

Safeguarding in the Martial Arts: Safe Practice

Martial Arts are activities where safe practice is essential to help prevent injury. Children* are particularly vulnerable as they are still developing mentally and physically, so training methods need to be modified as described below. (*also includes Adults at Risk)

Within Links Karate coaching techniques, particular reference is made to children and young people practising together and this guidance is now included here. Martial Arts Instructors need to understand the added responsibilities of teaching children and also basic principles of growth and development through childhood to adolescence.

- Exercises should be appropriate to age and build. Instructors should not simply treat children as small adults, with small adult bodies.
- There is no minimum age for a child beginning Martial Arts, as the build and maturity of individuals varies so much. However the nature of the class must be tailored to consider these factors.
- In general, the younger the child, the shorter the attention span. One hour is generally considered sufficient training time for the average 12 year old or below. Pre-adolescent children have a metabolism that is not naturally suited to generating anaerobic power, and therefore they exercise better aerobically, that is, at a steadily maintained rate. However, they can soon become conditioned to tolerate exercise in the short explosive bursts that more suit Karate training.
- Children should not do assisted stretching - they generally don't need to, and there is a real risk of damage with an inconsiderate or over-enthusiastic partner.
- Children should be carefully matched for size and weight for sparring practice.
- Great care must be taken, especially where children train in the proximity of adults, to avoid collision injury.
- Children should not do certain conditioning exercises; especially those, which are heavy, load bearing, for example weight training or knuckle push-ups. Children should not do any heavy or impact work but should concentrate on the development of speed, mobility, skill and general fitness.
- No head contact is permitted for children participating in kumite or partner work due to significant, evidenced based health concerns surrounding the impacts of concussion.

Warm Ups

All activities should first include a thorough warm up which is appropriate for the activity taking place. To help reduce the risk of injury, specific attention should be paid to those muscle groups that will be used during later activity.

Martial Arts involving throwing, grappling and strangling

The risks include but are not limited to: falling on unsuitable surfaces; landing on the head; damage to the joints from locks; strangulation.

Safe practice includes, but is not limited to:

- (a) Checking the matted area for suitability, particularly where the mats have been joined.
- (b) Checking that there are no hard surfaces or sharp/hard objects around the matted area.

- (c) Having an experience instructor who will ensure that children are not taught to use locks, throws or strangles which will cause injury.

Martial Arts involving strikes, punches and kicks

The risks include but are not limited to: concussion (brain injury) from heavy blows to the head; damage to internal organs and joints from heavy blows; injury from inappropriate stretching and other exercises.

Safe practice includes, but is not limited to:

- (a) No head contact under the age of 18
- (b) Ensure that correct and full protective equipment is worn during sparring sessions
- (c) Aim to match size/weight of children paired together, also taking into consideration the differing technical ability of the students to ensure sensible pairing.
- (d) Instructors or referees supervise at all times when sparring or competitions are undertaken.
- (e) Ensuring that mats are correctly laid and clean from grit, broken glass or plastic wet patches etc before sparring or competitions begin.

General Risks involving Martial Arts training and Dojo's

The risks include but are not limited to Trip Hazards from incorrectly fitting uniform, children wandering off, lacerations from uncut fingernails, toenails or jewellery.

Safe practice includes, but is not limited to:

- (a) Making sure obstructions can be moved away from the training area, or where this is not possible making sure that there is a reasonable area of clearance maintained throughout the session.
- (b) Advise students to keep fingernails and toenails cut short.
- (c) Prohibit the wearing of body jewellery, and if it cannot be removed then it should be covered whilst training or competing.
- (d) Advising students to only wear correctly fitting Karate Gi's, especially trousers, making sure the length is suitable.
- (e) Operate a 'meet and greet' policy where parents/guardians bring the younger children to the door and pick them up afterwards on time.

Above all, safe practice means having a suitably qualified and experienced instructor who will ensure that children are not exposed to the above risks and who can make a training session enjoyable whilst maintaining the discipline essential to learning Karate.