

The Benefits of Martial Arts for Children

As parents we are often concerned about the way our kids are spending their spare time. Too much time either in front of the television watching sports or cartoons which are becoming ever increasingly more violent or playing video games in which blood and violence are glorified seems to be more and more common these days.

Many people look at the martial arts and consider them to be another of the contributing factors to the violence displayed in these games and shows. After all aren't they all about flying kicks, punches and throws? If I enrol my child in a martial arts program, is that going to encourage them to engage in this violent behaviour?

The truth is that most martial arts programs are designed to discourage violent behaviour while at the same time supplying an outlet for aggression.

Judo and the media.

Most often, judo becomes newsworthy, we are shown a spectacular throw in which a judo player is seen flying high through the air and crashing to the mat in what looks like a bone-breaking landing. What we often don't see is that the person thrown immediately stands up, uninjured, to face his opponent. Also not shown, is the handshake between fighters after the victory has been awarded—recognition of a fairly won contest and no animosity between players. How is this possible? Read on.

What is this sport of Judo all about?

Judo is based on two principles:

Mutual welfare and benefit for all participants

Everyone is important in Judo. In every lesson both the teacher and the student learn from each lesson. The best learning takes place when all participants, students and teachers, respect each other both for the individual himself and for the skills he or she has learned.

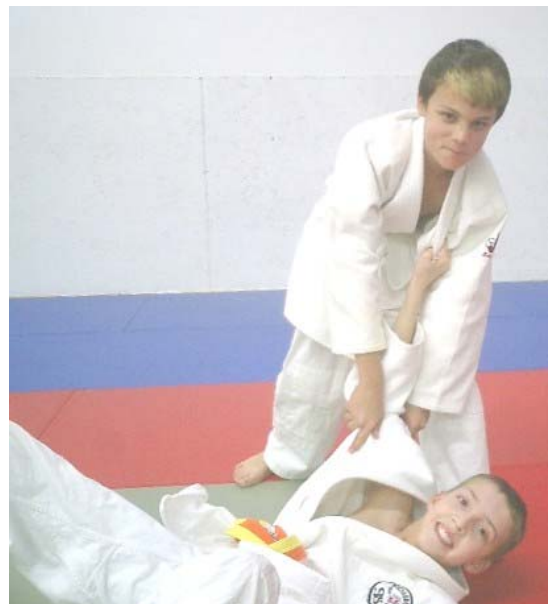
Maximum efficiency of effort

Judo is a sport that trains the body both mentally and physically. Judo attempts to develop a positive attitude toward sport in general, and toward the self that will last a lifetime.

Judo is a sport that was developed in the late 1800's in Japan. Its founder, Dr. Jigoro Kano, was physically quite small and was often bullied by bigger students when he was at school. He set out to learn how to defend himself by learning Jujitsu. At that time, there were many different rival schools of Jujitsu. Dr. Kano learned two forms of Jujitsu. While learning Jujitsu, he became concerned, though, that many students were injured while they learned this sport. He saw injuries as wasteful and foolish. He, therefore, set out to develop a safer sport--Judo.

Judo for beginners has three basic components.

1. Learning to fall safely and without injury.
2. Learning to toss an opponent safely in a controlled manner through a variety of techniques.
3. Learning to control an opponent in a hold-down.



These skills are learned cooperatively by all members of the club. Competition at this stage is discouraged. Most of a judo class is spent doing repetitions of body movements in order to refine a technique.

Once a skill is learned, then it is applied and practiced in closely supervised but informal contests. While winning in a contest is important, it is not winning at any cost. More importantly, contests are opportunities to test one's level of skill against another person. Often, the "loser" wins too, by forcing the superior fighter to work extremely hard for his victory. Contests should be fun and should be a positive learning experience.

There are no striking techniques used in Judo--no kicks, no punches, no elbowing, no head-butts, no finger jabs--none.



What can I expect for my child if he or she participates?

Each class begins with a short vigorous physical work-out. Judo strongly promotes physical fitness. A lesson introducing a new technique or reviewing and refining a technique usually follows. Groundwork, (it looks like wrestling), is used to practice skills and to increase stamina. Free practice usually ends the formal part of the class. A game normally ends the class.

How safe is this sport?

Undoubtedly, injuries will occur. Usually, they are scrapes on the feet and ankles because our skin is soft. Safety is uppermost in all instructors' minds. The learning of new skills is very closely supervised to ensure everyone's safety. The completion of a technique is only allowed when a student has demonstrated complete control of technique.

Contests are very closely supervised. If a potentially dangerous situation develops in a contest, the match is stopped. The same diligence is applied in learning a skill. All participants are made aware of the nature of danger and methods for averting the situation are discussed.

"I don't believe in fighting."

Strangely enough, neither do we at the club. At least not the way most people think of fighting. Students who study judo are strongly cautioned that the skills learned in the club are kept in the club. They are not to be used against anyone outside of the club, except as a last resort if they have been threatened with physical violence. Judo students rarely become involved in brawls and school yard conflicts. The discipline of the sport, the expectations of their judo teachers, and the knowledge of what could potentially happen if a judo technique were applied is enough to deter judo students. A Judo match is a very closely supervised and controlled contest of skill. The welfare of the contestants is always uppermost in the referee's mind. Grudge matches are never allowed.

By-products of a martial arts program

Judo and other martial arts build, self-esteem, self-discipline, confidence, self-respect, concentration and courtesy for others.

Self-esteem is built through a series of small victories. Every time a child learns a new technique and is able to execute that technique, they feel empowered. When they learn enough techniques they will eventually earn their next belt.

Discipline becomes Self-Discipline The belt systems used in Judo and other martial arts keep kids motivated. They want to achieve their next belt, and therefore are pro-active in finding out what they need to accomplish in order to attain it. The awarding of a new belt by one's sensei is a physical display and recognition of their hard work, commitment and achievement.

Confidence comes from learning that they are able to accomplish each of these small goals. As each goal is met the child begins to realize that he or she can accomplish almost anything by taking one step at a time, setting small goals, attaining them and then setting their next goal.

Self-respect Martial arts are perfect for kids that don't do well in team sports. It gives them a chance to flourish both physically and mentally without having to live up to the expectations of their peers. Each progresses at his or her own pace. We all recognize that some things come easier for some than for others, but we all get ahead just at different paces.

Concentration is improved through developing listening skills during the demonstration portion of teaching a new technique and followed through by having the student repeatedly practicing the technique, with emphasis on each repetition being a little better than the last one. In fact often time's children with special needs such as those with ADD (attention deficit disorder) or hyperactivity disorders are recommended to participate in martial arts because of the clear benefits of their structured training.

Courtesy for others is displayed by both the instructor and the students. There is a large emphasis on practicing safely, by using controlled techniques to avoid injuring your partner.

Martial arts are meant to teach its students to become complete people. It is not all about kicks, punches, throws and chokes. With the full benefits that martial arts can offer, they can help your children to become successful, fit, and respectful adults.