Transformative Life Skills: A program for individuals, families, and communities that enhances health and well-being through Mindful Yoga, Breathing Techniques, and Meditation.
## Program Information and Lesson Materials
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Niroga Institute

Founded in 2005, Niroga is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that brings:

**Transformative Life Skills (TLS)**

to individuals, families and communities through the integrative practice of dynamic mindfulness, including Mindful Movement, Breathing Techniques, and Meditation. The Sanskrit word, Niroga, means “freedom from disease” or integral health—health of body, mind, and spirit.

Niroga currently teaches 100 TLS sessions every week in 40 different sites, serving over 2,000 children and youth in schools and alternative schools, juvenile halls, and jails. We also conduct TLS training nationally for hundreds of educators and school-based behavioral health professionals, social workers, and violence prevention officials annually. In addition to helping them with personal sustainability (stress management, self-care and healing from secondary trauma), they are enabled to apply TLS in professional practice, both individually and in groups.

Niroga programs are widely viewed as evidence-based and trauma-informed, and a cost-effective front-line prevention and intervention strategy for education and mental health, positive child and youth development, and violence reduction. Independent research with students in urban schools has demonstrated that TLS can reduce stress and increase emotional awareness and regulation, enhance school engagement and distress tolerance, and alter attitude towards violence. These findings have multi-dimensional impact on learning readiness and social/emotional learning, classroom climate and school-wide learning environment, the academic achievement gap, education equity and the school-to-prison pipeline.

**Acknowledgements**

There are numerous individuals and organizations that have contributed to the development of this curriculum. Dr. Jennifer Frank, Research Scientist at the Prevention Research Center at Pennsylvania State University, has guided the formulation of this curriculum since inception. Senior Niroga teachers including Danielle Ancin, Annika Hanson, and Vanessa Zelmer contributed the content—integrating their extensive experience in conducting TLS sessions in a wide variety of settings.

Bidyut Bose, Founder and Executive Director of Niroga Institute, provided insight on the structure and progression of TLS practice from intra-personal to inter-personal throughout the 48 lessons presented. Erika Reynolds worked tirelessly on the layout and graphic design, making the entire curriculum eminently readable. Judy Dunlap, Niroga co-founder and Program Director, as well as Angela Urata, Niroga Operations Director, provided indispensable logistical support. We are thankful for many reviewers, both internal and external to Niroga, who have provided valuable feedback on the curriculum, and this project would not have been possible without the generous contribution of Niroga Board members and many individual donors.
Transformative Life Skills (TLS): An Overview for Instructors

What is TLS?
Transformative Life Skills (TLS) is a multimodality intervention that includes active yoga postures, breathing techniques, and centering meditation. Within the TLS curriculum, we refer to these three core practices as the ABC's (Acting-Breathing-Centering). The skills learned in TLS affect all aspects of life. They are transformative because if practiced regularly, they actually change the connections in the brain, becoming not only skills but also habits and, ultimately, behaviors and characteristics.

Why Transformative Life Skills for Youth?
Stress is endemic in our society, and our children are carrying it as well. Students come to school with day-to-day stress from their environment, chronic stress, and even traumatic and post-traumatic stress. Children whose parents were chronically stressed during their early development are often less able to manage their own stress and emotions, making chronic stress intergenerational. The impact of stress on the brain and learning is clear: when a person is under stress, the part of the brain that is responsible for memory, listening, language, and thinking is turned “off.” How can we expect our children to learn without first helping them to manage their stress?

People, including youth, act to seek safety and to feel better. When seen through this lens, “negative” classroom behaviors take on new meaning. The purpose of teaching Transformative Life Skills in schools is to provide students with ways to manage their stress, to find a sense of safety in their own bodies, and to take positive action to change their emotional and mental states. TLS covers the five core competencies of Social and Emotional Learning: self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. Young people need these tools in order to engage in school, learn, and have positive relationships. Yet schools often don’t provide these tools.

If we are sincerely interested in closing the achievement gap in US schools, we must look at the needs of all our students. Statistics show that African-American and Latino children are at much greater risk of being victimized by poverty, abuse, and toxic levels of stress. Schools traditionally have focused on punishing rather than healing the aberrant student, resulting in an achievement gap that, by the time the student reaches high school, is often insurmountable. In 2007, only 55 percent of African-American boys and 54 percent of Latino boys graduated from California schools. If we are to change this, we need to make our schools responsive to the needs of our children. (Oakland Tribune)

TLS offers adults and adolescents skills that they can apply on a daily basis with no ongoing cost. Once they learn the basic practice, they can continue to utilize the techniques throughout their lives. There is no “endpoint” to TLS: the more it is practiced, the greater the benefits. Other benefits of TLS include:

1. TLS is democratic. Any person, regardless of age, ethnicity, class, or physical or mental ability can practice TLS anywhere, as it requires no formal equipment. TLS concepts can be readily adapted to all levels of physical health and various conditions. The skills can be used in the classroom, individual therapy, family settings, group living, or enforced incarceration, or by individuals for their own personal practice.
2. TLS can reach youth who do not respond positively to traditional Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, such as adolescents and those dealing with head trauma, complex trauma, learning disabilities, or emerging personality disorders. The student is offered choices and invited to participate at his own pace, which can build a sense of self-determination and agency.

3. TLS is self-sustaining and empowering. As students develop a regular practice, it becomes incorporated into their daily lives. It creates a platform from which motivation is enhanced to address challenges as it elevates mood and engagement in other skill building and therapeutic processes.

4. TLS is trauma-informed. As such, it is meant to be not only accessible but also healing for students who have suffered acute or complex trauma. Trauma is an experience of not being in control of what happens to your body. Unreleased trauma often results in a disconnection from the body and a hyper-aroused nervous system. TLS invites students to reengage with their bodies in a way that gives them control, options, and tools for calming the nervous system and managing triggers.

5. The TLS protocol can be quickly learned by professionals to utilize with their students or clients and can be incorporated into the day in sessions as short as 15 minutes.

**How Does TLS Work?**
The centuries-old techniques of physical postures (action), breathing techniques, and meditation (centering) are known to reduce tension, relax and focus the mind, and energize the body. TLS works by incorporating these three components in unison: moving with full attention on the present experience while using the breath to calm the nervous system.

TLS is a strengths-based approach that sits firmly among the CBT emerging interventions. It enables students to learn integrative skills for self-monitoring, impulse-control, and managing anxiety and stress. The use of MRI on clients in research has shed light on how yoga postures, meditation, and breathing techniques impact the structure and functioning of the brain and nervous system. Chronic stress disrupts prefrontal cortical processing, affecting attention control, emotion regulation, adaptive coping strategies, and empathy; neuroscience shows that mindfulness practices mitigate those very same effects. The research of Tangney, Baumeister et al (2004) shows that emotion regulation affects academic potential, psychopathology, substance abuse, binge eating, interpersonal relationships and more. Therefore, TLS can have a dramatic impact on all of the above issues.

**Breathing:** Perhaps the most effective component of the ABC’s for managing stress is the Breathing. The calming breathing techniques practiced in TLS work directly through the brainstem to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, or relaxation response. This decreases the power of the “fight or flight” centers in the mind and restores the centers of self-control, language, listening, and thinking. Students connect movement with breath to help them focus their minds as they calm their nervous systems.

**Action:** The Action component of the ABC’s includes both mindful movement and holding various postures. The physical movements of TLS activate the insula, the part of the brain that is responsible for feeling body sensations and empathy. Through the insula we notice when it’s time to eat, to rest, or when we are going to lose our temper, and we are able to feel for others. Studies of the brain using
MRI have shown that yoga can cause the insula to grow. Thus the practice of yoga postures coupled with awareness of the body and breath can increase our self-awareness and our ability to maintain healthy relationships with others.

**Centering:** The Centering component of the ABC’s is the focus of attention. When we are centered, we are aware of what’s happening in the present moment. We notice our body sensations, thoughts, and feelings without feeling swept away by them. In yoga this is referred to as concentration and meditation. When we meditate, we use a part of the brain called the medial Prefrontal Cortex (PFC), which governs interoception, the ability to notice what is happening inside the body. The larger the medial PFC, the more control the person has over their actions. The medial PFC has a direct pathway to the amygdala, which is the fight-or-flight center of the mind, and thus is extremely important in stress management and emotional regulation. Neuroimaging has shown that the medial PFC increases in size through yoga and meditation. Those who meditate and do yoga regularly not only have greater control over their actions, but they can also manage the emotions that underlie their actions with greater ease.

Given that TLS affects the very structure and wiring of the brain, the lessons and skills learned become habits and behaviors. When students practice TLS regularly, they begin to see changes in the way that they feel and act even without consciously trying. They do not just memorize ways to have better stress management, self-awareness, self-regulation, and healthy relationships—they change their ability and behavior from the inside out.

TLS can be effective in meeting specific challenges commonly faced by youth:

1. **Trauma:** In people who have suffered trauma, both the insula and the medial PFC are severely damaged. This means that people suffering trauma often feel disconnected from their bodies and have severely compromised impulse control, in addition to other possible symptoms including hyperaroused nervous system. Hyperactive nervous systems disrupt sleep, reduce concentration and generate secondary health and emotional problems. TLS can restore the functioning of the insula and medial PFC. At the same time, the breathing techniques activate the parasympathetic nervous system to override the fight or flight response. With TLS youth develop a sense of safety in their own bodies, learn ways to calm themselves, regain control over their reactions to events, and are able to make smarter choices. The Department of Veterans Affairs is increasingly using yoga to treat PTSD, and preliminary research has shown yoga to have a higher rate of effectiveness than CBT in the treatment of complex trauma.

2. **Mood Regulation:** Through meditation, one’s mood can be enhanced and symptoms of depression and anxiety can be reduced. Yoga increases alpha and theta waves in the brain, which are needed to access and process emotions and pressures in life. Luders (NeuroImage, 2009) found that the brains of those who meditated have more gray matter and thus processed information more quickly, making them better at managing their emotions.

3. **Stress and Anxiety:** Stress generates the hormone cortisol, which can lead to a wide variety of health problems when present in high quantities or over a prolonged period of time, as is the case in chronic stress. After a yoga class, cortisol levels have been found to be reduced. A study by Harvard and Massachusetts Hospital on 28 highly stressed adults who did an eight-week course documented that the brain became less reactive and more resilient (Yoga Journal, June, 2010).
4. **Motivation**: Yoga allows for self-empowerment; yoga practitioners develop not only physical strength but also courage and willpower that can be used off the mat when faced by challenges. Those who practice yoga learn that they have the capacity to learn and succeed at new activities. They gain confidence in facing challenges, which carries over into their lives off the mat.

5. **Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD)**: TLS incorporates mindfulness, which, broadly interpreted, refers to focusing on the present moment, with full participation and an attitude of non-judgmental acceptance. Yoga assists youth in identifying physical sensations that occur and increasingly tolerating the discomfort that arises from the poses. This widening of the window of tolerance for discomfort can be applied off the mat as well. TLS’s use of physical postures, breathing, and meditation together create powerful tools by which those in recovery can disrupt the craving response, as well as affect metacognitive processes, which have broad and long-term effects on the abuse of AOD (Teasdale, Segal, and Williams 2003).

**Empirical Support for TLS**

A randomized, controlled study was conducted in 2012 to measure the effectiveness of Niroga’s TLS program in an urban school with 6th and 9th grade students. The findings and implications are compelling, and span three interconnected domains of social function: education, mental health, and violence prevention. Researchers found that students participating in the TLS program showed lower levels of perceived stress, greater levels of self-control, school engagement, emotional awareness, and distress tolerance, and altered attitude towards violence. This is not only beneficial to the students and the school as a whole, but it has direct multi-dimensional impact on education equity, the academic achievement gap, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

This study confirms the findings of earlier studies on TLS. A controlled study conducted in an ethnic/economically diverse high school (n=543) revealed statistically significant improvements in student self-control and concurrent reductions in perceived stress. Improvement was particularly strong for female students. Follow up interviews with program participants revealed a high degree of intervention acceptability and social validity among both students and teachers (Matthew, 2009). A similar study of TLS in a juvenile detention center yielded the same results of reduced perceived stressed and increased self-control, further demonstrating that TLS can be employed with youth of various cultures, backgrounds, and experiences.
About This Curriculum

Program Goals and Outcomes

The goals of the TLS curriculum can be organized according to the curriculum’s four units: Stress Management, Self Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Healthy Relationships. These objectives are cumulative, in that one builds upon the learnings of the other, but they are not linear. Each component of TLS affects and augments the others. Students do not “graduate” from TLS, but continue to enhance their stress management skills, self-awareness, self-regulation, and relationships throughout their lives. Thus the TLS curriculum is a catalyst to lifelong personal development.

Stress Management is a necessary gateway to self-awareness, emotional regulation, and managing healthy relationships. When we are overcome by stress (whether everyday stress, chronic stress, traumatic stress, or post-traumatic stress), the part of the brain that governs inhibition, logical thinking, and self-control goes “off-line.” This part of the brain also controls language and listening. It follows that students unable to manage their stress will have enormous obstacles to learning. The first premise of TLS is to calm the nervous system to bring this part of the brain back on line.

As students learn to reduce and manage their stress, they will be increasingly able to engage in classroom activities, listen to instructions, and remember what they have learned. Researchers have shown that anxiety plays an important role in attention disorders; providing students with tools for managing anxious feelings is essential for helping them manage their attention. Learning to reduce feelings of stress and manage stress and anxiety when it comes up can thus have a direct positive impact on learning readiness. It can also contribute to a safer and more engaged classroom climate and a positive school-wide learning environment.

Self-awareness includes being aware of your body sensations, emotions, actions (including reactions), and thoughts. The practice of yoga builds self-awareness by slowing down the action and breath and focusing the attention to what’s happening in the present. When engaged in this type of mindful movement and breathing, our thoughts slow down as well, making it possible to observe them without becoming absorbed in them. As we practice, we build neurological connections to support increased self-awareness, and we become more aware of our body’s signals, our emotions, and our thought patterns in every day life. Self-awareness affects our self-care, relationships, and self-regard; in fact, it affects every aspect of our lives.

Self-regulation is similar to self-control: the ability to alter your behavior, or choose the way you act. Research by Tagney and others has shown low self-control to be a risk factor for a broad range of social and psychological problems. On the other hand, higher self-control correlated with better grades, less binge eating and alcohol abuse, better relationships and interpersonal skills, secure attachment, better adjustment (less incidence of psychopathology and higher self-esteem), and more optimal emotional responses. In other words, better self-regulation positively affects all areas of life!

In TLS we practice mindful action combined with calming breathing, enabling us to widen our window of tolerance for discomfort and act deliberately rather than reacting to impulse. Mindful breathing calms the nervous system while we evoke sensations through our movement; we notice the sensations, which
can sometimes be uncomfortable or stressful, without reacting to them; and we pause to decide, whether we maintain or change the action. With practice, we build new connections in the brain that enable us to control our reactions and have more self-control, even in stressful situations.

Self-regulation means more than just controlling your actions though. We can also take action to transform the way we feel. The action in TLS includes postures that relax the body. When the body is relaxed, the person is unable to feel anxious or angry. Through practicing relaxing the body, students learn that they can do things that help them feel a sense of calm, and thus a sense of control over their experience.

**Healthy Relationships:** The intra-personal nature of the first three units gives way to the inter-personal in the final unit on Healthy Relationships. If students are lucky, they will have had contact with model healthy relationships in their lives. But many students will not have that experience. The goal of this unit is not to tell students how healthy relationships should be, but rather to lead them, through the practice of TLS, to gain a sense of their own interconnectedness and interdependence with one another.

Yoga can be challenging, but it is a non-competitive activity. It allows students the chance to build a sense of accomplishment and strength not by “beating” someone else or being better than them, but by practicing and getting better at something difficult. Thus we can all learn and improve, and support each other in our learning. Through exploring the body and the world of emotions, students celebrate their differences and appreciate how we are all the same. Students are offered the opportunity to work together to master poses in a group, and in doing so see how their actions affect the outcome for everyone.

Without stress management, self-awareness, or self-regulation, it would be very difficult to maintain healthy relationships. Healthy relationships, in turn, support students in managing their stress and developing self-awareness and self-regulation. All four aspects of the TLS curriculum support each other, buoying the student up toward healthier behaviors as they continue to practice.
Curriculum Scope and Sequence
The full TLS curriculum is four units comprised of eleven lessons, plus one lesson dedicated to reteaching concepts. TLS can be implemented in 15-minute, 30-minute, or 60-minute sessions. In most typical implementation scenarios, three lessons per week are delivered, and a unit is completed in a month. Each lesson focuses on a particular theme and introduces a new posture.

Unit Focus and Lesson Topics

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<th>Unit 3. Self-Regulation</th>
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<td>3.1: Your Environment Affects Your Thoughts and Feelings</td>
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<td>1.2: Recognizing Stress in Your Body</td>
<td>3.2: You Can Manage Your Thoughts and Feelings</td>
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<td>1.3: Knowing What Stresses You</td>
<td>3.3: Centering Yourself</td>
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<td>1.4: How Stress Affects Your Breath</td>
<td>3.4: Your Thoughts and Feelings Affect Your Actions</td>
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<td>1.5: Using Your Breath as a Tool</td>
<td>3.5: The Importance of Being Centered when You Act</td>
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<td>1.6: How Stress Affects Your Ability to Learn</td>
<td>3.6: Acting vs. Reacting</td>
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<td>1.7: Clearing Your Mind, Calming Your Body</td>
<td>3.7: Your Actions Affect Your Brain</td>
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<td>1.8: Feeling Tired vs. Feeling Relaxed</td>
<td>3.8: Using Tools to Calm Down</td>
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<td>1.9: How Stress Affects the Choices We Make</td>
<td>3.9: Using Tools to Energize</td>
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<td>1.10: Releasing Stress</td>
<td>3.10: Practicing Making Choices</td>
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<td>1.11: Long-term Benefits of Managing Stress</td>
<td>3.11: Imagining Possibilities</td>
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<td>1.12: Review and Re-teaching</td>
<td>3.12: Review and Reteaching</td>
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<tr>
<th>Unit 2. Physical and Emotional Awareness</th>
<th>Unit 4. Healthy Relationships</th>
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<td>4.1: Your Behavior Affects Your Environment</td>
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<td>2.2: Building Body Awareness</td>
<td>4.2: Understanding Your Habits</td>
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<td>2.3: Being Aware of Your Body as You Move</td>
<td>4.3: Building Healthy Relationships</td>
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<td>2.4: Building Awareness of the Breath</td>
<td>4.4: What Does “Karma” Mean to You?</td>
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<td>2.5: Recognizing How Your Emotions Affect Your Breath</td>
<td>4.5: Your Role in Creating Your School Culture</td>
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<td>2.6: Using the Breath to Manage Emotions</td>
<td>4.6: Sharing What You Learn</td>
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<td>2.7: Building Awareness of Thought Patterns</td>
<td>4.7: Recognizing That You Are Complete</td>
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<td>2.8: Thoughts and Feelings Always Change</td>
<td>4.8: Connecting with Your Best Self</td>
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<td>2.9: Watching your Thoughts</td>
<td>4.9: Seeing the Good in Yourself and Others</td>
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<td>2.10: Focusing Inward vs. Focusing Outward</td>
<td>4.10: We Are All Connected</td>
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<td>2.11: Choosing Where to Focus Your Mind</td>
<td>4.11: Strengthening Yourself to Strengthen Your Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.12: Review and Re-teaching</td>
<td>4.12: Review &amp; Reteaching</td>
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Lesson Structure
We designed TLS to be consistent with best practices in pedagogy and instruction in mind. Each TLS lesson follows a predictable sequence and format that we hope will feel familiar to most teachers and students.

Lesson Overview
Each lesson plan provides an overview of the lesson, expected learning outcomes, and required materials for each lesson.

Student Overview
The Student Overview section provides a systematic method for instructors to introduce, explain, and orient students to the purpose and expectations for the day’s lesson. This includes a review of the behavioral expectations for TLS. The Student Overview also includes an activation of background knowledge, in which the lesson theme is introduced, students reflect on a key question regarding the theme, and the theme is connected to the ABC’s for the day.

Acting, Breathing, Centering
The A-B-C’s (Acting-Breathing-Centering) is the heart of TLS practice. Each A-B-C lesson provides scripted instructions for how to guide students through the core TLS practice. The script is written intentionally in a way that is inviting, not commanding, and provides choice whenever possible. The breathing is woven through the script in order to calm the nervous system as students explore new concepts and challenges. We have found this type of language helpful when working with youth, and it is of the utmost importance when working with people who have suffered trauma.

Wrap-Up
To conclude the TLS session, students are led through a minute of silence, meant to allow students time to focus on themselves in quiet meditation, followed by the closing bell. Connection questions are asked at the end to reinforce lesson themes and monitor student learning and engagement.

Extension Activities
In addition to the core TLS practices, we have included suggestions for extension activities for each lesson. Through the core TLS practices and extension activities, the TLS curriculum engages various learning styles and modalities.

Physical Arrangements
TLS has been implemented in a wide variety of settings including classrooms, after-school programs, detention facilities, shelters and community centers. Although classroom arrangement is flexible, it is important that all students have a clear view of you during group instruction. Arranging the classroom so that students face forward or in a horseshoe shape is optimal. For some lessons it will be important to arrange students in a circle or horseshoe so that nobody is facing someone else’s back. This is indicated at the beginning of the Mindful Movement section of those lessons.

It is also helpful to post the agenda somewhere in the room so that students can refer to it. Posting and going over the agenda can help students to manage their own focus and attention during TLS sessions. In general, use your best judgment to manage the room so that students feel comfortable and safe enough to practice TLS.
Required Materials & Instructional Options

We designed TLS for flexible implementation so that it can be used across a wide variety of contexts. We have found that the some intervention support materials are necessary to implement TLS, while others are optional supports our instructors have found helpful over the years. Depending on the nature of the context and budgetary or space constraints, reasonable substations can be made to support implementation.

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<th>Material</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Appropriate Substitutions</th>
<th>Requirement?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musical chime or singing bowl</td>
<td>Helps students gain focus</td>
<td>Bell, gong</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Workbook</td>
<td>Keeps students organized and engaged</td>
<td>Dedicated folder, binder, and journal</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor Manual</td>
<td>Provides instructor with resources and support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Guidelines for Instructors

Adapting TLS for Your Students

TLS has been implemented successfully with a variety of students of different ages, abilities, and backgrounds. The specific physical postures are not as important as the focus and breathing employed with them. Thus students of various physical abilities may adapt the postures as needed and still get the benefits of TLS.

Many of the lessons introduce real-life scenarios in order to support students’ understanding and motivation to master skills. To maximize interest, we encourage instructors to utilize examples involving situations that are appropriate to the interests, abilities, and level of understanding of students in the classroom. Feel free to use local examples or events to illustrate concepts and ideas. Each script should be considered an example, and may be modified to fit the unique needs of your students. When adapting the script, however, be sure to maintain the language of invitation and choice, and always remind students of the breath. This is important in order to ensure that your TLS sessions are accessible to students of all backgrounds and experiences.

As with any intervention, student choice is critical for success. We have found that on average, very few students decline to participate. However, there may be some that would prefer not to participate on a given day or in general. It is important to allow students space and time to determine their comfort level with TLS, and to understand that some students may take longer than others to give it a try. It is the role of the instructor to maintain a safe space for students who are participating, while inviting (not forcing) those that need more time to participate.
Timing
The information contained in the lessons can be communicated to the students at any time during class. If students seem restless at the beginning of class, it might be better to get them moving first and go over the background information in small bits throughout the Mindful Movement section or at the end of session.

Feel free to change the order of activities, but if you choose to do so, keep it consistent. We have found that having a predictable structure for class helps relieve anxiety and create a safer environment for students to participate.

Maintaining a Safe and Comfortable Space
Repetition and clarity about expectations are important. Review expectations before starting each TLS session if students have difficulties following them. If students have no problems following the expectations, you may choose to only review them periodically.

Be sensitive to the needs of the students. They are often vocal about unmet needs for safety, sometimes in ways that seem like “acting out.” If students feel like others may look at them or make fun of them in TLS, they will not participate. Maintaining a safe container not only includes ensuring that all students follow the expectations for behavior, but also can include managing the space between students, asking students to move to where they will be able to focus on themselves more easily, listening and responding to students’ concerns, and checking in individually with students whenever possible.

Pacing and Language
Pacing for the “Mindful Movement” section is important. Be sure to allow for time for students to breathe deeply and notice the sensations in their bodies. This may seem slow to students at first and cause discomfort or acting out. Help students refocus through verbal cues, bringing attention to certain sensations and to the breath. The verbal cues offered in the scripts can be helpful. If you come up with other cues that help you in your own practice, feel free to try these out as well. Teaching from your own personal experience can often be more powerful than teaching from a script. However, it is best to keep cues concrete and body-oriented rather than using imagery in order to keep students’ focus on the present and prevent dissociation.

You may notice that the language used in the lesson scripts is invitational rather than commanding, and provides options whenever possible. Since this is a mind-body modality, we feel it is important for students to feel that they are in control of their own bodies. In using this type of language, you allow students to build capacity in sensing and caring for their own bodies and making healthy choices for themselves. If this type of language is different from your normal classroom language, or if you find it challenging to teach in this way, use the examples in the scripts to help you.

For the silent sitting, the instructor may vary the object of attention if desired. You may invite students to focus on their breath, on sensations in their body, on relaxing the body, or on sounds they hear. Whatever the students focus on, remind them not judge or label it as “good feeling” or “bad feeling,” or “noise” or “pleasant sound,” but rather just notice what is here right now.
Embedding TLS in Existing Systems
We designed TLS to fit within existing systems that serve young people. We have found that with minor modifications, TLS fits easily within a Response-to-Intervention (RTI) framework and can be used as a Universal, Selected, or Indicated Intervention option.

Monitoring Fidelity of Implementation
Treatment fidelity is the extent to which the intervention was delivered as intended. The TLS Instructor Manual provides a checklist for each lesson to help instructors monitor whether they have covered each lesson element. Suggested scripts are provided to assist new instructors through the initial implementation process. These scripts should be considered examples only, and instructors are encouraged to adapt these scripts as appropriate to fit the characteristics of the group and context.

Assessing Student Outcomes & Monitoring Progress
It is important that instructors actively monitor student engagement, performance, and fidelity on a regular basis. Instructors may choose to check-in periodically with students verbally or through questionnaires or other assignments. It is highly recommended to check in with students personally, as much as possible, especially if a student is having difficulty participating.

Instructor Qualifications and Training
TLS has been successfully delivered by a diverse array of practitioners including full-time yoga instructors, teachers, social workers, and psychologists. The curriculum is designed with two options for delivery:
1.) In-class TLS, and
2.) Mat-based TLS.

Mat-based TLS should be implemented by a trained and certified yoga instructor. In-class TLS, the focus of this publication, is shorter and can be implemented by a wider range of people. That being said, the more experience one has practicing yoga or TLS, the better they will be at teaching it.

Several levels of training are available through Niroga Institute for those interested in delivering in-class or mat-based TLS. Niroga currently trains educators, mental health professionals, community organizers, and others in the practice and sharing of TLS through TLS Trainings. TLS Trainings offer an exploration of the scientific basis for TLS, an introduction to the practice for personal transformation and tips and practice for applying TLS in professional work. For certified yoga teachers interested in applying TLS to teaching youth, the Yoga for Youth training is offered. This training offers best practices for adapting yoga to the needs of youth, tips and practice for classroom management, and the social and personal implications of bringing yoga to youth at risk. For more information on trainings offered through the Niroga Institute, visit:
http://niroga.org/training/
Instructor Resources
The community of Yoga Researchers and practitioners is growing every day. The instructor resources provided by the Niroga Institute includes:

Transformative Life Skills (TLS) Trainings

- **TLS Level 1** — 6 Hours, 1-Day Training
  For educators, health professionals and social workers, violence prevention officials, parents, and adult allies. This training enhances personal sustainability—increasing stress resilience and healing from primary and/or secondary trauma

- **TLS Level 2** — 12 Hours, 2-Day Training
  Enables participants to demonstrate and lead students or clients in short TLS sessions, 1-on-1 as well as in small and large groups

- **TLS Level 3** — 18-Hours, 3-Day Training
  Enables participants to train others in TLS Level 1 and Level 2 trainings; graduates of TLS 3 are examined for proficiency, and are given Certificates upon completion

- **Continuing Education Units (CEUs)** — available for all three levels of TLS training
  - For educators from California State University East Bay
  - For mental health professionals and social workers from the California Board of Behavioral Sciences

Post-Transformative Life Skills (TLS) Trainings—Mentoring and Coaching

- Ongoing regular mentoring/coaching of past participants, individually or as a group, is available in-person as well as on online (via phone, Skype, video) as requested, to ensure optimal application of TLS for personal sustainability and in professional practice

Information Resources

- Central Repository of Transformative Life Skills information is the Niroga website: [www.niroga.org](http://www.niroga.org)
  - Transformative Life Skills videos: [www.niroga.org/media/video/](http://www.niroga.org/media/video/)
  - Transformative Life Skills training introduction web page: [www.niroga.org/training/tls_training.php](http://www.niroga.org/training/tls_training.php)

  1) Healing Yoga—20 minutes a day for health and well-being
  2) Yoga 4 Youth—20 minute protocol by and for youth, with instructions in English and Spanish

- TLS Video ‘Clinics’ addressing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from past participants, along with facilitated online discussion and community of practice (blog)

- Online videos and mobile applications for health and well-being:
  - [www.niroga.org/media/video-healing_yoga/](http://www.niroga.org/media/video-healing_yoga/)
    - Manage Your Stress: Anytime, Anywhere
    - Healing Yoga for Trauma

In progress, 2013:
Multimedia TLS curriculum, with lessons available as videos and mobile applications
Curriculum Lesson Plans Key
Text for Units 1–4 lesson plans include:
1. Overview and lesson plan information
2. Narrative text—scripts for each lesson’s section and mindful movement, breathing,
or meditation instruction
3. Commentary for instructors reference

Narrative Scripts
Instructor narratives to students are shown in shaded boxes, per the example shown below.

The bolded “Say:” text introduces this formatting, and the following shaded boxes indicate when
text is “live script” for student instruction. When text is parenthesized, this indicates a brief lesson plan
comment, and is not read to students—per the “(Pause.)” shown in the example, below.

Text blocks outside the shaded boxes are instructor reference and lesson plan commentary—not script
that is read to students.

EXAMPLE:

Say: Begin to notice the rhythm of your own breath. Is it fast or slow? Deep or shallow?
Take a few moments to notice the rhythm of your own breath. (Pause.)
Now take a moment to find your pulse by pressing your fingers against the inside of
your wrist, or under your jawbone, or on the left side of your chest.

Text shown between the script shade-boxes is intended for instructor reference,
and contains lesson plan or topics commentary. This text will not be read to students.