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### Yoga craze spills over to preschoolers

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**NEW YORK (AP) --** When the yoga teacher urges her students to stretch like trees, Benjamin Wolfgang gets up on his toes. Jenna Katz opens her palms to the ceiling.

Francis Karagodins, however, runs around the room and plays with the curtains.

He can be forgiven: he's just 3 years old. Jenna is 4, and with two years of instruction behind her, a veteran in an increasingly popular activity, yoga for children.

For teachers like theirs, Jodi Komitor, it is a fast-expanding business. Two years ago, she taught 50 children a week at her Next Generation Yoga studio on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Now there are 150, paying \$20 per 45-minute class.

Co-author of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga with Kids," Komitor hosts yoga-themed birthday parties for eight at \$515, not including food, and trains other instructors, 20 at a time, at \$795 per person for a four-day session.

She sells animal motif relaxation blankets for \$75, and a collection of yoga video tapes for kids ages 2 to 7 sell for \$16.99 each. She has her own video in the works, as well as a chain of studios.



Joaquin Callenbach practices yoga over balls during a session at Next Generation Yoga in New York.

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Jenna Katz, 4, right, keeps an eye on instructor Jodi Komitor during a session.

"I'm starting a children's yoga clothing line next," she said.

As health-conscious adults discover the virtues of yoga, they want their young ones to stretch, bend and squirm, preferably striking yoga poses in the process.

"Yoga is good discipline," said Suzanne Koppelman, Jenna Katz's mother. "She is a very active child and it is good for her to slow down. It is good for her flexibility, too."

#### Starting young

Clearly, the children enjoy themselves as they slither like snakes, bark like dogs and try to dodge the mist Komitor sprays on them, saying "This is rain -- if you like rain, be a tree."

Whether classes like this help 3- and 4-year-olds grasp the philosophical underpinnings of yoga is anyone's guess.

"With the older kids, we talk about breathing and meditation," says Komitor. "With the youngest ones, we focus on a positive experience so that they become curious about yoga. It is a visual and sensory experience."

In Delray Beach, Florida, said the discipline offers a non-stress alternative to other sports.

"Parents are realizing that it is better for children to do yoga than be involved in competitive sports or Little League," she said.

Reiner said most of her students' parents practice yoga themselves. "They notice a major difference in the kids when they take yoga -- they are calmer and their balance improves."



Preschoolers lay on their yoga mats.

Helen Garabedian, who runs Itsy Bitsy Yoga in Marlboro, Massachusetts, said the form of exercise is liberating for children in a modern, restrictive world. Her classes cost \$15 per session, with younger siblings getting a 50 percent discount.

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