

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP A T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE

SUGGESTIONS GATHERED FROM
T'AI CHI CHIH TEACHERS



“You cannot appease the hunger by reading the menu.”
- Chinese saying

Justin invites all students to:
“Practice when you feel like it and
practice when you don't feel like it.”

“Pick the movements you like....”

Translation: “You must practice, practice, practice
to taste the fruits of the form.
Simply thinking about it or talking about it is not enough.”

T'AI CHI CHIH TEACHERS CONFERENCE, JULY 2012
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Introduction

This document is a collection of teaching strategies about how to help students develop a T'ai Chi Chih practice. These suggestions were collected from teachers who attended the 2012 T'ai Chi Chih Teachers Conference. During Break Out Sessions, teachers shared what strategies had worked for them and what were the most motivating for students. They also brainstormed what else might work in getting students fired up and practicing regularly. Some ideas came from submissions on FaceBook.

We all agreed that no name should be attached to any particular idea. All ideas are offered to the Tai Chi Chih Community of Teachers with an open heart and open hand. These ideas reflect the strong theme from Justin Stone to encourage students to begin practicing while they are learning and to start this process in a simple, effortless way.

Purpose: of These Suggestions

- To inspire TCC teachers to consciously intend for all students to practice T'ai Chi Chih on their own, so that they may reap the benefits.
- To help teachers to continually support every student in deepening their experience of T'ai Chi Chih. This is a life-long practice that we want every student to experience.

Sections:

I. PUBLICITY, ADVERTISING and HANDOUTS

II. TEACHER SUPPORT OF T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE AT HOME

III. PEER SUPPORT OF PRACTICE AT HOME

IV. T'AI CHI CHIH FORMS FOR PRINT-OUT

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP A T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE

I. PUBLICITY, ADVERTISING and HANDOUTS

TAI CHI CHIH BROCHURES, FLYERS & CLASS POSTINGS

Be clear and straightforward in your intention for all students to practice at home so that they reap the benefits of T'ai Chi Chih. The flyer might read: "*Students who sign up for this class are expected to practice at home during the week.*" Begin talking about home practice on the very first class and make it easy to start.

PERSONAL COMMITMENT CARD

Print and hand out the Commitment Card on the 1st or 2nd class so that students begin practicing at home. It says: "*With a sincere heart I make a commitment to myself to practice T'ai Chi Chih regularly so that the benefits I seek will manifest in my life.*" Tell students: "take this card home, and sign and date the card. Display it where you will see it daily." (Option: write your own commitment card.)

HONOR ROLL

Print the Honor Roll and display it in class each week at the sign-in table. Encourage students to sign their name *if they are practicing at home for any length of time*. Each week, a few more sign their name. Ask students to share how home practice is going. Someone always has something to say. The key is encouragement and small step to start: "one or two movements 2 x /day are better than none."

3x5 CARD: TAKE HOME & BRING BACK

Give students a file card to take home and record when they practiced that week. They bring it to class the following week and share. Set a goal and write it down: location and time of day. How long did I practice? "*Admit failures, move on, and celebrate success.*"

FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESS IN HOME PRACTICE

1. Select a room / space to practice at home or office.
2. Select soft, flowing music, or no music.
3. Select time to practice; establish a routine.
4. Write out your goal: what benefits do you want to experience?
5. Evaluate at the end of a week/month. Keep going.

USING T'AI CHI CHIH PUBLISHED RESOURCES

a. T'ai Chi Chih Websites and the Internet provide good information and articles by Justin Stone and others that are of interest to students. These can be downloaded and shared in class or used as homework.

b. Justin's Photo Text and Books - Some teachers use them as required reading for their series of classes. Every student should have Justin's DVD and Manual (Photo text) to use at home for practice. Have them for sale in every class or include it with the price of the class, so that they get it on the first class. Both are very helpful to new and continuing students.

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP A T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE

c. Booklets, flashcards, Checklists to Evaluate of T'ai Chi Chih Form, Handbooks, and other forms of curriculum created by T'ai Chi Chih teachers inspire students to deepen their understanding of this form of meditation.

d. DVD's created by T'AI CHI CHIH teachers are also helpful to specific populations who are disabled or limited in some way, as well as those for the general public. (Seated T'ai Chi Chih, and others)

e. DVD - CARMEN INTERVIEW WITH JUSTIN STONE

At the end of Carmen's and Justin's Interview DVD, there are comments by him to practice T'ai Chi Chih. Play this for students on the first class so that they are personally invited by Justin to practice!

All these resources are excellent ways to motivate students to move forward in their practice.

II. TEACHER SUPPORT OF T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE AT HOME

QUOTES FROM JUSTIN ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF PRACTICE

Find material in Justin's books and the Vital Force Journals that present reasons to practice and read it aloud in class *regularly*. ["Practice when you feel like it and when you don't feel like it..." "Practice the movements you like..." "You can't appease the hunger by reading the menu. Practice!"]

TEACHER SHARES PROGRESS IN HIS/HER OWN PRACTICE

Share with students how you got started, what you now experience as part of the practice, what are the benefits and what changes you made so that you were successful. Use a variety of ways (email, in class discussion, handouts, video clips, Online blog), to describe progress and pitfalls of practice. Tell students how T'ai Chi Chih has improved your health, etc (decreased fibromyalgia, arthritis, sleep problems, back/knee pain, recovery from surgery, etc.) If you have experienced some *Out of the Ordinary moments* in your own practice, tell your students about this and encourage them to reap the benefits of regular practice. They are intrigued by stories of what others have experience... and want to do the same.

ASSIGN ONE MOVEMENT FOR PRACTICE

When students selected and did one movement for the week, they found it extended their practice time from 30 minutes to 60 minutes... It changed their state of consciousness... All kinds of chi manifestations happened.

STREAMLINE YOUR PRACTICE

Design your practice so that it fits your lifestyle. Consider where to practice daily that is a good space, length of time, # of repetitions, etc. Insure success by starting small and building the time and number of repetitions. A short practice might include: 2 warm ups, 1-2 forward movements, 1-2 side to side movements, 6 Healing Sounds and Cosmic Consciousness Pose, or let the chi decide what moves to do.

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP A T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE

IN - CLASS DISCUSSION: REASONS TO PRACTICE

Have students dialogue with a partner (in which they can be more honest) or with the whole group as to why they should practice. What are the benefits they expect? What have they experienced already? Invite them to start a T'ai Chi Chih practice in the coming week. The important thing is to start.

PROPS FOR T'AI CHI CHIH

1. Students receive **2-3 feet of string** to use at home to check foot position in forward/back movements, so that the foot doesn't cross over the midline of the body but is placed correctly.
2. Remind them to look in the **mirror** to check for alignment and posture, foot position, etc.
3. Use an **hourglass** to demonstrate how the weight shifts slowly from back to front or side-to-side. (A **Slinky** is also good for showing slow weight shift).

JUST 5 MINUTES A DAY

Encourage students to take 5 minutes a day and do 1-2 movements. Report back next week in class how that worked for you.

PHRASES TO MOTIVATE

1. Remember that the chi is stored in the bones and dantien, and each practice is a deposit in your personal bank account (your body-mind-spirit). Remember: To grow, your personal energy account needs a Direct Deposit every day!
2. Quote from UCLA Study or other Studies to inform and motivate students about the positive effects of T'ai Chi Chih. Use Evidenced-based research to entice students and inspire them to get the same results.
3. Beginners often say: "I love T'ai Chi Chih and want to do this for the rest of my life!" Remind students of that original intent.
4. Remind students of the Folsom Prison inmates who practice daily: "If they can do it, you can do it too!"
- 5.. Use words like: "In your own practice at home this week, remember to apply what you have learned today." "Take your practice to a deeper level...", and so on.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS OF T'AI CHI CHIH

Tell students about the cumulative effects of regular practice. "The circulation and balancing of the chi is a cumulative process, and over time, it gets easier each time you do your practice. Eventually the quality and character of the chi is purified, and you find your whole life has become more harmonious. Clarity of mind, compassion, and gratitude are your natural heritage."

ROLE PLAY A TYPICAL PRACTICE AT HOME

1. **Teacher role-plays** how to get started... how to pick the room, the music, the time, and keeping a journal of when you practice.
2. **Student role-plays** a practice at home...what went right... what went wrong, how to improve the experience. It can be humorous or serious.

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP A T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE

WAKE UP CALL

Invite your students to start this simple practice each day: “Sit on the side of the bed, place your feet on the ground, take a deep breath... and pause to *feel grateful*. Practice gratitude every day.”

THE BENEFITS OF PRACTICING ON YOUR OWN

Students pair up in class and talk about what benefits they hope to experience, how they might start to practice at home, why it is important to do it regularly, and how to stay committed. Then have them share with the larger group. Empowerment comes from the peer group as well as the teacher. [As an alternative, this could be done on the phone or by Email.]

PRAISE GOES A LONG WAY

When working with students on corrections, always start with praise. Describe what they are doing correctly: foot position, weight shift, flowing from center, good alignment. Corrections done with a large dose of praise makes students feel more confident and want to go deeper and practice on their own.

HOMEWORK

Tell students they have homework! - To do the movements that they remember every day. Discuss *Habit Energies* and how to change them using T'ai Chi Chih. Use quotes on this subject from Justin's books. Encourage them to keep expanding and maturing their skills at the physical, mental, and spiritual levels.

IN-CLASS FOCUS ON PRACTICE AT HOME

- a. At the beginning of class, ask how their practice is going. Allow time for several people to share briefly.
- b. Ask them to do only the 1-3 movements reviewed in class, 2-3 x during the week.
- c. Remind them to use spare time at home: do Rocking Motion or some other movement while the food is cooking, or the water is boiling.
- d. Remind them to pick a place at home that feels right and is a good place to practice. Also pick a time to practice and stick to it for the week.
- e. Reinforce the thought that they don't need to do the entire practice. Just do a few movements to start. The practice will expand on its own over time.

OPEN PRACTICE AT THE PARK

Many T'ai Chi Chih teachers meet weekly with students to lead an open practice in a park or public setting, in which anyone may attend for free.

DISSOLVING THE HABIT OF PROCRASTINATION

We often put things off until the last minute or avoid them altogether. This harms us when we realize that our will and intent have been compromised. We feel we are a failure at getting something done. We can override this tendency by looking it right in the face and deciding *this day* to practice. Think of just today, not tomorrow or one week from now.

Acting upon this intention creates the road to success. Remember: *you will get from the practice what you put into it.*

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP A T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE

NOTE TO SELF: PRACTICE!

Write a note to self to practice on a card. Don't sign it. Bring it to class and trade it with a classmate who will give you theirs. It is a fun way to interact socially and to be supportive of each other to practice.

CALENDAR OF SUCCESS

Teachers have found it motivating to give the students a print out of a calendar month or two months and for students to use this to keep track of the days they practice. They circle the date or put a star on the date. When the month is over, they turn it in to their teacher, or not. Use the small purse-size calendars to save paper. It's fun to count up the stars and to feel good about it.

THE GIFT OF T'AI CHI CHIH

We give our self a gift as precious as a jewel when we sign up for a series of T'ai Chi Chih classes. This jewel can be polished only when we do the practice. A new facet is carved into this jewel every time we practice. One day, it will become a luminous jewel that is your life. A faceted crystal provides a good illustration of this point in class. Practice serves to carve off the rough edges of movement, and refines and develops the chi.

THE 5-DAY and 20-DAY CHALLENGE

Goal: to have them practice daily at home and to be recognized in class for that accomplishment.

Students like a challenge and having a goal to work for and achieve. Start small with a 1-Day Challenge. They sign a 1-Day challenge list in class and have a week to complete the challenge, then report back in the next class how it went. The next level could be a 5-Day Challenge. They must practice 5 days in a row, or start over. Many could do this in one week, then report back to the class how it went.

More challenging is the 20-Day Challenge, in which they must practice for 20 consecutive days, or start over. Students receive a Certificate of Completion for the 5-Day and 20-DAY Challenges. Of course, you could make the Challenge longer or shorter, depending on the individuals in class.

FEELING GOOD

Notice how good you feel after a T'ai Chi Chih practice and let that be your motivation for practicing at home. Remember to share Justin's encouragement that "the benefits are cumulative."

MAKING CHANGES IN YOUR LIFE

Take T'ai Chi Chih seriously. Remember your original intent to make some needed changes in your life so that you are living harmoniously and in balance. Remind yourself that it is a waste of time if you go just to socialize. You deserve better than that.

T'AI CHI CHIH AS EASY HOMEWORK

At the end of class, Teacher invites students to set a goal (silently) for the following week: how long, and when. Make it reasonable / attainable. Report back next week in class, commenting on successes and challenges. Remember to ask them about how home practice went *each week*. Share with a partner how it went for you this week and *what you intend to do the next week*.

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP A T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE

EMAIL SUPPORT

Contact students by email with movement tips after each class and mid-week with some writings about T'ai Chi Chih. Each time remind them to be faithful to their daily practice so their entire class can move forward together. "Don't let your fellow classmates down."

ENCOURAGE USE OF REST POSE

Discuss using Rest Pose throughout the day, to stay grounded, especially in times of stress. This will lead to practicing other movements along with Rest Pose.

PHONE CALL/CARDS TO CHECK IN

Call students who have not attended for a while and tell them they are missed. Ask how they are; encourage them to practice, even for 5 –10 min. Call, email, send a card to students who may be ill or recovering from surgery and remind them that their classmates are missing them and that can help them recover.

SEASONAL PRACTICE – INSIDE / OUTDOORS

Students enjoy practicing in different locations, inside in winter months and outside during nice weather. Students could meet in a Japanese Garden or Park to experience how wonderful an outdoor practice can be.

SWEET SUCCESS

Ask students to write down a 10-minute practice session of T'ai Chi Chih. (Which movements, what order, how many repetitions). Bring the page to class and exchange it with a classmate. This is fun and shows students that all practice is good, no matter what order!

SIMULATION OF A HOME PRACTICE

At the end of a class, invite all students to move on their own. Put on some soft music. Ask them to choose a movement and just ignore what others are doing, to begin practicing that movement on their own, and at their own pace. Goal: to show them how easy it is to practice.

MAKE A HOME VISIT

Encourage, encourage, encourage. Don't get stuck in the excuses. Share your enthusiasm for T'ai Chi Chih and your personal interest in how the student is progressing. Teachers who make a home visit form a personal bond with students. This motivates students to be more involved and to practice more consistently.

REMIND STUDENTS TO PRACTICE

Invite students to practice T'ai Chi Chih daily, what they can remember. Tell them **they must not go to bed** without having done at least a few movements that day.

ENCOURAGE USE OF “ROCKING MOTION ON THE GO”

Invite students to do Rocking Motion when standing in line at the store, when waiting in doctor's office or waiting on the phone at home. Omit hand movements, use just legs/feet.

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP A T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE

FOCUS ON A PRINCIPLE OF MOVEMENT AT HOME

1. Focus on complete weight shift forward/back.
2. Focus on complete weight shift side to side.
3. Focus on Softness.
4. Focus on mental connection with soles of the feet.
5. Focus on moving from Center (dantien)

I'M LATE, I'M LATE

When you are pressed for time and can't do a whole practice, then do what you can: Choose a few moves or let the chi choose them for you.

INVITE STUDENTS TO BE SUPPORTIVE OF EACH OTHER

You might say: "Don't let your fellow students down by not practicing between lessons. They are counting on you, and I am counting on you to practice the movements we did today, so that we can all move forward together. Don't worry if you don't do it exactly right, we can refine your movements next week." Keep reminding them that by practicing at home, they'll be contributing to the overall ability of every class member.

PHONE CONTACT

Use the Weight Watchers system of phoning once a week, to ask: "How are you doing?" Have students pair up and call each other and ask: "How are you doing with practice at home?" Encourage and focus on being supportive, focusing on intentions and progress, not excuses.

THE POWER OF NOW

Talk to your students about the power of NOW. Yesterday is gone; tomorrow is just a thought. The reality is that we have only now, this day. Plan your day so that you have some time to practice. Or: don't plan it; just do some movements when the thought arises.

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

Tell students that **you want questions** about the movements and remind them to write down their questions at home when practicing. Open class by asking: "What questions came up for you about a movement this week?" If no ones has a question, try this. Start by pretending to be a new student. Form a circle, step into the center and say: "Help me figure out how to do Around the Platter. What is the first thing I need to do?" Do the movement wrong to see if anyone picks up on the error. If they don't see the error, give them the choice: "Should I do it like this or like that? Which way is correct? They love when you do it wrong! (It makes them laugh and become relaxed.)"

SUGGESTIONS FOR SENIORS

1. Ask them to do just Rocking Motion at home to "get comfortable."
2. In class, ask if they are practicing.... And listen to their comments, giving praise for effort and not getting caught up in the excuses.
3. Ask them to do daily chores with both hands: sweeping, vacuuming, raking, brushing their hair, so that they are using both hands and performing a task on the left and on the right side.

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP A T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE

SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUTH AND KIDS

1. Tell them the T'ai Chi Chih movement "takes away their fears" and also helps them to sleep better and gives them more energy. It also helps them stay calm when they take tests, and helps them to think clearly.
2. Tell them you practice daily and set a goal in their minds that they can achieve this, just like you.
3. In After School Programs, remind them regularly to practice at home, even for a little bit. Ask them if they practiced and to share with a buddy what happened, what they did, how it felt.

PRACTICE DURING "LOST MOMENTS" OF THE DAY

Use those moments of the day to do T'ai Chi Chih when you are waiting for water to boil, for dinner to cook in the microwave, for someone to answer the phone, while waiting in line at the store, bank or at a doctor's office. This is a great way to build toward a longer practice.

PRACTICE LIKE A MUSICIAN

As a keyboard musician, I tell my students that I need to practice the piano regularly in order to maintain and improve my skills. I relate this to T'ai Chi Chih: we must practice regularly to get the benefits. If you are a singer or athlete, the same is true. We use practice to improve our performance and eventually, we do the practice because it brings us joy.

MENTORING STUDENTS

Some students show a strong interest in learning the T'ai Chi Chih form, and want to become a teacher. For selected students, having a mentor relationship with their teacher is very motivating and serves to move them in the right direction. Mentoring will be unique for each student but might include these considerations: learning the 20 movements; seeking correction continuously to make good progress; reading and studying Justin's books, Photo Text and DVD; keeping a journal of progress and benefits of the practice; assisting a teacher in T'ai Chi Chih class and leading a practice; participating in partner practice activities in class to gain experience in correction and learning to be a good observer; and establishing a daily practice of T'ai Chi Chih. In addition, attending Intensives, Retreats, and studying with another T'ai Chi Chih teacher all serve to prepare them for accreditation. A binder of suggestions would be helpful to those who want to prepare well for this goal.

ENCOURAGING ALL STUDENTS

Students need to be reminded and personally encouraged to practice. They are motivated if you say: "*You cannot do it wrong,*" as long as you are moving slowly and softly and fully shifting the weight.

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP A T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE

III. PEER SUPPORT OF PRACTICE AT HOME

PRACTICE WITH A FRIEND

Make an appointment with a friend to practice T'ai Chi Chih together once a week. in a park, in someone's home or office, even at the gym

PHONE PARTNER FOR HOME PRACTICE

Students pair up with a student in class and call/remind each other to practice, encourage/share progress and problems. They can call 1 x/wk or everyday or whatever schedule works for both of them.

STUDENTS SHARE STORIES OF HOME PRACTICE

What happened during/after practice? What has changed? These stories could be shared in print or verbally in class. The VFJ has many articles from teachers and students about practice. Ask student who do practice how they got started/how they develop their T'ai Chi Chih skills, how their practice has changed over time. Students could make a list of the benefits that they have experienced.

KEEP A PRACTICE JOURNAL

Keeping a journal, even a very informal one, is a good idea. It helps you see the progress you are making. Write the date, time of day, and length of the practice. Note changes, signs of chi and any questions. Are you experiencing stress reduction, weight changes, health benefits, more calmness, balance and coordination, spiritual attunement, joy and serenity? Note what is happening to you.

ONLINE BLOGGING

Each of us cultivates our practice differently, meeting our own challenges and setting our own goals and practice time. Our experience of the form and mental concentration also changes, just as surely as our bodies change as we age. Set up a website with a BLOG and invite students to check-in once a week or more, and share their progress, questions, insights, and learning with classmates and the larger community. What were your Practice Goals this week? Do you have any questions for the instructor? What have you noticed since you started practicing with intention?

"The road to success is always under construction." - Anonymous

SHARING PHOTOS OF HOME PRACTICE

1. Use your camera, phone or tech device to record yourself practicing at home, in the garden, in the office, in the park, etc. Bring photos to class to share with others.
2. Videotape or use camera phone to record T'ai Chi Chih movements and bring to class to share with others for feedback.

DO NOT DISTURB

One student wore a kimono at home when she was practicing T'ai Chi Chih. Her family was informed not to disturb her when she was wearing it! This worked very well for her. After hearing that story, many students made a ***DO NOT DISTURB*** sign, which they displayed when practicing at home. This also worked well for students who practiced at work.

VIDEO DIARY and SKYPE TO CLARIFY A MOVEMENT

Use a camera phone, video cam, etc in class to record student moving. Teacher views video and gives feedback and correction hints. Encourage students to use Skype with a T'ai Chi Chih Teacher or classmate to check a movement. This is a faster way of checking correct movement and eliminating problems than using videotaping. It works!

Gratitude and Appreciation to all who participated in this project.

