

# **Shin's Martial Arts**

*Letter to parents*

## **Parental Support for Children in Martial Arts**

As we start a New Year, I want to thank you for your support of Shin's Academy in 2012, and ongoing dedication in 2013. Last year had many positives; new students, first testings, black belt promotions, many individual student and instructor accomplishments, and a rededication to our partnership with Prairie Life Fitness. As always, there were challenges to overcome, but I believe everything works out for the best, and I've never been more proud of our Shin's Academy family or more excited for our future.

My hope is for this letter to be well received, spark additional conversations in the home and in the Academy, and give parents of children in our classes a better understanding of how to support a student and what it means for your child to be a student of the Martial Arts. As a parent myself, I can appreciate how much unsolicited parenting advice we all receive. This letter is specifically relating to your child's experience in the Martial Arts, and is in no way a solicitation to change your parenting style in any way.

Martial Arts can be a difficult activity for children to pursue without parental support. It requires perseverance over a long period of time, far past the point at which the novelty has worn off. As an instructor, I can personally attest to the positive results a student gains by having parents present at class, testings, tournaments, and demonstrations. But the responsibility of being a Martial Artist continues after leaving class and changing out of the uniform, and we look to parents to help us in reaffirming this message outside of the Academy.

Here are some ideas we ask you to consider as your child continues training in the Martial Arts.

-Take time to learn about the Martial Arts yourself. Begin by sitting in on as many classes as possible. Review the Student Manual, visit the website, read supportive literature, and most importantly, ask questions and encourage your child to do the same. Even consider joining the adult class as a formal student, allowing you and your child to practice at home together. You will have gained a basis of common experience to share with your child, and hopefully take away some valuable self defense knowledge and increased understanding of the Martial Arts.

-Provide your child with necessary equipment, and ensure they take pride in their gear. Almost every sport requires a uniform and equipment, and Martial Arts are no different. Additionally, our uniform has symbolic meaning as we wear white to represent purity in thought and intent, and a clean uniform/belt and well cared for pads are a reflection of this, and on the student, the instructor, and the Academy.

-Be positive and have fun! One of the most common reasons why kids drop out of Martial Arts training is it stops being fun for them. A positive parental attitude, with frequent compliments, praise, encouragement, and interest will go a long way toward keeping it fun. We strive to have our classes be a unique combination of seriousness and fun; help your child find that balance.

-Speak frankly with your child about the dangers in the real world. Emphasize that although Martial Arts can be a lot of fun, it is not intended solely for sport. Most children understand the need for self-protection, but must occasionally be reminded they are learning how to defend against real-life situations. Supporting your child in learning practical self-defense rather than depending on others for protection is to encourage personal growth, independence, maturity, and builds self-esteem. Most children will take this seriously, and they will appreciate your interest in enhancing their level of personal safety, security, and independence.

-Try not to overemphasize the importance of winning. Instead, focus on how proud you are of them just for being there in class and working hard. The same goes for tournaments and other competitions. Point out how many other children lack the courage and determination to compete at all in a non-team sport. Winning awards is great when it happens, but all children need praise, encouragement, and unconditional support, not just those few who take home a 1st place trophy. Also to keep in mind, the overall focus of Martial Arts training is to increase the chances of survival in a real-life threat situation, not to score points.

- Try to avoid judging or comparing your child's performance to others. A supportive parent is best served being positive and complimentary. Let the instructor make needed corrections, even if you hold a belt rank in the class. I often see this as the most difficult advice to follow, but is critical to the ongoing success of the student during their formative years.

-Finally, encourage home practice. Students who practice on their own at home will almost always do better than those who do not. The student may or may not want you to watch or assist with the practice; but you can still make it as easy as possible by clearing a suitable space and seeing that the child is not interrupted by siblings or chores for a given practice time. "Training" is a difficult concept for kids to accept, and even the tiniest leanings in that direction should be supported and encouraged. For example, I have found recording a student during practice and reviewing the video after can be one of the most effective ways to improve in Martial Arts. The key is to be constructive and offer positive reinforcement, ultimately resulting in a desire to practice more, improve, and record the next practice for review again.

Every student has unique needs, and there are no bad students. Your support in any or all of the above items gives your child the best opportunity to succeed in Martial Arts and any other activity they choose to pursue. Most students will gratefully accept all the support they can get, because no one can do the hard work and practice for them...and that's the point.

Again, I thank you and your family's support and enrollment in Shin's Academy, and look forward to having conversations about your child's experience with the Academy. If there are any questions I can answer, or if you have suggestions for future communications, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

Master Steven Shin