

Yoga in jails helps make better fathers

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A yoga instructor leads his class through various poses at the Chelan County Regional Jail in Wenatchee. Credit: Washington State University

A Washington State University researcher has found that yoga can help fathers in jail be better dads.

A study by WSU Extension educator Jennifer Crawford found that yoga, which can improve physical and mental health, may also help incarcerated fathers improve their [parenting skills](#).

"We would have a class on a specific topic, like child development or setting limits," Crawford said. "That would last about an hour, then a yoga instructor would come in and give a guided [yoga class](#)."

The study, located at Chelan County Regional Jail in Wenatchee, took place over three years with 14 different groups of male inmates. The program was advertised among the jail population; volunteers, who had to be parents of young children and pass a security screening, were recruited.

The results, published in the August edition of the *California Journal of Health Promotion*, showed that inmates demonstrated being more aware and accepting of their vulnerability and responsiveness to children, among other benefits.

The program, called "Fit Fathers, Successful Families, Inside and Out," had a goal of preventing child abuse and reducing recidivism by improving parents' resilience.

"Yoga can be physically demanding, and the initial responses we got from the participants confirmed that," Crawford said. "I believe the yoga practice helped participants become ready to learn and increased their willingness to try new ideas, absorb new information and begin to apply these in their lives."



Participants in the Fit Fathers, Successful Families, Inside and Out do the downward dog pose during a yoga session of their class. Credit: Washington State University

Although the yoga instructor for each lesson couldn't physically touch the participants due to jail regulations, Crawford said the classes didn't look that unusual.

"It was very similar to what a person would see in a normal yoga gym - other than the security guards entering and leaving the room," she said.

The instructor started every class with a centering exercise, then taught

simple sequences that focused on standing poses; more complicated poses were not used due to potential health issues among the inmates.

Outside of the class setting, the inmates did journaling exercises such as writing about their own upbringing or ways they communicate with their children.

The [yoga](#) classes were modeled on other programs around the country. The parenting classes followed a curriculum based on an established course taught in other correctional settings called "Fit2bFathers," developed by Ohio State University Extension.

The study, funded by a grant from the statewide nonprofit Council for Children and Families and the Washington State Department of Early Learning, didn't contain any control groups; Crawford said she hopes to conduct more rigorous studies in the future.

More information: Paper: www.cjhp.org/volume13Issue2_20..._CJHP2015_Issue2.pdf

Provided by Washington State University

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