

AWARENESS

Your child has enrolled to learn Karate. He or she has just received their first Gi or perhaps they are in their tenth year of training. Whatever the duration of Karate practice, correctly approached, the lessons go beyond the class proper. And as parents, grandparents or guardians, you can help reinforce those lessons ... in fact, help parlay those hundreds of hours of diligent work into good practical use.

Lets divide into general categories areas that Karate lessons address. Clearly, these categories overlap and are factored according to age and each child's unique set of circumstances. Putting aside the kicking and the punching, the techniques that are so focused in on as indicators of Martial Arts training, a closer look reveals much more happening on the Dojo floor.

Areas of development include:

Emotional Stability and Development:

1. The ability to properly handle emotional feelings in a social context under pressure.
2. The ability to properly respond to emotional uneasiness.
3. The ability to become more objective in decision making. To understand the decision making process as an objective one.
4. The ability to emotionally rebound after experiencing "failures".
5. The ability to graciously handle "successes".

The Development of the Sense of Self:

1. The ability to develop one's sense of self - self-empowerment, self-esteem, inner direction and motivation, self-respect, etc.
2. The ability to maintain a sense of self in any and every social context and under the myriad of pressures that society will bring to bear.
3. The ability to set goals for one's self and maintain short term and long term objectives.
4. The ability to develop an ego which gives a person exceptional confidence along with perspective, humility and compassion.
5. The ability to self-evaluate, self-examine without depending solely on accolades or 'outside' criticisms.

Focus:

1. Improvement upon all abilities which when brought completely into focus improves one's overall performance.
2. The ability to first recognize the challenge, meet the challenge and exercise oneself until the challenge is finalized.
3. The ability to finish well no matter the distractions.

The development of Physical Properties:

1. Learning to develop and finely hone the bodies' senses which includes territoriality.
2. Learning to physically empower oneself through the physical practice of balance, timing, power, speed, breathing, muscle development and flexibility.
3. The ability to hear and to correctly and productively respond instantaneously.
4. The ability to mentally control nervousness, habitual behavior, physical manifestations of fear, surprise, disappointment, etc.

Social:

1. The ability to interact with a microcosm - to observe and interact in an appropriate manner with peers, with people of all ages and abilities, in the Dojo.
2. The ability to work as an individual and as a 'team' player.
3. The development of character that lends oneself to become a leader rather than follower in society.
4. The development of the poise required in school, business, and in all areas that necessitate the proper presentation of oneself.
5. The ability to follow directions.

Ethics and Morals:

1. The ability to reinforce ones attitude regarding ethics and morals.
2. The ability to understand the importance of defining ones own parameters of moral and ethical behavior. Karate training helps reinforce one's principles as well as gives us the tools to appropriately defend those principles.

The list goes on. The point is, the Dojo is a learning ground for so much more than it's given credit for. Much of the value is intangible, but few parents overlook the dramatic change their child undergoes while practicing over the years. The Dojo acts as a mock society -- the practitioner "dies" physically and emotionally over and over again, picks himself up with lesson in hand and approaches the same dilemma repeatedly until successfully resolved. This by all definitions is the "coming of age." The Dojo is a controlled and safe environment for the harshest of lessons that life will hold. What parent wants it differently? We want our children to be safe and protected ... yet, what realistic parent would not try to properly equip their child? That cachet of equipment has always meant a stable home, clear moral parameters, a good education and enough physical and social skills to take them anywhere in the world with confidence. Today, that tool chest must also include the ability of survival in a very erratic and uncivilized world. Well, it's evident that every parent reading this has already come to that conclusion. Let's put forward some practical steps.

We are very busy telling children to be respectful, to "be nice," to act friendly and to be sociable, to obey authority ... yet, we are bewildered when our children get into trouble. Let's bring Karate skills into the picture. The first rule of thumb, the very essence of Karate training is that its use is for self-defense. Every Karate-Ka knows that prevention and skillful avoidance precludes a crisis situation. In other words, you should

be prudent about placing yourself in a precarious situation and know ahead of time the signs of one. One should know the avenues of preventative behavior and know the signals of a predator or predatory situation. This is manifold with a child - they lack the experiences required of making such evaluations unless they can “play through” such mock situations in the Dojo.

Karate training builds one’s intuition -- that is experience culminating to an instinct that helps us arrive to a decision intelligently but by all appearances seems like a “gut feeling.” Trust your child’s instinct on matters. Remember that a four year old and even some fourteen year olds are not able to verbally articulate in a fashion acceptable to most adults as acceptable reasons for not liking someone. It’s not a good idea to wave away what could be an instinctive early warning signal and it’s equally unwise for your child to begin not listening or trusting his innate sense of danger. All a small child knows is “this doesn’t feel right. This isn’t the way mom or dad talks ...” As a parent, allow your child some leeway - listen and observe carefully to his or her fears and try to get to the bottom of it rather than “no, Mr. Smith likes you, now stop acting that way”. In addition, don’t force affections from your child toward acquaintances. Treat them and their persons respectfully. Giving instructions like “go kiss him good-bye -- give everybody a hug” or allowing anybody to manhandle your child might in the future cause confusion. It means it’s okay to have kisses, hugs and intimate behavior solicited by perhaps a casual acquaintance. Allow your child to develop a sense of territory. Distance is his or her first line of defense.

Respect. We all want it. But don’t make blanket comments which will make your child assume that all figures in authority must be obeyed. Give them the tools by which they can discern proper and improper behavior no matter who is in authority. When we instruct your child, we often give warnings as to unusual behavior patterns. They begin to learn to observe a person’s actions which will signal the real intentions. So, to demand their obedience without thought and consideration is to rob them of their ability to fend off the proverbial ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing.’ As a rule, people in a Police uniform are to protect our security, but prudence is required when their behavior is out of norm. Teachers are to be treated with respect, if that teacher is demonstrating the appropriate respect to the student. What is out of bounds? Be explicit. A person is not allowed to manhandle you, use profanity, ask personal or intimate information. Furthermore, explain what information is private, what places are intimate, what areas are personal. If you as a parent demand an automatic response all the time, without thoughtful discussion, if you direct without some explanation, or expect performance without giving scope and perspective, your child will respond without thinking to any adult, not fully understanding the process of thought required to disseminate information.. Take the time to allow feedback from your child. They’re slow, so we tend to impatiently move along. But they’ll become faster and faster at assimilating data - just like the instantaneous verbal “oss” with simultaneous action in the Dojo.

Some Hints:

Never put names on handbags, lunchboxes, clothing and so forth. Even an adult will be caught off guard if someone enthusiastically calls out a name or nickname - it almost demands that we at least stop and inspect. Unless you want your child to be easily approached by a predator, allow him or her to keep the intimacy of their name reserved for friends.

Teach your child that it is not rude to run, even if the evidence is not “in”, even if they feel in the least bit uneasy. They study movements very carefully in the Dojo - always they are taught to be mindful of someone entering into their safe distance - don't let them drop their guard outside the Dojo! Watch your child carefully for signs which indicate that they have let their guard down in the wrong place. For example, your child follows the wrong type of character entering a public restroom. He feels safe because you are somewhere in the restaurant, but is unaware of how dire a predicament he/she could find themselves in just fifteen feet away from you. Your child should not be paranoid, just made aware to maintain alertness in all places at all times.

As parents each of you took the responsibility of reviewing a class before enrolling your child. It's our policy to make sure that the lessons taught and messages imparted are in keeping with the parent's traditions and values. But not all organizations and institutions demand this attention from parents. Never make assumptions about teams, coaches, teachers, baby-sitters, neighbors, - anyone your child will be left to as a charge. Once you hand your child over to anyone, your child assumes that that person is the caretaker and must be obeyed. Do your homework. Ask questions. Stick around. Come early. Interview, carefully and thoughtfully. Your child has been taught to obey ... make sure that they have enough sense of self worth and self respect in order to keep the clever and the insidious at bay. In the Dojo class, again, our children are not treated any differently than the adult. They are afforded all courtesies. No one is allowed to manhandle or even be rude to each other. Respect, Respect and Respect is practiced in the Dojo. Respect for privacy, respect for the Dojo facilities, respect for each other, respect for the instruction, etc. They will come to recognize the unprofessional behavior that is a telltale sign of danger. They will come to know if an adult is not behaving toward them like their peers and instructors in the Dojo, so listen to them carefully if they demonstrate trepidation.

Often the instructors ask children questions in order to examine their ability to respond. In that “interview”, Sensei examines the child's poise, ability to respond intelligently to an adult's questions as well as follow directions. Sometimes we ask the child the date of his birthday or how many times they practice per week ... whether they can write their name ... how many brothers and/or sisters they might have ... questions which demonstrate to the child that they indeed possess valuable information. The next step is to teach what information should be given out, to whom and under what circumstances. At the Club level never give out information concerning students. No one can even obtain a student's phone number without the express permission from that student. Why should your child be less cautious?

Teach your child to have pat answers (age of course if a factor) when he or she cannot decide on the correct course of action.

For Example:

Stranger: “Please give me your address so I can send your mother a letter”
Child: “Well, I’ll have her call you ... could you please give me your phone number?”
Stranger: “What is your fathers name Alex?”
Child: “Dad”
Stranger: “I mean his whole name”
Child: “That’s personal information.”
Stranger: “Could you help me look for my puppy? He got lost.”
Child: “I wish I could, but my father is waiting for me over there.”
Stranger: “Can you tell me how to find directions to your home, I have some flowers to deliver to your mother ... or could you take me there?”
Child: “No”!
Stranger: “What’s your phone number?”
Child: “We don’t give that information out. You’ll have to ask my parents.”
Stranger: “When are you going on vacation. Where are you going on vacation.”
Child: “My family considers that personal, I’m sorry.”

Role play with your child. Set them up so that they become alert while playing this “what if” game. Depending on their age, start to teach them about making assumptions - we do in Karate class. We are constantly teaching them to listen anew every time by changing the structure and directions ever so slightly. part of their promotional requirements is to be able to respond instantaneously to directions without making assumptions. If the instructor says “right foot forward” and the result is “left foot back”, the student is strongly corrected. Listening is critical to survival. Observation is critical to survival. Karate practice requires both of these cues and more with each and every drill. Karate practice demands that we avoid putting ourselves on “automatic pilot.” While we want to protect our children from undue stress, it’s unwise to allow them a sense of security which precludes alertness and alert actions. Putting your child on automatic pilot or letting them think that rules are steadfast and always dependable thwarts their development. Of course cars are supposed to stop at a red light, but some don’t. There are dependable adults and undependable adults. That car might hit you even though there are rules in place to help prevent that. Your taking time out to help your child evaluate his or her envision and make appropriate decisions is immeasurable in their developing years. There is a process by which children must weight their decisions.

1. Who is the Person? Stranger, or friend?
2. Am I able to keep a safe distance?
3. Is he or she asking me questions of a personal nature?

4. Am I in a situation where I cannot contact another adult in authority and/or my parents and so forth.

This process or warning system takes seconds in a child if he or she is allowed to role play with you. Once the danger signs go off, the Karate skills come into play:

1. The ability to face an uneasy, strange, intimidating situation mindfully.
2. The ability to maintain safe distance.
3. The ability to respond with the appropriate action or inaction.
4. The ability to assess the odds.

All of this seems to be common sense. But every instructor can tell you stories of having to bring some of their children into reality. Many are so dependent upon their parents, watching out for their safety that they never develop a sense of personal territory or self. It's not that we shouldn't neglect that parental duty, but are well able to expand and expand upon that duty. "Look out", or "watch where your going", isn't the way. Talk to your child as you take him or her through the day. Ask them questions constantly about their environment so as to improve upon their observational skills before they make "mistakes." Describe, in detail, your observations and thought patterns about what you might consider mundane routine activities.

For Example:

1. "Look at all those people in line. We'll have to go another way ... look over there by the stairs, shall we try that way?"
2. "Where is the shoe department do you think ... oh, you're right! Thank you."

Have a dialogue with your child which serves to keep him awake and alert as if he has value in his feedback. He will learn to hone his observational skills, develop a thought process in assimilating data and making decisions in an impromptu fashion, and enjoy the growing feeling that his/her ideas and impressions are of value to you. This is the practice of self esteem. Not saying "You're a wonder, how great you are ...". They have to honestly feel and think value on a regular basis. That distances your child from predatory behavior - and later, to cultish personalities and environments which cater to the emotionally unstable.

Share your own cautions with your child. "I'm not comfortable going this way after dark ..." Well, those kids look as if they are up to not good, lets try another way just to be safe, okay." Your child will develop unnecessary fears only if you make such statements or assessments with anxiety in your gestures and tone of voice. Rather, your intonations and presence should exude confidence, evenness, and a resolute thoughtful quality. In this way, a "crisis" situation is gradually learned to be handled with an even temper and cool head. in the Dojo, each time the child first encounters life's emotional issues (and instruction is filled with these experiences) the reaction in thought is something like. Help ... what are you going to do about it, Sensei? The Sensei has no reaction whatsoever commensurate with the students "shock". The accountability ball is

back in the student's court. While under a watchful eye, the Sensei allows the student to look to himself for problem solving first ... such dynamics leads to self-reliance.

The Sensei reprimands strictly the instruction not followed in detail. Such detail can be the difference between life and death. No student is allowed to follow another ... they must be personally responsible for all directions given - inner direction. Such a trait serves as an important shield against mindlessly following another without carefully examining the circumstances. Overall Karate practice requires a student to make no move out of personal control. Once self-control is realized, it is easy for the child to notice, and judge, the physical manifestations of others. With the study of perfect timing and rhythms also comes the learned sense of what is arrhythmic, out of balance, the inharmonious behavior of those around them.

In the Club or Dojo level many times, children are practicing with adults - it is achieved seniority that is respected, not chronological age. Therefore, their respect is earned as well as afforded by others. Such a child will not be compelled to be a "pleaser" to others for acknowledgment and recognition. A Karate student learns that action and productivity is necessary for peer acceptance, not a lot of talk about who they are or what they will be. That lesson alone in Karate guards your child against the clever flattery and attentiveness which draws unsuspecting children into dire situations.

Being aware covers a lot of territory. Correctly handling pressure, self imposed or otherwise, is part and parcel of the development of a strong Karate-Ka. Poise is a cultivated practice. Each time your child stands alone in class to perform his or her Kata, they face outside scrutiny as well as their own preparedness. Repetition of these experiences brings poise into place as second nature as the perfectly placed and timed punch or kick. And it's as important. Whether delivering a business presentation, facing a life or death situation, having to present one's ideas which indeed communicate that idea with assurance, poise, decorum and self-confidence is a critical tool of life. Furthermore, standing up straight, walking with eyes forward with deliberation, articulated and strong speech patterns are hardly the hallmarks of a victim. Predators are cowards. School yard bullies are cowards. It's their modus operandi to ferret out the personality that looks as if her or she will fear confrontation - will not put up a fight. Karate is used for the defense of ones life and highest principles when alternatives are not available. By definition, Karate skills are a do or die affair. Obstacles and weaknesses are never to be avoided, but addressed head on because every Sensei knows that when one's physical Karate skills are called upon, there is no hesitation and no letting up. Remember, we are teaching civilized behavior in the extreme to ensure proper character development. But, your child is also taught that there is an element in this world that □ takes advantage of others civility, □ knows no respect, only fear, and □ has nothing to lose. Base instincts, base behavior must be dealt with on certain occasions and we teach that in no uncertain terms. One must learn to speak the language of ones opponent. But first, remember to practice with your child and help develop in them a sense of what personalities, what actions, what circumstances in life they must be weary of. Unless such parameters of ethics, traditions and morals are strongly outlined for your child, no

matter how adept at Karate they might be, they will not know the correct circumstances in which to go instantaneously into action. Inaction is another variable we deal with. Remind your child that there must be something to be gained by an altercation other than ego satisfaction. We often point out that all leaders, all independent thinkers and people of action can be very lonely at times. How much easier it is for others to criticize, point fun at and otherwise deride people of quality rather than improve themselves. Is this a child's awareness problem? As adults, we recognize the same emotional quandaries in business and socially. It bothers us too. So share that with your child. No good to say "well, don't let it bother you" or "next time, hit him." Talk it out. Does he have something to gain? And of course it's going to bother him ... let him know about instances which have happened to you. Finally, remind your child that the more developed and cultivated, the more they might be a mark for those kids not properly brought up (you know, the less fortunate kids).

In the Club level we should not subscribe to the "warm and fuzzy" ideology. We're not out to fake a "feel good" situation for your child - we are imparting real life skills for real life achievers not dreamers. No smiley stickers go on the belts, not every child gets a medal, no child gets promoted until they earn that right, and mediocre attempts are not good enough. Our society has accepted mediocrity in all fields - we will not accept anything less than your child's personal best. Awareness is not a matter of just self-awareness or survival, it also includes an "eye" for quality and for excellence as well. In a world where parents are grateful that their children are not involved in gangs or drugs, the United States of America National Karate-do Federation criteria should be an "A" average. Why? By former standards, be aware, that was average work. We do not subscribe to the "lake weebegone syndrome" where every kid is above average ... we clearly see the work ethic required for excellence and will see a child quit (or withdrawn) rather than dilute the quality of the pedagogy. That's self awareness and that's reality as seen through the eyes of your Sensei.

We share in your desires for your child and we expect that cultivation for citizenship and awareness is a three way street between parent, child and teacher. In this way, your child will not merely learn to survive, but live a quality life.