



THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL TAEKWON-DO FOR CHILDREN WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

Traditional Taekwon-Do addresses a number of important issues facing both children and adults in today's educational and family systems. With the world changing and expanding so quickly, the ability to adapt to our fast moving culture is becoming increasingly difficult. Our Public Educational system makes a valiant attempt to meet the needs of our children, who we must recognize as the future of the human race.

In times of old, the epitome of warriorhood was the ascendance to a higher level of thinking, managing emotions and choosing correct behavior befitting a warrior. The warrior was society's ideal person, living for all that was just and fair and dedicating one's life to the Taekwon-Do tenets of Courtesy, Integrity, Perseverance, Self Control and Indomitable Spirit. Honor was a virtue to be measured by the quality to which one lived his life and how strictly he adhered to these tenets.

In modern times, the warrior's code still exists in Traditional Martial Arts. The word "martial" denotes a military philosophy, which subscribes to the idea that the greatest way to achieve meaningful goals on a large scale is by mutual cooperation. Today's martial arts offer a variety of benefits and services to our young people who are struggling to adapt to confusing and chaotic times gangs, violence in the schools and more recently, murder of children by children.

Although modern Traditional Taekwon-Do training was inspired by ancient warrior philosophies, the life and death strictness of the training hall have been transformed into a unique place of study, motivation and goal setting. Where once the warrior would spend his life perfecting martial virtues and deadly martial skills, today's warriors dedicate their lives to the perfection of character and the unification of the body, mind and spirit. The confidence gained by good physical health, self-defense skills and recognition from peers, parents and



teachers is leading our youth on a path of excellence so rare in other venues. Even school sports, which are not always funded due to budget cuts, focus on the "team" effort. Although this is an important socialization asset, it does not focus on the multifaceted needs of the individual, which is so important when developing the characters and personalities of tomorrow's world leaders.

Bettencourt's Taekwon-Do America

Traditional Taekwon-Do is the Korean art of self-defense and offers a system of discipline for the unification of the body, mind and spirit. Its roots have been traced to the period between 3 A.D. and 427 A.D. As with other martial arts, the attainment of warrior status is measured by the earning of the coveted "Black-Belt". There are nine levels of Black-Belt which take a lifetime of dedication to master. The Master level is at 6th Degree and the Grandmaster levels are 8th and 9th degrees.

The 1st Degree Black-Belt (1st Dan) is seen as the beginning level of learning the "way". It is at this point that much of the basic tools are developed and honed to the sharpness needed to ascend to the higher levels of training. These higher levels include:

1. Strengthening the body, perfecting technical, skill and timing and achieving the ability to perform a major portion of these skills as "second nature".
2. Strengthening the mind by forging a training regime of discipline, maintaining a regular schedule, teaching Taekwon-Do to others, and continued goal setting. This stage also emphasizes resisting the common weakness of the mind, which create unbalance. These may include overeating the consumption of alcohol, drugs, smoking, inappropriate and or uncontrolled emotions and actions unbecoming of a Black-Belt representative

of the “dojang” or Taekwon-Do school. If the mind is strong the body will follow.

Traditional Taekwon-Do also focuses on spiritual development by offering a strict system of martial virtues, tenets, and by supporting the individual’s spiritual practice or religion of choice. Taekwon-Do does not subscribe to any particular religion, but rather emphasizes the spiritual discipline and practices, respected by all major religions.

Modern Taekwon-Do training at Bettencourt’s Taekwon-Do America focuses on the individual needs of each student. More one on one instruction and mentorship is available due to the unique approach of learning by teaching. Intermediate and advanced students begin supervised teaching duties after about one year of training. This enables the students to more thoroughly learn his art and gives the new student the opportunity to ask questions, test his own ideas and to continue to develop his training plan on a more private level.

Instructor Training Program

As with any instructor-training program, the quality of instruction is dependent on the quality of training, supervision and practical experience. The training at Bettencourt’s Taekwon-Do America, focuses on technical skills and respect of others, eliciting parents’ advise and input, and developing a curriculum that will give the most benefits to its members. Traditional Taekwon-Do has become a very popular vehicle for instilling focus and motivation to strive for excellence. The instructor-training program is geared toward helping each student learn to become a teacher and a leader. The pride and confidence derived from such an experience serves as the motivating factor for many young instructors to improve their own skills and self-discipline, resulting in their becoming good role models for other students.

The program begins with a preliminary Instructor’s Seminar. This outlines those qualities needed to be a good and effective role model, teacher and self-motivator. It also introduces basic requirements of do's and don'ts of effective mentorship and leadership. The most emphasized attributes are following the Taekwon-Do tenets already described, a personal commitment to excellence and a willingness to give personal time to others who are learning the “way”. The “Do” in Taekwon-Do is translated as “way”, a path, method, as in the Chinese word “Tao”. Taekwon-Do is a way of life, designed to provide focus and purpose to all endeavors.

Weekly supervision focuses on successes, perceived failures, teaching methods, role-playing, and individual needs of students. This is also a time when these student teachers can ask pointed questions about proper execution of technique, philosophy and curriculum. It serves as an excellent forum for building the solid, unified core of our Taekwon-Do program.

Instructors are trained to be creative and flexible in their approach to each individual as personalized lesson plans are developed. This is accomplished with the following resources:

- Parental input is requested before and during their child’s training.
- Anonymous requests in the “Suggestion Box” • Staff meetings discussing issues of students with “special needs”
- Ongoing assessment of progress and goals through evaluation and testing.
- Specialized training in recognizing teaching children with unique needs (ADD, ADHD, inappropriate behaviors, low motivation, self-esteem, impaired social skills, etc.)

Traditional Reward System

Inherent in the Bettencourt’s Taekwon-Do America reward system is short-term goal setting. This is a valuable aid to a system of successive goals that are reachable in a reasonable amount of time. The curriculum was developed by the school’s President and Master Instructor, Steven Bettencourt, a 6th Degree Black-Belt who also holds a Masters Degree in Psychology. The particular curriculum is designed by age group so the feelings of competence, confidence and achievement become habit. The Taekwon-Do belt system serves this function as each student satisfies the requirements for each belt as short-term goals. As each belt is acquired, the long-term goal of Black-Belt appears more achievable. At Bettencourt’s Taekwon-Do America, the belt system is as follows: white, yellow stripe, yellow, green stripe, green, blue stripe, blue and red stripe, red, black stripe and black. There are nine levels of Black-Belt.

Other rewards include:

- Monthly achievement charts recording daily achievements.
- The Youth Tip system is a reward system, which breaks down each of the six elements required for the next belt level. Each tip is color coded with special tape on their belts and recorded on the student’s daily attendance card.
- Student of the Day, Week, Month and Year.

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- Special recognition for outstanding achievement in a variety of areas encompassing learning objectives, teaching excellence, performance excellence, etc.
- Feature story in the Bettencourt's Taekwon-Do America newsletter.

The children's programs begin at ages 3-6 for the Tiny Tigers, ages 7-12 for the youth program, ages 13-17 for the Teen/Adolescent program and age 18 to adults. It is our experience that children as young as 7-8 years old make excellent teachers. Peer support is a long used method for instant compatibility in many fields, and teaching Traditional Taekwon-Do is no exception.

Issues Faced When Teaching Taekwon-Do to Children

When Children begin Taekwon-Do training, they usually begin for a special reason. The most common reasons may be:

- Needs a structured, positive environment
- Comes from a single parent home; needs role model(s)
- Acting out behaviors at home and school
- Shy, low self-esteem, depressed
- Referral from school/Mental Health Professional
- ADD/ADHD/FAE/Asperger's, MRDD, etc.
- Just plain excited about Taekwon-Do
- Therapeutic respite for both child and caregiver

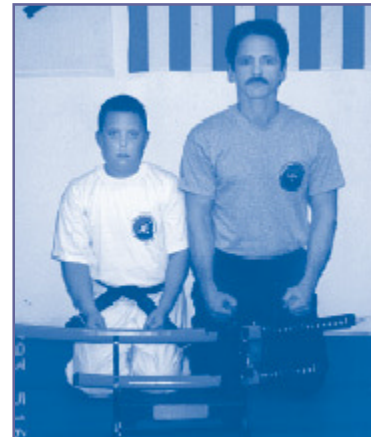
The instructor will do an inventory after the first introductory "get acquainted" lesson. A goal plan is established outlining the needs of both parent and child and according to the assessment of the instructor. This goal plan will serve as a barometer to progress as the training program is implemented.

It is also important that new goals be added and old ones replaced as the learning process unfolds. It is paramount that the instructors be consistent with approach and method when teaching each class.

Positive rewards are given every few minutes to keep each child on track and motivated. The high energy serves to motivate each child to greater levels of achievement and serves to address the relative short attention spans of young children.

Setting consistent boundaries with multiple rewards allows each child to stretch his creativity and effort in a safe environment. Each student quickly learns what behaviors are expected and acceptable in the

"dojang" (Taekwon-Do school) in order to maintain self-discipline and achieve rewards. We feel that boundaries are a testable fence that makes children feel safe and secure, knowing their operational parameters. The number one rule in the dojang is "safety", especially since no contact is ever allowed in free sparring practice, promoting respect,



nonviolence and safety.

The instructor is challenged to find the most positive points to reward in order to establish a baseline for encouragement. As one aspect of training becomes more proficient, it can complement the less productive efforts of other areas until balance can be achieved. For instance, a well executed kick can be rewarded at a crucial moment to serve as a confidence builder to perfecting stances, hand strikes, blocks or simply an increased effort in class.

Children who are resistant to perceived authority or criticism are especially challenging. When sensitive children are perfectionists, they may respond with a deflated ego, frustration and play the victim role. They feel they do not have the ability to "do enough" and give up. They may also simply get angry when corrected. Since they learn best from constructive input on progress, it is very important to establish a relationship of trust, respect and mutual cooperation. When the child feels the instructor is there to support him, is on his team and is proud of even small improvements, he is more apt to engage in more pleasing behaviors, especially for ages 3-13. Competence is so important to sensitive children, whether they react in tears, or anger, they must be treated with "kid gloves".

Above all, the Taekwon-Do experience must be fun to do, have ample rewards and noticeable benefits. Both child and parent must feel all these elements are inherent in the curriculum, lesson plan, reward system and

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quality instruction. When the child respects the instructor she will try her best....which is the best way to achieve her goals.

The Challenges of Children with Special Needs

Inherent in teaching children new skills and new information should be an awareness of how differently children learn. Bettencourt's Taekwon-Do America addresses the variety of learning styles of students of different ages, maturity levels, physical body types, gender and strength. In addition, many children with Attention Deficient Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAE), are referred to our school from public schools, mental health centers and parents of such children.

Usually, teaching styles and curriculum are designed to meet the needs of the "average" child. We have found that there really is no average child, a fact that most teachers have known for eons. Since Traditional Taekwon-Do focuses on the individual, rather than the group event, it is imperative that personal goals are emphasized.

Whereas many children can stand at attention for long periods of time, the child with ADD/ADHD can barely maintain a stationary position for more than a few seconds. This is especially evident upon first enrolling in this new and strange environment of discipline, expectation and rules, mixed with fun, excitement, and learning "cool stuff".

Instructors must be aware of this fact and consistently reward positive steps toward each goal. This consistency of sanctions with respect establishes a more beneficial environment for all of the young students. Children must be contacted directly with a physical touch, or getting down on one knee to meet their eyes in order to communicate a request. It is this special effort of getting the child with ADD/ADHD to "connect" to the class drills, to her/his peers and to the instructors that brings these children to a higher level of skill than they have ever achieved before. Instructors must also be consistent with negative consequences in the case of disruptive behavior. When the parents and teachers share daily progressive and regressive behaviors, there develops a consistency to the child's overall program, which aids substantially to his success. The main quality required of a Bettencourt's Taekwon-Do America teacher is **PATIENCE**. The challenge of each one of the Bettencourt's Taekwon-Do America Instructors is to embody the Tenets of Taekwon-Do through diligent

awareness of being a role model and mentor. It is through strong support and team effort that this is possible.

When acting out behaviors become too disruptive, children are respectfully removed from the class area, reminded of their responsibilities as role models for other children and may be given a time out. Even with all of the best efforts and intentions of the instructor, in the more severe cases, the student may be asked to leave the school until the following day or next class attended. Since actual punishment is discouraged, we focus on positive over negative reinforcement. In this way, we feel, there is much less resistance encountered in the overall positive learning experience. These children know they can return and they know clearly what their expectations are. We feel this is the best thing they can learn about the world as they begin to adapt their learning disabilities to mainstream programs. As Traditional Taekwon-Do teachers we also see ourselves as a remedial step toward normalization behavior to help these children to acquire adaptive skills that are easily implemented to other areas of their lives, such as home, peer groups and future employment.

The Pyong Hwa Musado style of Taekwon-Do taught at Bettencourt's Taekwon-Do America is a unique blend of martial skills, respect, genuine caring and mentorship of life skills. The Taekwon-Do learning experience challenges all age groups in the unification process of body, mind and spirit. Students are taught to master their emotions by stilling their thoughts. They learn that the blending of a calm mind and a calm emotional state leads to a controlled flowing of effortless action. This is the goal of learning the "Way of the Peaceful Warrior" at Bettencourt's Taekwon-Do America.

Since ADD/ADHD may exhibit poor emotional control resulting in acting out behaviors, we see lots of anger, aggression and frustration levels in these children. When they acknowledge a sincere desire to overcome these urges for outbursts, they become valuable partners in recognizing their signs of frustration, tension levels and inappropriate behaviors. In this way, their goal plan can be modified whenever needed, to truly become the Black-Belt they have always wanted to be. With such clear expectations and visible role models of peers and teachers, the metaphor of "Black-Belt" behavior becomes a powerful tool in helping these challenging children to reach their goals. They can also become important role models with increasingly significant teaching responsibilities, working with children with or without ADD/ADHD. The self-esteem, confidence and positive goal acquisition gained using this comprehensive approach has proven to be quite effective and rewarding

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to all involved in what may be the most important learning experience of their lives. Our participation in this process helps to fulfill our mission as builders of our community and making a positive difference in our society.

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