

# Trauma-Informed Teaching

## Language & Sacred Space

### Principles of Trauma-Informed Cueing

A trauma-informed approach empowers students to feel safe, autonomous, and respected in their practice.

- **Choice-Based Cues:** Use invitational language (“If it feels right for you, explore...”) rather than directive commands.

Here are some examples of **choice-based, invitational cues** that replace directive commands with empowering, open-ended language:

#### Instead of “Do this” → Try:

- “If it feels supportive, you might explore lengthening your exhale.”
- “You’re welcome to soften your gaze, or keep the eyes open if that feels steadier.”
- “Option to stay in stillness here, or add gentle movement if your body is asking for it.”
- “Notice if your shoulders want to melt toward the earth—if that feels nourishing, allow it.”
- “You may choose to stay with your breath, or let your awareness expand to include sound.”
- “If your body invites it, try reaching the arms overhead—otherwise, resting them at your sides is perfect.”

#### Why it Works

- **Respects autonomy:** Students are reminded they’re in charge of their own practice.
- **Reduces pressure:** No sense of “getting it right.”
- **Trauma-informed:** Invitational language honors safety, consent, and self-agency.

- **Encourages interoception:** Students check in with how it *feels*, not how it “should look.”
- **Non-Forcing:** Offer modifications and emphasize permission to pause, rest, or opt out.
- **Neutrality:** Avoid touch unless consent is explicit; guide with words and demonstrations.
- **Awareness of Triggers:** Be mindful of words, tones, and imagery that could be activating. Favor grounding metaphors (earth, breath, stability) over potentially triggering ones.

### Directive Cues (Command-Based)

- “Close your eyes.”
- “Bring your arms overhead.”
- “Straighten your legs.”
- “Take a deep breath in.”
- “Relax your shoulders down.”
- “Fold forward.”
- “Step your right foot back.”
- “Hold this pose for five breaths.”
- “Turn your head to the left.”
- “Engage your core.”

These are **precise, non-negotiable instructions**. They can be useful in certain contexts (e.g., safety, alignment, beginners needing structure), you will be able to see when a student is not comfortable with them - and then you can insert the choice based cues.

### Inclusive Language in Practice

Language shapes how students experience the space. Choose words that affirm all bodies and identities:

- Speak in **functional anatomy** terms rather than aesthetic ideals (“lengthen through your spine” instead of “**reach your crown chakra to the universe above you**”).

- Use **gender-neutral language** when addressing groups (“friends,” “everyone,” “students” rather than “ladies/gentlemen”).
- Acknowledge diverse experiences and capacities—reminding students that *every variation is valid*.

## Creating a Sacred Container

Beyond safe and inclusive language, the way you frame the class establishes the energetic container:

- **Intention Setting:** Begin by inviting students to connect with their breath, honoring both individual and collective presence.
- **Energetic Boundaries:** Establish clear guidelines—phones away, confidentiality respected, each practice as a judgment-free zone.
- **Ritual & Closure:** Open with grounding (breath, centering, intention) and close with integration (rest, reflection, gratitude) to signal safety and completion.
- **Collective Transformation:** Remind students that the work done individually ripples outward—strengthening not only their own body-mind but also the collective field of resilience, compassion, and balance.

## TCM & Yogic Integration

- Trauma-informed principles align with **Ahimsa (non-harming)**—protecting nervous system regulation.
- Inclusive language reflects **Santosha (contentment)** and **Svādhyāya (self-study)**—meeting each student where they are.
- Sacred space supports the **Shen (spirit) of the Heart** in TCM, creating calm, connection, and coherence for healing.

When teaching from a trauma-informed lens, with inclusive language and reverence for the container, movement becomes more than fitness. It becomes a sanctuary where safety, compassion, and transformation coexist. In this space, students reclaim agency, experience dignity, and touch the deeper wisdom of body, energy, and spirit.

## Teaching Techniques

### 1. CONNECT

Connection is the foundation of effective teaching. Before you can establish a meaningful connection with your students, you must first connect with yourself. This is why we focus on personal development early in the program. Whether teaching in-studio or via Zoom, it's essential to establish a personal connection practice before stepping into the classroom. Once you have connected with yourself, you can then engage your students with authenticity. Here are several ways to connect with your students:

- Introduce yourself, including the class of Prana Pilates and the duration.
- Encourage students to ask questions and inform you if something feels off in their bodies.
- Establish eye contact with students before instructing the first posture.
- Refer to body parts as “your” rather than “the” to foster a more personal connection.
- Use the first posture to center your students in the present moment - this is where you will do your 3 minute breath practice.
- Encourage students to set an intention for the class, which you can reference throughout.
- Minimize filler words to keep your language clear and concise.
- Maintain simplicity in your explanations and directions.

### 2. SIMPLE AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE

Your voice should remain authentic and consistent throughout your teaching, regardless of whether you're leading pilates, breath or yoga. Avoid altering your tone or style based on the content or the individual you're speaking to. Refrain from adopting a "yoga voice": a sing-song, overly elongated, or artificially soft tone. Speak with clarity and honesty, ensuring that your language is simple and grounded.

### 3. SILENCE & SPACE

As the name suggests, this technique emphasizes the power of silence and the importance of creating space in the classroom. Silence is not the absence of communication but rather the conscious choice to allow students time to process, reflect, and deepen their experience. Hold

space with confidence - maintaining your presence and connection with both yourself and your students.

#### **4. WEAVE IN THE MORE SUBTLE BODIES OF PRANA PILATES**

The medicine of the movement is in the Traditional Chinese Medicine Philosophy! Weave it in from the information you have in your training - but please - keep it grounded! Speak to the meridian lines, emotions in a responsible, non-trigger manner and the energetic body.

#### **5. STICK TO THE SEQUENCING SKELETON**

I promise, if you do - this will all start to make a LOT of sense!

Opening, Foundations, Progressive, Integration, Closing.