

# How to Choose a Karate School

By Gary Reburn and David Greber

**K**arate training can offer your children (and you) incredible benefits. From a physical standpoint, good karate training improves your entire body's strength, endurance, flexibility, coordination, and balance. Learning specialists frequently recommend karate training as a way of improving attention span, and the ability of the mind to process and use information. In addition, karate can help teach children how to be disciplined, determined, confident, and courageous people. Do all karate schools create these results? Not necessarily.

The benefits of karate do not come magically, quickly, or automatically. They are not the product of

mystical words, special clothes, or simply marking time. You have to start with a good karate school (or "dojo"). Assuming that you don't have any karate experience yourself, how do you know a good school when you see one?

You can start by looking at the school's literature, visiting their Internet web site, or reading their Yellow Pages ad. But the best way to evaluate a karate school is to visit the school while class is in session, and observe the class. Here are seven factors to consider:



Gary Reburn (5th Degree Black Belt) and Emma Reburn of Phoenix Karate.

## Teachers

There is no substitute for a great teacher. Ideally, you want instructors who have years of experience in practicing and teaching the art of karate, and who continue to improve their own skills. The instructors need to be able to encourage your kids to try hard and learn well, while maintaining discipline in

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the class. Positive encouragement should dominate the class; negative comments are the mark of an ineffective teacher, and such comments defeat the purposes of martial arts. You should sense energy, enthusiasm, and discipline in the class. The teachers should appear that they like teaching, and the students should look like they enjoy learning. You should sense that both teachers and students are paying attention to the details of the techniques being practiced, rather than simply going through the motions. Teachers should show a genuine interest in students of all ranks, on and off the mat--especially the youngest and newest students.

Sometimes, a karate school is built around a single senior instructor who may or may not teach much. And just because someone has great skill as a karate practitioner does not necessarily mean that they can teach anyone, let alone children. You need to know who is really teaching your kids, and what they are like as teachers.

#### Students

The courtesy and skill of students reflects on the effectiveness of their teacher. When you visit the karate school, take a look at the school's students, and particularly their non-black-belt students. Do they appear to demonstrate the character, strength, and skill that you hope your children will acquire? Do they relate to each other in a friendly, courteous manner? Do they pay attention to the instructor and do what they are told?

#### Class Length, Structure, and Content

Very young children (under 10 years old or so) may find it difficult to concentrate much longer than about 45 minutes at a time, but it is difficult to accomplish much in a karate class in less than an hour. Classes should be rigorous, with lots of activity to improve strength, flexibility, endurance, and balance. If the students are not sweating much, you

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are probably in the wrong place. If nothing else, karate requires hard work in order to be beneficial. Although some activities and exercises may be identical from class to class, a good instructor will provide variation that will expand the knowledge of students and keep class interesting. The classes should also not just be about physical lessons, but should stress the development of positive character attributes, such as courtesy, perseverance, and integrity.

### Facility

A karate school does not need to have an expensive facility to be great, and many great students have come from schools found in very Spartan facilities. Large spaces are not necessary either. If the karate school teaches techniques that involve taking an opponent to the ground, or wrestling with the opponent on the ground, then mats are helpful.

### Location

Ideally, your children should go to karate class two or three times a week. With all of the driving involved, it is a good idea to choose a karate school that is conveniently located to your home. If you can train with your kids, the time spent taking your children to karate class will be an even better investment.

### Style

There are numerous styles of karate, most of which originate in Japan, Okinawa, China, or Korea. Some karate schools teach one style of karate, and some combine elements of various styles in a way that seems best to the chief instructor. One advantage to learning a particular style of karate, rather than a combination of styles, is that if your family moves, your child may find it easier to locate another school, so that she can pick up where she left off.

### Price

Karate can be expensive, but it doesn't have to be. When checking

prices, be sure to ask not only how much the monthly charges are, but also how often the student can train for that charge. Other costs include the cost of the dogi (or uniform), the costs of incidental equipment, such as pads, and the fees charged for promotion tests. Students should be tested when they are ready, and not as a means of generating revenue for the school.

### Conclusion

Karate training can help make your child physically and mentally strong if you pick the right school. Do your homework, visit karate schools that are conveniently located and appropriately priced, and prioritize quality of instruction. If you chose wisely, you and your child will know that you have made an excellent investment in the future.

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