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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF THE UNITED STATES

# **Ethical Guidelines to Prevent Verbal Abuse, Sexual Harassment, and Physical Abuse**

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Section I – Legal Duties of U.S. Yoga Teachers</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Section II – Abuses of Power by Yoga Teachers</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Section III – Sexual Harassment and Other Abuses</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Section IV – Verbal Correction of Students</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Section V – Physical Adjustments and Consent</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Section VI – Empowering Students</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Section VII – Sexual Relationships with Students</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Section VIII -- New Reporting Requirements for Sexual Assault</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Section IX – Guidelines When Students Seek Informal Resolution of Other Complaints</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>17</b>



## Introduction

On October 10, 2018, we announced a series of modifications to our ethical rules and procedures to assure that all CIYTs adhere to the highest ethical standards and protect the safety, autonomy, and dignity of students.

We reaffirmed that our ethical standards prohibit any form of verbal abuse, any form of sexual harassment or abuse, any other physical abuses, and the establishment of intimate relationships when a student-teacher relationship exists.

We simultaneously announced that we would develop ethical guidelines and educational requirements to implement these standards. We here release these guidelines. They are based on the recommendations of a committee made up of students and CIYTs of all levels of certification. They also were reviewed by the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN).

We will now require that CIYTs certify annually — before they establish or renew their certification mark agreements — that they have read and studied these Guidelines. We also encourage our students to read them.

We recognize some CIYTs will need to change their practices to implement any new systems of informing students and obtaining each student's affirmative informed consent to manual adjustments. We ask that these measures be implemented as soon as possible and no later than January 1, 2020.

These ethical guidelines are a living document. We expect that there will be new iterations of them in the future.

We invite your comments. Please send any thoughts or suggestions to [ethicsjl@IYNAUS.org](mailto:ethicsjl@IYNAUS.org).

## Section I

### Legal Duties of U.S. Yoga Teachers: Potential Civil and Criminal Liabilities

CIYTs should have a basic understanding of the legal environment in which they teach.

IYNAUS's ethical standards are not laws. But they were adopted against the background of the laws of this country, and they seek to assure that CIYTs adhere to ethical standards that exceed legal requirements. The maximum sanction for violation of our ethical standards is revocation of IYNAUS membership and of the right to call oneself an Iyengar Yoga teacher.

At the same time, CIYTs should understand that significant legal duties apply to all yoga teachers. Although yoga teaching is not licensed anywhere in the U.S., yoga teachers are subject to the same criminal laws and other laws that apply to all other members of our society

CIYTs should understand that they will break the law and risk personal injury lawsuits (and sometimes criminal prosecutions) if they sexually touch students without consent, if they otherwise physically abuse or harm students, or if they make harmful or abusive statements to students. If abuses occur, victims/survivors should understand and consider their legal remedies. They are far more significant and effective than anything IYNAUS can do.

**Physical Adjusting without Consent or Unreasonable Touch with Consent.** Under the law of every state, it is unlawful to intentionally touch a person anywhere on the body without their consent (battery) or to threaten to do so (assault). It is also unlawful if the touch exceeds the consent given.

Personal injury lawsuits can be brought to recover compensation for the harm caused and punitive damages can be sought in many circumstances. In extreme circumstances, criminal prosecutions can be filed for both assault and battery.

Further, even with consent, a yoga teacher has a duty of reasonable care. A personal injury action for negligence can be filed if the touch was unreasonable.

**Sexual Touching without Consent.** In most states, it is a crime punishable by imprisonment to intentionally touch a sexually intimate area (e.g., genitals, anus, and breasts) through clothing without consent for the purpose of sexual gratification, sexual arousal, or sexual abuse. A court may infer the improper purpose from the conduct. If there is penetration (directly or through clothing) or if the touch is directly to the skin, the severity of the crime and potential penalties can be greater.

Whether or not this conduct results in criminal prosecution, it can be the basis for personal injury lawsuits in which victims/survivors may seek both compensation for psychological and other harms and, in appropriate situations, also punitive damages.

**Verbal Abuse and Other Harmful Statements.** Finally, words and expressive conduct can be harmful. The risks of harm can be magnified when the words or conduct are directed to individuals who are vulnerable, when the words and conduct are perceived as threatening, when statements are false and cause reputational harm, when words are sexual in nature, when words harm an individual emotionally, or sometimes when the statements create a hostile work environment. Such statements can be grounds for personal injury or other lawsuits seeking compensation (and often punitive damages) for defamation, for intentional or negligent infliction of emotional distress, or for certain other civil wrongs.

In extreme cases, verbal statements can be grounds for criminal prosecutions, particularly if they can be interpreted as motivated by an individual's race, religion, national origin, gender, or sexual orientation.

**Survivors' Remedies and Statutes of Limitations.** Survivors may file criminal complaints with prosecutors and pursue personal injury lawsuits or other remedies in courts in their own names. There may also be circumstances in which there are remedies before state or federal administrative agencies.

Survivors should be aware that actions must be brought within the periods set forth in the applicable statute of limitations. These vary from state to state and from offense to offense. Depending on the state, the circumstances, and the law at issue, the statute of limitations can be as short as 180 days or as long as ten years.

Survivors should consult legal counsel about their remedies. IYNAUS cannot provide legal advice.

## **Section II**

### **Abuses of Power by Yoga Teachers**

Our ethical standards include prohibiting sexual harassment and abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, and establishing sexual relationships when there is a student-teacher relationship. These standards were adopted to protect the dignity and autonomy of students and to prevent CIYTs from abusing the positions of power and trust that they occupy.

All teachers in all fields inherently have power over their students. They have knowledge and information that their students do not and can dispense approval or criticism. CIYTs have authority and inhabit positions of trust in yoga classes.

Yoga students may be more vulnerable than students in other fields. In yoga practice, students move their awareness from the periphery to the core, oftentimes accessing deep emotions. Students can have personal and profound experiences, sometimes with their eyes closed. The yoga practice can lead to the quieting of the mind and relinquishing of attachments and aversions. CIYTs also provide instructions that affect sensitive and erogenous areas. If yoga teachers mistake their authority in yoga classes as personal power, it could lead to abuses of their position of trust.

The yoga class is also a setting in which students can form strong emotional attachments to teachers and vice versa. If appropriate boundaries are not strictly observed, students and teachers can form desires and attraction to one another.

The CIYT's power can be further heightened: (1) if the teacher is the student's mentor or recommending teacher, (2) if the student assists in the teachers' classes, or (3) if the teacher is the studio owner or manager and the student is also an employee of the studio or otherwise works for the teacher.

Under any scenario, a CIYT who fails to exercise the necessary discipline and to observe appropriate boundaries can abuse power in ways that harm students.

The goal of our ethical standards is to prevent abuses of power by CIYTs and assure that yoga practice can instead empower our students. See Section VI below.

## **Section III**

### **Sexual Harassment and Other Abuses**

Section 2.c of the IYNAUS ethical standards prohibit any form of verbal or physical abuse of students. We adopted a separate prohibition on sexual harassment to make explicit what was already implicit: our rules bar any unsolicited and unwelcome sexual advances, sexual touching/adjusting, or verbal, visual, or physical conduct that creates a sexually hostile environment in a yoga class or studio. See Section 2.d of the IYNAUS Ethical Standards.

Sexual harassment is not gender specific. Harassers and their recipients may be of the same or different gender. The behavior does not have to be of a sexual nature and can include offensive remarks related to a person's sex, gender or appearance or making offensive comments about an entire gender.

CIYTs may not use sexually suggestive language or gestures. Nor may they use violent language, whether or not it is sexually explicit or suggestive.

To prevent the creation of a sexually hostile environment, CIYTs may not use sexually suggestive language, gestures, movements, pictures, or other images in their classes, in any studios that they own or manage, on their websites, or in their social media pages. CIYTs may not make sexual jokes, make graphic or degrading comments about sexual body parts, or display sexually graphic pictures or cartoons in a classroom, studio, or associated website or social media.

When there are references to sexually sensitive body parts – the genitals, the anus, breasts, the tail bone, and the buttocks – in teaching, they should be neutral and technical to describe actions without sexual implications or imagery. We caution against making any references to sexually intimate areas (the genitals, the anus, and breasts) with beginners and newer students.

Similarly, CIYTs must dress modestly and refrain from conduct that exposes sexually sensitive areas. CIYTs may not engage in other similar conduct that would tend to create a sexual or sexually hostile environment.

The teacher should avoid comments on their students' appearance that could be perceived as sexual or intimidating attraction. The teacher should avoid comments or instructions that idealize or assume a specific body type or body image. Also avoid gendered instructions or making gender generalizations.

If a student states that any behavior is unwelcome and the teacher repeats the behavior, it can be considered harassment.

As further explained in Section V, CIYTs may never intentionally touch certain sexually sensitive areas – the genitals, the anus, and breast tissue. CIYTs may adjust other body parts only with affirmative informed consent and only to provide legitimate adjustments, with no lingering, stroking, or massage-like actions. Great sensitivity and steps to minimize intrusiveness is required when physical adjustments are made to the buttocks, the groins, arm pit chest, and sternum. See Section V.

As further explained in Section VII, a CIYT may neither establish a sexual relationship nor make sexual advances or proposals when a student-teacher relationship exists. See Section VII.

## **Section IV**

### **Verbal Correction of Students**

An important feature of Iyengar Yoga are the individualized corrections that CIYTs provide students. Corrections can be made verbally — the subject of this section. When students do not respond to demonstrations or individualized verbal instructions, CIYTs can make physical adjustments through the medium of a prop or tactile contact with the student — the subject of Section V — Physical Adjustments and Consent.

Verbal instructions may not be abusive. If a verbal instruction has the purpose or objective effect of shaming, intimidating, humiliating or threatening students, it is verbal abuse and prohibited. It is unethical for CIYTs to demean a student for any reason, including attempts “to break students’ egos” by challenging their senses of themselves. Profanity and sexually explicit or suggestive language may never be used. Violent metaphors and language are prohibited, whether or not they use profanity.

These principles apply to verbal instructions given to the entire class as well as verbal instructions directed to individual students.

When a student is unsafe in an asana, a CIYT must intervene and help the student do an alternative version or asana. There are situations in which a student may resist these directions and may misperceive them as abusive. In these circumstances, CIYTs should emphasize that the teacher’s priority is always to assure safety and if necessary, explain why an alternative pose is appropriate for that student.

CIYTs should otherwise exercise caution in making individualized verbal or other individualized correction. Correction (whether verbal, through a prop, or tactile) may be perceived as judgmental, humiliating or domineering and may trigger a negative reaction, rather than the intended positive transformational result. Newer students may be unfamiliar with the culture of Iyengar Yoga classes and the fact that they are in a learning (rather than doing) environment. Even experienced students may not like being corrected by a CIYT with whom they have not established trust. Do not assume that unfamiliar students want to be corrected.

In general, teachers should give newer students physical and mental space to absorb what is being presented before being singled out.

### **Guidelines for Verbal Instructions, Adjustments and Corrections:**

- Use non-violent, compassionate communication.
- Make positive verbal corrections to identify correct actions without negative judgments.
- Emphasize friendliness, positive reinforcement and redirection.
- When reinforcing correct action, be specific so that the students have a clear understanding of the corrective action.
- De-emphasize your personal approval or disapproval and instead emphasize the correction.
- Find positives to reinforce in all students instead of singling out one good or one bad example.
- Be brief and use a neutral tone and neutral body language when giving a redirection.
- Provide a neutral, non-judgmental explanation when it is necessary to provide a student with a modification or an alternative asana for their safety.



- Build an awareness of and take responsibility for your own reactions.
  - Notice any reaction you are having to a student.
  - Acknowledge the response but don't act on it.
  - If feelings of frustration with a student are present, do not correct the student.
  - Wait to see if a more benevolent demeanor reappears before interacting individually with the student.

## Section V

### Physical Adjustments and Consent

Physical Adjustments are a critical feature of Iyengar Yoga teaching. Whether they are made through the medium of a prop or directly through hands on adjustment, physical adjustments teach correct actions and can prevent and address injuries.

However, adjustments that may benefit most students can be harmful for others. For example, physical adjustments could trigger past trauma in some students. **CIYTs should always be sensitive to the possibility that students are suffering from trauma and behave accordingly.** See Section VI.

Other students may experience physical adjustments as violations of their bodily integrity and privacy due to their personal space requirements, cultural background, or other reasons. We need to protect the autonomy and dignity of these students.

Further, there are types of touch that serve no legitimate purpose in Iyengar Yoga and that we believe antithetical to the values and culture of the U.S.

To implement ethical prohibitions against sexual harassment and against physical abuse, IYNAUS has adopted the following rules to govern touch by CIYTs:

- CIYTs may always touch students when necessary to prevent injury: e.g. if one student is about to fall on another student or is falling in a dangerous way.
- Otherwise, CIYTs may not touch students during class unless the CIYT is providing a legitimate physical adjustment to which the student has given **affirmative informed consent**.
- Adjustments cannot be made to the genital region, the anus, or the breast tissue of a student, no matter what a student says.

- Great sensitivity, caution, more explicit consent, and steps to minimize intrusiveness are required for adjustments to the buttocks, the groins, the arm pit chest, the sternum, and the abdomen.

### **Affirmative Informed Consent:**

- Affirmed informed consent is required both for physical adjustments through the medium of a prop and for tactile hands-on adjustments.
- Consent may not be assumed or inferred but must be affirmatively given by informed students. The student must be informed where the touch can occur and affirmatively consent to it. Consent cannot be inferred from a student's failure to opt out of receiving adjustments.
- At any point, a student may withdraw consent.
- We must respect the fact that a student who has given consent may feel uncomfortable being adjusted later:
  - After having received an unpleasant adjustment or correction.
  - After seeing another student being adjusted.
  - After feeling pain or discomfort.
  - After being emotionally triggered.
  - Or for any other reason that may cause them to change their mind.
- When a student withdraws consent, the CIYT may not adjust the student unless affirmative consent is given again.
- Teachers must consider that if a student does not want any type of adjustment ever, there may be situations in which it is appropriate to limit the postures they can do to prevent harm. To prevent injury, it may be necessary to modify or restrict inversions, back extensions or other asanas where there is significant potential for harm if physical adjustments may not be given.

### **Methods of Obtaining Consent:**

There are a variety of ways of obtaining affirmative informed consent. It can be different for newer students than for long time students with whom the CIYT has a relationship of mutual trust.

Studios owned by CIYTs should provide students with information that explains the use of touch in Iyengar Yoga. The student must be informed that the Iyengar Yoga method involves physical adjustments but that students will not be physically adjusted unless they affirmatively consent. The information can be posted on the wall, provided in a waiver form, and/or posted on the web site. Additionally, it should be provided orally to new students.

There are many ways in which consent can be given and withdrawn. Some suggest having students wear a bracelet or place a card or a chip in front of their mat to indicate that they generally consent to adjustments — with the student able to withdraw consent by removing the object.

Others suggest that teachers can ask students at the beginning of class and have students raise their hands if they consent to being adjusted. Some recommend that this occur while students' eyes are closed so that only the teacher sees who consents. There then must be other methods for consent to be withdrawn, and these must be communicated.

Each of these methods has advantages and disadvantages *e.g.*, chips in front of mats won't work when students don't use mats, when they move away from them in class, or sometimes when mats are moved. The method of obtaining consent is at the discretion of the studio or the CIYT, but consent must be affirmative and informed when given and there must be clear opportunities to withdraw consent.

Unless affirmative consent is clear from the relationship, past statements, and the circumstances, the teacher should also specifically ask if he or she can adjust the student before by saying for example: "Can I adjust your arm here? Is it ok if I rotate your thigh? I am going to adjust you, is it ok? Is it ok for me to touch your sternum?"

If a CIYT teaches at a studio or other location that does not adopt a mechanism to obtain affirmative student consent to adjustments and allow it to be withdrawn, it will be incumbent on the CIYT to establish such a mechanism.

Having a general conversation at the beginning of a class session or from time to time during classes regarding adjustments can be useful.

Some people have difficulty saying "no." Even if a student said yes to the adjustment, the body language may indicate the opposite when the adjustment is made. For example, a student may recoil from the touch or resist or otherwise go against the adjustment. If there is a verbal "yes" but the CIYT observes a nonverbal "no," the teacher should not adjust the student. CIYTs should develop sensitivity to nonverbal as well as verbal cues.

If a student informs you that they do not wish to be adjusted, respond with a positive comment such as, "Thank you for letting me know." Do not challenge them.

Trust is built between teacher and student over time. By allowing the student to participate in setting boundaries and by honoring the students' boundaries, trust will be built quicker and students who initially withhold consent may later allow the CIYT to utilize all their teaching skills with that student.

Once an understanding is established between a CIYT and a student, it may be unnecessary to ask before adjusting someone.

## **Regions of the Body—Prohibited Areas and Special Consideration for Other Areas**

Adjustments may never be made to genitals, the anus, or breast tissue, even with consent of students and even through the medium of props. If one of these regions is inadvertently touched, the teacher should immediately apologize so that it is clear to the student that the touch was accidental.

There are other regions that are highly sensitive, where props should ordinarily be used as an intermediary between the teacher and student and where explicit permission to adjust is imperative. Be sensitive to your and the students' gender in deciding whether to seek consent to specific adjustments. If you are not sure if your touch is being perceived as invasive, ask the student if they are comfortable with where you are touching them. Attention to non-verbal communication and body language must be intensified when working on or near the following regions:

**Armpit Chest and Sternum:** When adjustments are made for the armpit chest, sternum, and other areas close to breast tissue, there should be enormous sensitivity on how a student receives your adjustment and care should be taken not to touch breast tissue.

**Buttock region:** The buttock region may be a sensitive area for many students. Consider using ropes, belts, a block, a mat or a blanket as a barrier, or other appropriate props.

**Groins:** The groin is a highly sensitive region and adjacent to the genitals; therefore, extra sensitivity is required. Use ropes/belts instead of direct hands-on adjustment in this area whenever possible.

The teacher should ask the student to place the belts/ropes in the groin area and adjust them appropriately following the teacher's verbal guidance. In this way, the students' private space is respected.

**Abdomen:** Ask the student before touching their abdomen. The entire abdominal and pelvic cavities can be quite sensitive, and some students may not want to be touched there.

### **Adjustment Guidelines**

- Correct with words first.
  - Then through the medium of props.
  - Only then, use hands-on adjustments.
- Unless touch is necessary to prevent injury, the teacher should consider providing space for new students to become familiar with the dynamics of an Iyengar Yoga class before giving physical adjustments. There is not a prescribed number of classes taken before

physical adjustments are made, but it is important to consider giving newer students time to adapt to the method.

- If newer students do not respond to visual and verbal instructions, do not assume that you should seek consent for hands-on adjustments. The failure of the student to respond may be due to lack of interest or obstinance and further attempts to correct could be perceived as hostile or establishing dominance. If the student continues to return to class, see if they become receptive to visual and verbal instructions before suggesting hands-on adjustments.
- Adjustments should be clear. Know the intention of the adjustment and be as precise as possible. Adjustments can be of the following types:
  - Convey a sense of direction.
  - Be firm and quick.
  - Provide support (and then must be firm enough so that it truly provides the support intended).
  - Bring awareness to an otherwise dull region.
  - Helps mobilize that which is immobile or stiff.
- Teachers should stop adjusting if there is any perceived or felt resistance from the student.
- Adjustments should not be ambiguous. Teachers' hands should not drift in different locations or linger on a student after the adjustment has been performed.
- Teachers may not touch students in class in a casual manner such as:
  - Massaging
  - Soothing, stroking, caressing
  - Hugging
  - Sensual touch
  - Any ambiguous touch
- Adjustment should demonstrate firmness and create stability without being aggressive. In addition, the teacher needs to ensure the student is stable before leaving them after a correction.
- Hands-on adjustments are usually most effective during the exhalation phase of breath and coordinated with the student's exhalation to help the student relax and defuse psychological and physical resistance.
- Adjustments should never create a dynamic of dominance. Some adjustments such as standing over or on a student or adjusting with the foot can be perceived as domineering.
- Students should not be surprised or caught off guard by a teacher's adjustment. The teachers should let the student know that they are nearby, especially if approaching from behind. If standing behind the students, talking/instructing helps the students to know the whereabouts of the teacher.
- If the adjustment will be strong, warn the student in advance to avoid surprise and assure that the student is prepared.

- Students should feel safe during an adjustment. Teachers should ensure that their adjustments do not destabilize the student. In inversions without wall support for example, the teacher will inspire confidence in the student if they stand behind and either provide support or the potential for support. The teacher’s support should be light and yet stabilizing as the fear of falling backwards can have a contraindicated effect on the student.

## **Section VI**

### **Empowering Students**

CIYTs should create an atmosphere of openness, inclusiveness, and mutual respect in their classes. Abuses are more likely to occur – and less likely to be reported – when a teacher fails to appropriately manage their own boundaries or when a student feels unable to speak up for or set a limit for themselves in the classroom. Students are at increased risk of abuse if a dynamic is created in which a student feels dependent on or indebted to the teachers. Students must not believe that they need to cede their individuality and agency in order to learn from a teacher. The culture in the classroom established by the teacher should facilitate students' abilities to take care of themselves, speak up, and maintain personal boundaries that allow them to learn safely and effectively.

CIYTs must educate without usurping a student’s control, so all students can be safely attentive and receptive without surrendering their sense of self. Some examples of ways in which CIYTs can help empower students through yoga:

- Ask students to observe in themselves the effects of an action or an asana.
- Encourage students to begin a home practice to develop their own relationship with the practice and themselves.
- Explain to students that there are many correct ways to do an asana and that in any given class, a teacher is offering one way to promote a specific type of learning, awareness, and experience in that class.
- When teaching new techniques, variations, or modifications, allow time for students to experience and understand the differences.
- Ask the students to reflect and internally verbalize their experience so that they remain present, involved, and take ownership of the practice, value their own observations, and cultivate self-observation.
- Remind students that they can be their own best teacher; that the CIYT is teaching to an entire group and individual students may at times need an instruction or a pose different from what is being taught.
- Provide an explanation to the student when you offer modifications or alternative asanas.

- Maintain an open and supportive stance towards other teachers to avoid cultivating territoriality or a rigid mindset.
- Be open and available for questions. When appropriate, invite feedback or questions during class. Be available for questions after class.
- Don't harass a student or be insistent over a particular point of alignment. Trust that when they are keen to learn, they will progress.

If individual students appear stressed in class, it is possible that a prior trauma has been triggered. It is thus essential that CIYTs take extra care to be certain that these students feel safe and in control.

- Keep the student in the present moment.
- Offer options in the forms of modifications, props, or alternative asanas.
- Don't use that student as a demonstration model.
- If instructing the individual, do so with inviting, rather than ordering language.
- Do not insist that these students do anything towards which they feel reluctance.
- Do not insist that the student be placed in a particular part of the room. Give options.
- Do not dictate the duration or frequency of the breath. During pranayama, remind the student that they can return to normal breathing at any time and to breathe at their own pace.
- Allow the students to keep their eyes open during the invocation, restorative asanas, or Savasana. If students don't feel safe in Savasana, offer them alternatives such as sitting or well supported supine asanas with eyes open.
- Be mindful of your voice and language. While use of the active voice can effectively communicate precision and inspire confidence, it can also be mistaken as commanding and domineering. Give active voice instructions with a friendly tone, normal conversational voice volume and neutral body language. Learn to project your voice without shouting.
- Allow the student to leave the room to drink water, walk around, etc.
- Don't overcorrect.
- Do not approach, adjust, or instruct the student from behind, especially in standing forward bends. If they appear disturbed in asanas like Uttanasana and Prasarita Padottanasana, give them the option of doing the poses with the backs of their legs against a wall.
- Let the students cover themselves with a blanket in resting poses.
- Allow the students to decide whether to be tied with belts.
- Otherwise allow the student to maintain maximum control over themselves and do whatever is required to feel safe.

In order to make Iyengar Yoga accessible to all, CIYTs are responsible for creating an environment of inclusivity, where everyone in class feels safe and valued. This involves

recognizing individual differences with acceptance, tolerance, and respect, regardless of how anyone may identify in the world, including race, ethnicity, gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, body type, religious beliefs, or political or other beliefs.

## **Section VII**

### **Sexual Relationships with Students**

Section 2.e of our ethical standards prohibit the “establish[ment of] intimate relationships when a teacher-student relationship exists.” Intimate relationship means any form of sexual relationship, including kissing and any form of sensuous touch. Section 2.f also requires a CIYT to “recognize when the student-teacher relationship has been compromised” by “desires” and “assist the student in finding another CIYT if possible.”

These prohibitions protect the integrity of Iyengar Yoga classes. The classroom dynamic and potential for learning would be fundamentally altered if the teacher or students view the yoga class as a setting in which to meet or pursue a romantic or sexual partner. Iyengar Yoga classes must be free from such dynamics.

Students and teachers sometimes engage in patterns of behavior that are informed by earlier experiences, with or without awareness. These patterns of behavior can be harmful to both student and teacher, especially if earlier experiences involved any kind of abuse or neglect.

Students and teachers can form desires towards one another. Students may aggrandize the teacher or may develop strong feelings of attachment or indebtedness to the teacher if the student has experienced relief or healing from yoga.

Under the influence of emotions or chemistry, a student can be unaware of the dynamic at play. Intent, motive, or awareness on the part of the teacher or student is not required for this power dynamic to develop, and it will not immediately dissipate in periods in which a student is not taking classes with that teacher.

It is the responsibility of the teacher to maintain clear boundaries and to not take advantage of the trust or devotion of a student. That will protect individual working relationships, the safety and functioning of the whole of the class, and the integrity of the greater community.

## **Section VIII**

### **New Reporting Requirements for Sexual Assaults**

Our ethical guidelines are enforced through “complaints” filed with the IYNAUS Ethics Committee. On October 10, 2018, we adopted reforms to eliminate conditions in our community that prevented or inhibited complaints when significant misconduct occurred in the past. Our



procedures are summarized in the section of our website entitled [Standards and Considerations](#).

We now announce one further reform. Historically, IYNAUS has not required anyone to report allegations or evidence of ethical violations to the IYNAUS Ethics Committee. The decision whether to file a complaint — or otherwise to provide evidence of misconduct to IYNAUS's attention — has been committed solely to the discretion of individuals who experienced, witnessed, or were told about the misconduct.

We generally reaffirm that rule today. However, we conclude that there should be an exception to this rule when there are allegations that a CIYT sexually assaulted a student in class by intentionally touching the genitals, anus, or breast tissue. This is abhorrent conduct. We have a policy of “zero tolerance” when it is found to have occurred, and our rules should provide maximum reasonable assurances that evidence of this misconduct will be brought to the IYNAUS Ethics Committee.

Thus, in the future, a CIYT must report the information to the IYNAUS Ethics Chair if a victim/survivor has reported that any CIYT has intentionally touched a student's genitals, anus, or breast tissue in class. Similarly, CIYTs must report the information to the IYNAUS Ethics Chair if they witness any CIYT commit such a sexual assault on a student. The report must be made within 14 days of the receipt of the evidence or the date of these guidelines, whichever is later. This reporting requirement applies when CIYTs receive this evidence of a sexual assault from their own eyes or from the report of a victim/survivor. It does not apply when rumors are heard.

The report must be made even if the information was reported to the CIYT by the victim/survivor under an explicit or implicit request for confidentiality. If a student approaches a CIYT to complain about the conduct of another certified teacher, the CIYT should tell the student that allegations of this sexual misconduct must be reported. These are the rules that apply to faculty members and other employees of colleges and universities under Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 when students report sexual assaults. We believe the same rules are appropriate in our community.

We emphasize that we are NOT requiring CIYTs to report sexual assaults that are perpetrated on them directly. There are legitimate reasons why victims/survivors may choose not to file complaints or otherwise inform IYNAUS or CIYTs about assaults. However, if any victim/survivor reports the assault to a CIYT, the CIYT must report the information to the IYNAUS Ethics Chair within 14 days after the report or the date of these guidelines, whichever is later. The CIYT must also inform the victim/survivor that she/he is making the report.

## **Section IX**

### **Guidelines When Students Seek Informal Resolution of Other Complaints**

Because CIYTs must immediately inform the IYNAUS Ethics Committee if they have received reports of sexual assaults from victims/survivors, these complaints may not be informally resolved.

However, it is entirely appropriate for a student to seek to resolve other complaints informally, and we encourage CIYTs to cooperate in such efforts. If a student approaches you to complain about your conduct or about the conduct of another teacher, here are some guidelines:

#### **If a Student Complains to You about Your Teaching**

- Thank the student for raising the issue with you directly.
  - Acknowledge that it was brave of them to come forward.
  - Acknowledge the stressful situation.
- Respond with presence and curiosity and listen without judgment or defense.
- Restate what you have heard and ask if you have understood correctly.
- Respond but do not react.
  - Responding in a neutral way creates an opportunity for growth.
  - Recognize difference rather than rightness or wrongness.
  - Do not imply the student is at fault or attack the student's character.
- Respond as quickly as possible.
  - If you cannot respond immediately, ask the student for time to respond.
- If you have trouble responding to the complaint directly, contact your mentor, the studio owner/manager, your regional Iyengar Yoga association, or the Ethics Committee for assistance.
- If you can resolve the complaint informally, follow-through on any agreed upon action and check in with the student to make sure they are satisfied that the issue has been addressed and resolved.

#### **If a Student Complains to You About Another CIYT's Teaching**

- Use your discretion and judgment in deciding whether to receive the report about another CIYT. Yoga teachers are not therapists. If you do not feel comfortable receiving the information, you can compassionately inform the student. Provide the student with a list of resources where they can find that support (and have such a list readily available).

- If you receive the report, refer the student to law enforcement or other personnel if there is any concern for the student’s safety.
- If the student tells you that he/she wishes to talk to you in confidence, inform the student that you will not be able to respect the request for confidentiality if the conduct involved intentional touch to the genitals, anus, or breast tissue and that these accusations must be reported to the IYNAUS Ethics Committee.
- Otherwise, you may respect the student’s request for confidentiality as well as maintain confidentiality if you receive information from the other CIYT.
- Listen calmly with presence, curiosity, without judgement, or reaction — just as you would if the complaint were about your conduct. See above.
- Respond as quickly as possible — just as you would if the complaint were about your conduct. See above.
- If the student has not yet approached the teacher, use your judgement.
  - If the type of complaint seems like something that the student and teacher should be able to resolve together, encourage the student to contact the teacher directly.
  - If appropriate, offer to be an intermediary, but recognize that this can potentially be a difficult and uncomfortable road to go down.
- If the student has already contacted the teacher and has not received a positive response, refer the student to the IYNAUS Ethics Committee.
- If you are unsure of what to do, contact your mentor, the studio owner/manager, your regional Iyengar Yoga association, or the IYNAUS Ethics Committee for guidance.
- Be clear with the student what the next steps are, what actions you plan to take and what actions they can take next, but do not make any promises. The student should feel in control of the course of action, consistent with the CIYT’s professional duties and law.

## **Conclusion**

We have adopted these guidelines to assure that Iyengar Yoga is uniformly known in the United States as a method that protects the safety, dignity, and autonomy of its students. We understand that these guidelines may seem unnecessary to the many CIYTs who have been vigilant in protecting their students for decades. However, IYNAUS’s mission is to disseminate the teachings of BKS Iyengar as broadly as possible in the cultural and legal conditions of the United States. Our mission requires that all CIYTs in this country are held to the highest ethical standards, and we have determined that these guidelines fully reflect the values and norms of the U.S. today as well as the teaching standards of BKS Iyengar.

These guidelines are just a starting point. There is much more to learn and we look forward to your comments and suggestions. These will be reflected in future iterations of these guidelines. We also hope to develop other types of educational materials for CIYTs.

With these measures, we can move forward together and trust in our community.

Yours in yoga,

IYNAUS Board of Directors

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