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TEACHING CHILDREN



Teaching Children Martial Arts in the new millennium

Today there are a number of alternative views on how we teach children and those in their teens. Many successful ideas have been designed and explored regardless of the subject taught. Interactive-homework based programs, designed to bridge the lesson taught in class and various teaching techniques have undergone rigorous experiment and study to produce quality and lasting results.

The history of children's involvement in the martial arts and more specifically the children's curriculum design is barely twenty years old. The original founders (the majority of which were male) and early pioneers designed their martial arts curriculum in mostly military training environments. Their students

consisted of already disciplined males in a military setting. These founders of the arts at that time (the forties and fifties) may not have had the opportunity to teach their art to a younger age group. Curriculum that was specific for children did not exist.

It was not until the film industry and the modern computer games glorified the Martial Arts that captured the attention of both parent and child.

When Sylvester Stallone made the Rocky movies, it set a chain reaction that boosted and elevated the sport of boxing into new levels. Even the title track, "The Eye of the Tiger" was popular before world title fights at major shows and many martial art exhibitions. Young and not so young flocked to boxing gyms to learn the glorious art of boxing.

The great Bruce Lee ignited the main boom for the martial art industry in the early seventies, and should rightly take credit for bringing martial arts to a wider world audience. However it was not until 1983 when the Karate Kid movie opened, did the martial arts get portrayed as something a lot more than mere kicks and punches. The Karate Kid was the watershed and the turning point. It highlighted the enormous values and benefits of how the martial arts could have such a major positive role for children. Children's martial arts had an unexpected platform. It also got a big movie break in the follow up movie Karate Kid Two. The Films were unlike the previous genre. They portrayed the values of respect and discipline alongside the normally expected kicking and punching. The wise old man Master Maigui taught defense both physically and mentally. How to be resourceful and confident, as well as to value human life.

In this Supplement, we will do our best to publish interesting and relevant information for the benefit of ALL Martial Arts. Please send your stories, articles, news, events, etc, to:-
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When this sudden mass interest dawned on a growing martial arts industry some groups and instructors geared their Martial Arts to suit the child, most unfortunately did not. The majority of practitioners then, myself included, frowned upon any changes or compromise to the original way we were taught, and the way our instructors were taught before us.

When I became an instructor in 1979 I really did not want to teach children.

They took second place to the hard line attitude of the "blood and guts era" that my fellow colleagues and I had graduated from.

From the late seventies to the present time, it has taken ten to fifteen years of curriculum evolvement to reach this point. Today thankfully most open-minded and educated instructors teach the fundamental basics of discipline, self-control and respect, alongside the kicking and punching, and not to leave it up to the students to read about it in some theory book. While these were there all along, they are now recognized as major education tools for the martial arts industry and are taught for example, in student creeds at the beginning and end of class to instill these values.

Here is an example of the Junior student creed used in Family Martial Arts Black Belt Schools:

I respect my Parents, Teachers and Instructors.
I respect other peoples property.
I will say 'NO' to drugs & 'YES' to success.
I will arrive early for my lesson, because Martial Arts, makes me a better person, SIR/MAM!

But let's not fool ourselves. Teaching children, no matter what the subject, isn't easy. Society today bombards our offspring with pressures unheard of. Recent government surveys indicate that a school teacher is one of the highest

stressful occupations. Even more frightening is what happens in the worst case scenario when children lack control and discipline. We then hear the hard crime statistics of children joining the ranks of hardened criminals. Teaching children against the backdrop of overcrowded classrooms, violence and media pressure can easily discourage even the most charismatic educators.

We know the good news. We know that children who attend Martial Arts classes twice a week have improved their concentration and attention span. We are all only too well aware of the tremendous physical attributes.

The challenge therefore is not only simply to teach the physical "kicking and punching" elements of Martial Arts, but to educate both the children and the parents on the character, the emotional and the mental development that a systematic martial arts program can offer. Why educate the parents? Answer: Because independent statistics show that if a child is taught something positive, the more the exercise is reinforced and encouraged in the home, the better interactive development follows.

Over the next few months Master Frank Murphy attempts to set out the history and the current challenges facing us all in teaching the next generation. These series of articles will breakdown the material currently available, and present the Martial Arts to not just you the instructor but also to the parent in an easy and understandable format.

Master Frank Murphy runs a full time Academy in Kent, UK and has a number of affiliated clubs throughout the UK and Europe, comprising of Family Martial Arts Black Belt Schools. He can be contacted on:

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