

Adapting Practices: Problem Solving into Variety

The first *yama* of *ahimsa*, non-harming, is fundamental in therapeutic work. Creating and teaching explorations and experiential practices for your students and clients involves a delicate balance between sensitive observation of capacity (mental, spiritual, emotional and yes, physical) and the application of traditional formal teaching.

Adapting practices to meet students' and clients' needs can maximize the benefit of these practices without creating resistance, further discomfort, or even injury, i.e. "harm".

Signs of strain are visible in the body as skewed alignment, tension, non-gradated actions through the torso and limbs, deeply exaggerated joint actions, propping (lack of integrative support from tissues), shortened breath, facial and jaw tension, general look of dis-ease. 😊

Adapting formal practices allows us to work on a continuum from permitting those with impediments to engage in and benefit from a practice (in a satisfying, comfortable way (*sthiraasukhamasanam*), to supporting and assisting deepening into the practice for those currently enabled.

Two ways to approach adapting practices are **formally** and **functionally**.

Formally: when approaching practice formally, we're focused on the formal instruction of the practice. We supply support to reduce strain in achieving the "form". With the physical aspects of practice (although the same is true for attitudinal, mental, and energetic ones), we do what we can so that the practitioner can fit into the form. For instance, this may involve bringing the knees up with blocks on either side in a sitting meditative pose, or placing a block on the floor for the hand in triangle pose.

Functionally: when approaching practice functionally, we look at the purpose of the practice in a particular situation for a particular individual. We ask, what am I teaching this pose to accomplish? What is the value of this pose for this person or group? Then we deconstruct the formal pose, choosing one of its features as our focus, and design a new adapted practice with the functional value of the original practice as its focus.