

REAL MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING FOR OUR CHILDREN

By Sifu Frank Versagi

Confronting an unsafe or violent situation in cities across the United States today poses quite the challenge for our children. Citing examples would be redundant, just watch CNN for a couple days.

Today's "sport karate" is fine to a certain extent, but it is time to crank it up a couple notches. Martial Arts instructors today should allow our children see the nonsport aspect of their martial arts training.

It is far better for your students to confront "nasty" situations under your guidance than to have them bump into a situation at school or at the mall and not have a clue what to do. Let them experience a bit of fear under your watchful eye so those feelings are not brand new to them later on in a real situation and they just freeze; teach them clarity of thinking, or at least guide them toward that end goal, in the midst of an adrenaline rush.

Instructors should pad up and allow their students to go for the "illegal" areas of contact.

Let them kick your legs, elbow your ribs, kick to your groin; put eye goggles on and let them work on their eye jabs, all in the same breath telling them there are only rare times that they would really do this to someone. Get the mats out, put your young students on their backs and start dragging them across the mats, showing them how to go with the pull to get free as opposed to pulling against it.

Extreme, you say, perhaps only on the edges, but not ever addressing the realities of the world we live in today might be the opposite extreme; just work it into your classes once in a while.

Body conditioning for our young martial artists should also be broached. Nothing too far afield, but let the children make some contact with one another from time to time so that they realize, "hey, I got hit but it's not the end of the world. I'm okay."

I would not imagine any of us as instructors want our children to be involved in a scenario that they would really have to use what we teach them to harm another individual, but if they are, you want them to have tools with which they can react with and use to perhaps come out unharmed or not as harmed had they never been put to the test during all this time they are "training" in the martial arts.

Mental fitness/awareness is also part of real martial arts training. Without going so far as to instill paranoia in our children, today's instructors should broaden their young students' horizons, work on their awareness of regular, everyday events by teaching the

children simply to notice what is going on around them. Too many of our young martial artists leave their training at school, never carrying it out into daily activities, as they walk through life with their heads down. Instructors should advise them to look left and right as they walk with their mom through the parking lot toward their mini van, mention to them it's okay to question things or to say, "hey, mom, what do you think that guy is doing over there"; or "geez, mom, those men don't look very happy right now."

We should teach our children to use their wits, probably the best tool they have, not just their hands and feet, just in case that rare, ugly event actually lands in their hometown. Children should use all available tools at their disposal. The cafeteria food tray can become a shield, the salt shaker or half filled can of Pepsi may be used to throw in someone's face to buy them a couple seconds of run time, anything in reach can be used in one way or another, just teach them to be practical and not "stuck in the mud" martial artists, thinking they only have their two hands and two feet to use.

All that's necessary is watch the news, the heretofore unheard of, unspeakable event, no longer is. Instructors today should be one step ahead of the program and institute some "real" martial arts training into their curriculum, for it would be almost negligent if we did not.

As the ancient philosopher and statesman Confucius once said, "The main reason for teaching our children is to enable them not to need us as teachers anymore."

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