



Karate and martial arts are activities where safe practice is essential to help prevent injury. Children (this also includes adults at risk) are particularly vulnerable as they are still developing mentally and physically, so training methods need to be modified as described below.

Warm Ups

All classes begin with a thorough warm up and end with a cool down. This is appropriate for the activity taking place. To help reduce the risk of injury, specific attention is to be paid to those muscle groups that will be used during later activity.

All instructors have undertaken the KUGB instructor qualification. This ensures all instructors understand the added responsibilities of teaching children and the basic principles of growth and development through childhood to adolescence. Warm ups and exercises are appropriate to age and build, and instructors do not simply treat children as small adults, with small adult bodies.

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.

Strikes, punches and kicks

Physical contact is seen as a necessary and positive part of teaching karate, and is acceptable practice as long as it is appropriate and done in a safe and open manner. Instructors might manually adjust a student's technique – for example, by straightening a wrist or moving a block to a more affective position. They may need to move a child for safety, e.g. to avoid collision or prevent them from falling. Physical contact may also be used to re-assure or reward – for example, a light pat on the back or shoulder.

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

Instructors will:

- Always ensure that children are fit to train.
- Not allow children to do assisted stretching – they generally don't need to, and there is a real risk of damage with an inconsiderate or over-enthusiastic partner.
- Try to match children for size and weight for sparring wherever possible.
- Take great care, especially where children train in the proximity of adults, to avoid collision injury.
- Always consider the age, grade and ability of children involved in karate. Care should be taken with certain exercises and equipment and consideration should be given to the potential outcome of any activity.

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- Not allow children to perform certain conditioning exercises, especially those which are heavy load-bearing, for example weight training or knuckle push-ups.
- Not allow children to do any heavy bag or heavy impact work – rather, they should concentrate on the development of speed, mobility, skill and general fitness. Children are still developing and can be damaged by these exercises.

Children & Kumite (sparring)

The minimum age for a child beginning karate training including kumite is determined firstly by insurance requirements and constrictions, and also by the judgement of the instructor, as the physical and mental maturity of individuals varies so much. However, the nature of the class will always be tailored to consider these factors.

Kumite is always practised under supervision with strict controlled conditions and is not full contact. All kumite is practised wearing KUGB endorsed safety mitts. Therefore, any head techniques are always executed under a maximum arm's length safe distance and is light, controlled and not allowed to follow through.

In basic sparring, students must always state their attack “Jodan” (to the head) so their partner knows the attacker will be aiming at the head. Only when the instructor states “hajime” (begin) can a student begin an attack.

During kumite exercises, children will always be paired up with another appropriate child, taking into account age, height, weight and grade.

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