

A NOTE FOR PARENTS

By Del Saito

Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength.

- Francis de Sales

A young tree with many branches but weak roots will not withstand the tests of nature. It is the same with children. To grow strong and endure, they, too, must have solid foundations. Through discipline, governed by love and consistency, parents must be careful to provide their children with the balance necessary for healthy growth.

By enrolling your child in the practice of Karate-Do, you are strengthening his foundation. From his practice and study, he will learn many important values that relate directly to life and will enable him to face life's many challenges.

Hopefully the martial arts school that you have chosen will have more serious training and practice rather than playing activities. Too often instructors fall short in providing their students with serious training in preparing them for their future well being. It is important that you enroll your child to an extended period of training rather than a non-committal arrangement. Not only will it provide the instructor a much better opportunity to teach your child, but also allow your child ample time to become familiar with his instructor, fellow students and training activities. At that time, I also strongly suggest that you make an agreement with your child that he will promise to make this a commitment. Part of the equation for a successful training experience will be your commitment as a parent to get your child to his practice sessions on time and every time. By fulfilling your responsibility, your child will be able to form a good training habit and will not feel insecure not knowing if he'll make classes from one week to another.

In the practice of Karate-Do, your child will learn many aspects of dealing with conflict. Psychologically, he will be taught to be aware of his environment and how he should behave in order to conquer his fears. He will learn to accept responsibilities and respect other people's space. He will do things with proper spirit and feel the benefits of his accomplishments. He will be taught not to not make excuses nor point fingers of blame when reprimanded for his shortcomings.

Physically, he will be able to block, punch, strike, kick, throw, and move with balance, coordination, strength, and stamina. To bring a favorable equilibrium to his training, your child will constantly be placed in situations that allow him to practice and develop these skills.

He will learn to spar (kumite) honorably, using polished techniques, rather than brute force. Eventually he will be able to spar with the intentions to improve his techniques with proper timing, distance and attitude, rather than with emotional frustration or anger. Sparring will heighten his sense of responsibility for others. He will understand that he must act decisively but always with control.

In the practice of the forms (kata), he will learn to deal with his weaknesses and to have the discipline, patience, and courage required to memorize and complete the kata. He will find that much practice is necessary to understand and accept the structure of kata training in order to present a sound interpretation and performance. Kata training will further his understanding that he is responsible for himself, that he alone must succeed or fail, for there is no one to blame if things go wrong.

As your child develops his techniques and becomes confident, his mind will have more room to grow. Encouraged by his promotions, he will not be discouraged by defeat. If he finds that, perhaps, he is not the best, he will know that he can survive amongst the best.

Just as he learns to physically block kicks and punches, so too he will learn to mentally block harsh words and gestures; he will calmly continue the path toward his objectives without letting too many things in life disturb or upset him.

When your child needs to speak up for his rights, he will have the confidence to do so and with wisdom. If he must remain quiet and unobtrusive, he will learn to do this also. As he spends time in the dojo,

he will become increasingly aware of the needs of others and will find time to give encouragement and assistance to them.

A wheel turns smoothly on a well-balanced axle, yet if too tightly placed, it becomes choked and function is lost. Parents, in their desire to do things which they feel are good for the child, often place too many restrictions on children and that can be as unbalanced for a child as giving him too much freedom and choices. Your task in finding the balance will be endless. Your child's instructor is also obligated to discover that balance. Together, you will be able to teach him how to deal with life more fully.

Communication is important with your child's instructor. Make time to meet with the instructor at least once a month to discuss your child's development at home, in school, and at the dojo.

Periodically, most children feel compelled to test their limits or yours. If your child enters one of these periods, choose not to use his Karate training as leverage. You would not discipline your child by removing him from school or church, nor should you restrict him from other healthy activities that promote good habits. Other disciplinary actions should be found. At the dojos, your child's instructor may not let him test for advancement or may restrict him from tournament participation. Nevertheless, his regular training for daily growth is vital and should not be affected.

Should your child appear to be losing interest in Karate training, try to determine what is really taking place. Often times, your child just needs to stay focused and learn that perfection comes from constant practice, even if redundant at times. These moments can usually be resolved if you bring it to the instructor's attention. At times, your son or daughter may want to discontinue training because of other interests that may be equally positive for growth. You may wish to allow them to explore these other areas of interest, still reminding them of their training commitment.

Last, but vitally important nonetheless, I must encourage you to take an active part in your child's training. Encourage him. Ask him to demonstrate what he has learned. Attend his class. You may not want to watch your child in every class (and some of you may have to hold your tongue when you do watch) but, occasionally, you should plan on staying for the entire session. Other events such as belt ceremonies, tournaments and class outings can become opportunities for family outings which bring added encouragement and a sense of love and caring to your child.

Your child's involvement in Karate-Do will help you nourish him. His decisions will be sound, his mind composed. He'll see life through eyes more focused; his hearing will attune to gentle sounds like the soft breeze passing amidst a beautiful pine that has many fine branches and a strong foundation.