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TEACHING CHILDREN

MEETING THE CONCERNS OF PARENTS

I can safely say that most parents who visit Martial Arts schools are under the impression that it is simply about kicking and punching, and all they care about is whether the child is actually enjoying the activity. That level of understanding was borne out of the movies and a lack on the industry's behalf to educate parents about the benefits the martial arts can have as an educational dimension for children.

So it is up to the instructor and school to educate the parent in the first place. A Martial Arts school may have two main types of parent visit or inquire by telephone. The ones that have no previous knowledge about the club/school, or the ones who your existing students have already recommended to come and have therefore educated a little to a certain extent.

Parents coming to a martial arts school for the first time will need a lot more than a good first impression to secure their trust in the ability to teach and educate their child. They will need to see and hear, and yes smell, for themselves how the school can help their child. Instructors would need to be adequately qualified to teach children (and continually updating their training in this field), police checked, First Aiders and properly insured. Parents will want questions answered by competent, since instructors who enjoy teaching children and can address all their fears and barriers. For example: How can your martial arts help my child from being bullied? Get more confidence? Give them more respect? etc, etc. Once these initial questions are answered, you find that the questions that follow are related to your past record. For example; How does the instructor manage to get the child to accomplish certain goals? How does the instructor get the child to respect what they learn and not use it in the playground at school?"

N.B. These questions and more are answered at the end of the chapter.

I will explain these questions and the importance of that initial first impression, but first let me say that the first impression is most likely to be formed even before the parent gets to your school.

That first impression comes from the initial telephone enquiry which so many school owners seem to forget the importance of. Was the telephone call met by a professional, confident individual who knows what and how much information to give to the inquirer? When invited to your academy, were proper directions over the telephone, or a good map with a professional leaflet giving an explanation of the benefits of your school sent to the parent? While your do-jo or do-jang might be so simple for you to find and locate an easy parking spot, this could be a put off if directions were not communicated clearly. After all, they're hoping you're an excellent communicator! Is your do-jo easily sign-posted and can it easily be seen as you approach the school?

Parking for parents with one or two children is an important benefit and this request should be accommodated to create a welcoming visit.

• PARENTS VISITING THE ACADEMY/SCHOOL/CLUB FOR THE FIRST TIME

To continue with good first impressions, when the parent visits for the first time, try to give them some personal attention in order to answer their questions. If you are unable to do this because they have arrived while you are teaching, make sure you arrange another member of staff to speak with them. Most prospective parents would like to see your class in action so perhaps schedule the visiting times to allow personal contact either before or after the lesson.

• IMAGINE THE PARENT IS A CLOSE FRIEND

If you were to invite one of your close friends over to your house for dinner I am sure you would be an accommodating host and welcome them at your front door. Your greeting at the door of your martial arts school, should be viewed in the same light. Both the parent and the child will have mixed expectations of what's on offer. It doesn't matter if it's the local scout hut or a state of the art dojo you can do a lot to create that vital first impression. If they arrive at the same time as some of your existing students are arriving they are already seeing the results of your teaching. If

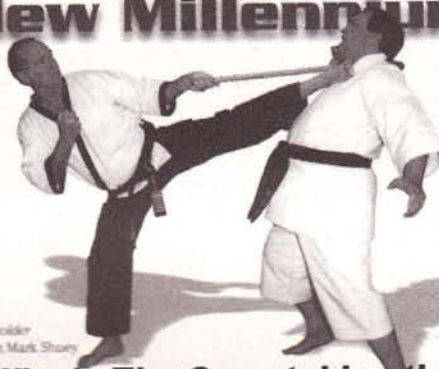


these student appear well behaved, aren't noisy, are well mannered and well groomed, exchange respectful and polite greetings to you and your staff, a good impression is no doubt formed. Contrast this against a few unruly kids, who burst in the door, barely acknowledge your presence and run wildly towards the nearest kick bag, need I say more!

Frank Murphy has been teaching since 1979. His wife Catarina a third degree black belt is currently studying a Masters degree in physical education at Loughborough University. Together they run martial arts educational seminars in the UK, Rep. Of Ireland and Portugal. You can contact them at Family Martial Arts headquarters in Kent on:
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