



# Is Your Little One Ready For Karate?

Beginner level Karate Kids seem to be getting younger and younger nowadays. What is the right age to start the martial arts? Is your little one ready for Karate?

Back when I started practicing martial arts in the early 1980s in England the youngest child my local karate school would take was 8 years old. Consequently I started karate at the age of 8. I was then thrown in with the older kids and the adults and was given the option to “sink or swim”. As karate has become more popular over the years, kids of a younger age are getting started in the martial arts. There has of course been a strong influence from the Ninja Turtles and the Power Rangers but also with the ever expanding commercial karate schools, specialized programs for the little kids are becoming more and more popular. Programs with names such as Tiny Tigers, Little Ninjas or Little Dragons abound in most martial arts schools. So at what age are kids being accepted into these programs?

It seems that the age of 3 ½ to 4 years old is the youngest age for kids to be accepted into a martial arts program. This basically coincides with the age that a child can begin pre-school and this is obviously no coincidence. So if your child is around 4 years old then he or she will probably be accepted into your local martial arts school. However there are other factors that you should be aware of.

Is this the first time your child has been involved in a group activity? If so be prepared for some initial nervousness and unwillingness to get out on the floor without you.

Have you already taken your child to your local martial arts school to watch a class? If not, then do so as this is a great opportunity to pre-frame your child so he or she knows what is expected and what a karate school and karate class looks like.

Do you have realistic expectations for your child? Karate for a 4-year old should be about coordination, focus and fun. It is not about self-defense or hard core discipline at this age. These aspects will be gradually introduced over time as they get older.

Can your child stay focused for about a half-hour at a time? Most young kids have very short attention spans and consequently when teaching karate to a 4-year old an instructor needs to use a series of short but focused drills that flow from one to the other. Be sure to find an instructor who uses this type of method so that your child will maintain interest for the whole duration of the class.

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Can your child follow one or two-step instructions? Your child needs to be able to follow basic directions in order to function in the karate class. If your child does not do this at home then it may be a sign that he or she will also struggle at first in the karate class. On the other hand a karate class may be the ideal place to help your child learn the value of structure and basic discipline.

All of the above points are just some ideas that you should ask yourself when thinking about enrolling your young child in a martial arts class. The bottom line is you probably won't know all of the answers unless you give it a go but at the very least you should have some ideas of what to expect and how you can help your child make a successful transition into a fun and very valuable activity.

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