

How & Why Children Benefit from Judo by Mark Lonsdale

“Winning a championship is a temporary accomplishment– being a better person is for life”

More important than just building a better athlete, sports should build a better person. Judo in particular, develops discipline, manners, punctuality, strength, stamina, tenacity, toughness and confidence – all character traits that are essential to success and respected by society. Society also respects a person who wins with humility and loses with grace.

One of the unique aspects of judo training is the respect for others that is taught and required in the dojo. In time, through judo, this respect grows into a heightened level of self-confidence and discipline. For the parents of a rambunctious 6 or 8 year old, this cultivated respect and discipline can appear “heaven sent.” As a result, very rarely does one find a junior judoka who is poorly behaved or disrespectful to adults.

While judo is a martial art, and therefore a combat sport, the fighting that children do in the dojo is actually a form of preparation for life’s many challenges. In life, as in judo, we do not always win. So doing *randori*, and competing within the rules, teaches children persistence, resolve and perseverance. They also learn that it is not winning that is always important, but the time and effort dedicated to the training, and finding the courage to compete, that separates the judoka from others.

In its simplest form, character building in judo comes from the ability to be thrown on the mat, and then to get back up and keep fighting. This determination and toughness should never be undervalued. The first step towards success, in any endeavour, is to learn the lesson taught by *Mifuni* – “seven times down, eight times up.” Or as John Wayne would have put it, “You need to dust yourself off, Pilgrim, and get back on that horse.”

Junior judoka also learn the lesson of responsibility, or more specifically, taking responsibility for one’s own success or failure. They learn that if they want to succeed in grading, promotion or competition, they must turn up for class, pay attention to Sensei, learn their techniques, and then apply them in *randori*. Failure, on the other hand, can be directly attributed to how little effort they put into their lessons and training. And since children like to have fun, they also learn how much fun it is to succeed in games, pass a belt promotion, or win in *shiai*. In time they learn that the medals and trophies are just the icing on the cake. It is the peer acceptance and respect in the dojo that is more important. Recognition and a pat on the back from stern-faced Sensei are more valued and last much longer than a coloured ribbon.

There is also the self-defense aspect of judo. With all the weirdoes, stalkers, crazies, and bullies out there, parents constantly worry about their children. But in judo, children gain fitness, strength, stamina, balance, agility and awareness. *Randori* and competition also develop a rough and tumble level of self-confidence that allows even junior judoka to identify a threat and react appropriately (provided the judo training has been supplemented with sage parental advice).

To conclude, judo teaches many life lessons and develops strong character traits that will serve children through their difficult teen years and into adulthood. These virtues may seem to go well beyond what is practiced in the dojo, but in reality, this is exactly what Professor Jigoro Kano intended when he created Kodokan Judo. *Jita-kyoei*, mutual welfare and benefit, is one of the most important maxims in judo, and exemplifies the greater value of judo training. *Jika no kansei*, strive for perfection, is another significant motto, provided one understands that we strive for personal perfection so that we may better help others.

“The man who is at the peak of his success and the man who has just failed are in exactly the same position. Each must decide what he will do next.”

-- Jigoro Kano