

## Knowing When Martial Arts Can Serve to Protect

By Chris Marek

“You’re not my Dad!” screams a six-year-old boy during his marital arts class. His instructor urges the boy to role-play with him as he grabs the boy’s arm and prods him to scream louder and louder the words, “You’re not my Dad”. This effective self-defense technique helps children practice protecting themselves against an unwanted attack or abduction.

It’s a tool practiced in martial arts classes but it’s not a standard martial arts technique.

Self-defense tools are being taught in the matted grounds of karate schools that don’t originate from the martial arts.

“We are realistic that a child will have a difficult time fighting back an adult attacker,” said Michael Armstrong, owner of the Arizona Personal Protection Academy, a Kyokushin Karate School located in Paradise Valley.

“Our specialized personal protection programs for children, called Know n’ Go, emphasize escape as your greatest tool,” Armstrong continued. “Children are being instructed to be more aware, escape and run away, avoid dangerous situations, use intuition and create more attention to themselves by yelling key words such as STOP and FIRE. All these self-defense tools have proven to be effective without a child swinging one karate chop.”

“I also bring these self-defense tools to my children’s martial arts classes as a part of their karate lesson for the day,” said Armstrong. “This year I found out what a difference these lessons can make in a child’s life. One of my students, 10-year-old Savannah Rudolph, was approached by a man while riding her bike. Savannah kicked the man enough to get out of his reach and then raced home as he chased her. Luckily, Savannah was not abducted and had the knowledge to escape.

“Teaching children self-defense tools along with the marital arts lessons is common today in most martial arts schools,” said world-renowned martial artist/screen actor Jeff Speakman, who is the director of a North Phoenix Martial Arts School called Arizona Kenpo Self Defense Systems.

Speakman oversees the largest Kenpo Karate organization in the world and is also a certified defensive tactics instructor for the U.S. Government which includes the Department of Justice

divisions DEA, FBI and Border Patrol. His belief on what makes a valuable self defense program worthy of enrolling your child is based on the purpose of the martial art style.

Speakman, along with the majority of martial arts experts, agree that there are certain martial art styles that are more reality based for self defense situations. These styles, such as Kenpo and Kajukenbo, have been modernized from centuries old martial arts and are based on science applications involving physics.

The more traditional systems of martial arts/karate do not provide self-defense topics during their standard lessons. It is their choice to keep the two subjects respectfully separate.

“If self-defense was the only reason for a child to enroll in martial arts, most parents, we found, would not have their child involved,” said George Bell owner of a military based system of karate that includes tae kwon do for kids, defendo and moosado, fitness program and a personal protection program at the Martial Way Training Centre located in Northeast Mesa.

“What parents are looking for in a karate class is first the sport and secondly, they like the focus/concentration skills that are learned. However, when offered the chance to give their child self-defense lessons during their martial arts classes, as we do at our school, there are no complaints from the parents. They appreciate developing more awareness in the event that possibly, one day, their child may need to protect him/herself as effectively as possible.

“I saw that happen with a 5<sup>th</sup> grade student of mine. A bully started picking a fight with my student and his first reaction was to step back and avoid the fight. The bully would not stop coming at him so he used force to control the bully without hurting him as he had learned from a martial arts technique. End of story. Nobody got hurt and the bully learned that his aggression was ineffective.”

When asked about the optimal age to teach self defense/martial arts to a child, Fred DePalma, owner of eight Team USA Martial Arts schools in the east valley, stated that there is no set age. “The right age to begin these lessons are entirely based on the child’s attention span and their interest level, “ said DePalma.

“I’ve seen kids as young as three years old taking an interest and showing enormous talent in karate. However, that is not the norm. Generally, the age span to begin someone’s child is from five to eight years old.

"In order to teach them to protect themselves from harm, what we work on developing is the child's inner confidence. How long that takes is anyone's guess. What I do know is that the more they train the better they will know what to do when danger is confronted.

"My favorite example of self defense smarts is when a 12-year-old student of mine, who had been a martial artist for several years, was at home alone and intruders came in. During the home invasion the child was smart enough to know that hiding was the best thing to do until the intruders left. Confrontation was avoided and the child had the confidence to make a safe decision during a dangerous situation."

"Having others teach your child self defense is one step but not enough" said Sal Banuelos, owner of The North American Kajukenbo Martial Arts Centers in California, Hawaii and locally in Gilbert.

"The self defense lessons offered either separately or in a martial arts class must have the parents involved, too. Once they leave our school I remind and encourage our parents to talk about self defense situations and practice using the safety techniques over and over again."

Randy Walker, a martial arts student, assistant instructor and parent of three at Sigung Banuelos' school, experienced firsthand how the karate he and his family learned was tested when needed.

"I got an urgent telephone call from my daughter, Kaitlyn's, 5th grade teacher telling me how Kaitlyn, who is one of the smallest 5<sup>th</sup> graders, got in a fighting match with a well-known school bully. My first reaction to his words was the fear that Kaitlyn was in trouble for using her karate. Kaitlyn and I talk often about not using karate in an aggressive way so I was hoping that she had remembered this rule. It turned out that the teacher wanted me to know that he was grateful that Kaitlyn had taken a stand. I was so proud of my daughter and told her this, the first chance I had, especially since she asked me immediately if she did the right thing."

Kaitlyn describes the incident happening so fast that her reactions just took over.

"The bully had grabbed my backpack and I asked him why he was being so mean. That's when he started swinging his arms to hit me and I punched him. He grabbed my hair and I kicked him and began yelling at him to stop. For the rest of the school year the bully stopping picking on me and everyone else, too. I was glad that I my was able to do the right thing."

Safety and martial arts instructors all agree that there is no way of knowing how a child or adult will react in a dangerous situation. Learning what your choices are and how best to use those in practice will definitely give anyone a better chance to also do the right thing. END