

# HOW TO CHOOSE A QUALITY MARTIAL ARTS SCHOOL

The most important piece of advice we can give you is to *visit the schools that interest you*. Once there, here are things to ask about and look for:

- 1. Check the Attitude.** Instructors who treat their students with little respect, yet demand it themselves, may be on an ego trip. Watch how students act when the instructor is not in sight. If they continue their training diligently, the instructor is respected. If the students feign interest and then goof off as he walks away, look out!
- 2. Warm-ups and cool-downs.** You can injure ligaments or muscles that aren't properly conditioned. A good warm-up including ample stretching exercises is important along with a short cool-down workout after a vigorous training session. By visiting the school of your choice, you can see for yourself if they're included.
- 3. Location.** Proximity to your home or work is important. Choose a school that suits your needs, but is also within a reasonable driving distance. You may regret the location in the winter or as you fight the highway traffic each day before class.
- 4. Equipment/facility.** Some schools are large and modern, providing showers, lockers, and in some cases, weight training equipment, while others are not. Decide what's most important and necessary for your training. A pretty school isn't necessarily a highly functional school and vice versa.
- 5. Style.** This is a very important aspect you should consider: is your body type, or your temperament, suited to the martial art you've chosen? A high-kicking style such as taekwondo could aggravate knee, back, or hip problems. If you have a lot of body strength you might enjoy a grappling art such as Jiu-Jitsu. Does your chosen style require competition? This is an activity that many students enjoy, yet many do not.
- 6. Class sizes/Schedule.** Many new students prefer to be part of a large training group, rather than a small class. One of the benefits of smaller classes is more personal attention, and less chance of becoming "just a number." Also, check about what time classes are offered, as well as the length of the class. Decide what length you would be comfortable with before committing to a school that offers classes that are either too long or too short for your tastes.
- 7. Quality of Instruction.** If the school is headed by a well-known martial arts master, many prospective students mistakenly believe they will receive their instruction from this individual. Such is rarely the case. More often than not, classes will be taught by an assistant or high-ranking student at the school. Inquire about any certifications or training received by instructors.
- 8. Class/Age Groups.** Are classes separated by age and/or belt level? Adult students may not appreciate training with second-graders, some of whom may be able to execute the techniques better than they can. The different maturity levels could prove to be distracting to both you and them. Also, serious self-defense training is postponed in favor of more age-appropriate and fun activities in children's classes.
- 9. Ranking.** Some martial arts instructors are in business simply to get your money and couldn't care less about your progress in the art they teach. To discover if this is the case, ask the instructor about his belt-ranking system. If he says you need to be proficient in a certain number of basic movements, forms, sparring and self-defense techniques before he will promote you to a higher rank, you are likely dealing with an honest teacher. If, on the other hand, the instructor tells you that you will receive a new belt every two months, be wary. You should never move up in rank until you are ready and qualified to do so. A good instructor does not push students to move up in rank merely to receive a belt-testing fee.
- 10. Size of School.** Some schools are part of a large chain, others are small operations run by a single instructor. The quality of instruction you'll receive is not necessarily related to its size. You can receive both poor or excellent instruction at a small school, and the same goes for large schools. Although large schools may offer better equipment and a nicer facility, smaller schools offer students more personal attention from their instructors. Check out both types during your research.
- 11. Price of Instruction.** Rarely do martial arts schools advertise their prices in the phone book. Prices can be determined on a monthly basis, over several months, or by how often you train each week. In some cases, family package deals may be available. Some schools will ask you to sign a contract. We've heard from parents repeatedly that they've regretted this costly mistake. Be sure of what you are signing! A martial arts school contract is no different from any other: it obligates you to pay whether you or your child attends or not. In the case of young children, you must decide if they'll stick with the program for 12 months, 3 times weekly, or if she'll decide to take up another hobby within a few months. Some instructors charge modest fees of around \$20 monthly, while some garner over \$90 monthly. You will also need to add the cost of uniforms, training equipment, belt rank testings, tournaments, etc. to the basic lesson fee. It is up to you to determine what you feel is a fair and manageable price for instruction.

All of this may sound like a lot of work simply to find a martial arts school. But if you're planning to invest hundreds of dollars and hundreds of hours over the next few years, don't you want to be sure of what you are getting in return? If you make a list of the things you feel are important, and check off those items as you visit your prospective schools, you will find that your choices are quickly narrowed. Before long, you'll be performing martial arts at a school that is right for you or your child.

Kamikaze Karate does not endorse any particular martial arts school or dojo. We believe that each martial art has its own beauty and value. We hope this checklist helps you in your search.

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