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Instructor's Guide to Teaching Kids

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* **Instructor's Guide to Teaching Kids**

PHOTO BY RICK HUSTEA

All advanced practitioners and instructors should invest in kids—not just because kids will determine the future of our sport but because they'll decide whether we'll go to a nursing home when we get old.

Anyone who's taught or observed a kids class, however, knows that they're not just "little adults." They often get into the arts for different reasons. They learn differently, and they stay in or drop out for different reasons. Effective advertising and marketing may bring kids to your school, but their experience, the climate of the class and their relationships with their instructors and fellow students are what will keep them there.

Over the past 25 years, numerous studies have explored why kids participate and continue in sports. Having fun consis-

tently ranks at the top of the list. They also want to achieve and improve their skills and hang out in a positive environment with other kids (and instructors) that they like. Winning doesn't even make the top 10. Young people enjoy the excitement of competition, but winning isn't the most im-

portant thing or the only thing. In fact, most kids say they'd rather play on a losing team than sit on the bench for a winning team.

In youth sports, participation rates peak between the ages of 11 and 13, then steadily decline through adolescence. The main reason that kids drop out, re-

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search shows, is they're no longer having fun. Other specific reasons include a perceived lack of ability, too much pressure and poor coaching, all of which can take the fun out of it.

Parents are also a big part of the equation. Studies show that when they support and encourage their kids' participation, the kids enjoy the sport more and tend to have more positive feelings about their own performance. On the other hand, when parents put pressure on their kids, it reduces their enjoyment and increases their stress about how they perform—both of which can cause them to quit.

What are the implications of this research for you as a martial arts instructor or parent? First, if you teach kids, consider how you might make things fun and enjoyable. This doesn't mean that you should do only "fluffy" drills or never critique their performance. It does mean that you should create an instructional climate in which kids are more inclined to learn and retain what you're teaching.

Second, devise ways to provide regular feedback to students about their progress. As an instructor, you understand the difference between effort, skill and ability. Young kids often do not. They think that if

they lose, it's because they didn't try hard enough. Without correction, they may just repeat the same mistakes but with greater effort. When they're consistently unable to do as well as they'd like, they may conclude that they lack ability and drop out. Young people—particularly in a competitive environment—may gauge how well they're doing only by whether they win. You can help them find other ways to monitor their progress and focus on their performance, not just on the outcome.

Third, remember the power of positive feedback. Being specific is an important part of making feedback effective. If you equally praise good and poor performance and effort, it loses its impact. You may have to pay more attention to find specific signs of improvement.

Corrections work better when they're delivered with positive feedback. Some experts recommend a "sandwich" method in which corrective feedback is embedded between two positive comments. For example, you might say: "You were giving a really good effort right there. Remember to keep your hips low on that move. Your timing is excellent."

Some research suggests that positive instructor feedback may be more important

for male students than female students. Other studies have indicated that this may be because girls' participation in sports tends to be more strongly motivated by intrinsic factors—like enjoyment—than boys' participation, which may be driven more by needs for achievement and status.

Martial arts training provides a venue for kids to learn and apply important life skills. Instructors and parents model these lessons whether or not they intend to. How we handle frustration, how we treat and speak to others, and how we exercise our authority will affect not only how kids learn the martial arts but also how they navigate the challenges of youth. ✕

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THE ULTIMATE BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU INSTRUCTIONAL

The advertisement features a central image of Jean Jacques Machado in a blue gi, standing with arms crossed. To his right is a circular logo with a red triangle and the text 'JEAN JACQUES MACHADO.COM' and 'ONLINE TRAINING'. Overlaid on the right is a screenshot of the 'TAP™ Progressions Console' software interface, showing a video player with a jiu-jitsu clip and a details panel. Below the interface is a table of submissions.

ID	Title	Description	Position	Action	File
309	No-gi knee bar from half guard leg	Similar to clip 197, Jean Jacques goes directly for a knee bar instead of the guard pass, but here ...	half guard	knee bar	
	No-gi guard pass to knee	Jean Jacques demonstrates a clever submission technique when your opponent is blocking your ...	half guard	knee bar	

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