

Helping Kids Find Their Force: Q&A with Lisa Roberts

By Connie Mitchell | Posted: Thursday, May 1, 2014 1:00 pm

When Lisa Roberts was 28, she was diagnosed with kidney cancer. Through her treatment journey, Roberts sought and benefited from a variety of complementary and alternative therapies. That experience opened the door to Roberts' passion for sharing her knowledge with others as a yoga teacher and Reiki practitioner.

Roberts now works with pediatric oncology patients at a major children's hospital in St. Louis, finding playful and child-friendly ways to teach individuals and small groups how to use breathing, yoga and meditation for pain control and relaxation. Roberts recently published *Breathe, Chill: A Handy Book of Games and Techniques Introducing Breathing, Meditation and Relaxation to Kids and Teens*.

How exactly does yoga help young cancer patients?

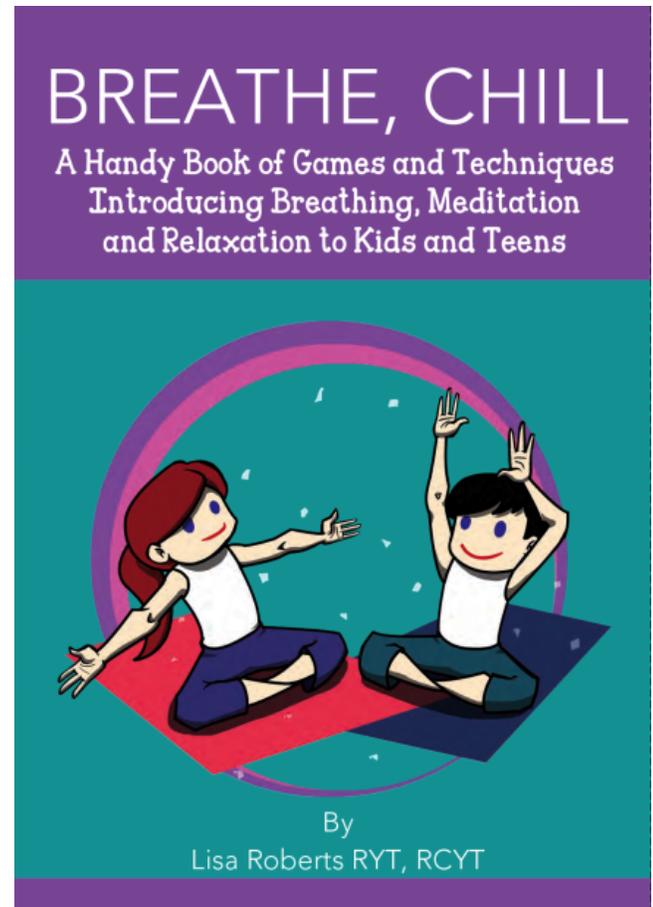
When kids are hospitalized, it's stressful. Kids experience stress and anxiety just like adults, and the techniques we teach in yoga are a healthy distraction for them. It's fun, and at the same time, it's benefiting them. These are tools they can use for life. It's very empowering for them.

How do you adapt yoga techniques for this young audience?

I make a point of using empowering words. For example, we might do 'Star Wars yoga' and talk about the Force. I ask if they have a Force within them. At first they say, "No." Then I ask, "What about your breath?" And we focus on how they can use their breath—their Force. Then they retain that and can access it in other parts of their life. Also, I try to steer the sessions away from their hospitalization because there's enough focus on that, but I explain they can use these tools when they have an exam at school, for instance.

How do hospitalized children actually perform yoga poses?

It depends on the nature of their hospitalization, and everything's adaptable. It can be done in the bed if they can't get up. If they're feeling so-so and want to get out of bed and sit in a chair, then we'll do that. Some just want to do guided meditation and relaxation techniques. I really just depends on the individual needs of the patient.



Breathe Chill Cover

What kinds of benefits have you seen among your young clients?

Based on surveys that parents have filled in, there are comments about it relieving the kids' stress and anxiety. Recently, a gentleman contacted the pain clinic and described what we did with his son as 'a magic pill' that helped his pain. The yoga, meditation and breathing speak for themselves. When I get this feedback, it means the world to me. But one point I do want to make is that it's not a magic pill—it's within you. You have this ability in yourself, and I'm just guiding you to access it.

In addition to her work with hospitalized children, Roberts has a 'mobile yoga studio' and teaches individual or group sessions in a variety of locations. Learn more at yoyoyogatherapy.com.