

Tips for helping your child get the most out of GKR karate

After school, Karate is undoubtedly one of the most valuable ways that your child can spend his or her time. It develops a wealth of positive character traits including respect, determination, self discipline, problem solving, patience, honour and positivity. Nothing is sadder than seeing promising students who do not get the full benefit from a class, or who quit on a whim. It's frustrating when I hear a parent say "He wasn't interested so I won't force him". One momentary expression of dissatisfaction from the child, and the parent allows the child to quit something massively character-building. Is it any wonder so many of today's kids are growing up to be troublesome?

Helping your child

- **Encourage their interest**

In general, kids work best when trying to earn your approval. The more you encourage them, the more they will want to earn your praise by trying hard. Kids thrive on attention. If you show interest in their karate, they will enjoy the whole experience more.

- **Develop consistent training habits**

Like many things in life, once they become habitual, they become easier. One of the biggest reasons people quit, is that they simply fall out of the habit, and it can happen in as few as a couple of missed classes. Try to ensure that training day is kept free of competing activities and appointments.

- **Encourage home practice**

It's a simple equation – the more you train, the faster you improve, and when you train on your own, it forces you to think about it more, so practicing in front of the living room windows, or out in the garden is a great way to improve.

- **Train more than once a week**

Students who train more frequently show a dramatic increase in their rate of improvement. Although the optimum is 3.5 times a week, even just training twice a week will make a significant difference.

- **Train with them**

For many kids, time spent with mum or dad is more important than anything, so why not combine activities and attend the class yourself?

Behaviour problems

- **Too many E numbers**

Do not feed your child sweets or fizzy drinks or food with lots of additives before class – it makes them too excitable and they do not concentrate properly.

- **Lethargic and lacking concentration**

Don't over-feed your child before class – a large meal takes energy to digest, and shuts the brain down for some people, making concentration harder. A light, healthy snack and a small drink of water is best.

- **Medication too late**

If your child takes drugs to help with issues such as ADHD, it's best if you administer them a while before training, not as you walk through the door. Speak to your medical advisor for the best timing.

- **Over-excited**

Do not allow your kids to do over-stimulating activities or go out to play before class – they quickly get into a excitable state that can be hard to calm down

- **Too late at night**

For some kids, an evening class is too late – why not try a morning class on the weekends to see if their attention and/or behaviour improves?

- **Short attention span**
If your child is young, perhaps they simply lack the attention span to make it through a class? The earlier classes only last an hour, but if that is still too long, speak to your instructor about your child sitting out after half an hour.
- **Action plan**
Speak to your sensei about a plan of action – does your child always misbehave when he partners or is near particular children for example. Does he need more attention or stimulation – or less? Would a firm hand help, or does he need a bit of TLC?

Kids who don't want to train

- **Why the change of heart?**
The second your child expresses reluctance, try to find out what happened in class the week before. Were they bored, did they get told off, did they have an argument with another student or learn that they were not ready for grading? Kids often over-react the second they meet the tiniest challenge. Don't let them run away from obstacles or they'll be doing it their whole lives!
- **Something more fun to do instead**
Clearly establish that karate time cannot be substituted with play time, computer games or TV time – Kids will usually take the easy route out the second things get challenging
- **They sense your lack of resolve**
Don't be wishy-washy about their training. It's something they do for their well-being – like eating vegetables and going to school. If they think it's negotiable, they'll try to negotiate every time.
- **Forgotten why they train**
Remind them of the benefits. Self defence, confidence, fitness, being with friends. Have the reasons they joined (or you joined them) changed? Probably not.
- **Quit at the first difficulty**
Kids' lives are easy nowadays, and far too many cannot deal with even the smallest amount of challenge. They'll whine and make up excuses and "tummy aches" and reasons not to train. They need you to impart the discipline that they lack if they are to grow up to be determined and resourceful people.
- **Sense your reluctance**
All too often, parents make it clear to kids that taking them to training is inconvenient, and they stay away at the drop of a hat. Is it any wonder that these kids are not eager to train, when their parents clearly resent taking them?
- **Too much homework**
Your brain works best when it is not stressed. Even during exams, physical activity is the ideal relief from a lot of mental activity. If your kids have so much homework that they cannot find an hour or so a week for karate, maybe you should take it up with their teachers...