

# *Choose the Right Karate School for your Family!*

By Jay Haynes

The following article describes the characteristics consumers should consider when choosing a martial arts school. We hope you find it helpful in becoming an educated consumer of martial arts services.

**1. Safety** - Safety should be the number one concern above all else when you or your child is involved in any activity. Please make sure that your instructor is certified by the American Coaches Certification program (ACEP) which is standard for every coach in any sport. Is your instructor certified in First Aid and CPR and capable of handling emergency medical situations? Also, make sure that the instructor has at least a basic knowledge and training in sport kinesiology. Lastly, as a major safety concern, decide for yourself how safe the surface used for training is. Is it a padded non-adhesive surface, or a hard wood or cement floor? If you or your child accidentally fell down or was thrown to the ground, would you/he/she be hurt?

**2. Teaching Style** - The instructors should teach in a style that is fun, exciting, educational, and positive. Students should learn respect. However, they should never be downgraded especially in a negative manner which would be damaging to their self-esteem. Positive reinforcement techniques are the only acceptable teaching techniques at my dojo, and should be the only ones acceptable for you or your child as well.

**3. Technical Knowledge** - A complete karate school should be able to teach all aspects of the martial arts including: weaponry (Kobudo), empty hand forms training (Kata), sparring (Kumite), as well as self defense. A true Karate instructor should be always trying to develop the positive qualities in the student: self-confidence, self-esteem, discipline, etc. Different children grow better with different incentives; therefore unless your school teaches what excites your child, you are wasting your money.

**4. Rank** - The instructor should be at least a 4th degree black belt in order to run a school. This minimum experience and rank is necessary in order to provide the excellent instruction you are looking for. The instructor should be able to readily give you a phone number to call to verify the authenticity of any rank certificates displayed in the school. Also, many schools will have lower ranking instructors teaching classes. For example, having Green Belts teach the White Belt classes, Brown Belts teach the Green Belt classes, and Black Belts teach only the Brown Belt classes is a common practice. Do Certified Black Belt Instructors teach all the classes? Also, do not be swayed by high-ranking instructors. The 22-year-old 20th degree Black Belt is probably more interested in pumping his own ego than developing his students' technique. Most reputable Martial Arts organizations have time and age requirements for certain ranks of Black Belt. A young kid with a high-ranking Black Belt is usually only fooling himself!

**5. Tuition and Other Fees** - Some schools quote you a low monthly rate, but then charge you an outrageous price for advancing in rank. Some schools charge several hundred dollars for promotion to Black Belt. You should be aware of the extra fees that are thrown in. Here is a list of questions you should ask:

- How much do you charge for belt test fees?
- How often do students belt test?
- What other items/equipment will be necessary for training down the road and how much do they cost?
- What membership fees will I be required to pay and how often?
- Will the tuition increase and by how much if I am promoted into a "Black Belt Club," "Master's Club," or some other program?
- When will I be considered for this "club" or "program"?
- Even if the school says they have no contracts or long-term agreements for you to sign, will you have to commit to one later on?

Another common practice today is to quote an extremely low monthly price to start out at, but within a couple of months, demand you to lock into a very high rate for a long time period (i.e. years!). Before joining any program, make sure you understand what you will be expected to pay over the long term. (i.e. the last question on the list)

**6. Other Value Added Services** - Does the school emphasize many other positive goals besides simply punching and kicking? Ask the instructor what other things they do besides martial arts training. Some different things that we do are: Awards ceremonies for getting good grades in school, special headbands awarded for youngsters who keep their room clean and make their bed, personalized parent / teacher conferences, special social events to keep our students off the streets and in a positive peer group, the nationally acclaimed Good Touch/Bad Touch program educating our students and their parents about sexual abuse, a certified teenage drug abuse awareness program, a Karate Youth Club for teenagers to keep them active in safe and fun environments, sleep-overs and parties for holidays such as Mother's Day and Halloween, and many others. Decide for yourself what you feel is important for your child or yourself and then determine if the facility has those same goals in mind.

In conclusion, it is important that you see for yourself the school, instructors, and classes, which you or your family will be participating in. If you are not allowed to watch the classes, do not join the school. Also, talk to other students and/or their parents and ask them why they like the school, and determine for yourself if their reasons for training there are similar to your own!