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Itsy Bitsy yoga for those teenie weenies

This Shrewsbury fitness program is for infants and toddlers

By Pam Pollan

RECORD CORRESPONDENT

SHREWSBURY — Infants and toddlers are given the chance to get into fitness at an early age with the Sweet Pea Yoga program.

Alexandra De Collibus of Hopkinton owns Sweet Pea Yoga and is a certified Itsy Bitsy Yoga facilitator who teaches yoga to infants and early toddlers at Bounce Youth Fitness, located at Mass. Health and Fitness in Shrewsbury, owned by Dina Taylor.

When Taylor was lining up instructors to teach at her new family fitness facility she contacted De Collibus about offering classes there.

"It's a unique different, alternative form of exercise. If nothing else, it's very nice bonding time," Taylor said.

The infant class takes place primarily on the yoga mat with the toddler on his or her tummy or back (or in a parent's arms or on top of a parent's legs), with the parent/caregiver assisting the baby into developmentally appropriate poses.

"The infant class is a calming and nurturing yoga practice filled with unique yoga postures that can make babies happier, digest better, sleep longer and feel more comfortable in their bodies. This class allows parents/caregivers that uncluttered, one-on-one time to bond with and learn about their baby's unfolding personality and growing body," De Collibus said.

Many people might think it would be difficult to keep the youngster on the mat.

"The idea is to get the parent involved by showing their tot the poses (first I demonstrate, then the parents tries) and engaging them through the ac-



Practicing the Sweet Pea Yoga program are (clockwise, from left) Rebecca Van Marter, Sophie Ellis, Tyler Powderly, Caitlin Shapleigh.



Participants in the Sweet Pea Yoga infant program are (from left) Kathleen Mosher with daughter Elizabeth, Liz Robinson holding her daughter Penny, Bernadette Markey holding her daughter Julia, Carolyn Harp holding her daughter Brynna and Heather Behal holding her daughter Keira.

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Karen Crum

...tivity, movement and rhyming songs that accompany the pose... it is rare that we have a tot participate in each pose that we try but we don't expect that," De Collibus said.

Karen Crum and her young daughter of Hopkinton have taken three infant sessions with De Collibus.

"I originally took it because I was a new mom and was looking to meet other moms and for my baby," Crum said.

For Crum, who loves to exercise, it was her opportunity to introduce her baby to exercise.

"It's adorable to see all the babies in all these yoga positions," Crum said.

Crum practices what she's learned at home with the baby.

"It definitely calms the baby down at the end of the day, helps with digestion and I like it to just help her relax and know that sleep is coming her

way, hopefully," Crum said.

Crum said that she looks forward to the special time she's committed just to focus on the baby.

The program is not designed to be an adult yoga class that adds the baby into an adult's regular yoga poses. The yoga class introduces poses that are developmentally appropriate for a baby or toddler's growing body, instructors say.

"There are poses that are optimal for babies who are building the strength, coordination and muscle memory to crawl, but are not yet crawling. There are more active poses that are suitable for busy crawling, walking and running toddlers," De Collibus said.

De Collibus trained directly with Helen Garabedian, the founder of Itsy Bitsy Yoga and author of Itsy Bitsy Yoga "Poses to Help Your Baby Sleep Longer, Digest Better,

and Grow Stronger."

The class sizes are designed to be intimate.

"Any class offered by Sweet Pea Yoga will not exceed 10 parent/baby pairs. The classes I offer at Bounce will probably be smaller," De Collibus said.

Smaller classes allow more opportunity to really notice the developmental, emotional and personal growth of the babies from week to week, De Collibus said.

"In Shrewsbury, because of the smaller class sizes, the duration of the class is 45/50 minutes," De Collibus said.

Each session is 6 weeks in length and costs \$75. Advance registration is required for the classes.

For more information and to register, visit www.SweetPeaYoga.com or call Sweet Pea Yoga at (508) 981-3244 or Bounce Fitness at (508) 845-7827.