

## DON'T SMASH THE BUGS

By Sifu Frank Versagi

Doesn't it seem disconcerting to watch our children outside supposedly "playing," while they stomp to death every bug that crosses their path? Is there something wrong with this picture?

The children would not like it if a man the size of a house walked up and just stepped on them because he could with absolutely no regard for their lives. Should we not teach the value of life, no matter how small, to our children as part of their martial arts training? They're just bugs, you say? It's not the size of the life; it's the behavior pattern being created. Teaching our children the idea that everything has a right to live and it's not up to them to decide life and death, hopefully will aid them in their decision making process in the years to come.

Children are taught to punch, kick, get out of holds, et cetera, all under the guise of martial arts training; they are also taught not to use the skills they have learned to be a bully at school or experiment on their siblings, only use the training for self defense. The natural fit here would be that while we're teaching the children to respect others and not pick on them, to input the concept that all life in all forms should be treated the same and not stomped out just because they feel like exerting some dominance over another living creature. Although dominance at times for children can be useful, but it has its place.

Let's instill respect for all living things in our children now during their formative years; whether you label it kindness, compassion, or just plain old good common sense, it's not a bad idea to get that behavior pattern started. 5 to 10 years old is not so young that the children can't comprehend what is alive and what they have just killed. Better to instill the idea of killing at random is not an appropriate way to act now, as opposed to waiting when they are teenagers or adults. Teach the children they can be kind and still be a good, "tough," martial artist. Remind them that some of history's greatest warriors knitted, painted, or sat "softly" in meditation for hours, when they weren't out killing their rivals.

Children across the United States today are taught a myriad of self-defense techniques while participating in martial arts classes. A hard, well focused punch can be invaluable, a non-telegraphed, snapping front kick to the groin is a useful tool to have at their disposal, but the balance of soft and hard is another invaluable lesson. Teach the children to physically take care of themselves and in the same breath teach them not to smash the bugs, lean them toward having more reverence for all forms of life so the kind behavior patterns are developed as well as the patterns of a good block, punch, or leg sweep. A well-rounded martial arts child today, will have a better chance of being a positive

contributor to society tomorrow.

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