issues from which she had only recovered when she discovered the tools of yoga in India.

Heather implored Parliamentarians to support the introduction of yoga into schools, taking the opportunity presented by the Education Bill currently going through Parliament.

Speaker 1. Dr Jon Goldin - Former Vice-Chair of Child and Adolescent Mental Health, **Royal College of Psychiatry**. He said there had been progress on prioritising mental health for children in school. Increased resources (79 million pounds) were also being directed to this area. However, the pandemic increased demand for services and these services are currently overwhelmed. Capacity is only meeting around 25% of demand.

Dr Goldin said there needed to be systems-wide approach, bridging the gap between schools and health services. Age 0-25 need appropriate support, based on clear standards for mental health support, and good data. Clarity for commissioners needed and clarity about what is commissioned and how money is spent. Mental health support teams in schools and the emotionally literate schools initiatives he said were both important.

An adequately trained mental health workforce is needed – current there is a shortage of suitably qualified people.

The pandemic exacerbated socio-economic disparities. There is a very clear link between poverty and mental health. Being prevented from going to school during lockdown increased mental health problems among young people. Some children were stuck in homes with challenging relationships, or abusive relationships. Schools are places of calm and safety for many children. This highlights the need to provide support to parents as well as children. (NOTE: Some children – around 25% - said lockdown made their lives better, including a significant number on the autistic spectrum.)

Home schooling, where some children did not have access to a computer, worsened inequalities. Loneliness, eating disorders (which have gone up exponentially, and where early intervention is crucial) also increased significantly, as did overall uncertainty and anxiety.

The system is under great pressure and more resources are needed. “We have a real crisis at the moment”.

Speaker 2 (via video) Dr. Sat Bir Khalsa - **Harvard Medical School** (yoga researcher and associate professor of medicine). He said stress, behaviour, academic pressure, physical health and attention issues all face young people. A study following children from 9-21 highlighted how early age problems led to higher adult risk of mental health disorders. Another study found that 17% of high school adolescent in America had considered suicide.

70% of young people who have a mental health issue had not received appropriate treatment for their problem.

Yoga can improve global human functionality through engaging the attention networks, including increased mindfulness. Leads to stress and emotional regulation. Yoga works on fitness, self-regulation, awareness, and spirituality, as shown by Sat Bir’s logic model.

There is growing research evidence of the efficacy of yoga to promote child and adolescent mental health.

Speaker 3. Dr. Lana Jackson - Yoga Therapist and Senior Clinical Psychologist for Young People in **CAMHS**. Children’s mental health services are under intense pressure. Yoga can help in a group setting and with individuals. Mainstream talking therapies can be a challenge for some young people. Mindfulness and acceptance-based practices can help, but again, for some, sitting still is difficult. Those experiencing a lot of sympathetic drive can benefit more from body and movement practices, such as yoga, which can work on the body and mind at the same time.

Yoga equips young people with emotional regulation strategies that they can use moment by moment in their lives as challenges arise. Rather than pushing emotions away, yoga helps young people work through emotions and learn skills of self-regulation, self-awareness, concentration and focus.

She called for better integration of health and education and a focus on developing the evidence base further and evaluating the yoga interventions used. Don't forget about parental mental health and how this will positively impact child mental health. Also supports attunement, and a healthy family dynamic.

Lord Stone added that not only mind and body but also heart is needed, embracing compassion, as an important component.

Speaker 4. Charlotta Martinus – Founder, **TeenYoga** (leading UK organisation bringing yoga into schools). One in 4 young people between 14 and 18 are facing a mental health problem. There has been a big increase in cases of self-harming. Many are denied treatment due to capacity issues.

However, 37% of those practicing yoga are under the age of 18, contributing significantly to well being in this age group.

Trained yoga teachers can help as a primary care intervention to address these issues. A Nottingham SEN school introduced 10 minutes of yoga every day and behavioural issues halved. It also changed the atmosphere in the entire school.

Charlotta presented qualitative evidence of pupils who had learned emotional release and self-calming strategies through yoga. She asked, what is happening during yoga practice? Cortisol levels halved in the yoga group in one study. They also became prosocial, relaxed and were able to function better due to the yoga. Feedback from participants: "That was sick" "Can we do this every day". Those who had been playing-up experienced shifts in their levels of anxiety and perceived stress, and were more able to socialise, learn and emotionally self-regulate.

A Wirral school has fully integrated yoga into its school, staff wellbeing programme and teaching and learning. The head teacher said "Yoga has provided children with a first-aid kit for life". "Tools to survive in a difficult world". "The yoga helps us to co-regulate others".

Yoga is cheap, effective, scientific, systematic and promotes self-regulation. It can relieve some of the pressure on CAMHS and other services and help our young people in a way that society should.

Speaker 5. Shivani from Bradford. She spoke about being racially bullied and internalising hate and channelling that on herself. This led to low self-esteem and self-harming and social anxiety. Happiness is always in the future – an external goal. Yoga philosophy teaches that everything we need, including happiness, is within us. Yoga has the power to help young people in the way it has helped me.

Speaker 6. Jyoti Manuel – Founder, **Special Yoga** (leading UK organisation on yoga for children with special needs). Jyoti explained how she had pioneered yoga with SEND children and how it had led to significant positive changes for children who were more able to learn. It supported their physical health and wellbeing.

There are 1.5 million young people (20% of all children) with a diagnosed SEND need in England. These issues affect their ability to learn, behaviour and social connection. Physical ability and agility can also be affected.

The yoga is aimed at helping them to thrive, but also benefits the education of the other youngsters around them, by improving the overall teaching and learning environment.

Well-being, posture, emotional regulation have all improved as a result of yoga, studies show. These are skills for life. Slowing the breath down and triggering the relaxation response are techniques that can help these children develop capacity to learn and thrive.

One parent said “I think the yoga has saved my marriage”.

We need to get yoga into schools. It’s cheap, it’s impactful and effective.

Speaker 7. Joanna Fletcher - **APPG** Lead on Yoga for Children. Joanna explained how her children were not keen on the idea of doing yoga during lockdown until she challenged her three boys to breathe the slowest, and it transformed their mood. This shows the need to make yoga fun and engaging for children. The techniques of emotional regulation, learned early, can serve throughout life.

The YogaJo Foundation aims to work with teachers and others to provide short yoga practices for young people and their parents, all available via a large online platform. Teachers can access short 5- or 10-minute videos to support yoga in schools. The Get Ready to Learn programme in New York has used this approach and can be improved upon, Joanna said.

The online platform is highly cost effective. It will also address the needs of SEND children. She said they were working with a consortium of schools in Sutton Coldfield to understand how yoga can support children.

Joanna spoke about her work with Sutton Coldfield Rugby Club for injury prevention, and composure on the pitch. Through the network of 2,000 rugby clubs over 200,000 thousand children can be reached and taught yoga.

The Schools Bill is an opportunity to integrate yoga into schools and through a few meaningful breaths great change could take place. What would change? Relaxation, breath and physical practice are the cornerstones of yoga.

Heather Mason said that breathwork had the most impact.

Speaker 8. Kwesia. I was excluded from school, and was a carer for my grandmother who had Parkinsons and Alzheimers. Kwesia suffered losses of loved ones from knife-crime and an honour killing. I faced a lot of challenges growing up. Sport was an outlet and I became a football coach at the age of 16. My mental health deteriorated and I attempted suicide. I was referred to CAMHS. My Dad took me to a Hammersmith Well-Being conference and I gave yoga a try with Charlotta. From that experience I was overwhelmed and crying – the

stress I was carrying was released. Previously I thought yoga was for white middle class women. I didn't realise it was all about connecting to the world better.

City Girl in Nature was an initiative I started in 2020 – I started it to help city people to connect with nature, including the use of meditation in nature.

Ben Bradshaw MP – impressive and moving testimony. My advice is to show firm public health benefit data. Cost benefit data needs to be nailed down and circulated to Parliamentarians and policymakers. Yoga probably has one of the highest cost-benefit figures.

Andrew Mitchell MP. I'm here because of my constituent Joanna and she is doing great things. Yoga is a very powerful intervention that can save the state a lot of money and help a lot of people.

Tabitha, another young person attending the meeting, spoke about becoming overwhelmed by ritualistic behaviour, and thoughts of suicide. Yoga she learned at school has helped her to control her OCD and continues to do so.

Heather Mason ended the meeting by thanking Jonathan Lord. She said there were 5 good studies on Return on Investment. Hearing how yoga has transformed lives was compelling. The UK has 20% of schools involved in yoga (including youth and after-school clubs). The Schools Bill is an opportunity to broaden yoga and transform lives. She thanked everyone attending for their passion and commitment.

The meeting ended at 19.10.