

Welcome Message

Hello there, I'm glad you're here.

Do you struggle with the pressure to be someone other than yourself?

Do you feel overwhelmed by the thought of becoming an adult and everything that's involved with that role?

Do you sometimes feel alone, misunderstood and not recognized for what you are capable of?

If you answered yes to any of these questions then you're in the right place, and you're certainly not alone.

My name is Jenny Kierstead and I'm the founder of *Breathing Space Yoga Studios* and *Yoga in Schools*. While I currently live an amazing life filled with career success, relationship fulfilment and vibrant wellbeing, this wasn't always my reality. When I was 16 years old, my whole world came tumbling down around me—my dream of becoming a university basketball player was in jeopardy, my parents were divorcing, my dog who slept on my pillow each night was hit by a car and died, my boyfriend was diagnosed with cancer and my beloved grandmother passed away. While any one of these occurrences would be considered traumatic, I had all of them happen at once! It was indeed, the perfect storm.

Up until that point, my life had been status quo: the same house, same family structure, same routine and same friends. My parents were leaders in the community and very respected. My two siblings and I were well loved. People used to think of our family as the ideal. But behind our outwardly perfect image there was a storm stirring that would eventually crest into a massive wave of destruction.

And when it struck, I was completely ill-prepared. As I attempted to cling to the pieces of my crumbling world, I used what few coping mechanisms I had at the age of sixteen. I dealt with the perfect storm by controlling what aspects of life I could: my diet and my body. Before I realized what was actually happening, the dark power of anorexia took hold of my life and continued to do so for years.

After many years of suffering and many moments on the brink of giving up, I have emerged from the wreckage of that storm. I have also amassed incredible skills from years of cognitive therapy, bodywork, ancient healing practices, rigorous personal inquiry and service.

The teen years are the most creative, energetically charged years of our lives. My work over the last twenty years has been to create a repertoire of core competencies, or inner treasures as they are referred to here, to help those in this phase of life stay healthy and balanced. Many people, like me, live through these years without effective life skills. For that reason, this program is truly applicable to women of all ages.

My hope is that this program will be deeply rewarding with content you will refer to for years to come. It is also my hope that this program ignites you and challenges you, calling you to reconsider habits that don't serve your highest potential. This work of questioning old ways of being requires great courage and

faith on your behalf. Speaking from experience, you will not only survive, but come out on the other side thriving as a whole new version of yourself.

A Girl on Fire is a woman free to be who she was born to be, a woman who confidently shines her light essence into dark spaces and a woman with the power to wholeheartedly lead humanity into greater realms of consciousness, compassion and peace.

I hope this work transforms your life as much as it has mine.

May you be healed

May you be happy

May you know great joy

May you dwell in peace.

Jenny

Week 1 – What is the “Girl on Fire”?

This week’s focus is to gain a deeper understanding of:

- Welcome and overview of the program
- 10 Inner treasures
- Feminine and masculine stereotypes
- What is a Girl on Fire?

Facilitator Notes

Welcome and Introductions

- Facilitator should share some personal background or bio to establish rapport

Code of Conduct

- Review the code of conduct. Discuss each element of the code and how this will impact the next 12 weeks as a group.
- Have 2 copies for each student printed and have them sign both – one for themselves and one handed in to the instructor.

Goals and Structure of the program

- Review the Goals of the program and structure of each class

- Any questions on the pre-reading?
- Include any ground rules and housekeeping items
- Discuss the use of Personal Boundary Cards in class:
 - No physical assists today, thanks!
 - Yes you can assist me today, thanks!

Let's Empower, Not Overpower

The intention of this program is to empower you as a young woman and to recognize the strength of your feminine energy in a way that respects, not diminishes, the masculine. We are shifting from the oppression of women into a reality of equality. We are not claiming to be better than guys, but rather members of the same human race with gifts of equal value.

Did you know that in many workplaces, women are still paid less than men for the same job?

As the pendulum swings back into balance between the sexes, the shift is creating some waves. Some men feel threatened by women who stand in their strength and effectively assume roles they've never claimed before. But we are not attempting to overpower or horde all the opportunities. This is not about striving for superiority or control over anyone. It is simply about **a readiness to walk side-by-side, with mutual respect for what we as women have to offer**. When we feel valued and appreciated, we shine our brightest light. And when women shine fully, the whole world alights with kindness, creativity and caring.

10 Inner Treasures (Core Competencies)

Each weekly class is themed according to the 10 Girl on Fire inner treasures. These inner treasures have been selected with the hope that by cultivating these core competencies, you will have the skills to live empowered, joy-filled, and harmonious lives.

- 1) Self-awareness
- 2) Self-worth
- 3) Confidence
- 4) Discernment
- 5) Resilience
- 6) Discipline
- 7) Optimism
- 8) Contentment
- 9) Connection
- 10) Essence

What does being healthy mean?

In yoga, health, or *svasthi*, is defined as a woman who is well-established in herself. She is the strong, confident, balanced woman who exudes the qualities of good health that most of us would describe as well-nourished, joyful, radiant, warm and enthusiastic.

Instead of looking outside of yourself for answers to life's questions, you are invited throughout this program to look inside for the answers to your deepest questions. By tapping into your own innate intelligence, you will access the ability to maintain your own vibrant

health and facilitate your own self-healing. Instead of relying on an expert to fix your problems—which we are taught to do in this culture—you will be encouraged to pay attention to your very own inner healer. By listening to your own needs and applying these simple and easy techniques, you will become the expert of your own life. As a Girl on Fire, you will learn to become self-established and self-reliant, balanced in body, mind, and emotions.

As human beings, our highest state is having the awareness that we are interconnected and actually one with all that is. This includes the many multidimensional aspects of ourselves (body, energy, mind, wisdom and our true nature), as well as our immediate surroundings (community) and our extended environment (the entire universe). In a state of oneness—or unity—we literally *become* the world and experience the infinite power and presence of all that is.

In Western culture—with our obsession with external pursuits, technology, material consumption, physical perfection and money—we have become dangerously disconnected from the needs of the natural environment, and from our own needs.

This Girl on Fire program is designed to help you remember who you are by bringing parts of yourself back together as a whole. That means re-integrating your mind, your body and your soul. When this happens, you will become grounded, strong and centered in who you are as a radiant young woman with a specific and wonderful purpose. When challenge strikes in your future, which it will, it is our intention to have provided you with the inner resources to skillfully navigate your way through it, or at least, the awareness to seek assistance from a trusted source.

What we know

- Approximately 91% of women are unhappy with their bodies and resort to dieting to achieve their ideal body shape. Unfortunately, only 5% of women naturally possess the body type often portrayed by Americans in the media.¹
- Women are still significantly underpaid in the work-force. Even working full-time, women continue to bring home 20% less than the men that work beside them. That includes women with university degrees. Aboriginal women, radicalized women and immigrant women take home even less.²
- Plastic surgeries are now up into the millions per year. Girls will go to great lengths to try and achieve the perfect body. In just one year, the number of girls aged 18 and younger who had breast implants nearly tripled.³
- In the United States, 20 million women and 10 million men suffer from a clinically significant eating disorder at some time in their life.⁴

¹ “11 Facts About Body Image”, Do Something.org, accessed September 2016, <https://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-body-image>

² “The Best and Worst Places to be a Woman in Canada 2015”, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, accessed September 2016, https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2015/07/Best_and_Worst_Places_to_Be_a_Woman2015.pdf

³ “The Facts about Girls in Canada”, Canadian Women’s Foundation, accessed September 2016, <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-girls>

⁴ “Get the Facts on Eating Disorders”, NEDA

- Some of the top mental health challenges among 8 to 15-year-olds are ADHD, mood or depressive disorders, anxiety, and eating disorders.⁵

Stereotypes of Feminine and Masculine

Feminine

What is feminine? Media claims that feminine is sexy, passive, pretty, external, skinny.

Does this woman look happy? Empowered? Feminine?

Most runway models meet the body mass index physical criteria for anorexia.

Twenty years ago, the average fashion model weighed 8% less than the average woman. Today she weighs 23% less.⁶

These bizarrely unfeminine beauty standards have actually made women look like skinny, unhappy bags of bones. Society has disempowered and starved the feminine, draining us of our life force, which flows when we live within a healthy body weight.

True femininity expresses itself in all shapes, sizes and colors.

Feminine energy is graceful, fluid, watery, creative, wild, round, full, assertive, bold, sensual, healing, still, dark, incubating, nurturing, reflective, intuitive, compassionate, all-embracing, listening.

How do these images differ from the ones we see in the media today?

Traditionally, women and Goddesses had robust, curvy, full figures. They were nurturing and life sustaining, like the sacred cow in India that is so highly revered for her ability to sustain life with her milk. In fact, the cow is such a highly honored symbol of sustenance that even McDonald's doesn't serve beef in India.

Women naturally have higher levels of adipose/fat tissue than men so that we can nourish our families and live a long, healthy life. In some cultures today, a larger figure is



Feeding Hope, accessed September 2016, <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/get-facts-eating-disorders>

⁵ "Any Disorder Among Children", National Institute of Mental Health, accessed September 2016, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-disorder-among-children.shtml>

⁶ "Plus Sized Bodies, What's wrong with them Anyway?", Plus Model, accessed September 2016, <http://www.plus-model-mag.com/2012/01/plus-size-bodies-what-is-wrong-with-them-anyway/>

symbolic of prosperity, reflecting enough financial means to abundantly provide for our needs.

Today, however, we have become fat phobic and many women have developed obsessions with fat, spending their whole lives battling the bulge and moving from one diet to another. There is even a medical term for it, called body image distortion—or dysmorphophobia.

In order for women to heal our broken relationships with our bodies, we must take on the challenge of breaking out of the current feminine belief structure that society has created for us. If we are honest with ourselves, it becomes apparent that our true purpose is not to achieve physical perfection in order to meet the passing beauty standards of our time. Nor is it our sole purpose to be the vehicles of sexual satisfaction for men.

While it's important to feel good about our bodies and our sexuality, could there be a higher calling for us?

In the yoga tradition, feminine energy is called *Shakti*. It is the creative force of the universe that resides within the body, specifically at the base of the spine. Through mindfulness and yoga practices, it actively moves up the central channels along the spinal column, clearing blockages, healing illnesses, awakening our energy and expanding our awareness.

Shakti is a powerful force of feminine energy. It is the primal creative principle underlying the cosmos and the energizing essence of embodied spirit. According to the ancient yogis, the whole universe is the manifestation of Shakti.

Shakti is also known as *devi*, from the root *div* “to shine” so we could say she is “the shining one.” In the *Rig Veda*, one of the oldest Indian spiritual texts on yoga, Aditi is the goddess of the great womb, the mother of the entire universe, and holds *agni*, the essence of fire, in her womb, much like a mother does with a baby.

Aditi is shining and luminous. She upholds the law and enforces justice. She is closely identified with the cow. As legend has it, the milk pours down from the cosmic cow, providing daily nourishment and life substance to all that is.

We can see that femininity is the female generative force that is both nourishing, like the cow, as well as luminous, shining and igniting like the fire essence.

Masculine

What is the masculine stereotype that is portrayed in society today?

Often we think of it as power hungry, aggressive, controlling, hard, tough, all-knowing, emotionless. This is NOT a true depiction of masculine energy, but a reflection of an imbalanced state.

In yoga, Shiva is the masculine energy that resides at the top of the spine as pure potential, awaiting the rise of its counterpart, Shakti. Shiva is the being while Shakti is the becoming. Shiva without Shakti is powerless and Shakti without Shiva is without purpose. We can see then, just how crucial it is to respect both energies of the feminine and masculine within all of us, women and men alike, since an imbalance of either one causes ill health.

Facilitator Notes

Small group discussion – Looking at photographs of women's body types. Can you think of a woman in your life who is

nurturing and comforting like the sacred cow in India? Can you think of an inspiring woman who makes change in the world with her fire essence, like the shining one? Can you relate to these energies within you?

Girl on Fire Description

In yoga there are two concepts: (prakasha) “luminosity” and (vimarsha) “mirror.”

Luminosity is the light of lights, the source of all light, which we will discover within ourselves through this program.

The mirror is the reflection of this eternal light. Without it, the light of all lights would never be seen. It is one thing to shine our light when we are alone, but it’s most important that we shine our light out for others to receive and be nourished by. We are not here to shine privately, we are here to unearth our gifts, and use them to contribute positively to the unfolding of the universe. The source light of the universe shines through us as radiant light and love, not to be kept hidden, but to be shared with and mirrored back by those around us. Our light illuminates others lives and vice versa.

In order to keep our inner light well lit, we need to keep our inner flame at our core well stoked. Over the course of this program, we’ll talk about things that dampen our flame, which we’ll call fire snuffers, and how we can protect our fire from these draining sources. We’ll also discuss the many ways that we can nurture our flame to keep the bonfire within glowing brightly. This, we will call fire fuel.

Facilitator Notes

Larger group discussion: When you think about a Girl on Fire, what does she look like? Who is a Girl on Fire that you know personally or a celebrity that you follow from afar?

This is something you’ll want to keep reflecting on, as it is essential to have a model on this journey of becoming an empowered, confident and healthy young woman.

A Message from Jenny

Throughout this program I have added excerpts from my memoir in progress about my struggle, my awakening and my eventual triumph over anorexia and how I’ve emerged from my severely imbalanced state to a life of true joy.

When the Dalai Lama was asked how to build self-esteem, it took three translators to explain the concept. He had never heard of poor self-esteem and never experienced it within his spiritually rich, community-based Tibetan culture.

When I was young, I experienced the worst poverty in life: a lack of respect and esteem for myself. I was like a baby bird with defective wings, and when it came time to fly, I flopped

instead. Only after much suffering and searching, would I eventually gain faith in my own wings and discover the necessary tools to fly freely.

After many years of deep inner work and personal growth, I now live with strong and capable wings, giving myself permission to express my gifts through my work. I am challenged and rewarded daily in my role as parent of two amazing Girls on Fire in the making, and my intimate relationship with my husband is grounded in love, trust, transparency and humor.

In the beginning, a seed only needs an itty bitty ounce of nourishment to grow. This nourishment may come in the form of curiosity, or hope, or even despair. It doesn't matter what fuels your journey, so long as you take it. Have patience and relax your expectations of yourself. My advice for you at the beginning of this powerful journey is to simply be willing. Be willing to learn new skills, to leave the past behind you and courageously step into the new territory of your authentic, brilliant self.

Healing can be slow and mucky, but it can also be instantaneous as well. You may find that one week of practice suddenly opens you to a new way of thinking, altering your world forever, and for the better. I've learned throughout my journey of healing that anything is possible when we open our hearts. Let yourself be surprised and delighted and know that I am your greatest cheerleader on this brave and rewarding path.

Jenny

Ritual

The beautiful thing about becoming more mindful and self-aware, is realizing that we have the power to choose our inner attitude. Once we understand that feeling bad (and the complaining that goes along with it) is optional, we can then decide how we want to feel. What is your ideal feeling state? This program is designed to help you choose feeling good over feeling negative for the rest of your life.

Once you have a sense of how you want to feel inside, you can selectively identify things in your environment that support your new attitude. Did you know that you're allowed to leave a party, or walk out of a movie theatre, or ask your dentist to turn off frightening news on the TV or request a change in gossipy conversation if these things don't align with your intentions?

One of the most powerful ways we can bring ourselves back to wholeness and our desired feeling state is to practice the simple art of ritual. Ritual is the act of doing something with the intention of connecting with our highest and brightest self within a safe environment. Rituals help us to release old, outmoded habits, and invoke ways of being that are more aligned with our true self and the pure desires of the heart.

Incorporating ritual into your daily life affirms your desire to become an empowered, strong young woman with a secure sense of self-worth. You are invited to create a special place and time in your life for the self-reflective work you will be doing throughout this program. Whether it's a corner table in your bedroom or a whole room designed to reflect your highest vision, work with what you have. Frame inspiring images and choose symbolic items like stones, shells and candles that help to anchor you in feelings of goodness and remind you of your dreams.

The mind and body respond well to consistency, so set aside the same time in the same place each day to do this juicy work of reciting affirmations, sitting in silence, aligning with a person of success, reviewing Girl on Fire notes, writing, singing, you name it. Your future is worthy of this time, even if it's just five or ten minutes each day.

What is Omwork?

Om is a sacred symbol of unity, oneness with ourselves, others and the creative force of the Universe. It is known to be akin to the most basic primordial sound of the Universe. Reciting Om is said to invoke a sense of peace, unity consciousness and love.