

# **I Teaching Iyengar Yoga in the UK 2: General Teaching and Ethical Guidelines – “The Teachers’ Handbook”**

## **I4a Guidelines for Iyengar teachers on the art of adjustment and the issue of consent in teaching**

“Outwardly the teacher should be tremendously strong but deeply receptive to the needs of the pupil. Serve the pupil who has come to you as if serving divinity”. BKS Iyengar.

It is an important part in the teaching of Iyengar Yoga that teachers will be required to adjust their students during the practice of asana.

First of all let us consider the reason and purpose for adjustment:

- It may be a health and safety necessity
- To enable the student to experience - the asana, an action, a feeling
- To bring understanding of an action - for example, adjusting a student with a raised shoulder
- To correct a common misalignment by showing on one student to benefit the whole class – several students may then need to be adjusted in the same way
- To encourage relaxation and release tension in an area
- To help students understand alignment and extension
- To bring a student into balance e.g. in Sirasana, Sarvangasana, Ardha Chandrasana, or any asana where there is imbalance or insecurity.

Protocol of adjustment should be introduced as a matter of priority in beginners’ classes. Teachers could advise the students that hands-on adjustment does take place if and when verbal adjustment has not been fully effective. If a student prefers not to be adjusted, that student should feel free to tell the teacher. This is something the student and teacher may wish to discuss privately. The student’s wishes should be respected by the teacher and recorded so that any teacher deputising or assisting will also know the situation. Students who have requested not to be adjusted should receive only verbal adjustments until such time as

they may become confident enough to benefit also from hands-on adjustment.

A few considerations:

- i) Teachers should be aware of cultural sensitivities i.e. members of some communities may not wish to be adjusted by male teachers and in some instances, female teachers.
- ii) Therapeutic adjustments may have to be more sensitive, e.g. back problems. Where there are more serious problems, e.g. cancer, some students may not wish to be adjusted at all.

Even though such cases will be taught by Senior teachers or experienced teachers with therapy qualifications, this also should be respected.

iii) When adjusting - verbal adjustment should come before physical adjustment.

iv) The teacher has the opportunity to adjust the student in such a way that the whole class benefits from the words of instruction, encouragement and explanation.

v) In this way a beginner may feel less singled out.

vi) It should be crystal clear as to why an adjustment is being made, although this need not involve verbal explanation if the student is able to feel the advantage directly.

vii) Adjustment is best left until the students have some understanding of what they are being taught, a teacher should not immediately 'pounce' on a student to adjust without the person having been given time to self-adjust, unless there is an urgent safety reason to do so.

viii) As teachers we have to learn also what to ignore and to leave for future work Some definite prohibitions:

(a) Teachers should not use their hands to support or adjust on or very near private and sensitive areas of the body particularly genital or excretory organs or the breasts. It may be permissible to use a rope or belt in the groin to correct a student or encourage a certain action.

(b) Teachers should not use the front of their pelvis to support or adjust or press against sensitive parts of the student. However, the side of the hip is sometimes used to adjust - e.g. to correct balance in Ardha Chandrasana, Virabhadrasana III or the standing twists.

(c) Teachers should not 'show off' what they know by over-adjusting or aggressive unnecessary adjustments.

(d) As requested previously by Guruji there should be NO PARTNERWORK BETWEEN STUDENTS. (See I4b). Partner work can be helpful in teachers' classes and peer group sessions for training, so teachers and trainers can practise making good adjustments.

It is important that if any student declares past trauma or a medical issue and does not wish to be hands-on adjusted because of this - then again this should be respected. In time, with care and sensitive teaching, this situation can change.

If any teacher feels they are unable to deal with any student with past trauma or medical conditions, they should take the advice of a Senior teacher, or their own Mentor.

We should not fear or doubt over giving adjustment. It is part of being an Iyengar teacher and if we are to continue to follow Guruji's work and lineage then we should not change the essence of our wonderful method.

One of Guruji's well known quotations in the Essential Qualities of a Yoga Teacher is as follows:

"Be affirmative when teaching so as to create confidence in the pupil. Be negative within yourself so that you can reflect upon your work. Work on your own self, quietly at home, to find out where you yourself have committed mistakes, either in your explanations, or in the method of correcting a pupil"

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