
Safeguarding in the Martial Arts: Safe Practice

Martial Arts are activities where safe practice is essential to help prevent injury. Children are particularly vulnerable as they are still developing mentally and physically. Training methods are to be modified as described below, however, this can be applied to adults where applicable.

Warmups:

All activities should first include a thorough warm up, and head to toe stretching with gradual cardiovascular activity. To help reduce injury, specific attention should be paid to those muscle groups that will be used during later activity.

Martial Arts involving striking:

Avoiding excessive stretching and exercises such as press-ups on the knuckles or hitting heavy bags; the joints of children are still developing and can be damaged by these exercises.

Throwing, grappling and strangling:

The risks include falling on unsuitable surfaces, landing on the head, damage to the joints from locks & strangulation.

Sparring:

Light contact only, especially to the head i.e. the technique is targeted but controlled so that whilst the opponent is touched the technique is not followed through. Expert neurosurgeon advice is that the use of helmets, mitts or foot pads does not eliminate the risk of brain injury from full contact strikes.

Weapons:

- No live blades (sharp or otherwise) in the training hall when children are present.
- Safe protocols for the use of training weapons by children.
- Good supervision at all times by competent Instructors.

Safe practice must include:

- Checking the matted area for suitability, particularly where the mats have been joined.
- Checking that there are no hard surfaces or sharp/hard objects around the matted area.
- Having an experienced instructor who will ensure that children are taught to use locks, throws or strangles safely, without hurting their partner.

Martial arts can result in a wide array of injuries. The injury is often dependent on the form of martial art being performed.

Concussion

Common symptoms of concussion include headache, dizziness, nausea, balance problems, difficulties with concentration, and memory problems. Symptoms can last from several minutes to days, weeks, months, or even longer in some cases. Martial arts that emphasise striking and throwing are more likely to result in concussions. Anyone with these symptoms should seek out the advice of a health professional. They should not be allowed to return until cleared by a qualified health care professional.

Head/Eyes/Ear/Nose

Striking and grappling can result in minor injuries such as cuts, bruises and lacerations. More serious injuries, such as fractures of the nose, face, or skull as well as significant injuries of the eyes mouth or teeth can result. These injuries may be minimised by selection of martial arts style, proper training and coaching, and use of protective equipment.

Neck

Minor injuries to the neck, such as bruising and abrasions, are most common. However, some forms of martial arts that do allow choking techniques can result in loss of consciousness. It's important to understand the risks of different forms of martial arts and to learn them under appropriate supervision.

Extremities

Injuries to the extremities include cuts, bruises, sprains, and strains. Fractures and joint dislocations are less common, but can occur, particularly in styles that use throws and joint locking techniques. Injuries can be minimised with proper supervision and the use of appropriate technique.

Skin

Cuts are common injuries in martial arts. Athletes participating in contact sports, such as wrestling and martial arts, can be more prone to developing certain skin infections. These injuries should be evaluated and treated by an appropriate health care professional.

Safe Practice Summary

Above all, safe practice means having a suitably qualified and experienced instructor who will ensure that children and adults are not exposed to the above risks and who can make a training session enjoyable whilst maintaining the discipline essential to learning a Martial Art.