



**GKR**  
KARATE



## SECTION 4: Teaching Children

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## 4.1 Introduction

Karate builds self-confidence. This provides the platform for developing good values and strong character.

While children enjoy karate training because 'it's a fun thing to do', they are learning important lifelong lessons, values and etiquette that will help shape how they view the world around them.

Karate develops respect. It is a physical and demanding activity, yet children who participate and progress in the art will develop a positive attitude that they can take with them to help accomplish other important tasks and face other challenges in their lives.

All of the above benefits are very important. However the avenue by which they will develop these skills and attributes is their instructor, their 'real life' role model.

GKR Karate is dedicated to making children feel accepted as well as motivated towards their training. We focus on providing children with a positive environment where they can develop their confidence and self esteem. Our aim is to provide a place where they will find continual support when they feel down or discouraged. We must be ready and able to give children the additional support to face life's challenges and to stay on the right path.

All GKR instructors should feel this same dedication as nothing in life builds someone's confidence as knowing your role model supports you, encourages you and has total faith in you.

***'It has been said a great leader helps people to believe they are better than they actually are.'***

In addition to the positive and supporting environment, we must also provide our children with discipline. This includes ensuring children are coming to class on time and follow the etiquette of the dojo. It also includes learning to respect themselves as well as others, which is such an important objective that we should aim to instill in all of our students (and ourselves). Discipline also involves teaching our children not to feel that they can't complete a task because it is too hard or because they failed the first time they tried.



This discipline will help them to stay focused and work hard to achieve their goals.

Martial arts have been taught for centuries and today it is taught all around the world. Its teachings are totally unique compared to most conventional sports. The lessons and values learnt in karate can help children become better citizens and help them to handle many of the situations that life throws their way. Therefore the responsibility should not be taken lightly. We hope you become very familiar with this section as it is designed to help you become a better instructor by helping the children you teach.

## 4.2 5 Keys for Teaching Children

It is important to note that when teaching karate, the way we communicate with children and adults may vary immensely.

This section is designed to give you some better teaching methods in order to keep your younger students motivated, disciplined and attentive – all of which will ultimately help you achieve better results in your teaching.

There are many points we could cover on the topic of 'teaching and dealing with children'. However, we have summarised this section into 5 key areas.

### **Key #1 Motivate them**

The aim for every child in training is to become the best "karate kid" they possibly can. This will require you to motivate them to want to do well in all areas of karate training.

These areas include:

- Discipline and concentration
- Etiquette and good manners
- Self esteem and self confidence
- Self control
- Technical ability

How do you motivate a young student? By finding ways to 'connect' with them and give them fun classes with plenty of recognition, you will find it much easier to motivate them. Motivation means making them 'feel' good about what they are doing. So, our role as instructors is so much more than turning up to class and shouting out a bunch of numbers. It involves 'leading' our students to train hard, stay focused and remain motivated about their karate.

### **Key #2 Praise, recognise and encourage them**

Everyone loves praise, recognition and encouragement. They should be constant in every class. In general, and this may apply to the martial arts, people in leadership often spend too much time reprimanding and looking for things people do wrong, and not enough time looking for things people do right. Imagine going through a whole class just looking to pick out what your students were doing wrong! The class atmosphere would be dull, and your students would literally quiver every time you walked by, hoping you wouldn't notice that their stance was too long or too wide etc. How motivating would that be for the students in your class?

So, our objective is to teach students with plenty of recognition, encouragement and positive feedback. Achievement Certificates are great and work very well too. But, where Achievement Certificates will only go to one or two children per class, praise, recognition and encouragement can go to every student in every class.

### **Key #3 Always talk with enthusiasm**

Talking with enthusiasm is literally telling your class that you enjoy teaching them. It also helps to keep the class high spirited, energetic and enjoyable. We have all seen popular children's television programs. The one thing they all have in common is the 'enthusiasm' in their voices. This doesn't mean as a karate instructor we should talk like a

children's television presenter, but we can teach with enthusiasm. For example, in an adults class we punch "full focus", whereas in a 6pm class where there are many children and some adults we may punch "full focus" then look at the kids and say "that means really, really fast", or "10 out of 10 fast" etc.

More ideas for this are to be found later in this section.

### **Key #4 Make learning fun**

Children love to have fun. Everything can be made to be fun: from basics, to learning kata, to even learning about discipline.

Too many people can fall into the trap thinking that the majority of a class need not be enjoyable; and if the students behave and go through the hard and necessary things, they will be able to have some fun during the games at the end of the class. This is not the case at all. There is no reason why the entire class should not be enjoyable.

Making learning fun increases your students' attention span. They listen more, stay focused on the class and keep coming back for more! As a result of all of this, they learn more and develop their karate skills.

### **Key #5 Pass on good values**

Being a martial artist is not only about learning the physical act of karate. It is about developing yourself as a person. It is imperative that students are coached in all areas, both mental and physical. Ideas for this can be found later in this section.

## **4.3 Motivating Children**

Children often avoid things that don't stimulate them. We have all seen an infant who plays with a toy for a while then quickly decides to go and play with something else. They have the choice to do this.

In karate training children are not given an option to go and do something else. Part of the discipline required is that they follow along with what the instructor has chosen. Because of this, children in class can sometimes be distracted, and may not pay full attention during the basics. This is often because they aren't kept stimulated throughout these periods. So they start to misbehave, look around, fidget, ask to go to the toilet or just simply switch off all concentration.

## **We can try to reason with them by...**

- Letting them know that the basics are important.
- Letting them know that they can't grade if they don't learn their basics or kata.
- We may make an agreement with them that we will only play games if they focus and concentrate for the basics and kata.

To be a good instructor we must understand one very important thing:

***“Adults and children think very differently. What motivates and seems reasonable for an adult may seem boring and unfair to a child.”***

The following are ideas for keeping children mentally stimulated and therefore motivated.

### **4.3.1 Motivating Children During Basics**

There are a number of ways to go about improving children's technical ability in their basics.

Regardless of how you go about this you must remember that children must be mentally stimulated to keep full attention.

The following are a few exercises that may be used to help you when teaching children.

#### **1. Competition with a partner**

***“Children love to play games because they enjoy competing with each other.”***

During the basics, you may have everyone face a partner. The game is to compete against them.

While counting through the basics slowly, the object is to have more focus than their partner (also to fidget less!). While counting, you and your sempai should be walking between the lines and pointing out the people who are doing it correctly.

When going through fast, the object is to be faster than their partner. When counting, vary the length of time between counts so students work on their reflexes, rather than anticipating the next count. After the Kiai on 'Ju' ask them to put up their hand if they were faster than their partner.

#### **2. Competition with yourself or your sempai**

This exercise is very similar to the above. Instead of facing a partner they stand in their normal lines and compete against you.

While you are counting slowly they must aim to have more focus than you. As you will be competing with the class, your sempai can walk around and correct people. After each technique, you can ask your sempai if anyone had more focus than you. He/she may pick someone who tried hard, then publicly let everyone know that 'John' had the most focus. Occasionally the sempai can choose you, this gives you a chance to entice your students to put in more focus!

While counting fast, vary the length between counts. Occasionally you may 'fake' the next move. This keeps the children on edge and makes them concentrate more. Also, by occasionally moving before the count, keeps it enjoyable. (When you do this, always let them know you cheated, and let them know you are sorry and cheating is wrong).

After each fast technique ask your sempai who was fastest, the same as when going through the techniques slowly applies.

This exercise may be done with your sempai competing and you walking around instead.

#### **3. Competition with a single student**

This exercise is exactly like the one above, however the students do not compete with you or your sempai. The object of this exercise is to select a student to come out to the front of the class, and the rest of the class competes against them. If the student out the front is the 'best', then they stay there for the next technique. If they are 'beaten' by another student, they swap places. Try to pick different people each time with this exercise. Don't pick winners on ability but rather effort. Make it fun! The basics section will fly by! Don't forget to add recognition and praise. Every time you have a winner, have the whole class clap for them. Watch them smile from ear to ear!



#### 4. Have students 'teach the class'

Have you noticed how many commercials there are on TV, or television shows where children are in the role or roles of adults. This is because it is commonly known through studies, that children love to see themselves as responsible and capable.

While this shouldn't be done too regularly in class, it is a good idea to sometimes bring the kids out one at a time for each technique and have them count through. Here you can guide them in what to say, such as the name of techniques, the 'kamae' command, slow, medium or full focus. Have them count as loud as they can when they count fast.

Children always enjoy this exercise, and you can pick the children to come out who...

- Behave the most
- Try the hardest
- Fidget least, etc.

Whatever you want them to focus on.

#### 5. Pick your 'special sempai'

At the end of each class, you nominate the 2 best behaved and most focused students to be your 'special sempais' for the next class. During the basics, you can have these 2 students out the front as your sempais with you going over the techniques. Since this is something you can run every week, all of the children will want to be picked for next week's 'special sempai'.

This exercise keeps them focused during the basics section. They all want to please you the most so that you will choose them for next week's 'special sempai'.

### 4.3.2 Motivating Children For Improvement During Kata

The topic of this section is to help keep your children motivated during kata.

Like teaching the basics, plenty of praise and recognition is important.

The following are some helpful hints to help you in this area of teaching.

#### 1. Competing with you

The desire to win will always help someone concentrate and push themselves. This is where you may describe the next technique of the kata, then demonstrate it. After this, encourage them to see if they can do the technique on the count ...

**As good as you** (eg long stance, good posture, back leg straight etc).

Upon counting, move with the class. Ask your sempai to pick out all the people who are in a great stance and have correct technique. Don't just pick one person here, but everyone who is correct.

**As fast as you** (moving through to punch or block quickly).

Upon counting, move through as fast as you can. Ask your sempai if anyone was quicker. Have the sempai pick someone who was fast, then publicly let everyone know that they were the fastest in the class.

**As still as you** (eg no fidgeting).

Upon counting, move with the class, fast and correctly. Hold still for a few seconds. Stand up and move around the room with your sempai and praise everyone who is not fidgeting.

This exercise may also be done where you do not do the kata with them, but instead count and walk around, you can make a game of it by having anyone who fidgets or looks around to sit down. Then at the end, everyone who is still standing gets a big round of applause.

Practising kata with plenty of encouragement will help you to get the best possible results from your children.

#### 2. Achievement Certificates

Before starting kata, let the children know that for those who don't know the kata, if they can learn it that day they will earn an "Achievement Certificate".

If they do learn the rest of the kata that class, make a huge deal of it after class and then give them the certificate and have everyone clap.

You should make a point of giving out an Encouragement Certificate at certain 'highlight points', such as:

1. When they learn to count to 10 in Japanese

2. When they can remember the order of the hand techniques.
3. When they learn the order of the 5 basic blocks.
4. When they learn the order of the 4 kicks
5. When they learn the first kata.
6. In general, set points of achievement like the ones listed here so that your class can feel they are progressing well at each point. You may, as the instructor, hand out these certificates for a variety of things at your discretion.

### 4.3.3 Motivating Children For Improvement During Combinations

Similar to basics and kata, it can be easy to lose the undivided attention of children while going through basic combination work.

The following are some ideas to help aid the instructor when teaching kumite and combinations

#### 1. Keep them simple

As soon as you complicate a combination children will switch off. This doesn't just mean to not add too many techniques. With children, its often best to finish a combination with the front arm, as opposed to finishing, for example, with a reverse punch and then expecting them to understand that the next move forward is with the same arm. Simple combinations for children are moving forward with a single technique, or a block followed by two punches so the last technique ensures the arm finishes over the forward leg.

#### 2. Allow the children to choose the techniques

When the children are involved in the decision of what techniques are chosen, they will tend to put more effort in.

For example:

- Have all the children with their right leg back in zenkutsu dachi.
- Ask one child to name a block
- (eg they may chose hooking block).

- Ask another to chose a strike
- (eg. they may chose a head level punch).
- Ask a third child to chose a kick
- (eg they may chose a round kick).

Now you will go through the combination with them, being hook block, head level punch, round kick, then step back and hook block again.

Alternatively you may work on the children's balance by having them hold the kick before stepping back into stance again and have three more children choose three more techniques.

#### 3. Include a game such as "Punch, block & kick"

This is an excellent game for improving technique, stance and focus during their combinations.

##### Step 1

All kids stand in long forward stance at the back of the room.

##### Step 2

Pick one child to come out to the front of the room facing away from the class with eyes closed.

##### Step 3

Each time you count, the students step forwards in long forward stance- they may land with any strike, any block or do any kick (kickers land in a guard position).

##### Step 4

After they have completed the technique, the child at the other end yells out with either "Punch" or "Block" or "Kick".

##### Step 5

Any child who has just completed what the person out the front has called, they then must go to the back of the room and start again on the next count. eg. If a student steps forwards with a block, and then the call is for "Block" they must go back and start again.

##### Step 6

Proceed with the next count - after the child cries out punch, block or kick etc.

#### The Object

The object of the game for the children is to get to the front of the dojo first.



If they do, they then take the place of the child who was originally calling out (for a big dojo, you may just pick a certain point to which the children must aim to cross over first).

#### **Why this works**

This exercise is effective because the aim of the game for the children is to get to a certain point in the dojo, and it teaches them to have long stances, as a short stance will not cover much ground.

After the first round you may begin to add in 'extras' for sending students back such as ...

#### **Incorrect stance**

Let them know that even if they pick a technique that the person out the front does not choose, you will send them back if they have an incorrect stance, eg front leg too straight, back leg bent. Always let them know, if you send them back, why you did so.

#### **Too slow**

They will also be sent back if they move forwards without enough focus and speed.

#### **Fidgeting**

If they fidget or look around they will be sent back.

It is often a good idea to add each of the extras in, one round at a time.

This is a valuable exercise, as the children are focusing on winning. The way to win means to not only guess a technique right, but also to complete the technique correctly, with full focus and no fidgeting. Each time they forfeit one of these they risk losing the game.

In summary, regardless of whether you are teaching your children basics, kata or combinations; by using the five key areas for 'Dealing with children' you will achieve the best possible results.

## **4.4 Keeping Correct Discipline in the Dojo**

Occasionally in class we get a child who can stir up the class atmosphere with poor behaviour.

Even the most disciplined of classes can have one or two trouble makers. Students with poor discipline need to be dealt with as soon as possible, as often other students leave the club because they become tired of constant disturbances.

When we talk about dealing with 'troublemakers', we are not just talking about when a child misbehaves in class. We are talking about a child who repeatedly, over a number of classes, misbehaves and shows no response to the normal disciplinary measures.

#### **Normal disciplinary measures for misbehaviour are...**

- a. Give them a verbal warning. If they are talking or misbehaving with someone close by, separate them.
- b. Have them go to the back corner. It is important to have them at the back so they are out of sight and therefore cannot draw attention to themselves or show off.
- c. Have them stand in sumo stance (shiko dachi) or in a ready stance (heiko dachi). They will find these less stimulating than things such as squat kicks and therefore will dislike the consequence.
- d. If they continue to misbehave in the same class, have them sit out of the games.

- e. Talk with them at the end. Let them know they have really good karate and it upsets you to see them not trying.
  - f. If it continues let them know you will speak to their parents unless they start to behave. This alone often works well.
  - g. If they do this repeatedly and do not respond to the normal disciplinary measures, you will need to speak to their parents at the end of the class. It is important that we do not have students disrupting the class environment, as this will cause other parents to feel that their children are being held back from learning.
- Get them on side with you and, as a good idea, ask them to come and see you at the end of each class to see how their child went.
  - Again let them know and at the same time tell their son or daughter that they have good karate and you want to grade them but at the moment they just need to concentrate a little more and misbehave a little less. Let them know your aim is to help their child and not just to help your sanity.

**Note:** *It is important to focus on the positives about their training as well, or after going home and talking with their parents they may insist on not coming back. If this happens they will not get what it is they need right now...discipline.*

## Successful ways to deal with misbehaved children

### 1. Talk to the children who may misbehave before the class starts

If you have a child who has a habit of misbehaving, have a talk with them before class. Do this in a positive way, with plenty of encouragement. Let them know when they behave they show good skills, and you want to see them become one of your best students.

### 2. Ask them why they misbehave

In instances where they do it often, ask them why they misbehave. You will be surprised at the answers you get. However often you may get a good reason.

### 3. Talk to their parents

If a couple of weeks have elapsed and you have not seen a change in them, then you will need to speak with their parents after class. Have them wait with you in the dojo until their parents come in to pick them up.

Inform the parents that.

- Their son or daughter has good karate when they apply themselves (start with a positive).
- However for a couple of weeks they have been disrupting the class on a number of occasions and it is beginning to concern you.
- Ask them if they could talk with him or her about this and perhaps together you and they can help their child.

### 4. Continue talking with parents

Keep in contact with the parents. Every time the children show progress, let their parents know that you are proud of them.

### 5. If they are still not improving

If after all this, you will need to ask the parents if their son or daughter really wants to be there (often parents want it more than the child). We have all heard the saying 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink'. If the child is still disrupting the class, talk to your Regional Instructor about having the child put on suspension from training for a short period.

**Note:** *Try to understand why they may be misbehaving.*

Children misbehave for a number of reasons. Some of these may be:

- Low self esteem.
- No real desire to be at class.
- Lack confidence with the techniques.
- Crave attention.
- Influenced by another child.
- Boredom (perhaps from not grading for a long time).

If you can understand why that child is misbehaving, then this will help you deal with the



problem. For example, if it is because they just would rather not be there and that their parents are making them attend, it is best to talk to the parents about not coming back to class, either for good, or for a short period of time.

If you feel it is because they are influenced by another child, talk to the parents about coming another day or going to another dojo where that other child is not present.

If you feel it is because they lack confidence, have their parents purchase a video and make sure they practise at home. Also give them plenty of encouragement when they are training to build confidence.

If they haven't graded for a long time, then set a goal with them and their parents. Have them purchase their next belt and keep it with them. Constantly encourage them that they will be grading soon and they just need to keep trying.

**Hint:** *By putting yourself in their shoes, you may be able to come up with a strategy that will motivate them to train harder, therefore misbehave less.*

## 4.5 Problem Solving: Dealing With Disgruntled Parents

Nobody likes to deal with complaints, but it is something that can happen when dealing with children in a class environment. Parents can genuinely get concerned about their children's progress or what may go on in the dojo, and they may at times want to speak with you about it. The better you are prepared to handle these situations, the better you can resolve the situation.

The most important part of a conflict situation with a disgruntled parent is to listen to what they have to say! The biggest problem that arises is that human beings usually will go into 'conflict mode' as soon as they realise they are in a conflict situation. The first stage of this conflict mode is that we stop listening! We start thinking defensive thoughts like "I don't have time for this", "This person doesn't know what they are talking about", "They should try teaching their child" etc.

We stop paying attention as to what is coming from the other person and we miss out on the information that we need to resolve the situation.

Often our objective is to save face, and defend our actions. As sweet as the victory may be, it is a short term victory. We feel better about ourselves but the parent may feel you didn't really resolve the issue. Often their child doesn't return to your class. If this happens then you haven't really won anything because the most important part of resolving the conflict is helping the child.

## Successfully dealing with conflict

### 1. Listen and empathise

It is important to hear them out fully, and to try to understand their concerns (put yourself in their shoes). This may require resisting defensive feelings. The better you understand where they are coming from, the better you can handle the situation. They will appreciate the fact that you were concerned enough to hear them out. If you don't know what they are feeling, or what they are concerned with, then you won't be in a position to be able to help them.

### 2. Understand that parents can get defensive too

Of all the things that a parent can get most defensive about, their child is at the very top of the list. Being aware of this may help you to 'choose your words' when dealing with a situation involving a student and their parent. To be understanding of their emotions in this situation is very important.

### 3. Communicate clearly

The worst thing that can happen after resolving a situation is that both the parents and yourself have a different idea of what was resolved and what was to happen from then on. Always communicate clearly so everyone knows exactly what is meant. This way both parties walk away from it with a perfectly clear understanding.

### 4. Ask them questions

After repeating back their concern, to confirm your understanding, instead of answering it straight away ask them "Is there is anything else that you are concerned about because I would really like to know". This disarms the other person, it shows you are not putting up a wall, but are showing them that they are important to you and so are their concerns.

### 5. Resolve the issue: acknowledge your limitations

Nobody is perfect, and people will understand this. If it is a situation that you are having trouble with

resolving, then let them know this. For example, for a big class with one instructor.

*"This happens to be one of the larger classes in the area. We are looking to get another person down here to help in the next couple of weeks, but you are really pointing out something that is very valid!"*

After this, aim to fix the situation as soon as possible. If you forget about it, they will just get disgruntled again.

#### **6. Resolve the issue: by acknowledge their concerns**

Whether you personally feel their concern is valid or not, always show concern and take the approach that they are right. "That's a reasonable concern and I can understand that any parent would want to make sure that their child gets the right amount of individual attention in class. My assistants here are very good, and together we make sure each child does get individual attention in class. I will however make a point of what you say so that Billy gets the attention he should. I would really encourage you to watch that next time you come, but your concern is reasonable, and any parent would feel the same way".

#### **7. When it's the wrong time**

Sometimes when a parent wants to talk with you about a concern, it may be the wrong time. For example class may be about to start. When this occurs it is important to let them know this without having them feel you are dismissing them or avoiding the situation. We can do this by ...

"Mrs. Smith, I really understand that this is a concern for you. I am about to start the class. Can I see you after class, or perhaps we can make a time to talk by phone or meet in person."

#### **8. For important issues**

Any issue that arises that you feel is quite important and beyond your control it is important to pass them onto your Regional Instructor. Let them know that while it is a very valid concern, it is out of your control to fix the situation. Give them the number of your Regional Instructor so he/she can help with their concern.