

**IAYT Yoga Therapy Competency Areas**  
**For use in**  
**IAYT Continuing Education**

Extracted from the IAYT Educational Standards for the Training of Yoga Therapists.

The IAYT Board approved the **Educational Standards for the Training of Yoga Therapists** in 2012. Updates were made in 2016 and again in 2017 after receiving input from many member schools. New standards are currently being reviewed to be released in later 2019.

These standards were developed over a three year period by a diverse group of experienced yoga therapy educators and practitioners. The goal was to define the foundational knowledge and skills required for the safe and effective practice of yoga therapy and identify the core knowledge, skills, and competencies of yoga therapists. The draft standards were twice presented to IAYT Member Schools and practitioners and the practitioner community in order to ensure that the final set of standards would be widely acceptable and allow for a diversity of yoga philosophies and training approaches.

IAYT certified yoga therapists (C-IAYT) must complete continuing education consistent with the competency areas so that it is clear what component of yoga therapy is supported by the training.

To assist you with this identification, the following pages provide an extract of the competency areas from the full Educational Standards document. The details are included to provide further explanation if needed, but are not required in the application process. We have also included the page with the IAYT definition of Yoga Therapy.



## Definition of Yoga Therapy

*Yoga therapy is the process of empowering individuals to progress toward improved health and wellbeing through the application of the teachings and practices of yoga.*

Yoga is a scientific system of self-investigation, self-transformation, and self-realization that originated in India. The teachings of yoga are rooted in the Vedas and grounded in classical texts and a rich oral tradition. This tradition recognizes that the human being's essential nature is unchanging awareness that exists in relationship to and identification with the changing phenomena of the empirical world.

The yoga tradition views humans as a multi-dimensional system that includes all aspects of body; breath; and mind, intellect, and emotions and their mutual interaction. Yoga is founded on the basic principle that intelligent practice can positively influence the direction of change within these human dimensions, which are distinct from an individual's unchanging nature or spirit. The practices of yoga traditionally include, but are not limited to, asana, pranayama, meditation, mantra, chanting, mudra, ritual, and a disciplined lifestyle. Yoga therapy is the appropriate application of these teachings and practices in a therapeutic context in order to support a consistent yoga practice that will increase self-awareness and engage the client/student's

energy in the direction of desired goals. The goals of yoga therapy include eliminating, reducing, or managing symptoms that cause suffering; improving function; helping to prevent the occurrence or reoccurrence of underlying causes of illness; and moving toward improved health and wellbeing. Yoga therapy also helps clients/students change their relationship to and identification with their condition.

The practice of yoga therapy requires specialized training and skill development to support the relationship between the client/student and therapist and to effect positive change for the individual.

Yoga therapy is informed by its sister science, Ayurveda. As part of a living tradition, yoga therapy continues to evolve and adapt to the cultural context in which it is practiced, and today, it is also informed by contemporary health sciences. Its efficacy is supported by an increasing body of research evidence, which contributes to the growing understanding and acceptance of its value as a therapeutic discipline.

## Competencies Profile

### Section I. Yoga Foundations

Suggested Guidelines: 120 hours minimum for this section

#### Category 1.1. Yoga Teachings and Philosophy

Suggested Guidelines: 35 hours minimum for this category

**1.1.1 Familiarity** with the evolution of the teachings and philosophy of the yoga tradition and its relevance and application to yoga therapy, including teachings from Vedic and post-Vedic periods, Samkhya, Yoga, Tantra, and Ayurveda.

Examples of concepts and models from the above teachings and philosophy relevant to yoga therapy, include but are not limited to,

- a. *tanmatra/bhuta/indriya* (subtle element/gross elements/senses);
- b. *purusha/prakrti* (consciousness/material world);
- c. *pancamaya kosha* (dimensions of the human system);
- d. *guna* (fundamental forces of nature); and
- e. *dubkha* (suffering/discomfort).

#### Category 1.2. Yoga and the Mind

Suggested Guidelines: 35 hours minimum for this category

**1.2.1 Knowledge** of yoga perspectives on the structure, states, functioning, and conditions of the mind, including, but not limited to,

**1.2.1.1** *drashtr* (seer), *drshya* (seen);

**1.2.1.2** *antahkarana citta* (consciousness), *buddhi* (intellect), *ahamkara* (ego), *manas* (mind);

**1.2.1.3** *citta vrtti* (activities of the mind), *citta pariama* (structural changes in the mind), *vyutthana/nirodha* (mind's potential for distraction and focus);

**1.2.1.4** *artha* (cognition), *bhava* (mood), *svabhava* (inborn nature), *vasana* (residue of experience), *samskara* (conditioned pattern of thinking and behavior); and

**1.2.1.5** states of mind: *mudha* (stupefied/dull), *ksipta* (disturbed), *vikshipta* (alternating between distraction and focus), *ekagrata* (one-pointed), *nirodha* (focus enveloped/held/ restrained), *vaishvanara* (waking), *taijasa* (dream), *prajña* (deep sleep), *turiya* (beyond).

**1.2.2 Knowledge** of yoga perspectives on distracted/disturbed conditions of mind and their expressions as expressed in such texts as the *Yoga Sutras*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and other texts, including but not limited to,

**1.2.2.1** *klesha* (affliction);

**1.2.2.2** *lobha*, *krodha*, and *moha* (greed, anger, attachment);

**1.2.2.3** *dubkha* and *daurmanasya* (suffering/discomfort and negative attitude/thinking), *sarupyam* (identification with the contents of the mind or seer taking the same form as the mind); and

**1.2.2.4** *antaraya* (obstacles to progress in yoga).

### **Category 1.3. Framework for Health and Disease**

Suggested Guidelines: 50 hours minimum for this category

**1.3.1 Knowledge** of the basic perspectives on health and disease from yoga and Ayurveda relevant to the practice of yoga therapy, including the concepts of

1.3.1.1 *panca maya (kosha)* (fundamental structure of the human system);

1.3.1.2 subtle anatomy;

1.3.1.3 *tri-dosha* (effect of the elements on the physical body);

1.3.1.4 *tri-guna* (effect of *sattva* (equilibrium), *rajas* (activity), *tamas* [inertia]);

1.3.1.5 *prakrti/vikrti* (*dosha* constitution at birth/imbalance of the *dosha* currently expressed in the body);

1.3.1.6 *ama* (undigested food, emotions, etc. accumulated in the body);

1.3.1.7 *agni* (internal fire(s) and their contribution to health);

1.3.1.8 *prana vayu* (*prana, apana, vyana, udana, samana*);

1.3.1.9 *prana prakopa* (disturbance of the *vayu*);

1.3.1.10 *surya/chandra* (sun/moon);

1.3.1.11 *brmbhana/langhana* (expansion/contraction); and

1.3.1.12 *vyuha* model: *beya* (the symptoms), *hetu* (the causes), *bana* (the goal), *upaya* (the tools).

**1.3.2 Knowledge** of categorizing illness, including

1.3.2.1 Development/evolution of disease (*samprapti* [pathogenesis]), including but not limited to direction, intensity, onset, and duration and their influence on the ease or difficulty of healing and disease management.

1.3.2.2 Setting priorities: symptoms/pacification (*sbamana* [short term]) and purification/strengthening (*sbodbana* [long term]).



## **Section 2. Biomedical and Psychological Foundations**

**Suggested Guidelines: 155 hours minimum for this section**

### **Category 2.1. Anatomy and Physiology**

**Suggested Guidelines: 90 hours minimum for this category**

**2.1.1 Knowledge** of human anatomy and physiology, including all major systems of the body and their interrelationships, as relevant to the work of a yoga therapist.

**2.1.2 Knowledge** of biomechanics and movement as they relate to the practice of yoga and the work of a yoga therapist.

**2.1.3 Knowledge** of common pathologies and disorders of all the major systems, including symptoms, management, illness trajectories, and contraindications, as relevant to the work of a yoga therapist.

### **Category 2.2. Additional Biomedical Knowledge**

**Suggested Guidelines: 15 hours minimum for this category**

**2.2.1 Familiarity** with commonly used drugs and surgical procedures, as relevant to the work of a yoga therapist.

**2.2.2 Familiarity** with common medical terminology.

**2.2.3 Knowledge** of how to reference current healthcare information relevant to the work of a yoga therapist, including pathologies, disorders, drugs, and surgical procedures, as relevant to the work of a yoga therapist.

### **Category 2.3. Psychology and Mental Health**

**Suggested Guidelines: 30 hours minimum for this category**

**2.3.1 Basic knowledge** of commonly occurring mental health conditions—from psychological distress to psychiatric conditions—their symptoms, and common approaches/interventions, as they relate to the work of a yoga therapist.

**2.3.2 Basic knowledge** of psychological concepts and terminology, including mood, cognition, behavior, and personality, as relevant to the work of a yoga therapist.

### **Category 2.4. Additional Knowledge**

**Suggested Guidelines: 10 hours minimum for this category**

**2.4.1 Familiarity** with models of human development, including developmental stages, lifecycles, and personality, and their importance to medical and psychological health and well-being.

**2.4.2 Familiarity** with the influence of familial, social, cultural, and religious conditioning on mental and medical perspectives of health and healing.

### **Category 2.5. Body and Mind Integration**

**Suggested Guidelines: 10 hours minimum for this category**

**2.5.1 Knowledge** of the interaction of the body, breath, mind, intellect, and emotions in health and well-being.



### **Section 3. Yoga Therapy Tools and Therapeutic Skills**

**Suggested Guidelines: 140 hours minimum for this section**

#### **Category 3.1. Yoga Therapy Tools**

**Suggested Guidelines: 60 hours minimum for this category**

**3.1.1 In-depth knowledge of the application** of *yama* and *niyama* in the context of yoga therapy.

**3.1.2 In-depth knowledge** of the range of yoga practices and their potential therapeutic effects for common conditions. Practices may include, but are not limited to,

**3.1.2.1 *asana*** (postures);

**3.1.2.2 *pranayama*** (regulated breathing);

**3.1.2.3** meditation and relaxation techniques such as *bhavana* (visualization), *mantra* (recitation), and ritualized activities such as *nyasa* and *mudra*; and

**3.1.2.4 *vihara*** (lifestyle modifications) including basic yogic dietary concepts.

**3.1.3 In-depth knowledge** of contraindications of yoga practices for specific conditions and circumstances.

#### **Category 3.2 Basic Principles of the Therapeutic Relationship**

**Suggested Guidelines: 35 hours minimum for this category**

**3.2.1 In-depth knowledge** of, and observed capacity for, well-developed communication skills: listening, presence, directive and non-directive dialogue.

**3.2.2 Demonstrated ability** to recognize, adjust, and adapt to specific client/student needs in the evolving therapeutic/professional relationship.

**3.2.3 Demonstrated ability** to recognize and manage the subtle dynamics inherent in the therapist/client relationship.

**3.2.4 In-depth knowledge** of the scope of practice of yoga therapy and how to assess the need for referral to other professional services.

#### **Category 3.3 Principles and Skills for Educating Clients/Students**

**Suggested Guidelines: 35 hours minimum for this category**

**3.3.1 In-depth knowledge of and demonstrated ability** to implement effective teaching methods, adapt to unique styles of learning, provide supportive and effective feedback, acknowledge the client's/student's progress, and cope with unique difficulties/successes.

**3.3.2 In-depth knowledge of and demonstrated ability** to transmit the value of self-awareness and self-responsibility throughout the therapeutic process.

**3.3.3 In-depth knowledge of and demonstrated ability** to develop and adjust appropriate practice strategies to the client/student.



### **Category 3.4 Principles and Skills for Working with Groups**

Suggested Guidelines: 10 hours minimum for this category

**3.4.1 Basic knowledge of and demonstrated ability** to design, implement, and evaluate group programs.

**3.4.2 Familiarity** with group dynamics and techniques, including communication skills, time management, and the establishment of priorities and boundaries, as well as techniques to address the specific needs of individual participants, to the degree possible in a group setting.

## **Section 4. Practicum**

Suggested Guidelines: 205 hours minimum for this section

### **Category 4.1 Providing Yoga Therapy**

Suggested Guidelines: 55 minimum practicum documentation and mentorship hours for this category, plus a minimum of 150 hours of practicum delivery

**4.1.1 Demonstrated ability** to conduct intake and assess the client/student, including

**4.1.1.1** Taking a history of the client and his/her condition(s); and

**4.1.1.2** Assessing the current condition using the tools relevant to the yoga therapist, including an evaluation of the physical, energetic, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of well-being.

**4.1.2 Demonstrated ability** to elicit the goals, expectations, and aspirations of the client/student.

**4.1.3 Demonstrated ability** to integrate information from the intake, evaluation, and observation to develop a working assessment of the client's condition, limitations, and possibilities.

**4.1.4 Demonstrated ability to apply knowledge** of how to determine which aspects of the client/student's conditions, goals, and aspirations might be addressed through yoga therapy.

**4.1.5 Demonstrated ability** to identify priorities and set both long- and short-term goals with the client/student.

**4.1.6 Demonstrated ability to apply knowledge** of pacification, purification, and strengthening strategies.

**4.1.7 Demonstrated ability to apply knowledge** of strategies that address common disorders and pathologies of the major human systems and common mental health conditions, as well as other goals and aspirations of the student as relevant to the work of a yoga therapist.

**4.1.8 Demonstrated ability to apply knowledge** of how to combine intake, evaluation, observations, and working assessment to develop an appropriate practice or session strategy for individual clients/students as well as group classes, taking into consideration the holistic nature of the individual.

**4.1.9 Demonstrated ability to apply knowledge** of how to choose and prioritize the use of yoga tools and techniques, including selecting, sequencing, adapting, and modifying yoga practices appropriate to the needs of clients.

**4.1.10 Demonstrated ability** to teach or deliver the appropriate practices for individuals as well as groups, taking into consideration the assessment of their conditions, limitations, possibilities, and the overall practice strategy.



**4.1.11 Demonstrated ability** to facilitate the client/student's experience of the practice, including

**4.1.11.1** providing instruction, demonstration, education of the client/student using multimodal strategies of education such as auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning tools; and

**4.1.11.2** providing supportive strategies for the client/student to actively participate in his/her practice, such as a means to remember his/her practice (e.g., auditory and visual tools).

**4.1.12 Demonstrated ability** to develop and maintain therapeutic relationships including

**4.1.12.1** fostering trust by establishing an appropriate therapeutic environment through privacy, confidentiality, and safety; and

**4.1.12.2** practicing effective, client/student-centered communication based upon a respect for, and sensitivity to, individual, familial, cultural, social, ethnic, and religious factors.

**4.1.13 Demonstrated ability** to provide follow up and re-planning, including

**4.1.13.1** gathering feedback, re-assess, and refine the practice and to determine short-term and long-term goals and priorities;

**4.1.13.2** addressing new and changing conditions, goals, aspirations, and priorities of the student/client and to provide appropriate support; and

**4.1.13.3** providing appropriate closure for the therapy sessions.

## **Section 5. Professional Practice**

**Suggested Guidelines: 30 hours minimum for this section**

### **Category 5.1. Ethical Principles**

**Suggested Guidelines: 15 hours minimum for this category**

**5.1.1 In-depth knowledge** of yoga practices and methods for self-inquiry related to establishing, practicing, and maintaining ethical principles.

**5.1.2 In-depth knowledge** of generally accepted ethical principles of health care codes of conduct and yoga's ethical principles.

**5.1.3 Demonstrated ability to apply knowledge** of generally accepted ethical principles and related concepts from the yoga tradition to professional interactions and relationships.

**5.1.4 In-depth knowledge** of the scope of practice of yoga therapy, resulting in the demonstrated ability to discern the need for referral to other modalities.

**5.1.5 Knowledge** of the extent of one's own individual training, skills, and evolving experience in yoga therapy, and knowledge of the importance of practicing within such parameters.





## **Category 5.2. Legal, Regulatory, and Business Issues Pertaining to Yoga Therapy**

**Suggested Guidelines:** 5 hours minimum for this category

**5.2.1 Knowledge** of current relevant local, state, and national laws and regulations impacting the work of a yoga therapist.

**5.2.2 Basic knowledge** of business practices relevant to the work of a yoga therapist, including record keeping, planning, and financial management.

## **Category 5.3. Relationships with Peers, Mentors, Clinicians, and Organizations**

**Suggested Guidelines:** 5 hours minimum for this category

**5.3.1 Basic knowledge** of other healthcare fields and their potential role in and relevance to the work of a yoga therapist.

**5.3.2 Basic knowledge** of how to establish, maintain, and utilize a referral network of peers and related healthcare practitioners and organizations.

**5.3.3 Basic knowledge** of how to develop and maintain ongoing collaborative relationships.

## **Category 5.4. Personal and Professional Development and Continuing Education**

**Suggested Guidelines:** 5 hours minimum for this category

**5.4.1 Knowledge** of the fundamental value of ongoing personal practice, long-term mentorship, and skills maintenance/development through continuing education.

**5.4.2 Knowledge** of when and how to seek advice and support for case consultation, educational advancement, and personal practice.