

Is Taekwon-Do Practical for street self defence. How do you know?

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For this essay I will be looking at self-defense practicality from the point of view of our younger students. In these cases, the “street” is their home, playgroup, kindergarten or school etc.

Our Kubz are the very beginning of Taekwon-Do. Kubz and Mini Kids make up the majority of our students and I believe we are teaching “self defence” in a very real way for them. A way that is empowering and not frightening, a way that teaches them to consider others along with themselves, a way that helps them to trust their instincts. The skills they learn in communication and problem solving are paramount in being able to stand up for themselves and others.

This, I believe will stay with them for life and help them to build good solid relationships with the strength to know right from wrong, be able to make good decisions and have the ability to believe in themselves.

A very important part of self-defense for everyone (especially children) is empowering their inner spirit and self-esteem. For children it is being able to look up, stand up and to use their voice effectively. An example of this is a student of mine (Preston) who is a very quiet and shy young boy. In class we practice saying “stop it, I don’t like it” and/or “stop I will tell”. We drill it over and over again in different ways and use different reasons i.e.

Someone trying to interfere or take the toys they are playing with

Someone saying mean things to them

Someone pushing or pulling them in a way they don’t like

In the case of our four year old student Preston: He was playing with a group of friends at a play group. One of the other children kept taking the toys away from Preston. Preston’s mum heard Preston say, in a strong voice, “stop it, I don’t like it” to the other boy. His mum said she was really surprised and happy to hear his voice and that he was sticking up for himself, using his words – the words she hears us say in class consistently. It also made her turn around and take notice of what was happening. The other boy actually gave the toy back and played with something different alongside his friends.

Preston’s mum was excited to let me know how much it had helped Preston in his confidence as speaking up for himself is something he had never done before. Previously he would have been upset and not had a way to deal with it and possibly hit out.

We also make sure the children understand that if someone asks them to stop, they need to stop straight away too. It goes both ways. We talk about how it makes us feel and how we think others would feel too.

Self defence is keeping yourself safe: With young children this can be quite a scary subject. However, it doesn’t need to be. If we give them the tools in a matter of fact way that makes sense to them – they don’t need the big scary stuff – they can learn how to always communicate with their parents or caregivers in an open, natural and effective way.

Secrets and Surprises – we bought our kids up with the “no secrets only surprises”. It is something we are so pleased that Master Hutton added into his Kubz syllabus (through Phil Thompson). The idea is that the kids learn that surprises are good and can be kept for a little while, like gifts and surprise parties. Secrets are not good and should ALWAYS be told to their secret keepers (mum and dad or main caregivers). If someone says “don’t tell” then they must tell their secret keepers.

In the case of Holly-Kate, her mum bought some chocolate biscuits in the shopping. Mum said to Holly-Kate “don’t tell dad, it’s our secret”. Mum put them in the cupboard and didn’t think anything more of it. Holly-Kate on the other hand heard the words “don’t tell” and “secret”. She waited until her dad walked through the door and immediately ran up to him saying “I have a secret to tell you dad”. Well Holly-Kates mum’s stomach just dropped when she realized what that “secret” was. “Dad, mum has some chocolate biscuits and they are hidden in the cupboard”. Mum and Dad both laughed, but it made them think about what they were saying and how their children were interpreting what they were saying. They were both so pleased that Holly-Kate spoke up and “told on” the other parent as it showed she had taken the classes seriously – don’t tell means tell no matter who it is saying it. This is the reason they have two secret keepers.

The way we teach self defence to the younger students is really important. We teach our kids how to punch, kick and block etc. This is the confidence builder. We also teach them releases from grabs to their wrists and bodies. These things we teach them, are at a level relevant to them. For example, a grab from a friend pulling them in a direction they don’t want to go, or from someone approximately their own size being mean. The most important part of this though is what they say as they are releasing and where they are looking. They need to be looking at the person and saying directly and strongly “stop it, I don’t like it” or “stop it, I will tell”. This is the part of the self defence we teach, I believe works. It is what our parents say time and time again. “I heard my child saying “stop it, I don’t like it” – the parents are taking notice and are also able to help, praise or guide their children in the direction they need to go mentally.

Below are a couple of messages from parents that show the way we are teaching works:

“My daughter used to be very shy and was picked on a lot at school. She has gained confidence after starting Taekwon-Do, she is enjoying school a lot more as she has had the confidence to make new friends”

“We had been called to school as our son was constantly picking on other kids. A friend suggested he join a Martial Art and your club was closest at the time. Since joining (2 years ago) he has built enough confidence in himself that he has stopped picking on others and he is much nicer to his little brother too”

“My son constantly looked at the floor, I didn’t consciously realize until I bought him to Taekwon-Do. The instructor was always saying “look up” or “look straight ahead”, “you won’t see anything coming”. He is a kid that walked into people in the mall if they didn’t move or I would have to pull him up before crossing a driveway if a car was coming out, he

just wouldn't see it. He stopped me walking into a pole recently while I was on my phone. That's when I realized he has come a long way in a short time"

Taekwon-Do gives students the ability to grow into well rounded children, teenagers and adults.