



How Early Should You Start Your Child In The Martial Arts?

While the martial arts is an enjoyable and very worthwhile activity for children, it's important to recognize that progress will take consistent class attendance, some practice and support from the family (kids can't drive themselves to class).

How early to start a child really depends on the individual child and their level of interest and maturity. Many professional schools have age specific classes and curriculum programs for children as young four, five or six years old. These programs are very popular and can be a great way for a child to learn concentration, self-control and start to develop more coordination.

Programs for children of this age usually are less demanding than mainstream martial arts programs and bypass much of the serious self-defense training in favor of more age appropriate and fun activities.



How Do I Choose A Martial Arts School For My Child or Me?

The principles are the same for choosing a school for yourself or your child, so I will address the answer for parents, as there are a couple of special considerations when children are involved.

Step one in choosing a school is to clearly understand what you want you or your child to gain from learning the martial arts. Is it a light recreation? Then a community center program may suffice. Is it self-defense or personal development? If so, then a full-time professional school will be more suitable. Many parents view the martial arts as part of their child's educational development. With a good professional school, this is very possible.

Step two is to recognize that choosing a school is really choosing an instructor. Be sure to visit the school and watch the instructor work with other children of the same age. Every school is very different because every instructor is different. Don't get confused by claims of black belt degrees, tournament wins or martial art styles. The only style that matters is the teaching style of the instructor and how your child will respond to him or her.

Finally, trust your instincts. A professional school will have a family atmosphere, lots of smiles and be well kept. You'll feel comfortable with the personnel and the facility.

While this may not end up being the closest school to your house, when it comes to your safety or the safety and education of your child, an extra ten-minute drive can make a world of difference in the outcome.



What Kind Of Facility Should I Look For?

Here it's important to trust your first impressions. The modern martial arts school is clean, well lit, spacious and has good family atmosphere. The mirrors are polished, the floor is clean and the dressing rooms in good order. On the wall you might see photographs of recent school events and outings and there should definitely be an area for parents or family to sit and watch the classes.

Beware of any school that doesn't allow you to watch the class. Particularly if you are a parent looking for school for your kids, you might have real concerns about a school that doesn't allow you to watch them work with your child. An instructor might say that they don't want the child to be distracted by the parents, but the truth may be that the instructor doesn't want to be accountable to the parent.

Conversely, professional instructors will practically insist that you stay and watch. They know that once you see the positive lessons they are teaching your child, that you'll be even more supportive of the training.

The truth is that the instructor who encourages you to take the time to watch your child in class is doing you and your child a great service. In today's busy world, the tendency to drop off a child and not take the time to share the experience of learning a new skill is all too prevalent.

I've always found that the kids whose parents were in class and supportive seemed to do much better and be more well adjusted than the drop off kids. Children, more than anything else, want their parents to take an interest in them and be proud. Martial arts, taught by a professional, have a series of "victories" for each child ranging from a new belt or stripe on their belt to other forms of recognition for the child. That recognition is greatly enhanced when the parent is there to share in the pride.

Consider a professional martial arts instructor as a part of the team whose goal is to instill a strong sense of self-pride and confidence in your child. As a parent, your presence in that classroom is critical to the success of the team.