

Ladybird's Remarkable Relaxation

How children (and frogs, dogs, flamingos and dragons)
can use yoga relaxation to help deal with
stress, grief, bullying and lack of confidence

MICHAEL CHISSICK

Illustrated by
SARAH PEACOCK



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Guidance for Teachers and Parents

Introduction

Ladybird Relaxation has been the jewel in the crown of my yoga lessons since 1999, and is the most successful relaxation technique that I have ever used in my career as a children's yoga teacher. It is successful because:

- it is remarkably simple, fun and easy to learn
- everyone can do it
- once learnt, children can take it and use it anywhere
- it is genuinely yoga based
- it works! Children become relaxed.

Who is this book for?

Ladybird's Remarkable Relaxation is aimed at primary and elementary school teachers, head teachers, teaching assistants and people who work in the field of special needs who may have little or no knowledge of yoga, and is suitable for children of all ages.

It is also a *must* for children's yoga teachers and will save them hours of planning time.

This yoga story book is also for parents who are looking for a fun and engaging story to teach their children about coping with difficult emotions.

What are the benefits of relaxation for children?

There can be little argument that relaxation is beneficial for children, whether in school or at home. Based on anecdotal evidence alone it is clear that relaxation can help to:

- calm busy minds and young nervous systems; which in turn helps children to deal with anxiety and tension, and ultimately reduces stress
- relax muscles, joints and the whole body, as well as revitalising tired children (and teachers and parents too!).

More specifically, children can practise Ladybird Relaxation at times of stress anywhere, anytime, with immediate results.

Main goal

The main goal of Ladybird Relaxation is to give children a relaxation technique that, once learnt, they can use anywhere and anytime to help them to cope with a problem, without depending on anything or anyone but themselves. In other words, to give children the skills, knowledge and responsibility to manage their own relaxation.

Do children enjoy Ladybird Relaxation?

I am still amazed that even the most exuberant children enjoy this relaxation. The majority of children I teach are happy to lie still on their mats for around six minutes. They look forward to Ladybird Relaxation and complain if, for any reason, I have to leave it out; and they are forever telling me how they use relaxation outside of the yoga lesson.

Here are some examples of how Ladybird Relaxation has helped children:

CASE STUDY 1

Five Year 5 girls were sharing a room on their school trip to the Isle of Wight. For most of them it was their first time away from home without parents. The first night they talked and giggled and couldn't get to sleep. It was suggested that they try Ladybird Relaxation, which they did three times and then fell asleep.

CASE STUDY 2

It is easy to practise Ladybird Relaxation at the desk; which is exactly what a Year 6 teacher did with her class every morning before the SATS exams last year. She is adamant that her year group were calmer, more relaxed and better able to cope with the exam stress.

How can Ladybird help children deal with problems?

Having practised yoga and all things related since the 1970s my conclusion is that within each of us there is a vast reservoir of courage, wisdom and compassion that we can call upon in times of problem and crisis. From those three elements can grow:

- self-respect
- respect for others
- perseverance
- coping skills
- confidence
- self-awareness.

My whole approach to children's yoga has been developed with the aim to help children realise that they can tap into that reservoir in order to enhance their self-efficacy, self-belief and self-esteem.

Ladybird Relaxation has been central to reaching that reservoir. I believe that when children are relaxed they are most receptive to the idea that they have these inner resources; resources that can then colour their decisions and actions in a positive way.

Yoga speak

Ladybird Relaxation is based on the practice of yoga nidra. Yoga nidra is also called “rotation of consciousness,” which, in the context of the technique described in this book, simply means directing your attention or focus to specific body parts in a specific order. Yoga nidra is seen in the yoga world as a “systematic method of inducing complete physical, mental and emotional relaxation.” In fact, it is great practice for improving focus.

How to use this book

IN SCHOOL

The story can be easily integrated into your provision for self-esteem enhancement, for example SEAL, PSHE or Circle Time in the UK.

The story highlights four typical problems that children experience:

- inability to cope with workload
- being bullied
- lacking confidence
- grief.

Read the story to your class and invite them to talk about their own problematic situations, which may be similar to those that Frog and friends experience.

The next stage is to use the Ladybird Relaxation Script, which you will find on page 47. It is designed for whole-class participation either in the hall or at desks. In the hall is best. If possible let each child have their own mat or space. Have your resources (ladybird puppet, bells, ladybird on string) ready.

As you become more familiar and confident with the script feel free to adapt it to meet the needs of your children and what may be happening in front of you. For example, if a child is moving their hands when they are supposed to be keeping them still you could say: “If you can keep your hands still the ladybird may land on you.”

Class teachers will be able to practise with the whole class immediately. It is safe, easy to use and fun. I have used this technique with children from nursery age to Year 6 (3 to 11 years old). It’s tried, tested and *works!*

CHILDREN’S YOGA TEACHERS

I recommend that you dedicate 5–6 minutes to Ladybird Relaxation towards the end of your 30-minute lesson. Use the script on page 47 and read this guidance to enrich the experience.

PARENTS

Read the story with your child or children and practise together. Take turns to be the leader. Share examples of your own experiences where relaxation has helped you be in the right life state to find courage, wisdom and compassion to help with a problem. Of course deposit practice points in the “relaxation bank” by practising even when your child does not have a problem.

Motivating children to be still

Often, for the first 3–4 weeks after I have introduced this technique, I ask the children to think about how the tiny, shy ladybird may be feeling; that any movement may frighten or startle the ladybird, and to show me how kind they can be by being as still as they can. It's a motivation that works well. Try it!

VOICE

Your voice is the key. Use a strong, warm, calm voice. Too low and children can fall asleep or get bored because they cannot hear you. Too loud and harsh and you'll be wasting your time. Usually I teach in a school hall with the mats arranged in a circle. Some halls absorb sound easily so do some tests before you start.

STRUCTURE AND ROUTE

It is a vital aspect to this technique that the ladybird takes the same route each time. It can be clockwise or anti-clockwise. Rarely do I use the words *left* or *right* because that can be confusing for many children, preferring to use the words "the *other* shoulder, *other* thumb, *other* toe" instead. By keeping to the same structure each time you will reinforce the activity, which will help children learn to the point that they can practise this on their own anywhere.

BELLS

Ring a bell or simple triangle each time the ladybird lands on a body part will help the children focus. At the end of the relaxation continuously strike the bell or triangle to signal that Ladybird Relaxation is finished. It's fun!

EXPECTATIONS

Do set your expectations at realistic levels. Some children will fidget to some degree – that is normal. You will find, though, that they are fidgeting a lot *less* than they normally do; and through regular practice fidgeting and most movement will disappear – so persevere!

Years 3 to 6 (8–11 years old) find it easier to be still, whereas Reception to Year 2 (4–7 years old) need more input from you. I will only teach to nursery classes (3–4 years old) when I think they are ready for it, which is normally by the summer term if I have been teaching them since September in that academic year.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS CHILDREN

If you teach any special needs children, who may not be able to follow your verbal instructions or may find stillness a challenge, ask another adult to use a ladybird finger puppet with the child so they can feel it landing gently on the toe, knee and so on. I often use Ladybird Relaxation in special needs schools with the ladybird finger puppet suspended on a string.

LADYBIRD PUPPET ON A STRING

Another highly successful approach is to have a ladybird finger puppet on a length of string tied to a pole. Children will do *anything* to be the person controlling the pole – even improve their behaviour; and those on the floor or chairs who want to be landed on by the ladybird will try even harder to be still.