

# The Facts About Martial Arts For Kids

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# FACTS

## About Martial Arts

# for Kids

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## Introduction

There are many myths about martial arts training, and the general public accepts some as fact. In the following article, I have outlined general guidelines, and precautions, for parents who are considering enrolling their child, or children, into martial arts.

In this book I have listed some common issues and questions that parents often ask about martial arts for their children. Also, you will be much more informed about the benefits of martial arts, the structure with a martial arts school, and know what to realistically expect.

## Chapter 1

What should I be looking for in a martial arts school?

Safety comes as a first priority for parents who seek martial arts instruction for their children. Here are a number of key factors to consider:

Is safety equipment used when children are performing exercises and drills that require contact? This is especially important when children are sparring in martial arts. In many martial arts schools, sparring equipment is required, or the child cannot spar. The number of injuries resulting from sparring in Karate, Kung Fu, and Tae Kwon Do is surprisingly low in comparison to many league sports.

Nevertheless, I once had a father pull his son out of our martial arts school because he found a karate studio that would let his son "fight" without protective equipment. In our school, it is mandatory to wear martial arts equipment for the safety of the students. Sparring equipment has come a long way, so why not use it?

The flooring surface should match the martial art. If take downs, sweeps, and throws are required, there should be some kind of matted floor available. Many of the state-of-the-art martial arts schools have a floor surface specifically designed for martial arts. It makes no sense to have anyone throw a classmate on a hard floor, with the type of flooring available, as this can result in long-term injuries.

### Can parents watch Karate classes?

Let's put it this way, if you cannot watch your child practice karate, or any other martial art, you should find another school. I can appreciate the fact that some martial arts instructors don't want to deal with interfering parents. This is the reason for rules and signs.

Remember the "hockey dad" incident? There are a few people who, through their own conduct, create rules for the rest of us. However, you are the parent and are entitled to see your child train in karate or any martial arts class.

Fire exits, fire extinguishers, and someone who monitors visitors, as they enter a karate studio full of children, should be standard features. We have three fire exits and one main entrance, in our studio, but only one door is used for an entrance. Kids understand security because they see the same precautions in elementary school.

Also, watch out for poles in the middle of the room. Adults will spot them, but an excited child in a karate class may forget and end up crashing into one. Make sure that you feel secure about the studio, surroundings, rules, and the staff before you make a decision to have your child take martial arts classes.

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Paul Jerard is the director of Yoga teacher training at Aura in RI. He's a master instructor of martial arts and Yoga. He teaches Yoga, martial arts, and fitness. He wrote: *Is Running a Yoga Business Right for You? For Yoga students wanting to be a Yoga teacher.* <http://www.yoga-teacher-training.org>

## Chapter 2

Now let's address more issues and frequently asked questions that concern parents who seek to enroll their child in a martial arts program. The first question in this part is possibly the most important one of all.

### How do I find the right martial arts teacher for my kids?

You will know when you have a face-to-face meeting and observe him or her teach a martial arts class. The chemistry between a prospective martial arts teacher and you should be good.

After all, your child is supposed to learn courtesy, respect, self-discipline, goal setting, and many more life skills from his or her martial arts instructor. If the martial arts teacher you are considering displays none of the above-mentioned qualities, please continue to shop around.

It makes no difference if your child is learning Karate, Jujitsu, Aikido, Judo, Tae Kwon Do, or Kung Fu, when the teacher is not a good role model. You don't need to expose your children to hazards or questionable characters in order for them to learn martial arts. The martial arts school philosophy, and the instructors, should meet your standard - never settle for less.

Are you looking for discipline, academic improvement, life skills, tournament competition, self-defense, or a positive activity? Martial arts studios are not created equally. A life skills school may not meet the needs of a competitive parent or child. A "tournament school" that teaches Sport Karate, Sport Jujitsu, or enters many competitions, may be lacking in life skills and so forth.

This is not meant to take away the value of any aspect in martial arts training, but to make you, as a parent, aware that the emphasis will be different from one type of school to another. Also, the self-defense aspect will be taught differently within each martial arts school. Some martial arts schools teach more of one technique such as: punching, kicking, joint locks, sweeps, and throws.

At our wellness center in North Providence, Rhode Island, we teach all of those aspects, and we also teach self-defense through communication. For example: Wouldn't it be better to prevent a physical conflict by talking it out? If a child is fully capable of defending himself or herself, why should he or she pursue a physical fight?

As adults, we know that the diplomatic approach to a physical conflict will not always work, but it is worth a try. Our children need to look at social skills, awareness, and courtesy as survival tools. Whether they are walking down a street, or entering the workplace, these skills are extremely important.

Know your goals and your child's needs. Please make sure your reasons for enrolling your son or

daughter in martial arts classes are sound. Martial arts for your child, is his or her personal endeavor. You can share in the feeling of accomplishment by being supportive and watch them grow to be successful. Success is one of the most important gifts we can give to our children.

The ideal martial arts instructor should have knowledge of sports medicine and CPR training. This may be one of the reasons why serious injuries are rare. Make sure that the safety of each child is a priority with the martial arts school you choose.

Some parents may feel I play it too safe within a karate class, but they have not seen a child knocked unconscious, a broken nose, or loss of blood, in my school. When I was a Sport Karate coach, referee, and judge, I saw all of those things in tournaments, and children were all wearing protective equipment.

Therefore, safety precautions are a very important factor, when deciding which martial arts school you should choose for your child.

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## Chapter 3

### "Martial Arts or Karate may not be a good fit for my daughter."

We are living in the 21st century, and I still hear this one. This kind of thinking is what has been holding women back for centuries. This statement is not only made by fathers, but by mothers, too. If your daughter wants to try martial arts, let her have a chance. Martial arts classes for girls, or women, are very rewarding.

Over the years, I have coached successful female martial arts competitors who were every bit as good as their male counterparts. In the past, our kids' karate demonstration team had female captains. At one point, we had more girls on the demonstration team than boys.

Lately, we have hit the opposite cycle, with more boys than girls, as the kids from our kids' Karate demonstration team perform around the Providence, Rhode Island area. However, girls learn faster, understand precision, can easily grasp complicated techniques, and are usually better kickers.

Some grappling arts, such as Jujitsu, are not as popular with girls, but I have coached good female grapplers, as well. There is no reason to stop your daughter from learning martial arts, if she shows an interest. All of the life skill benefits such as, goal setting, self esteem, self discipline, success, and self defense, make martial arts training as important for girls as it is for boys.

### "How can I justify the cost of Karate?"

When you consider that many Karate schools charge less than a babysitter, martial arts training for children is a "bargain." Consider this formula based upon a fairly high priced Karate studio. Most martial arts studios, in the United States, average around \$70 per month to train a child. Granted, some are more and some are less, but let's look at your price per hour, if you paid \$100 per month.

That comes to just \$25 per week, and many Karate studios have a three class limit per week for children. That comes to \$8.33 per session for your child to learn life skills, self defense, and play with good kids in a safe environment. Martial arts, for children, are a formula for success, and the cost is really, "peanuts."

Most well behaved children are allowed to take more Karate classes. The children who "run the staff ragged" will be reminded of the weekly limit. So, the truth is the real cost may be less than peanuts, since there are plenty of martial arts schools, including our center in North Providence, Rhode Island, that charge far less than \$100 per month.

Using the formula mentioned above, the cost of Karate per class for a martial arts school, charging the national average of \$70 per month, comes to \$5.83 per session. Did I say martial arts training is a bargain? Maybe I should have said martial arts training is a steal.

The alternative to plug kids into the television, and put a joystick in their hands, is a big mistake. It's not any cheaper, when you consider the cost of games and the ever changing video game formats.

On top of that, here's what video games do for kids: Create anxiety, destroy social skills, teach them a lot about violence, and waste most of their time. All you need to do is throw a Big Mac in their lap every night, and within a year, you should have a child who is a nervous wreck, with poor communication skills, and an obesity problem.

Over the long-term, the wrong after school activities result in very expensive health and psychological care. Therefore, look at martial arts as preventative medicine, and as a bonus, your child is staying out of trouble.

Lastly, if cost is really an issue and you still can't justify paying less than you would pay for a babysitter at \$5.83 per session, you can still shop around and talk until you find the right karate studio.

A martial arts studio, that is "packed to the rafters" with kids, may not be as negotiable as a Karate studio that is an upstart, or a martial arts center that has plenty of room in their kids Karate classes.

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# Chapter 4

## “How important is age?”

In a nutshell, age is extremely important. A child who cannot handle being in kindergarten, or pre-school, will not be able to concentrate in a martial arts class. Before five years of age, any child who can focus in a martial arts class is exceptional.

We have successfully trained a few children who were, or are, four years of age. I don't want to turn away the next Bruce Lee or Mozart, when he or she comes along, but there are a few factors to consider when a child is very young.

- 1.** Can he or she let go of a parent's hand and work independently, in a classroom setting? This is very important, unless you can find a martial arts teacher that will teach parent and child, together, in the same classroom.
- 2.** What are your true goals? When a parent has a lot of patience, it is much easier to accomplish realistic goals of focusing in a classroom, improved motor skills, and enhanced athletic abilities. However, instant success and precision performance are not likely. In many cases, young karate students tend to “shine” around seven years of age or older, so why put your child under pressure?
- 3.** How much of a distraction is a young child going to be in a karate class? If your child is used to being the center of attention, this won't work in a martial arts class. Time is shared with other students, and the objective is to learn everything in the daily lesson plan. This cannot be accomplished if a child is screaming for attention.

Within our Karate studio, in North Providence, we have a no pressure screening process for young children, as a measure, to see if joining our kids Karate classes will be a good relationship for the parents, child, and the Karate studio. This is why we have a free 30-day trial membership, with no obligations on either side.

As a parent, you want your child to get the optimum martial arts experience every time they train. This can only happen if the martial arts school establishes clear guidelines for conduct and if all the children participating are “team players.”

Otherwise, parents do not get their money's worth and children waste time in a Karate class, while the child who gets the most attention is a discipline problem.

Within a child's mind, being responsible for his or her actions is a matter of developing awareness, and everything is a new experience. As adults, we know that this knowledge comes with age, but each individual child grows at a different rate. Children are not “little adults,” and we cannot place adult expectations upon them.

If you put children into extremely high-pressure situations, they will not continue to enjoy the activity. Whether it is martial arts, academic school, or little league baseball, it is healthy for parents and children to have goals, but we all have to learn to accept life's little setbacks without worry.

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# Chapter 5

## **“Will my child become more violent from learning karate, jujitsu, or another martial art?”**

### **In a word, “No.”**

Children learn self-control by practicing martial arts; and the code of conduct that is enforced, within the studio, is carried outside into every day life. The average martial arts school works with parents, and academic teachers, toward the goal of optimum student success.

When you see a Karate demonstration team perform, that is not an indicator of the life skills taught within the Karate class. It is the “flashiest” component of Karate training, presented to capture the public attention. Ten minutes of kids using ancient weapons, breaking, and working in synchronized choreography, is more interesting to the public, than a lecture, by me, about dealing with bullies without violence.

However, let’s take a closer look at the ten minutes of flash.

The next time you see a martial arts demonstration team, remember those children have to practice those techniques over and over again.

### **This requires self-discipline, goal setting, perseverance, and each child being a team player.**

**There is no room for a “one way” personality on any martial arts demonstration team. Such a personality would work against a good public performance. In a typical Karate class, all of the above-mentioned life skills are learned and much more.**

Children learn much more about violence on the television, playing with video games, and dealing with daily life, than they will ever learn in a karate class. Even if a Karate teacher was the classic “evil sensei,” that you may have seen in the Karate Kid movie or on Kung Fu Theatre, most children can think of far worse violence.

All you have to do is watch the news, cartoons, listen to the radio, or read a newspaper, to see things worse than unsupervised hand-to-hand combat. So, the self-defense methods taught to children actually pale in comparison to school shootings, bombings, wars, and drive-by shootings.

Karate was created by unarmed civilians on the island of Okinawa and was taught in secret among family members for their personal protection. The philosophy, within a martial arts school, will not always be the same, but the seeds of violence are not sown within a martial arts setting.

All you have to do is look around you to see more, and far worse, violence than learning self-defense - integrated with constructive life skills. The fact is a martial artist is not a “street fighter.” If that were a requirement, we would recruit the toughest kids in North Providence.

**As I explain to the children in my Karate and Jujitsu classes, “Never forget the word, “artist,” means to be creative, to be an innovator, and to think for yourself.”**

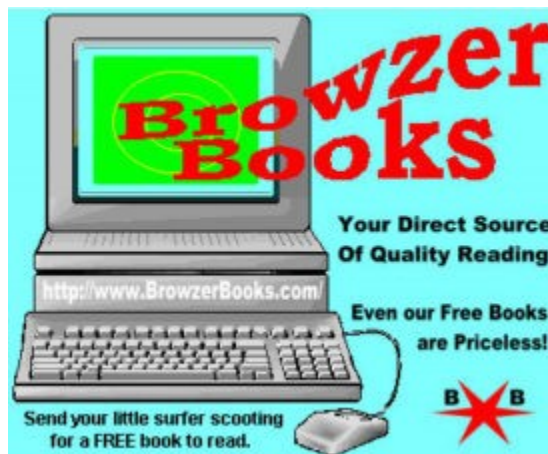
Children who learn martial arts are more apt to be well adjusted and know how to defuse a potentially violent situation.

On top of that, most children who study Karate, or any other martial art, will not be “trouble makers.” The children we teach from the Greater Providence, Rhode Island area have learned enough about leadership, in our Karate and Jujitsu classes, to think for themselves. For parents, the gift of martial arts training to their children has many rewards, right now, and into their future.

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