A PARENT'S GUIDE TO MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING FOR CHILDREN

RAISING A BLACK BELT

How the right martial arts school builds confidence, focus and respect, and how to choose one, in the words of the families who lived it.



PRESENTED BY MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON

Grand Master Stephen Oliver · Grand Master Jeff Smith

10TH DEGREE BLACK BELTS

with

Amanda Christensen & Stephen Christensen

4TH DEGREE AND 3RD DEGREE BLACK BELTS, MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON

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How the right school builds confidence, focus and respect, and how to choose one

Grand Master Stephen Oliver, MBA

10th Degree Black Belt

Grand Master Jeff Smith

10th Degree Black Belt

Former PKA World Light Heavyweight Champion

with

Amanda Christensen & Stephen Christensen

4th Degree and 3rd Degree Black Belts

Owners and Instructors, Mile High Karate Thornton

YOUR SCHOOL

Mile High Karate Thornton

Colorado's Black Belt school since 1983

YOUR INSTRUCTORS

- **Amanda Christensen**, 4th Degree Black Belt, Owner
- **Stephen Christensen**, 3rd Degree Black Belt, Owner
- **Ali Christensen**, 4th Degree Black Belt, Head Instructor

Family classes are available, so you can train beside your child.

PROGRAMS

Program	Who it's for
Little Ninjas	Ages 4 to 6
Karate for Kids	Ages 7 to 12
Teen Martial Arts	Ages 13 to 17
Adult Martial Arts	Fitness and self-defense
Family Classes	Parents and children together
Black Belt Club and Leadership Team	Black Belt and beyond

Book your child's first class at Mile High Karate Thornton →

Online special: two weeks free, with a free evaluation and a free uniform.

3979 E 120th Ave, Thornton, CO 80233
(303) 280-1839 · MileHighKarate.com · ThorntonMHK.com
Open 9 am–9 pm, seven days a week · Classes Mon–Fri 3–9 pm, Sat 9 am–3 pm

Independently owned and operated by Tasak LLC as a Mile High Karate franchise.

Mile High Karate Thornton is certified by the National Association of Professional Martial Artists and Martial Arts Professional Magazine.

MEET YOUR CO-AUTHORS



Amanda and Stephen Christensen

4th Degree and 3rd Degree Black Belts
Owners and Instructors, Mile High Karate Thornton

Amanda Christensen, a 4th Degree Black Belt, and Stephen Christensen, a 3rd Degree Black Belt, own and operate Mile High Karate Thornton. They have taught martial arts to families in the Thornton and Westminster area with Mile High Karate since 2003, shortly after they began training alongside their two daughters.

For more than 20 years they have worked hand in hand with the community. They run before- and after-school enrichment programs in the Jefferson, Adams and Brighton school districts that teach character lessons through quality martial arts instruction. The programs give back 100 percent of the funds raised to the schools, and Mile High Karate donates its instructional time and materials.

Through the Mile High Karate system of instruction and leadership, the Christensens have developed an experienced team of Black Belt instructors who spend as much time training their teaching, communication and leadership skills as their martial arts skills. That team is led by their oldest daughter, Ali Christensen, a 4th Degree Black Belt and head instructor in Thornton. She began teaching the school's Little Ninjas at age 14, served six years in the Colorado Army National Guard, and worked four years as a registered behavioral therapist for children with autism.

Their mission is simple: recognize all positive growth, and give every student the tools to develop strong martial arts skills along with the skills they need to be successful and happy in life.

> *"When you begin your training with Mile High Karate, you are not just considered a student; you become part of our Mile High Karate family."*
>
> **— AMANDA AND STEPHEN CHRISTENSEN**

OUR SCHOOL'S STORY

Colorado's Black Belt school since 1983

Grand Master Stephen Oliver opened the first Mile High Karate school in Lakewood, Colorado, on August 6, 1983, with the blessing of his teacher, Grand Master Jhoon Rhee, the Father of American Tae Kwon Do. More than 150 students joined in the first 90 days, and Mile High Karate grew to five schools within 18 months. Since then it has promoted more than 1,000 Black Belts, from age 5 to age 76. Grand Master Jeff Smith, former PKA World Light Heavyweight Champion, is Chief of Instruction.

Mile High Karate teaches American Freestyle, which grew from Grand Master Rhee's Tae Kwon Do. It combines Korean kicking, traditional forms and practical self-defense, and it rests on the three foundations Grand Master Rhee taught: practical self-defense, personal development and the art of the forms.

Amanda and Stephen Christensen began training in 2003 alongside their daughters and have taught Thornton and Westminster families ever since. Amanda is a 4th Degree Black Belt and Stephen a 3rd Degree Black Belt; they own and operate Mile High Karate Thornton, at 120th Avenue and Colorado Boulevard. Their daughter Ali Christensen, a 4th Degree Black Belt, is head instructor, and every instructor came up through the Mile High Karate system of instruction and leadership.

The traditions are the same ones Mile High Karate students have shared for decades: intramural tournaments since 1985, Black Belt community service projects, the three-day Black Belt Retreat in Breckenridge, and the annual Black Belt Extravaganza, held since 1990, where every new Black Belt receives the belt on stage in front of family and friends.

RECOGNITION

- More than 1,000 Black Belts promoted by Mile High Karate since 1983, ages 5 to 76
- Well over 30 percent of active Thornton students are Black Belts
- Well over 120 intramural tournaments hosted
- Go2 Karate Distinction Award for Thornton, Colorado
- Before- and after-school enrichment programs in the Jefferson, Adams and Brighton school districts, with funds raised returned to the schools

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON

What parents want, and how we help

Self-discipline	Children learn to control impulses, stay committed to goals and follow through, even when something is hard.
Focus	Every class is practice in listening, concentrating, following instructions and staying on task, and parents see it carry into the classroom.
Confidence	Children earn stripes, learn skills and advance through the ranks, building self-esteem they earned themselves.
Respect and courtesy	"Yes, sir" and "Yes, ma'am," the Principles of the Black Belt and the Student Creed, practiced in every class and carried home.
Fitness and coordination	Strength, balance, coordination and flexibility, built in classes that never feel like a chore.
Safety and bully prevention	Bully awareness, stranger danger, situational awareness and basic self-defense: avoid trouble first, stand tall, defend only when truly necessary.
Every child welcome	Our instructors have experience supporting children with ADD, ADHD, autism spectrum disorder and other challenges.
A goal worth reaching	Black Belt is every student's long-term goal, and the Black Belt Club and Leadership Team take the best students further still.

Book your child's first class at Mile High Karate Thornton →

FROM MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON

How a Mile High Karate Black Belt is earned



At Mile High Karate, a Black Belt is never sold and never handed out at an ordinary class-night test. Every rank has a written requirement, and students advance by meeting it. Character counts too: report cards, home challenges and a Black Belt community service project are part of the journey.

Black Belt candidates complete informal pre-tests, a formal pre-test and a written examination. Then they finish at the three-day Black Belt Retreat in Breckenridge, training and testing alongside senior Black Belts, Grand Master Stephen Oliver and Grand Master Jeff Smith. The testing has historically run about 48 hours from start to finish. For a consistent student, the whole journey typically takes about 36 to 48 months.

A few weeks later, new Black Belts walk on stage at the Black Belt Extravaganza and receive their belts in front of their families, instructors and fellow students.

> *"Nobody is insane enough to give a test for 48 hours, but that's what makes this so great, so good, so real."*
>
> **— BERNARD KERIK, FORMER NEW YORK CITY POLICE COMMISSIONER, ON THE MILE HIGH KARATE RETREAT**

To Grand Master Jhoon Rhee (1932–2018), the Father of American Tae Kwon Do, who taught both of us that the kicks and punches are only the beginning.

And to every parent who has ever sat on a bench, watched a nervous child bow onto the mat for the first time, and wondered what was about to happen. This book is for you.

"Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness… The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too."

— W. H. MURRAY, *THE SCOTTISH HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION*

Raising a Black Belt: A Parent's Guide to Martial Arts Training for Children

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The student and parent stories in this book come from essays, reviews and letters written by Mile High Karate students and families and by families in other schools that use the methods described here. The reviews marked as coming from Mile High Karate Thornton families were published by their authors on Google, Facebook or the school's websites, and appear on MileHighKarate.com. Full names are used where the original source provided them. Spelling has been lightly corrected; the words are theirs.

Photographs in this edition show students, families and instructors of Mile High Karate Thornton and are used with the school's permission. Their presence does not mean that any person pictured is quoted in the text.

This book is for general information. It is not medical, psychological or legal advice. Consult your child's physician before beginning any physical activity program.

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MartialArtsWealth.com · StephenCOliver.com

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START HERE

A Two-Minute Guide for Busy Parents

> *You don't have to read this whole book before you visit a school. Read these two pages, book an introductory lesson, and come back to the rest when you want to go deeper.*

Who this book is for

It is for parents of children who are shy, distracted, easily frustrated or being picked on. It is just as much for parents of confident, busy, successful kids who need a bigger challenge, real responsibility and friends who pull them up. Good martial arts training meets every child where they are and takes them further.

One school, one standard

This edition of the book was written for families of Mile High Karate Thornton. Mile High Karate teaches American Freestyle karate, which grew from the Tae Kwon Do of our teacher, Grand Master Jhoon Rhee, the Father of American Tae Kwon Do. Your child will learn Korean kicking, traditional forms and practical self-defense, with a character lesson in every class.

We use **Black Belt** throughout this book for the long-term goal: a high standard of skill and character, earned through steady training. At Mile High Karate, Black Belt is every student's goal from the first week. The journey has four parts: excellent instruction, steady practice, meaningful milestones and growing responsibility.

Many of the stories in this book come from Mile High Karate students and families, written over more than four decades. Every student's words are their own. Amanda and Stephen Christensen and their instructors will explain exactly how the program works at Mile High Karate Thornton.

What a great school does that you can see for yourself

When you visit, watch for five things. They matter more than the style, the trophies or the size of the building.

1. **Every child is known by name,** and hears it often.
2. **Correction builds children up:** praise something real, fix one thing, encourage, then notice the improvement.
3. **Children practice instead of waiting** in long lines.
4. **Progress means something.** Instructors hold a real standard for every belt, stripe or skill level, and give each child a plan to meet it.
5. **Someone notices when your child is missing,** and calls because they care.

Here is what that looks like in practice. A seven-year-old keeps losing her balance on a front kick. The instructor doesn't repeat "Balance!" louder. She kneels down, asks the girl to "squeeze the floor with your standing foot like you're holding a marble," and watches. The next kick is steady. The instructor smiles: "What did you change?" The girl answers, "I squeezed the floor." Now she owns the fix. The same coaching works just as well for a boy learning his first form, or a girl learning to keep her hands up in sparring. That is teaching, and it is what you are paying for.

The questions parents ask first

- **What does it cost?** Tuition depends on the program and how often your child trains. Before you enroll, ask us for the monthly tuition, every program option, what is included and the policies, all in writing.
- **How much time does it take?** Two classes a week is our standard recommendation. Classes for the youngest students run about 30 minutes, and most other classes run 45 to 60 minutes. A consistent student typically reaches Black Belt in about 36 to 48 months.
- **My child tried a sport and quit.** That is common, and it is one of the main reasons parents choose martial arts. Chapter 8 shows how we help children through the hard weeks.
- **My child isn't athletic.** Nobody sits on the bench. Every child works at their own level, and coordination and strength come with practice.

- **Will it make my child aggressive?** We teach control, restraint and conflict avoidance from the first week. See Chapter 6.
- **Can I train too?** Yes. Mile High Karate Thornton offers family classes, and many of our families have one or both parents training. See Chapter 10.

Your first step: an introductory lesson

The first visit commits you to nothing. Here is what usually happens:

1. You call or text (303) 280-1839 or book online, and we ask a little about your child. Wear comfortable exercise clothes and bring water.
2. Your child takes a beginner lesson with an instructor and learns a few first skills.
3. You watch the teaching, and you get to see the five things above for yourself.
4. The instructor answers your questions and explains the program, the schedule and the cost.
5. You decide, at home, with all the information in hand.

Book your child's first class at Mile High Karate Thornton →



PART ONE

Why Martial Arts?

What parents are really looking for, and how a character-first program delivers it.

SuccessfulKids.com



A Letter to Parents

Dear Parent,

Sara Hallock started training at nine. The first time she stood in front of a board she was supposed to break, she was terrified, and she cried. Then her teammates started cheering her name, and she broke it. As she later wrote, “I built up some confidence and some courage and I broke that board! I would have never tried that before.”

Moments like that are what this book is about. So before anything else, let us ask you the question we ask every parent who walks into one of our schools:

When your child faces something hard, what do you want them to believe about themselves?

Most parents tell us some version of the same thing. *I want my child to believe, “I can do hard things. When I work at something, I get better.”*

That belief can't be handed to a child. It has to be earned, over and over, in a place where the challenges are real, the coaching is good, and every small success is noticed. A great martial arts school is built to provide exactly that, two or three times a week, for years. Your child will try something difficult, get coached, improve, and see their own progress.

You may be reading this because your child is shy, distracted, easily frustrated or being picked on. You may be reading it because your child is already doing well and needs a bigger challenge, real responsibility and a group of friends who pull them up. This book is for both.

We have spent our lives building these places. I started training in 1969 at the Jhoon Rhee Institute in Tulsa, Oklahoma, opened my first school at 15, and on August 6, 1983, founded Mile High Karate in Lakewood, Colorado. Since then I have watched more than 1,000 Mile High Karate students, from age 5 to age 76, earn their Black Belts. My co-author, Grand Master Jeff Smith, began training in 1965 and became the Professional Karate Association World Light Heavyweight Champion. Today he is Mile High Karate's Chief of Instruction, responsible for instructor training and Black Belt testing. Amanda and Stephen Christensen, our co-authors for this edition, have taught Thornton families with Mile High Karate since 2003, and every one of their instructors came up through the Mile High Karate system. You will find all of our stories at the back of the book.

Here is the most important thing those years have taught us:

The Black Belt is not really about the belt.

It is about the shy seven-year-old who learns to speak up. It is about the boy who failed a test, came back anyway, and learned that a setback is not the end of the story. It is about the parent who sat on the sidelines for months, finally stepped onto the mat, and found a new way to be close to their child.

You will meet many of those families in this book. We collected their words over decades: essays students wrote before their Black Belt exams, letters and reviews from parents, and notes from instructors. Many of them are Mile High Karate families, and some are your neighbors in Thornton and Westminster. The words are theirs.

We also want to be honest with you. Choosing an activity for your child costs time, money and energy. This book tells you what a high-quality program looks like, what it asks of your family, and what results you can reasonably expect.

If you have only a few minutes, read the Start Here pages and book an introductory lesson. Watch a class. Ask hard questions. Then decide.

With respect,

Grand Master Stephen Oliver
10th Degree Black Belt, Tae Kwon Do and Karate



CHAPTER 1

What Parents Are Really Looking For

> *Parents rarely enroll a child for the kicks. They enroll for the person their child is becoming.*

When a parent first calls a martial arts school, the question usually sounds simple: “What ages do you teach?” or “How much is it?” But when we sit down with that parent and ask *why* they called, the real answer comes out. It almost always sounds like one of these:

- “He's so shy. He won't even order for himself at a restaurant.”
- “She can't focus. Her teacher says she's bright but she won't finish anything.”
- “He gets frustrated and gives up the second something gets hard.”
- “There's a kid at school who's been picking on her.”
- “He's on screens all day. I just want him to move.”
- “We want something we can do together as a family.”

If one of those sounds like your home, you are in very good company.

What 2,677 reviews tell us

We wanted to know what parents and students actually value once they are inside a martial arts school, not what schools *say* they offer. So we gathered and studied 2,677 public reviews of 419 martial arts schools in more than 200 cities across North America. More than 1,000 of those reviews were written by parents. We sorted every review by the themes it mentioned.

Here is what families talked about most:

What families mentioned	Number of reviews
Instructors who genuinely care	1,750
A community that feels like family	1,180
Welcoming to beginners	633
Fun	573
Fitness	531
Confidence	359
Discipline	329
Patience with children	323
Self-defense	285
Respect	252

A note on these numbers: they come from public reviews posted online. Each review was sorted by every theme it mentioned, so one review can count toward several themes. The counts show what reviewers chose to write about. They do not measure how many children improved.

Two things stand out.

First, the number one theme was not technique, trophies or self-defense. It was **instructor care**. Parents wrote again and again about instructors who knew their child's name, noticed when their child was struggling, and called when their child missed class. The quality of the teacher matters more than anything else in the building.

Second, **"family" and "community" came in a strong second.** Parents do not just want a class. They want a place where their child belongs, surrounded by adults and older kids who are working hard at something good.

One father put it plainly:

> *"Because of martial arts, I have surrounded my son, and now my daughter, in a very positive and nurturing environment. It sure is a much better environment than seeing my kids hanging out at the skate park."*
>
> **— RICH O'MARA, FATHER OF TWO**

A grandfather who paid for his granddaughter's lessons compared it to the program that shaped his own sons:

> *"I have two sons who were in the Scouting program and both are Eagle Scouts. I see similarities. Character development was just as important in Scouting as the camping and other activities. Same in this program... The benefits for those who stay with it can be life changing."*
>
> **— STEVE D., GRANDFATHER OF A SIX-YEAR-OLD**

The six results parents tell us about most

Across decades of letters, essays and conversations with families, the same six changes come up over and over. Each one has its own chapter in this book:

1. **Confidence.** The shy child who starts raising a hand, speaking to adults and standing tall.
2. **Focus and self-discipline.** Homework done without a fight. Better listening. Better grades.
3. **Respect.** "Yes, ma'am" and "thank you" that show up at home, not just in class.
4. **Safety.** A child who knows how to avoid a fight, use a strong voice, and protect themselves if they must.
5. **Perseverance.** A child who learns that hard things get easier, and that quitting is a habit too.
6. **Leadership.** A child who goes from following to helping, teaching and setting the example.

And underneath all six is a seventh, the one parents mention with the most emotion: **the change in the relationship between parent and child.** We will get to that in Chapter 10.

What martial arts is not

Let us be honest about one more thing. Martial arts training is not magic, and it is not a quick fix. A child does not walk in shy on Monday and walk out confident on Friday. Real change takes weeks, then months, then years. It takes a child who comes to class two or three times a week and a parent who backs up the lessons at home.

The parents in this book did not see results because they found a miracle. They saw results because they made a decision, found the right teachers, and stuck with it. The rest of this book will show you what that looks like.

> *"They not only teach martial arts, they help parents to raise good human beings. You can quickly see the impact of their teachings reflected at home."*
>
> **— NOELIA QUIROZ SERRATE, MOTHER**

What training looks like at your child's age

Every good school groups children so that the lessons fit their age. Here is what you can typically expect.

Age	What class looks like	What it builds first
4 to 6: Little Ninjas	Short, playful classes of about 30 minutes. Lots of games, simple movement skills such as kicks, punches, rolls and safe falls, and practice listening and taking turns.	Listening, following directions, balance, and the first taste of "I did it!"
7 to 9: Karate for Kids	Structured classes with clear goals and visible progress through stripes and belts. Partner drills and self-defense basics, plus forms, combinations and pad work.	Confidence, focus, self-control, and coordination
10 to 12: Karate for Kids	More technical training, controlled sparring under close supervision with protective gear, intramural tournaments, and chances to help younger students.	Perseverance through harder challenges, responsibility, and a peer group with good habits
Teens	Advanced skills, Black Belt preparation, the Black Belt Club and the Leadership Team, and leadership roles such as assistant instructor.	Leadership, discipline, fitness, and a positive identity during the years when it matters most
Parents	Family classes, training side by side with your child.	Your own fitness and confidence, and a shared goal with your child

Ask us which class your child would join and what a typical week looks like at Mile High Karate Thornton.

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"The best decision we made for our sons. Consistent character, leadership and personal development. Sustained athletic and intellectual growth. Owners and adult leaders who genuinely care about your kid. Kids who want to see each other succeed and lift each other up when the going gets tough. Plus, you get to be indoors a lot of the time ;)"

— ELIZABETH GALENTINE, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"Mile High Karate in Thornton has an amazing program! If I could give 6 stars I would! The program is more than just leading to kick and punch. My daughter has learned mental and physical toughness along with life skills that will last forever. She has learned how to deal with bullies and deescalate situations and how to use her voice to express herself. She was a COVID kindergartener and struggled to focus in school. In the last 2 years she has grown into a straight A student and even set long term goals to achieve her dreams in life. I cannot say enough about how Mile High Karate in Thornton has changed her life for the better!"

— DOYLE DAVIS, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW



CHAPTER 2

More Than Kicks and Punches

> *In a well-run school, character comes first. Martial arts training is how we teach it.*

When you watch a children's martial arts class for the first time, you will see techniques being drilled: kicks and punches, blocks, combinations, forms and self-defense. What you may not notice at first is everything else happening in the room: children greeting their instructor and partners, answering with a strong voice, waiting their turn, helping a younger student find the right position, and reciting the Mile High Karate Student Creed about self-discipline and self-control.

That is not decoration. That is the curriculum.

Grand Master Jhoon Rhee, who taught both of us, put it in three words that every one of our students learns: **knowledge, honesty, strength.** Knowledge in the mind. Honesty in the heart. Strength in the body. A martial art that builds only the body is just exercise. The physical training is the vehicle. The destination is the person.

The six Principles of the Black Belt

At Mile High Karate, children learn and recite six Principles of the Black Belt. They are simple enough for a five-year-old and deep enough to last a lifetime:

Principle	What it means to a child
Modesty	Be proud of your work without bragging.
Courtesy	Use good manners and kindness with everyone, every time.
Integrity	Do the right thing, even when no one is watching.
Perseverance	Keep going when it gets hard.
Courage	Do the right thing even when you feel afraid.
Indomitable Spirit	Never let anything beat your spirit. Never give up.

These are not posters on a wall. Instructors use them every class. When a child wants to stop halfway through a drill, the instructor does not just say "Keep going." The instructor asks, "Which principle do we need right now?" And the child answers, "Perseverance, sir!" and keeps going. Over months, that conversation moves from the instructor's mouth into your child's head.

The Eight Black Belt Success Skills

Alongside the principles, Mile High Karate students learn eight Black Belt Success Skills. They are the heart of *The Black Belt Mindset*, the 16-lesson character curriculum every new student begins with, and each lesson comes with a Key Word, a short Mat Chat in class and a Home Challenge. We have taught these skills to children and adults for decades because they are the same skills that drive success in school, in business and in life:

1. **Goal attainment and positive self-expectancy.** Set a clear goal, expect to reach it, and do the work that makes it happen.

2. **Definite commitment.** Decide for sure, and commit to the goal.
3. **Unshakable character and personal honesty.** Tell the truth and take responsibility for what you do.
4. **Visualization.** See it in your mind before you do it.
5. **Total self-confidence.** You can do hard things when you are willing to work for them.
6. **Positive self-talk.** Be in charge of the words in your head. Make them help you, not hurt you.
7. **No excuses.** Take responsibility for the choices within your control.
8. **Positive respect.** Use good manners, treat others well, and respect yourself with healthy habits.

Notice what these have in common. None of them is about fighting. Every one of them is about how a person thinks, decides and acts.

The Nine Qualities of a Black Belt

Finally, every Mile High Karate Black Belt is built on nine qualities of character, drawn from Denis Waitley's *The Psychology of Winning*. We call them the nine "positive selves": positive self-awareness, self-esteem, self-control, self-motivation, self-expectancy, self-image, self-direction, self-discipline and self-projection. In everyday language, that means a child who knows their strengths, likes who they are, controls their reactions, works hard because they want to, expects their effort to pay off, sees themselves as the person they are becoming, sets goals, does what the goal requires, and carries themselves with confidence and courtesy.

Ask any teacher, coach or employer what they wish more young people had. You will hear that list.

How it is taught: one lesson, many times

Children do not learn character from a lecture. They learn it from repetition, practice and recognition. In a quality program, character lessons are built into every part of the week:

- **A word or theme of the month.** Every class that month talks about it, from the youngest students to the adults.
- **Short mat chats.** Two or three minutes at the start or end of class where the instructor tells a story and asks questions.
- **Creeds and principles recited aloud.** Children memorize them, and the words become part of how they think.
- **Home assignments.** Children are recognized for doing things at home without being asked, such as making their bed or helping with dinner, and a parent signs off. At Mile High Karate, a completed seven-day Home Challenge, signed off by a parent, earns an attitude stripe.
- **Assigned reading.** Every stage of training has a book and a matching lesson on the mat: *The Black Belt Mindset* for beginners, books such as Brian Tracy's *Maximum Achievement* in the Black Belt Club, and John C. Maxwell's books on teamwork and leadership on the Leadership Team.
- **Report cards and teacher forms.** Students bring in school grades and teacher comments before their next promotion, so that effort at school counts, with allowances for each child's learning needs.

One parent with years of martial arts experience was skeptical going in. Here is what won him over:

> *"My favorite part of the school is the 'Word of the Month' coupled with the leadership classroom time. The students are spending time learning how to be successful at more than just karate. This dovetails nicely to form the warrior and scholar concept in martial arts."*
>
> **— J. F., FATHER OF TWO**

And here is how a nine-year-old described it, in his own words, before his Black Belt test:

> *"Some of the skills karate has taught me are the eight magic words: yes ma'am, no ma'am, please, thank you, you're welcome, yes sir, no sir and I love you. Another example is when I bow in and out of my karate school. I use my respectfulness at school by using the magic words with my teachers and fellow students. Honesty means to me that I don't lie, cheat, and I am honest with myself."*
>
> **— A NINE-YEAR-OLD STUDENT PREPARING FOR BLACK BELT**

The student creed

Mile High Karate students say the Student Creed together in class. Grand Master Oliver wrote it, and generations of Mile High Karate students have said it:

> *I develop myself physically and mentally, based on the* MILE HIGH KARATE SPIRIT.
>
> *I intend to develop myself in a positive manner and avoid anything that would reduce my mental growth or physical health.*
>
> *I intend to develop self-discipline in order to bring out the best in myself and others.*
>
> *I intend to use what I learn in class constructively and defensively, and never be abusive or offensive.*

Read that last line again. From their very first week, children promise out loud that their skills are for protection only, never for bullying or showing off. That promise matters, and we will come back to it in Chapter 6.

Why not just another seasonal sport?

Parents often ask how martial arts compares with soccer, baseball or basketball. Those are wonderful activities, and a great coach in any sport can change a child's life. Team sports are especially good at

teaching children to depend on each other and to belong to something bigger than themselves. We tell parents that honestly.

But a good martial arts program offers some things a seasonal, recreational sport usually can't.

- **It doesn't stop when the season ends.** A season lasts a few months, and then the team breaks up. Martial arts runs all year, with the same instructors, the same goals and the same expectations. Week after week, your child trains with people who know them well.
- **Character is part of the curriculum.** At Mile High Karate, listening, self-control, respect and responsibility aren't just mentioned in a pep talk. They are taught, practiced, corrected and rewarded every class, and at Mile High Karate they count toward the next promotion.
- **Every child plays the whole game.** No one sits on the bench or waits for a starting spot. The smaller child, the awkward child and the child who struggles at first all work toward the same clear standards, at their own pace.
- **A distant goal becomes a series of steps.** Black Belt can feel impossible to a young child. Belts and stripes break it into small steps: learn a skill, keep practicing when progress is slow, accept correction, show what you can do, then take on a harder challenge. Children repeat that cycle again and again, until they know in their bones that effort leads to results.
- **Power is taught together with restraint.** Children learn to control their force, to stop the instant a partner or instructor says stop, and to stay calm when challenged. Few other activities teach physical skill and self-control together so directly.
- **Responsibility grows with rank.** Over the years, students go from following instructions to helping beginners, leading parts of class and setting an example for younger children.

None of this happens automatically. Schools that promote everyone no matter what, or that teach technique without character, don't deliver it. At Mile High Karate, rank is earned against a written standard and is never tied to payment. The value comes from the quality and

consistency of the instruction. That is why Chapter 12 shows you what great instruction looks like, and Chapter 15 shows you how to choose a school.

The rest of this book shows what happens when these lessons take root. Let's start with the change parents notice first.

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"Wonderful school! They not only teach martial arts, they help parents to raise good human beings; you can quickly see the impact of their great teachings reflected at home. The instructors and leaders are fantastic and always show genuine care for all the students."

— NOELIA QUIROZ SERRATE, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"I was skeptical about putting my kids in a karate school at first. My son has special needs and my previous martial arts experience had me against an American TKD school. Two years into the system and I have to say that I'm quite pleased with the curriculum. The instructors work well with my son. My daughter is also doing quite well and has shown improved confidence and skill. My favorite part of the school is the "Word of the Month" coupled with the leadership classroom time. The students are spending time learning how to be successful at more than just karate. This dovetails nicely to form the warrior and scholar concept in martial arts."

— J. F., PARENT, WESTMINSTER, GOOGLE REVIEW



PART TWO

What Training Builds

Confidence, focus, respect, safety, fitness, perseverance and leadership.



CHAPTER 3

Confidence: From Shy to Standing Tall

> *Confidence is not something you can give a child. It is something a child earns, one small success at a time.*

Of all the reasons parents bring children to us, confidence is near the top of the list. And of all the changes parents report, it is usually the first one they notice.

Here is why. A child cannot be talked into confidence. You can tell your child “You're amazing” a thousand times, and it helps, but deep down children know the difference between praise and proof. Confidence comes from proof: “I couldn't do that before. Now I can.”

Martial arts training is built to give a child that proof, over and over, in a safe and structured way.

Small wins, stacked on purpose

In the first class, a child learns a ready stance and a first punch. Small win. Soon they can recite the Student Creed, or remember a whole sequence of moves. Small win. Then they earn a stripe or a new belt in front of the class and their family. Bigger win. Later they break a board, perform a form at an intramural tournament, or walk across the stage at a belt graduation.

Each win is just a little harder than the last. That is not an accident. Good instructors plan the steps so that a child is always stretching, but never so far that they cannot succeed with effort. Over time, those wins add up to a new belief: "*When I work at something, I get better.*"

That belief is the foundation of real confidence. And it carries over to school, sports, friendships and everything else.

The board break

At Mile High Karate, few moments capture this better than a child's first board break. Here is how one girl described hers, written when she was eleven:

> *"The first time I broke a board, I was terrified and I cried. I thought there was no way I was going to be able to break a board. As I heard my team members cheering my name, I built up some confidence and some courage and I broke that board! I would have never tried that before."*
>
> **— SARA HALLOCK, STARTED AT AGE 9**

Read that again as a parent. *Terrified. Cried. No way.* And then: *team members cheering my name.* And then: *I broke that board.* In about two minutes, that child experienced fear, support, courage and success. She will remember that moment for the rest of her life, and she will draw on it the next time something scares her.

A grandfather watched a whole class of young children go through the same experience:

> *"The first hour and a half was learning how to visualize their goal, and practicing on cushioned pads. By the end, my granddaughter broke three boards, as did many of the other students. And even those who were not able to on their own got assistance from the instructors, who cradled their hands and helped them break the boards. The looks on the kids' faces was powerful."*
>
> **— STEVE D., GRANDFATHER**

Notice that *no child was left out.* In a well-run program, every child gets to succeed. The difference is how much help they need along the way, and that amount shrinks over time.

Speaking up

For many shy children, the hardest thing is not a kick. It is their own voice. Martial arts classes ask children to use their voice from day one: answering their instructor loudly, using a strong shout called a kiai in many striking arts, introducing themselves to a new partner, and later, leading parts of class.

> *"Karate has given me the confidence to talk to adults. I used to be shy and nervous to talk to new people, but it's mostly just adults. To me adults expect more than kids would and I didn't want to embarrass myself or make a bad impression."*
>
> **— DOMINIC MACIAS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**
>
> *"When I joined the leadership team I learned how to stand up in front of a big group of my classmates and explain ideas. This task made me nervous at the beginning, but through practice and time I began to feel comfortable expressing my ideas in front of others."*
>
> **— BRYCE MARTINEZ, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

One father described what it was like to watch this happen to his son:

> *"I was particularly amazed as I watched my son develop public speaking skills at his tender young age of 6, 7 and 8 years old. What could make a parent more proud?"*
>
> **— RICH O'MARA, FATHER**

And a nine-year-old summed it up with no false modesty at all:

> *"Each year my teachers comment on my manners and how kind I am to other students. I am always the first to volunteer, and always have my hand up first to partner up. I am not afraid to talk in front of people, and to introduce myself to, and speak to adults."*
>
> **— TURNER BENTON, AGE 9, STARTED AT AGE 5**

When shyness runs deep

Some children are not just shy. They are deeply introverted, anxious in groups, or overwhelmed by new people. Parents of these children often worry that a martial arts class will be too loud or too much.

In our experience, a structured class can be one of the best places for these children, because it is predictable. The same opening routine. The same warm-up. The same words. The same expectations. A child who struggles in the chaos of a playground often relaxes when they know exactly what will happen next.

One mother, who trained as a child herself and later brought her own son, wrote this:

> *"My son is very introverted and struggled a lot with social anxiety. Since he has been in karate, our extended family compliments him all the time on his confidence and leadership abilities. He is now a part-time instructor and part of the ambassador team. He has made so many friends."*
>
> **— MINDY DAVIS, MOTHER AND RETURNING BLACK BELT**

A young woman who became a head instructor looked back on her own start:

> *"I was super shy and reserved. Now I am confident and am not afraid to stand up in front of a crowd and speak about the importance of respect, self-discipline and focus... If you asked me if I would ever go back and change something in my life, my answer would be, 'I wish I had started karate sooner!'"*
>
> **— TIFFANY G., 3RD DEGREE BLACK BELT, STARTED IN AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM**

Confidence is not cockiness

Some parents worry that martial arts will make their child aggressive or arrogant. A quality program teaches and rewards the opposite. Remember the principle of **modesty**: be proud of your work without bragging. Truly confident children do not need to prove anything. They are calm. They are kind. They help others because they are secure enough to share the spotlight.

One girl described the shift from follower to leader this way:

> *"I used to be the girl in a group of friends that almost always obeyed or didn't stick up for herself. Now I'm like the leader of the group. My friends listen to me and ask me for advice."*
>
> **— TALEI MIKULAS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME

- **Praise effort, not talent.** Say "You practiced that all week and it showed," not "You're a natural."
- **Let your child show you.** Ask them to teach you what they learned in class. Teaching builds confidence faster than almost anything.
- **Celebrate stripes and belts.** Come to graduations. Take pictures. Put the certificates on the fridge. Children notice what their parents celebrate.
- **Let them order.** Give your child small chances to use their voice: ordering at a restaurant, answering the phone, greeting a neighbor.
- **Don't rescue too fast.** When your child is nervous before a promotion or a big class, let them feel it. Say "I know you're nervous. I also know how hard you've worked." Then let them walk onto that mat.

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"Mile High Karate has been amazing. We enrolled my 6 year old because he desperately needed some focus. In the last 6 months he has shown incredible changes. At the same time he absolutely loves being there and is incredibly proud of what he has accomplished. I think what I appreciate the most is that training isn't just a hobby for the instructors, it is a full time job. The teachers put so much time and dedication into their students. They focus on a curriculum with not only martial art skills but also practical life lessons and fundamentals directed at younger students that are also important reminders for all other students. I have been so impressed that I have been encouraged to join and better myself. Great Job MHK."

— MICHAEL BRACE, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"We absolutely love MHK! Our daughter is showing more confidence and strength with each class and belt graduation. She is taking ownership and responsibility that she has not in the past. We appreciate how much attention is given to each student on an individual basis. The instructors and staff treat each and every person who walks in the door with a level of respect, kindness and support that is unmatched. Thank you to everyone for welcoming our family with open arms."

— DESIREE MARTINELLI, PARENT, THORNTON, FACEBOOK RECOMMENDATION



CHAPTER 4

Focus, Self-Discipline and Schoolwork

> *Self-discipline is a skill, not a personality trait. Like a kick, it gets stronger with practice.*

"She's so smart, but she can't focus." We hear that sentence from parents nearly every week. The good news is that focus and self-discipline can be trained. A martial arts class is one of the best training grounds we know of.

Why this matters so much

Researchers have studied self-discipline in children for decades, and the findings are striking. A well-known study by Angela Duckworth and Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania found that eighth-graders' self-discipline predicted their grades better than their IQ did. The Dunedin study, which followed more than 1,000 people in New Zealand from birth into their thirties, found that children with more

self-control grew into adults with better health, more financial stability and fewer serious problems, whatever their intelligence or family background.

In plain language: **teaching your child self-discipline may be one of the most valuable things you ever do for them.** And self-discipline, like a muscle, gets stronger the more it is used.

How a martial arts class trains focus

Watch a good children's class and you will see focus being trained in dozens of small ways:

- **Eyes on the instructor.** Children learn to stand still in a ready position, eyes forward, waiting for the next command. For an active child, holding still for even ten seconds is a workout for the brain.
- **Listen, then do.** Instructors give a short instruction, and children must remember it and carry it out. The instructions get longer and more complex as children advance.
- **Count and control.** Techniques are often done on count, together. A child who moves early or late notices immediately.
- **Sequences.** A form is a set pattern of many moves performed from memory, and a combination links several techniques together. Every new belt adds more to remember. It takes focus, memory and many repetitions.
- **Respond right away.** When an instructor says “Hands up!” or “Stop!”, hands go up or the drill stops immediately, often with a “Yes, sir!” or “Yes, ma'am!” Children learn to respond the first time.

Over time, these habits do not stay on the mat. Parents tell us about it constantly.

> *"We enrolled my six-year-old because he desperately needed some focus. In the last six months he has shown incredible changes. At the same time he absolutely loves being there and is incredibly proud of what he is learning."*
>
> **— MICHAEL BRACE, FATHER**
>
> *"Our daughter has been going for over a year and loves the teachers and students. They teach ethics and confidence along with karate. She eats better, does chores and has improved in school."*
>
> **— HOLLY MURRY, MOTHER**

In the student's own words

The most convincing evidence comes from the children themselves. Here is an eleven-year-old girl, three years into her training:

> *"Karate has made me more focused. I always had trouble staying focused in school. My brain likes to wander sometimes and so then I am not focused on the teachers. Now it is easier to listen in class and get homework done. I am getting better at taking tests and my grades are improving. I am also more focused at home so I get my chores done faster and take responsibility for mistakes without making excuses."*
>
> **— SARA HALLOCK, AGE 11**

And a boy who learned to catch himself drifting:

> *"I am a better listener because I am able to realize when I am going off task. Using the tools I have been taught, I can refocus myself. I am able to listen to anyone even if it gets really boring, because I know that it will probably help me in the future."*
>
> **— JACE GILL, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

Read that last line again: *even if it gets really boring.* That is self-discipline in its purest form, written by a child.

Schoolwork counts

At Mile High Karate, schoolwork is part of a child's progress. Before a promotion, students bring in report cards, and parents and teachers fill out short forms. The expectation is effort, not perfect grades. When a child is struggling, the parent, teacher and instructor agree on a plan that takes learning differences into account. A child who isn't putting in the effort at school or at home may be asked to wait for the next promotion.

This is not a punishment. It is a lesson: *Black Belts take care of all of their responsibilities, not just the fun ones.* And it gives you, the parent, a powerful partner.

> *"I keep my grades up because I realized that if I don't, I cannot pass to my next belt level. I want to become a Black Belt someday. For this reason I try my best to keep my grades up. Yes, it is a challenge sometimes, but I ask for help, and 90% of the time I get help from my teachers."*
>
> **— JACE GILL, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

Another young student explained how it changed his after-school routine:

> *"Karate has taught me to be responsible when it comes to doing my homework. I am able to get it done right when I get home from school. I have never missed turning in a school or karate assignment."*
>
> **— A NINE-YEAR-OLD BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

Doing it without being told

The highest form of self-discipline is doing the right thing without being asked. Many programs teach this directly with a home challenge. Children log small acts at home, school or in their community that they did on their own: making the bed, helping a sibling, carrying in the groceries, picking up trash at the park. A parent verifies each one, and

after ten verified acts the child is recognized: in our schools, with an attitude stripe on the belt; in others, with a certificate, a patch or praise in front of the class.

Parents love this, for obvious reasons. But the deeper benefit is what happens in the child's mind. Over time, "What can I do to help?" stops being a chore and starts becoming who they are.

> *"My 8-year-old has excelled in school, at home, with manners and being more attentive. And so have I as a parent."*
>
> **— JEFF B., FATHER**

Home practice and character challenges

Here is what this looks like in practice. In our own schools, students earn **attitude stripes**: stripes for character, not technique. Other schools recognize the same habits with certificates, progress cards or praise in front of the class. Either way, character recognition is separate from technical rank, which always depends on the school's own standards and the rules of any organization it belongs to. They earn them by completing challenge sheets at home. The parent signs off on each one, and then the instructor does. Here are three of the most popular challenges, and what each one teaches.

The Self-Discipline Challenge. Every time your child helps out at home *without being asked*, beyond their regular chores, they write down what they did. Ten verified entries earn an attitude stripe, and each sheet is worth three stripes. A young student's list might include setting the table before anyone asked, helping a younger sibling find their shoes, or carrying in the groceries.

The lesson: initiative. Most children wait to be told. This challenge teaches them to look around, see what needs doing, and do it. Because a parent signs every sheet, you get to catch your child being good, and tell them so.

The Reading Challenge. Students read at home for 15 to 20 minutes per session and log the title, the time and the date. A parent checks off each session. Five sessions earn a stripe, and the full sheet of 15 sessions is worth three stripes. Young readers may read with a parent. Suggested reading includes martial arts history and philosophy, biographies of athletes and leaders who overcame adversity, books on goals and mindset, and books on health and fitness. Really, any book that builds knowledge and vocabulary counts. Adults count too: business, leadership and self-improvement books all qualify.

The lesson: daily habits build the mind the way daily training builds the body. As the sheet itself says, "Reading builds the mind of a champion — on and off the mat."

This idea has deep roots. When Grand Master Jhoon Rhee, who taught both of us, ran his first schools in Washington, D.C., many of his students were the children of foreign diplomats. His rule was simple: children who did not keep up their grades could not test for Black Belt. The ambassadors loved it, because their children's grades went up.

The Healthy Eating Challenge. Its motto is one every athlete learns sooner or later: "*You can't out-train a bad diet.*" Each time your child makes a smart food choice on their own, they log what they chose and what they passed on. For example: "I chose an apple instead of chips." Ten entries earn a stripe, and the sheet is worth two. The sheet is built on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It asks children to eat real, whole foods, fill half the plate with fruits and vegetables, include protein at every meal, drink water instead of soda or energy drinks, limit added sugar, processed food and fast food, never skip breakfast, and read labels.

The lesson: ownership. Writing down what you passed on, not just what you ate, teaches a child that every choice is a decision, and that the decision is theirs. It is not about dieting or counting. It is about treating food as fuel.

Why it works. Every one of these sheets carries three signatures: the student's, a parent's and the instructor's. That is the same team that will carry your child to Black Belt. Your child learns that a belt is not earned only on the mat. It is earned at the kitchen table, at bedtime with a book, and in the choices they make when no one is watching. And in our family classes, parents can take the challenges too.

Emotional self-control

Focus is not only about attention. It is also about managing big feelings. In class, children learn to take a breath before reacting, to accept correction without sulking, and to keep trying after a mistake. Several students wrote about this in their Black Belt essays:

> *"Karate has helped me with being calm and breathing instead of crying and getting upset. I can control my emotions and understand how to react to different situations more positively."*
>
> **— DOMINIC CONNELLY, STARTED AT AGE 5**
>
> *"I have learned how to be calm and breathe, which has helped me to not yell when I am in an argument. I am able to take a second to breathe and calm down in any conflict. I do not lose my temper as fast as I did."*
>
> **— JACE GILL, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

One father of a nine-year-old put it simply: his son had greatly improved his motor skills as well as his emotional management. His advice to other parents: *trust the method. In the end, the results are very worth it.*

WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME

- **Use the class language.** Use "Yes, sir," "Yes, ma'am" and the week's Key Word at home too. Consistency speeds up learning.
- **Ask for the first-time response.** Give an instruction once, calmly. Expect a "Yes, Mom" and action. Thank them when they do it.
- **Support the home assignments.** Sign the challenge sheets. Notice the acts of self-discipline before you are asked to.
- **Partner with the instructor.** If your child is struggling at school or at home, tell the instructor. A good one will bring it up in class in a way that motivates your child, without embarrassing them.
- **Keep the routine.** Focus grows from consistency. Two or three classes a week, on the same days, works better than bursts of attendance.

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"MHK has done amazing things for all 3 of my children. All three of them (13, 8, and 5) have began to excel in school and around the house. The instructors genuinely care about each and every student and take the time to fully explain everything to each student ensuring that they fully grasp one concept before moving onto the next. They take the time for one on one instruction if needed (particularly with the little ones). I can't wait to see how much more MHK influences and affects my kids!"

— ANDREA FALKFINO, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"Great experience. They are always friendly And helpful. The classes are great for focus, Discipline and have great structure While having fun. There is so much more then what I have described. My daughter and I do karate together, and I feel like it has brought us closer together."

— DESTINY MOAD, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW



CHAPTER 5

Respect and Courtesy That Come Home

> *Every good martial arts class begins and ends with a sign of respect. It is a lesson children carry home.*

In the martial arts, respect is not a suggestion. It is built into everything. At Mile High Karate, students bow when they enter and leave the training floor, and bow to their instructors and partners. Many children answer instructions with “Yes, sir” or “Yes, ma'am.” They thank the partner who just held a target for them. They help put away equipment.

None of this is about blind obedience. It is about a simple, powerful idea: **every person deserves to be treated with courtesy, and you deserve to treat yourself with respect too.**

The magic words

Early on, many young students learn a short list of "magic words": *please*, *thank you*, *you're welcome*, *yes sir*, *no sir*, *yes ma'am*, *no ma'am*. Mile High Karate students add an eighth: *I love you*, said to Mom and Dad.

It sounds small. It is not. One girl, writing as she prepared for her Black Belt, was honest about where she started:

> *"Before I started karate I was a troubled kid in the second grade with no respect. Something had to change... On the first day of the program I learned seven magic words: please, thank you, yes sir, no sir, and you're welcome. That was a start... When my journey began I had very low grades and no friends, and I was sad. Now I have changed schools, majoring in trumpet, and I am doing great at school. But what I have made the most progress in is my respect. Karate has changed my life."*
>
> **— MAKENNA BARTOS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

What parents notice first

Because courtesy is practiced in class every day, it shows up at home faster than almost any other change.

Other parents described the change in a single line:

- "They teach the kids the important things at a young age: respect, yes ma'am, yes sir, homework, chores, responsibilities."
- "Everyone is so nice, our son is more respectful and focused in school."
- "Our daughter is showing more confidence and strength with each class and belt graduation. She is taking ownership and responsibility that she has not in the past."
- "They teach so much more than 'moves.' They teach life skills. Leadership skills. Invaluable."

Respect is also honesty

In our system, respect is tied closely to integrity: doing the right thing even when no one is watching. Children learn that respect means telling the truth, owning their mistakes, and not making excuses.

One boy wrote a wonderful story about this in his Black Belt essay. He and his little brother were playing catch, and a wild throw broke their older brother's window:

> *"I ran inside and told my mom that me and my brother broke the window. Yes, they were still very angry, but if I would have waited something could have got in and I would have for sure got in more trouble. What I'm trying to say is it pays to tell the truth the first time, not until you're caught... Karate taught me to tell the truth even if it results in punishment, and take the blame for it."*
>
> **— DOMINIC MACIAS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

Every parent who reads that will smile. That is a child who has learned something that many adults never do.

Respect for family

Some of the most touching changes happen between siblings. A boy who started training at age five wrote:

> *"Karate has helped me share and be okay with my sisters wanting to use my stuff and be around me a lot... I know now that I have a voice and how to use it in a more respectful, positive and informative way... I have been a better brother, son and friend because of what I have learned."*
>
> **— DOMINIC CONNELLY, STARTED AT AGE 5**

Another young student explained how respect turned into kindness at school:

> *"Another important thing that karate has shown me, and that everyone should really do, is be kind to people and treat others as you would like to be treated. It could be something as easy as saying hi, or asking if people at school want to play with you at recess, sitting with people that are usually alone at lunch... You may not know it, but you're helping them get through a time when that person could be sad or angry."*
>
> **— A BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

Respect for yourself

There is one more kind of respect that is easy to miss: self-respect. Our eighth success skill, *positive respect*, includes respecting yourself with healthy habits. Students learn that their body and mind deserve good food, enough sleep, exercise and positive thoughts. The student creed itself asks children to avoid "anything that would reduce my mental growth or physical health."

As children reach the teen years, that lesson takes on new weight. A teen who has promised out loud, class after class, to protect their own health has a built-in reason to say no when the pressure comes.

A note on "Yes, sir" at home

Some parents feel a little awkward when their child starts answering them with "Yes, ma'am." One grandfather noticed that his daughter and son-in-law were a bit uncomfortable at first. He was not. Our advice: lean into it. Your child is practicing respect, and the best place to practice is with the people who matter most. Over time the words become natural, and the attitude behind them stays.

Still, respect is much more than "Yes, sir." Our customs are just one way it shows. Just as important are the children who tell the truth about a mistake, speak up when something feels wrong, ask for help, respect a partner's boundaries, accept people who are different from them, and disagree politely. A good school notices and praises those things too, and it doesn't measure every child by one communication style.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME

- **Model it.** Say please and thank you to your child. Children learn courtesy by receiving it.
- **Expect the magic words.** Gently remind your child the way an instructor would: "How do we answer?"
- **Praise honesty out loud.** When your child admits a mistake, thank them for telling the truth before you deal with the mistake.
- **Bring it into family life.** Ask your child to bow or shake hands when greeting a grandparent, or to thank the cook after dinner.
- **Talk to the instructor.** If respect at home is slipping, let your child's instructor know. A quiet word from a respected teacher often works wonders.

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"Our daughter has been going here for over a year and loves the teachers and students. They teach ethics and confidence along with karate. She eats better, does chores and has improved in school. We have been going for over a year!"

— HOLLY MURRY, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"We've been bringing our son here for well over a year now and I can say nothing but positive things about MHK! The staff are amazing and they all go out of their way to make you feel welcome. AND the values our boy is learning are lessons that he will use throughout the rest of his life. I am so happy that we found this place!"

— JASON ANDERSON, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"Great place for your karate needs. Character development like no other place and everyone treats you like a family. Also, judgement free zone, which is extremely important."

— ANELIA A, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW



CHAPTER 6

Safety, Bullying and Real Self-Defense

> *The best self-defense is the fight that never happens. We teach children to avoid it, to talk their way out of it, and only as a last resort, to protect themselves.*

Many parents come to us because they are worried about their child's safety. Some have a specific worry: a classmate who pushes, a group that excludes, a long walk home. Others just want peace of mind. Either way, it is one of the most important reasons to train, and one of the most misunderstood.

Let us clear up the biggest misconception first.

Martial arts does not make children violent

Parents sometimes ask, “Won't learning to punch, kick or take someone down make my child more likely to fight?” A quality program works hard to make sure the answer is no. From the first week, it teaches

restraint, control and avoiding conflict.

From their very first week, students promise out loud that they will use what they learn "constructively and defensively, and never be abusive or offensive." Instructors remind children constantly that martial arts skills are for self-defense only, never to bully or start a fight. A student who misuses their skills outside of class faces real consequences, including losing rank.

There is a reason this works. Children who are confident and capable do not need to prove anything. It is often the child who feels weak and unsure who lashes out. Training gives children an inner calm: *I know I can protect myself, so I don't have to act tough.*

One boy wrote about exactly this moment:

> *"When I was over at a friend's house, another friend said that 'karate was stupid and useless.' They then threatened that I probably couldn't even take a hit. I used the first lesson I learned in karate, and that was to avoid the fight, and I went home."*
>
> **— A NINE-YEAR-OLD BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

That is a nine-year-old with the self-control many adults lack.

The ABCs of conflict avoidance

At Mile High Karate, children learn a simple, memorable plan for handling conflict. A twelve-year-old explained it perfectly in his Black Belt essay:

- **A**: **Avoid** potentially dangerous situations.
- **B**: **Be calm** and breathe.
- **C**: **Communicate** with confidence.
- **D**: **Don't** make the situation worse.

He also listed the five rules of safety that he learned early in his training:

1. Use my mind.
2. Use my words.
3. Use my legs (walk or run away).
4. Ask for help.
5. Defend myself.

Notice the order. Defending yourself physically is rule number five, not rule number one. Children learn to think first, talk second, leave third, get help fourth, and fight only when there is no other choice.

A strong voice

One of the most powerful self-defense tools we teach costs nothing and works for even the smallest child: a strong voice. Children practice standing tall, looking someone in the eye, putting a hand up, and saying loudly and clearly, "Stop! Leave me alone!"

Bullying is never the fault of the child being bullied. But children who practice standing tall, making eye contact and using a strong voice have tools that often help them shut teasing down before it escalates.

> *"Learning self-confidence also helped me when talking about strangers and how to act around them. I already knew the basics about strangers, but karate helped me learn that a strong voice can be a powerful weapon."*
>
> **— BRYCE MARTINEZ, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

And an uncle wrote simply that his nephew was learning that he has a voice and how to defend himself.

Stranger safety

Age-appropriate safety lessons are part of a good children's curriculum: what to do if a stranger approaches, how to recognize a "tricky" adult, who the safe adults are, what to do if you get separated from your

parent in a store, and how to call for help. These lessons are taught calmly and practically, so children feel prepared, not frightened.

When defending yourself is necessary

Sometimes a child truly cannot avoid a physical situation. For those moments, children learn simple, effective skills: how to keep their hands up and protect their face, how to break free from a grab, how to stay on their feet or get back up safely, and how to create an opening and escape. Ask your instructors what the curriculum covers at your child's rank. As children advance, controlled sparring teaches them to stay calm and think while someone is pressing them.

The goal is never to "win a fight." The goal is to get safe. One student explained it clearly:

> *"Combinations taught us to powerfully and quickly deal with one or two opponents so we can run and get help, or get to safety."*
>
> **— TEDDY SIMMONS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

And another boy wrote:

> *"Karate has helped me defend myself without hurting the bad person."*
>
> **— JORDAN GILL, AGE 12**

He probably does not realize how wise that is.

Bullying: what training changes, and what it does not

We will be honest with you. Martial arts training will not make bullies disappear. What it does is change how your child responds. Stopping bullying is still the job of the adults around your child, and we will help you work with your child's teachers.

Parents tell us their children start walking taller, speaking up, telling an adult when something is wrong instead of hiding it, and shrugging off teasing that used to crush them. One mother in our review study signed her ten-year-old daughter up specifically because she was "an easy target for bullies." A boy described the change in himself this way:

> *"I have learned how to handle situations like being bullied, kids trying to punch me, and a lot more."*
>
> **— XAVIER CHAMBERS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

If your child is being bullied right now, please do three things. Tell the school. Tell your child's martial arts instructor, so they can reinforce the right responses in class. And keep talking with your child every day. Training is a powerful tool, but it works best alongside caring adults who know what is going on.

Taking martial arts to the kids who need it most

Both of us worked closely with Chuck Norris and his program for middle school students, Kick Drugs Out of America, now known as Kickstart Kids. The program teaches martial arts during the school day to middle schoolers, many of them at risk, and it reports having reached more than 120,000 students over more than 30 years. In 1996, Chuck personally thanked Mile High Karate by letter for raising $18,267 for the program, and he later visited our Arvada school to meet the students.

We saw firsthand what happened when kids who were drifting toward trouble found a teacher who believed in them, a team that expected them to show up, and a goal worth working for.

We want to be careful here. The best-known outcome claims for that program come from the program itself and its supporters, not from independent research. But independent research on similar programs exists. In a study of 60 high-risk boys at an urban middle school, half were randomly assigned to a traditional martial arts course and half to a waiting list. The martial arts group improved on a number of behavior

measures, and none of the six students permanently expelled during the study came from the martial arts group (Zivin et al., 2001). It is one small study, not proof. It matches what we saw with our own eyes.

That same commitment continues in Thornton today. For more than 20 years, Amanda and Stephen Christensen have run before- and after-school enrichment programs in the Jefferson, Adams and Brighton school districts. The programs teach character lessons through martial arts, give 100 percent of the funds raised back to the schools, and Mile High Karate donates its instructional time and materials.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME

- **Practice the ABCs.** Role-play simple situations at dinner: "What would you do if someone at recess grabbed your ball?"
- **Practice the strong voice.** Let your child practice their "Stop! Leave me alone!" at home. Make it fun, but make it loud.
- **Make telling safe.** Make sure your child knows that telling you or a teacher about a problem is courageous, not tattling.
- **Back up the rules.** If your child ever uses their martial arts to show off or hurt someone, support the instructor's consequences. The rule only works if everyone keeps it.

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"This school is quite magical!! It teaches and propels the students mind toward positive outcomes in many situations. The community and family feels authentic and genuine!! They really go above and beyond to take martial arts to the next level!! My Nephew is learning that he has a voice and how to defend himself."

— CHARLES CORDIER, UNCLE OF A STUDENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"Mile High Karate put on an awesome Women's Self Defense Class for us and it was amazing. Such great information, excellent instruction and valuable lessons for us all...."

— KATIE ANDERSON, WOMEN'S SELF-DEFENSE CLASS ATTENDEE, COLORADO, FACEBOOK RECOMMENDATION



CHAPTER 7

Fitness, Coordination and Every Kind of Learner

> *Martial arts is one of the few activities where every child plays the whole game, every class, at their own level.*

Today's children sit more than any generation before them. Screens at school, screens at home, screens in the car. Parents feel it, and many come to us saying some version of "I just want him off the couch and moving."

Martial arts is a remarkably complete form of exercise for a growing body. In a single class, a child works on:

- **Strength:** push-ups, sit-ups, squats and holding strong stances and positions.
- **Cardiovascular fitness:** fast-paced drills, combinations on pads or targets, and conditioning games.

- **Flexibility:** stretching every class, so kicks get higher, movement gets freer and bodies stay healthy.
- **Balance:** kicking on one leg, staying balanced against a partner, falling safely and landing under control.
- **Coordination:** using both hands and both feet, the left side and the right, often in a set pattern.
- **Spatial awareness:** moving around other students safely, judging distance to a target or a partner.

And it does all this while children are having fun, earning rewards, and working toward a goal. That combination is the secret. A child who is excited about their next belt will happily do push-ups they would never do on their own.

No bench, no cuts

In many team sports, the most athletic children get the most playing time, and the rest wait. In a martial arts class, every child is moving the whole class. Each child is measured against their own progress, not against the star of the team. The slower learner and the natural athlete both earn their next belt by meeting the standard, at their own pace.

That is why martial arts so often becomes the activity that finally "clicks" for children who never found their place in sports.

> *"Martial arts has helped our bored ten-year-old find passion in a sport."*
>
> **— KELLIE O., MOTHER OF TWO**

A boy who started reluctantly described his transformation:

> *"In 2013 my mom and dad started me. I didn't want to do it because I thought it was a waste of my time. I was very shy. I used to be that person who sits around all day and did not exercise except for P.E. The only thing I liked to do was play games and not do homework. I overcame that habit and I'm trying to overcome others."*
>
> **— XAVIER CHAMBERS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

What the children say about their bodies

Children are often surprised by how strong they become. Their Black Belt essays are full of it:

> *"Stretching I think is most important since I feel a lot more able to do stronger punches and higher, better-looking kicks. Since I joined, I've been able to go about eight inches lower in my splits. Stretching also helps relax me, since I sometimes feel stressed by all that is going on, and it somehow makes me feel like I had a reset."*
>
> **— TEDDY SIMMONS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**
>
> *"Karate has improved my strength incredibly. I could probably not do as many good push-ups as I do now. It's also improved my physical health. Karate has kept me physically fit."*
>
> **— TALEI MIKULAS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE, FIVE YEARS OF TRAINING**

One nine-year-old even ran a 5K with his father, who was raising money for charity as part of his own Black Belt requirements:

> *"I felt very tired, however I was very happy to see that I could actually do the race... We came together as a team and I feel that being part of karate gave us this opportunity to grow as a unit."*
>
> **— A NINE-YEAR-OLD BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

Coordination and the youngest students

For children ages three to six, martial arts is a wonderful way to build the basic motor skills they need for school and every other sport: balance, crossing the midline of the body, telling left from right, following a sequence, and controlling big movements. Classes for this age are short, playful and full of games, but each game has a purpose.

Parents of young children often notice coordination improvements first, followed by better listening. One father described his nine-year-old's progress over several years: greatly improved motor skills, and better emotional management along with them.

Every kind of learner

Some of the most moving letters we receive come from parents of children with special needs: children on the autism spectrum, children with ADHD, sensory differences, coordination challenges, or anxiety. These parents often arrive nervous, having been turned away or quietly discouraged elsewhere.

We want to be careful here. Martial arts is not therapy, and it is not a replacement for medical or professional care. But the structure, repetition, clear expectations and individual attention of a well-run class can be a very good fit for many of these children. Here is what some of their parents wrote:

> *"My son is on the spectrum and has had vision issues that affect his balance and coordination, and he had been in physical therapy for a couple of years... Absolutely love this place, and so does my son!"*
>
> **— JOSHUA ATENCIO, FATHER**
>
> *"They genuinely care about their students and the families. They have a staff of wonderful instructors that take the time needed with each student, with patience... Our son, who is on the spectrum, has been able to thrive alongside the rest of his family, something we are more than grateful for."*
>
> **— HEATHER HOWITT, MOTHER**
>
> *"The teachers are knowledgeable in child development and know how to motivate the students with positive reinforcement. They have been able to pick up on my youngest child's sensory issues and made accommodations for her to succeed."*
>
> **— AIMEE C., MOTHER OF TWO**
>
> *"I was skeptical about putting my kids in a karate school at first. My son has special needs... Two years in, I have to say that I'm quite pleased. The instructors work well with my son. My daughter is also doing quite well and has shown improved confidence and skill."*
>
> **— J. F., FATHER**

If your child has special needs, please tell the instructor before the first class. Our instructors will ask questions, listen to what works at home and at school, and plan accordingly. Several Mile High Karate Thornton instructors have experience with children with ADD, ADHD and autism, and head instructor Ali Christensen worked four years as a registered behavioral therapist for children with autism. Some children do best starting with a private lesson or two before joining a group.

Safety in training

Parents reasonably ask about injuries. In a quality children's program, safety comes first. Classes start with a warm-up and stretching. Contact is carefully controlled and supervised. Sparring is introduced gradually, only after children have learned control, always with

protective equipment, and every child learns to stop the instant the instructor says so. (Our own teacher, Grand Master Jhoon Rhee, is credited with inventing the foam safety equipment now used around the world, after a student was hurt at a 1969 tournament.) Bumps and bruises happen in any active pursuit. Ask us exactly how we manage risk: its contact rules, how it matches partners by size and skill, who supervises student helpers, and what it does when a child is hurt.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME

- **Make practice part of the day.** Ten minutes of stretching, form practice or movement drills before dinner adds up fast.
- **Practice together.** Ask your child to lead you through their warm-up. You will both get a workout.
- **Protect the basics.** Sleep, water and good food make a visible difference in how your child trains.
- **Talk to the instructor about any health concerns,** including asthma, allergies, past injuries or medication, so they can plan for your child's safety.

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"Absolutely love this place & so does my son! My son is on the spectrum … We decided to give Mile High Karate a try since it worked so well with his older sister. We went with the Mile High Karate location located on 120th & Colorado Blvd because we found that Ms. Christensen was educated in teaching/working with kids who are on the spectrum…. AND WE COULDN'T BE MORE RELIEVED & HAPPY!!!!! He took to it like a fish in water! … & for that I'll always be eternally grateful for Mr. & Mrs. & Ms. Christensen. MHK has completely changed our son in the most beautiful way sincerely. I HIGHLY recommend Mile High Karate on 120th & Colorado Blvd. They're caring, flexible, understanding, FUN!, compassionate, & REAL! Give them a try sincerely."

— JOSHUA ATENCIO, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"Feeling Black Belt Excellent Today!! … Mental strength and the way we live our life style is of the utmost importance, far beyond what I can do physically! I have never felt better than I do now! … My strength is increasing, my balance and flexibility is improving, my attitude and life style is changing, and my self-confidence and determination has never been higher! I can't thank [my instructor] enough for pushing and encouraging me to join Mile High Karate, letting me know my physical disabilities will not stop me from earning my Black Belt! He was inspiring and everyone at Mile High Karate is constantly encouraging me, supporting me, and expressing how proud they are of me each day! … Be Black Belt Excellent Today, I BELIVE IN YOU!"

— JESS SCHULTZ, ADULT STUDENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"They genuinely care about their students and the families. They have a staff of wonderful instructors that take the time needed with each student with patience. They also have the staff to teach more advanced material, a win-win. High energy, yet focused on the "art" of martial arts. Our son, who is on spectrum, has been able to thrive along side the rest of his family, something we are more than grateful for."

— HEATHER HOWITT, PARENT, WESTMINSTER, GOOGLE REVIEW



CHAPTER 8

Perseverance: Learning Not to Quit

> *Quitting is a habit. So is finishing. Childhood is when children learn which one they have.*

If we could give every child just one lesson from the martial arts, it would be this one: *keep going when it gets hard.*

Today, many children can quit almost anything with no consequence. Don't like the piano? Stop. Soccer is boring? Try something else. Each time, a child learns a small lesson: when something gets hard or uncomfortable, the answer is to leave. Over years, those small lessons add up to a habit.

Martial arts training teaches the opposite habit. Not by forcing children to suffer, but by giving them a long-term goal, breaking it into small, achievable steps, and surrounding them with people who believe they can do it.

The plateau every child hits

Here is something every parent should know before they start: **at some point, your child will want to quit.** In our schools, it most often happens once the newness has worn off and the techniques get harder. Sometimes it comes after a test that did not go well, or when a friend stops coming.

This is normal. It is not a sign that martial arts is wrong for your child. It is the moment the real learning begins.

How you handle that moment matters more than almost anything else in this book. We cover it in detail in Chapter 13. For now, read what children write when they look back on the hard parts:

> *"Some days I don't feel like going to class or practicing, but when I get there I always have fun and am glad that I went."*
>
> **— TURNER BENTON, AGE 9**
>
> *"Even when I feel like I have nothing else to give, there is always a little bit more of myself that I can give... Persistence will make you stronger."*
>
> **— BRYCE MARTINEZ, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

When a child does not pass

In a quality program, not every child is promoted the first time they try. That might sound harsh, but it is one of the most valuable things a school can do. A belt that cannot be failed means nothing. A belt earned after a setback means everything.

One nine-year-old boy did not earn the stripe he needed to move up to the next level with his team. Here is what he chose to do:

> *"Rather than not go, I got permission from my instructor to participate in the Saturday test with my teammates. I went through the entire day, running and working out and testing with my team. I knew that I would not get my new belt, but I wanted to be with my team, and wanted to show my instructor that I would not give up. Karate taught me to be a team player and to not give up."*
>
> **— TURNER BENTON, AGE 9**

Picture that little boy running and working out all day long for a belt he already knew he would not get that day. That is character. And he went on to Black Belt training.

Here is an even harder story, from a girl who was cut from Black Belt preparation not once but twice:

> *"People keep asking me why I am not a Black Belt like my mom. Well, all I told them is, 'I got cut.' The reason why is because I had no confidence in myself… After that, I became angry, and that anger turned into determination. I proved to both myself and my instructors that I am good enough to be a Black Belt… Then last year I got cut again, right before my forms test. I was very disappointed and upset… When I tried out for the next cycle, I tried my hardest. I believe I was one of the strongest people on that team… I will be a Black Belt. Nothing can stop me now!"*
>
> **— MAKENNA BARTOS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

As a parent, it is painful to watch your child fail. Every instinct says to protect them. But think about what that girl learned that she could never have learned from a participation trophy: that disappointment can be turned into determination, and that she is stronger than her setbacks.

Decide early

Over fifty years of teaching, I have noticed something that every Black Belt I have promoted has in common. They set the goal early, usually at white belt. Not at brown belt. Not "someday." They decided they were going to be Black Belts, and they treated it as a definite goal, not a maybe.

Every new family makes a choice, whether they realize it or not. Choice one: train for a little while, then move on. Choice two: become a Black Belt. "Maybe" sounds like a third choice, but it isn't. In my experience, families who stay at "maybe" rarely make it. Families who decide usually do.

The good news is that the path is clearer than it sounds. Your child doesn't go to school wondering, month to month, whether they will finish. They just keep going, and the grades keep coming. Martial arts works the same way. Come to class two or three times a week, practice at home, and you keep earning the chance to be promoted. Each belt still has to be earned, but steady attendance is what makes that possible.

Even champions lose

My co-author Jeff Smith held the PKA World Light Heavyweight Championship from 1974 to 1980 and defended it seven times. He finished his professional career with 32 wins and 1 loss. That one loss, in January 1980, is part of his record, and he has never hidden it.

I share that with children often. Even a world champion loses sometimes. What made Jeff a champion was not that he never lost. It was that he kept training, kept learning, and kept getting back in the ring. That is perseverance, and it is exactly what we want your child to learn.

Perseverance through life's interruptions

Sometimes the obstacle is not a test but life itself: an injury, a move, a new baby, a family illness. One mother who trained alongside her children had foot surgery and later a long pregnancy break, nearly a year in total away from the mat. She came back both times:

> *"During that time I came to really realize how important karate was to me and that quitting was not an option. The discipline to come each week, to work your hardest to become stronger... improved my physical health as well as my mental health."*
>
> **— SARAH PUCKETT, MOTHER OF THREE**

Her children watched her do that. Imagine the lesson they learned.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME

- **Decide on the goal together, early.** Talk about Black Belt as a family goal from the start, the same way you talk about finishing school.
- **Expect the plateau.** When your child says "I want to quit," don't panic and don't negotiate on the spot. Say, "I hear you. Let's talk to your instructor."
- **Never let a bad day decide.** Have a family rule: we don't quit on a bad day. We can talk about it on a good day.
- **Share your own stories.** Tell your child about a time you wanted to quit and didn't. Children need to know adults struggle too.
- **Celebrate comebacks.** When your child earns a promotion after a setback, make a bigger deal of it than an easy pass.

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"We chose the right place for our sons journey to black belt. We are almost there with high goals to accomplish in the future. The confidence he has learned to have in himself would be worth it on its own but that is not all that has been gained. It's life long lessons that haven't always been easy. Moving forward when he wanted to give up. Taking responsibility for his own actions. Failures that have turned into triumph. We gained a circle of great people that have become a second family!"

— ANGELA COVINGTON, PARENT, THORNTON

"So far Milehight Karate has been a great experience, my now 9 year old son has greatly improved his motor skills as well as his emotional management, the key is to trust the method in the end the results are very worth it."

— DANIEL ALMARAZ, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW



CHAPTER 9

Leadership: From Student to Role Model

> *A Black Belt is not someone who has learned everything. A Black Belt is someone ready to help others learn.*

One of the most surprising things parents discover about a quality martial arts program is how early it begins asking children to lead. A young student a few belts along might be asked to show a brand-new white belt how to tie their belt. An older child might lead the warm-up. A teen might help run a class for the youngest students, always under an instructor's supervision.

This is by design. In the schools we work with, the path to Black Belt is also a path to leadership.

Leadership is taught, not just hoped for

At Mile High Karate, committed students join the Black Belt Club, and Black Belts can go on to the Leadership Team, which turns students into team members, then leaders, then teachers. Grand Master Oliver and Grand Master Smith call it the Leadership Factory. At Mile High Karate Thornton, well over 30 percent of active students are Black Belts. In it, students get extra training not only in martial arts, but in skills like:

- Speaking in front of a group
- Setting and tracking goals
- Helping and encouraging lower-ranked students
- Being on time, prepared and dressed for class
- Taking responsibility for the training space: setting up, cleaning up, putting equipment away
- Reading and discussing books on success and character (Mile High Karate students read assigned books at every stage and take book tests on them)

Leadership students are easy to spot on the floor, and younger students look up to them. That visibility matters. When a child knows that six-year-olds are watching how they behave, they start behaving like someone worth watching.

> *"As I progressed through each belt level, I was becoming more of an example to lower ranks... When I moved into Black Belt preparation, I was so proud of myself because I got more responsibilities, like cleaning and setting things up."*
>
> **— XAVIER CHAMBERS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

Children who love to teach

We are always moved by how many children, when given the chance, discover they love helping others learn:

> *"I really enjoy being a class assistant, and it gives me the opportunity to help others and meet new people who are starting karate!"*
>
> **— SARA HALLOCK, AGE 11**
>
> *"I enjoy teaching and showing others what I know. I got that inspiration from watching the instructors and seeing what kind of impact they have on all of the students, young and old. I have gained the confidence to share my knowledge with others even when they are older than me."*
>
> **— DOMINIC CONNELLY, STARTED AT AGE 5**
>
> *"I really love teaching classes, especially teaching beginners. Some of the kids are really cute and fun to work with. Sometimes they can be difficult too."*
>
> **— COLMAN O'MARA, AGE 10, PREPARING FOR BLACK BELT**

That last line made us laugh, because every instructor in the world knows exactly what he means. A ten-year-old who has learned that teaching is rewarding *and* sometimes difficult has learned something real about leadership.

The girl who struggled with respect in second grade, whom you met in Chapter 5, became one of the school's student leaders:

> *"I am still a team leader today, but I am working to be an assistant. I am also glad to help lower belts learn new forms and combinations. I especially enjoy working with the youngest karate students."*
>
> **— MAKENNA BARTOS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

Leadership outside the school

The goal, of course, is not to produce children who lead only in class. It is to produce children who lead everywhere. Parents tell us about it at school, on teams, at church and in the neighborhood. One young student described a new responsibility his mother gave him:

> *"This year I have a new responsibility to work with four other kids that live on my street. My mom put me in charge of making sure we all walk together and get to and from the bus stop without any problems... My leadership skills have helped me to lead people. In school it has helped me problem-solve and given me the ability to have relationships with other kids."*
>
> **— A NINE-YEAR-OLD BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

Where it leads

The leadership lessons children learn on the mat show up years later in careers. A young woman who started in an after-school program and became a head instructor wrote:

> *"Teaching martial arts may not be a traditional job, and people may not fully understand when I tell them, but I know that I've gained all the experience I need for any workplace. I've learned the qualities of a dedicated employee and successful leader, and I know that I'll be able to take my training and apply it anywhere I go in life."*
>
> **— TIFFANY G., 3RD DEGREE BLACK BELT**

A student who started at age nine wrote this at sixteen:

> *"I am now 16 years old and I am an instructor with my 2nd Degree Black Belt, and I truly am loving it. Martial arts has presented me with so many opportunities to succeed at goals in every aspect of my life, whether that be in martial arts, my acting career, my education, and even my home life."*
>
> **— RICK GARCIA, 2ND DEGREE BLACK BELT INSTRUCTOR, AGE 16**

And a mother who earned her Black Belt alongside her children wrote that her seven-year journey helped her thrive in her professional career. Another mother, a program manager, put it this way:

> *"Karate has also increased my confidence at work. As a program manager, I am required to make critical decisions and guide my team to success. I feel like I am better prepared to tackle any obstacle that may get in our way."*
>
> **— CARLY HALLOCK, MOTHER AND BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

Why we care so much about this

We have spent our careers in the martial arts. But both of us have also spent decades coaching business owners, and we can tell you that the qualities that make a great Black Belt are the same ones that make a great employee, manager, parent and citizen: showing up, keeping your word, taking responsibility, helping others succeed, and staying calm under pressure.

When your child earns a Black Belt in a quality program, they will not only have learned a martial art. They will have spent years practicing leadership, in front of real people, with real responsibility. Very few children get that kind of training anywhere else.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME

- **Encourage leadership opportunities.** If your child is invited to a leadership program or to assist in class, see it as an honor and support it.
- **Give real responsibility at home.** A pet to feed, a younger sibling to help with homework, a meal to help plan. Leaders grow from responsibility.
- **Ask leadership questions.** "Did you help anyone in class today?" is as important a question as "What did you learn?"
- **Read together.** Read the same books your child is assigned, from *The Black Belt Mindset* to *Maximum Achievement*. They make great dinner conversation.

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"This program has been great for my family. We started my son when he was 4 years old, and I soon joined him on the floor. I was able to spend 100s of quality hours with my boy in an activity that we both could enjoy. My wife joined us a few years later. This program helped teach my son leadership skills, public speaking skills, self confidence, and how to set and achieve any goals he creates for himself. The owners and instructors care for every student, and want nothing more then for all to succeed."

— MARC NEMETH, PARENT, WESTMINSTER, GOOGLE REVIEW

"I started with mile high karate when I was 5 yrs old. I've gone from my white belt to my 3rd degree. I've had the wonderful opportunity to work with and be taught by large number of incredibly talented, intelligent, and honorable instructors. In my time teaching I've seen the positive impact we are able to make on people's lives. Its a great place to start your martial arts journey."

— BESSAIRE BUSTON, BLACK BELT ALUMNUS, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"This is a high-quality martial arts school, run by good people, that delivers on their promise to develop self-defense, physical fitness, and leadership skills in their students."

— HARRISON SNIDER, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW



PART THREE

The Journey to Black Belt

Family classes, the path ahead, great instruction and your role as a parent.

SuccessfulKids.com



CHAPTER 10

When Parents Get on the Floor Too

> *Most activities ask parents to drive, pay and watch. Martial arts is one of the few where you can train right beside your child.*

We saved this chapter for the middle of the book because it is, for many families, the heart of the story. Again and again, the most emotional letters we receive are not about a child's confidence or grades. They are about what happened between a parent and a child when they started training together.

We encourage every parent to train with their child in our family classes. Nothing else we know of builds the bond, the shared goals and the follow-through at home that training side by side does. Whether you train or not, we ask every parent to stay for every lesson and stay fully engaged, because your child is watching to see whether this matters to you. If your schedule makes that hard some weeks, tell your instructor. There are other ways to stay involved, listed below.

"Nope. No way. Totally out of my comfort zone."

That is almost word for word what one mother told her nine-year-old daughter, who had come home from a school assembly begging to try karate, and then begged her mother to join too:

> *"My response was, 'Nope, no way, totally out of my comfort zone. I will sit on the side and watch, thank you very much.' I was so uncoordinated and awkward I couldn't even imagine being out on the floor. Finally, I agreed to attend one class, mostly just to get her to stop asking me. I was so self-conscious, I just knew everyone on the side was watching me and laughing at me. A strange thing happened, however. About halfway through the class, I started to have fun and enjoy myself!... Going through this journey with my daughter has been an incredible experience. We have grown closer with each step!"*
>
> **— CARLY HALLOCK, MOTHER, TRAINING TOWARD BLACK BELT WITH HER DAUGHTER**

Her daughter remembered it slightly differently:

> *"I begged and begged and begged her to do it with me. She said, 'No way, out of my comfort zone!' I kept begging until she agreed to take a class with me. It's three years later now and we are still going!"*
>
> **— SARA HALLOCK, AGE 11**

In time, mother and daughter were preparing to test for Black Belt together.

Memories your children will keep

One father explained exactly why he decided to step out of the parent seats:

> *"The thing that made karate so attractive was that the kids and I would be on the floor learning at the same time. Karate gave me the opportunity to not just watch the kids participate in something, but also be part of the experience with them. I wanted them to have memories of their dad out on the floor with them, watching me struggle and overcoming obstacles... I thought I knew my kids pretty well, and karate has raised that to a whole new level."*
>
> **— STEVE TRUJILLO, FATHER OF TWO**

Read that line again: *watching me struggle and overcoming obstacles.* How often do our children get to see us learn something new, be bad at it, and get better? That may be one of the most valuable lessons a parent can ever model.

His wife joined next. She worked nights and could only make weekend classes, so she started two belts behind the rest of the family:

> *"I saw other adults on the floor and thought to myself, I can do all that kicking and punching... I joined so we as a family can participate and start this journey as a family. I was two belts behind them. I had to play catch-up and double-tested on one of my tests so I could be at the same level as the rest of my family... I learned that I can be successful in whatever endeavor my life leads me."*
>
> **— MY TRUJILLO, MOTHER OF TWO**

Their son summed it up in one line: "Before I knew it, my entire family was in the karate program."

Hundreds of quality hours

Parents who train with their children often use the same words: *quality time.* Not time in the same car, each looking at a separate screen. Real time, working toward the same goal, sweating together, cheering each other on. Each of you progresses at your own pace and earns your own rank, but the journey is shared.

> *"We started my son when he was 4 years old, and I soon joined him on the floor. I was able to spend hundreds of quality hours with my boy in an activity that we both could enjoy."*
>
> **— MARC NEMETH, FATHER**
>
> *"I have enrolled my entire family and we all enjoy our time here learning as a family, and this experience has brought us closer as a family."*
>
> **— GREG MCGINN, FATHER**
>
> *"My husband and I also joined the program and we are about a year and a half away from Black Belt. It's been such an amazing journey... The fact that we could join as a family and work toward a common goal is priceless."*
>
> **— KELLIE O., MOTHER OF TWO**

What it does for you

Parents who train are often surprised by how much it does for *them*. They get fitter, calmer and more confident. Many say it is the first exercise they have ever stuck with.

> *"My kiddos have been doing karate for almost two years. My husband and I finally joined and are on our third class, and my body has never felt so amazing!"*
>
> **— LINDSEY GRIFFIN, MOTHER**
>
> *"I'm not the most 'athletic' person. I didn't take any physical education after sixth grade, never played sports, and didn't really consider exercise fun… I am in the best shape of my adult life, and I continue to surprise myself with what my body can do. I also feel better knowing that if the situation arises I could protect myself and my family, and that my family can defend themselves."*
>
> **— SARAH PUCKETT, MOTHER OF THREE**
>
> *"I am in terrific shape at a time in life when many men start to fade… I distinctly remember signing the banner on the wall stating I would be a parent of a Black Belt."*
>
> **— RICH O'MARA, FATHER, WHO TRAINED TOWARD BLACK BELT ALONGSIDE HIS SON**

One single mother of four boys started training at 45, after months of watching from the side:

> *"Never had I imagined that I would become a karate student at the age of 45… My karate career started out on the sidelines watching my son. The month of May came around and moms were encouraged to join for free all month. I mustered up the courage to jump on the floor with him and I never left. Now we are a family of three on the karate floor! I have also gained new friends that I will cherish forever. It has been challenging, but one of the best decisions I have ever made."*
>
> **— TINA GILL, MOTHER OF FOUR**

If you cannot train yet

If an injury, a health condition or your schedule keeps you off the mat for now, you are still part of the team, and your role still matters. Watch class whenever you can, with your phone away. Learn the terms and the

creed. Practice with your child at home. And join a family class as soon as you can. Parents who stay engaged become friends, cheer at tests and celebrate together. One father who stayed for every class wrote:

> *"While I do not participate, I am at all of the classes with her. We both have bonded with other parents and students... This is our new 'country club'! These are the types of people I want, and want my daughter to hang out with."*
>
> **— JEFF B., FATHER OF AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD**

Whether you are on the mat or beside it, be fully present. That is what turns a class into a family journey.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Join a family class.** Ask about family classes at Mile High Karate Thornton, designed for parents and children to train together. It is one of the most powerful things you can do to multiply your child's results.
- **Start with one class.** Just try it. Your child will never forget the first time you stepped onto the mat beside them.
- **If you train, let your child teach you.** Children light up when they get to correct Mom or Dad's stance or grip.
- **Be there when you can.** When you watch, put the phone away. Your child looks over to see if you are watching.

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"We love MHK! They have become like family for the past 8 years. My daughter started when she was 6 and I couldn't imagine where we'd be without karate. They have helped all of us grow both physically and personally. We love the school and staff so much, my son and I also joined 18 months ago. A family that kicks together, sticks together!!"

— KADEE KLINE, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"I love Mile High Karate! I enrolled my son to help with discipline and focus and because he really wanted to do it. After a week he wanted me to do the 2 free weeks with him. I obliged and thought it would help acclimate him. Honestly, I probably love it more than he does!! That was over a year ago!! I look forward to class and all of the instructors are amazing!! It's like having an extended family where you also learn amazing skills and exercise! We love it so much we committed to [the Black Belt Club] and working towards our black belts! I have yet to be bored or tired of it. There is always something more challenging to learn. And I cannot stress enough how amazing every single person who works and trains is! They are the icing on the cake! It's so worth it! If you've ever thought about martial arts this should be your first choice!"

— JAM CANDI, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"My kiddos have been doing karate at Mile High for almost 2 years, my husband and I finally joined and are on our third class and my body has never felt so amazing ! I recommend Mile High Karate 1000/10!!! All of the instructors are awesome. my kiddos really enjoy Mile High Karate!"

— LINDSEY GRIFFIN, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"Children and adults wanting to study martial arts should do so at MHK in Westminster. The owners ... are professional, caring, and have a systematic and holistic process to help their students meet their goals. The black belt instructors are patient, energetic and before you know it you will realize that they have pushed you out of your comfort zone and at some point either you or your child be performing beyond your perceived capacity. MHK students not only learn self defense but they are taught the principles to become better students , employees, community leaders."

— CHRISTYLE RUSSELL, PARENT AND ADULT STUDENT, WESTMINSTER, GOOGLE REVIEW



CHAPTER 11

The Path to Black Belt

> *The road to Black Belt is long enough to change a child, and structured enough that any committed child can finish it.*

Parents naturally want to know: What happens along the way? How will my child's progress be measured? What age is right? This chapter answers those questions. At Mile High Karate, every rank has a written requirement, and students advance by meeting it, not by time served and never by payment. Your instructors will explain exactly what your child's next rank requires.

A child's own explanation

One of the clearest descriptions of the journey we have read was written by a karate student, not an instructor. Here it is, lightly shortened:

> *"Karate is just like school. White to orange belt is like the earlier years, where you learn the basics. Then, from orange through high red, you continue to build on the basics by adding more difficult moves. The brown through high brown belts are focused on what you have already learned, but making it better, faster and more powerful. Then comes Black Belt preparation, which is like high school, preparing you to enter the world of a true Black Belt. Next is the Conditional Black Belt, which is like college, fine-tuning your skills and discipline. You progress through each level like grades in school before finally achieving your Black Belt."*
>
> **— XAVIER CHAMBERS, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

We could not have said it better.

The stages

Stage	What your child learns	What it builds
Getting started	Class routines, how to greet the instructor and partners, safe movement, and first techniques: a ready stance, a punch and a front kick	Comfort, safety, and a feel for whether the school is right for your family
Building fundamentals	The core skills of American Freestyle: blocks, kicks, combinations and forms, plus basic self-defense, bully prevention and stranger safety	Coordination, attention, consistency and the habit of coming to class
Applying skills	Supervised partner work: drills, self-defense practice and controlled sparring with protective gear	Judgment, self-control and adaptability, and perseverance through the first plateau
Becoming dependable	Handling corrections well, training safely with every partner, helping a newer student	Persistence and responsibility
Significant milestones	Belt graduations, intramural tournaments, demonstrations and attitude stripes	Pride in progress that was truly earned
Black Belt and beyond	Black Belt, then the Black Belt Club, the Leadership Team, higher degrees and supervised chances to teach others	Mastery, mentorship and a lifelong practice

Is there a timetable?

At Mile High Karate, a consistent student typically earns a Black Belt in about 36 to 48 months, training at least two classes a week. That is a typical range, not a promise. Every rank still has to be earned against the written standard, and we will never promise a Black Belt by a set date. Ask your instructors which milestones fit your child's age, what each requires, and how progress will be reviewed.

What we can tell you is what makes the difference: steady attendance, practice at home and a family that stays involved. The goal is steady development measured against meaningful standards, not speed. The question is not how fast your child gets there, but what they build along the way.

Be cautious of any program that promises a Black Belt by a set date, no matter what. A belt is only as valuable as the standard behind it. A Black Belt that takes real effort to earn means something to your child for the rest of their life.

Promotions and milestones

At Mile High Karate, students earn stripes in class and new belts at belt graduations, in front of their families. A promotion should never be a surprise: your instructors will explain what each rank requires and tell you when your child is ready. Children also show good grades, good behavior at home and completed Home Challenges, signed by parents and teachers. That kind of character recognition supports a child's growth, while technical rank always rests on the written Mile High Karate standard.

Black Belt preparation

As students approach Black Belt, Mile High Karate candidates complete informal pre-tests, a formal pre-test, a written examination and a Black Belt community service project. Then they finish at the three-day Black Belt Retreat in Breckenridge, Colorado, training and testing alongside senior Black Belts, Grand Master Oliver and Grand Master Smith. It is designed to be hard, because a Black Belt should be. A few weeks later, new Black Belts receive their belts on stage at the annual Black Belt Extravaganza, held every year since 1990.

Students and parents describe it as one of the most meaningful experiences of their lives:

> *"It was really tough for the first few weeks until my body got stronger. I got stronger physically and I can do more push-ups, burpees, and my split is getting closer to the floor. I look forward to each day and tell myself that I'm getting stronger, faster and more flexible. I'm here to support my team."*
>
> **— MY TRUJILLO, MOTHER TRAINING WITH HER FAMILY**
>
> *"The team truly works together, struggles together, pushes through the challenging times together, and you never feel like you are in this alone."*
>
> **— CARLY HALLOCK, MOTHER**

The right age to start

- **Ages 4 to 6: Little Ninjas.** Short, playful classes focused on listening, following directions, balance, coordination and basic safety. Children this age learn through games, so Little Ninjas is designed specifically for them, not a big-kid class with little ones mixed in.
- **Ages 7 to 12: Karate for Kids.** The core children's program. This is where most of the character development in this book happens, and where many children begin their path to Black Belt.
- **Teens.** A powerful age to train. Teens benefit enormously from the confidence, fitness, self-defense skills and positive peer group, at the very age when they need them most.
- **Parents and adults.** As you read in Chapter 10, it is never too late. Mile High Karate has promoted Black Belts as old as 76.

There is no perfect age. The best time to start is when your child is interested and your family is ready to commit.

Black Belt is a beginning

Finally, the most important thing to understand about the path: **Black Belt is not the finish line.** In Korean and Japanese tradition, a first-degree Black Belt is often described as a serious beginner, someone

who has mastered the basics and is now ready to truly learn. Many of our students continue for years after Black Belt, earning higher degrees, becoming instructors, and passing on what they have learned.

> *"I plan to continue my martial arts training and reach my 2nd Degree Black Belt... I am ready and excited to start learning new forms and combinations."*
>
> **— COLMAN O'MARA, AGE 10**
>
> *"I've been lucky enough to have been a part of this school for more than 22 years! The skills they teach go way beyond kicking and punching. I can't wait to open my own school and continue to help kids develop confidence, self-discipline and so much more!"*
>
> **— ZACHARY, BLACK BELT AND INSTRUCTOR**

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"My son started taking Karate at MHK Thornton 2 weeks before he turned 5 years of age. The staff has been nothing but outstanding in guiding my son into the little man I see today (he is now 10 years of age) and almost a certified 1st Degree Black Belt! The staff provides techniques in self-defense as well as manners! They hold the students accountable but the students hold the instructors accountable as well. If you are looking for a fun-loving learning environment don't hesitate and join today!"

— JENNIFER WING, PARENT, THORNTON

"I really thought it was just going to be some kind of fun activity. It didn't really mean too much to me. ... And then, as I kept going, it just consumed my every moment, except for when I was at school. All my friends are in martial arts, all my friends trained at the same school with me. ... So it just became my life and then just learning, with the goal-setting that is part of the program, one of those things that everybody sets when they first start here is black belt. And then along the way, you just become that. It really does just become your goal, especially as a little kid."

— KYLE GALLOWAY, MILE HIGH KARATE BLACK BELT, THORNTON

"I have been going here for 16 years, and through my training here, I have been helped with my confidence and ability to focus on projects. Throughout my youth, the instructors walked me through anything I needed help with. I have never had any issues with communication or events. I highly recommend this school for adults and children. Mile High Karate isn't just a karate school its a family and a positive community."

— TROY C., STUDENT FOR 16 YEARS, THORNTON



CHAPTER 12

What Great Instruction Looks Like

This chapter is written by Grand Master Jeff Smith, Chief of Instruction for Mile High Karate and Martial Arts Wealth Mastery.

A good instructor will motivate. A great instructor will inspire.

I have been in the martial arts since 1965. I was a junior-high paperboy in Kingsville, Texas, when I talked my way into Jhoon Rhee's college karate club. I have been training, competing and teaching ever since.

Nine years later I won the Professional Karate Association World Light Heavyweight Championship. I fought on the closed-circuit card of the Ali–Frazier "Thrilla in Manila." I was the first recipient of the Bruce Lee Award. I am proud of all of that. But I can tell you honestly that all of it started with teachers who were willing to teach a paperboy.

That is why, for the past several decades, my real passion has been training instructors. Stephen and I wrote a book on it called *Extraordinary Teaching*. Today I spend my time helping school owners and their instructors teach better. If your child trains in a school that works with us, the people teaching your child are part of that effort.

So let me tell you, parent to parent, what great instruction looks like, and what to watch for when you visit a class.

1. Every child is known by name

A great instructor uses your child's name, often. “Great kick, Emma!” lands very differently from “Great kick!” Watch a class and count how many children hear their own name in the first ten minutes. In a great class, the answer is all of them.

2. Correction that builds a child up

Every child needs correction. That is how they improve. But how it is delivered matters enormously. We train instructors to correct in three steps:

1. **Praise something real.** “Sam, your hands are up. Excellent guard.”
2. **Correct one thing.** “Now turn that back foot a little more on your kick.”
3. **Encourage.** “Do that and it's going to be a great kick. Show me!”

Then, and this is the part most people miss, the instructor watches for the improvement and praises it. The same three steps work just as well for a new form or a sparring combination. A child who is corrected this way does not feel criticized. They feel coached.

Parents notice the difference. One mother in our review study described instructors who “discipline the students without scolding or yelling” and teach respect “by example.” That is exactly right.

3. Structure with energy

Children thrive on structure, and they also need energy and fun. A great class has both. It starts on time, follows a clear plan, and moves quickly from one activity to the next, so there is no time to get bored or into trouble. At the same time, the instructor's voice, enthusiasm and games keep children excited.

> *“The classes are great for focus, discipline and have great structure.”*
>
> **— DESTINY MOAD, MOTHER**
>
> *“High energy, yet focused on the ‘art’ of martial arts.”*
>
> **— HEATHER HOWITT, MOTHER**

4. Every child working, all class long

In a great class, children are not standing in long lines waiting for a turn. Everyone is moving, practicing or partnering. If you see a lot of waiting, ask about it.

5. Standards that mean something

Great instructors care about your child too much to hand out belts for showing up. They hold a real standard, and they help each child meet it. When a child is not ready for promotion, a great instructor tells the child and the parent honestly, and gives them a clear plan to get ready.

6. They notice when your child is missing

This one surprises parents. In great schools, if your child misses a class or two, someone calls. Not to scold, but because they care and they know that consistency is everything. Parents in our review study mentioned this again and again:

> *"They really care about the kids. It's obvious in the way they teach, call you if you miss class, and help you stay on track with training."*
>
> **— JOHN S., FATHER**
>
> *"Even when parents are busy, as we get, instructors take the time to call or catch you to give quick progress reports... It's important to have people that you feel really care about your kids."*
>
> **— A PARENT OF SEVERAL STUDENTS**

7. Instructors who keep learning

The best instructors never stop being students. They take instructor courses, attend trainings, and are coached by more experienced teachers. At Mile High Karate, instructors train every week using *Extraordinary Teaching*, the system Grand Master Oliver and I wrote together: observed teaching with specific feedback, and promotion based on demonstrated teaching ability, not rank alone. A school that invests in its teachers is investing in your child.

8. They are role models first

Your child will copy the instructor's attitude, language and habits, good and bad. Great instructors know that. They are on time, dressed professionally, positive, respectful to every student and parent, and they practice what they teach. Over the years, many of the best instructors I have trained started out as shy little white belts themselves. They know exactly how your child feels on the first day, because they felt it too.

> *"The owner and his wife, along with their staff, all began karate at a younger age, and are good people. They take interest in the students and they make it fun."*
>
> **— STEVE D., GRANDFATHER**

Inspire, don't just motivate

Here is the lesson I teach every instructor I train. Motivation comes from outside: a sticker, a stripe, a cheer. It works, and we use it. But inspiration comes from inside. It happens when a child looks at their instructor, or at a Black Belt a few years older, and thinks: *I want to be like that.*

When that happens, you won't have to push your child to go to class. They will be waiting by the door, dressed for class.

That is what great instruction does. That is what we train every instructor to do. And that is what you should expect for your child.

— Grand Master Jeff Smith

10th Degree Black Belt, Karate and Tae Kwon Do; former PKA World Light Heavyweight Champion

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"My daughter loves it and this school has taught her so much. They take the time to even give her private lessons when she needs the extra help."

— MALLORY BUSS, PARENT, WESTMINSTER, GOOGLE REVIEW

"Very nurturing environment- each trainer was so patient with our almost 4 year old. We look forward to more classes!"

— KELLY PARPOVIC, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"Great School for training. My kid has made tremendous progress because of the knowledgeable teachers and staff here. They really care about the kids, its obvious in the way they teach, call you if you miss class, help you stay on track with training."

— JOHN S., PARENT, THORNTON



CHAPTER 13

Your Role as a Parent

> *Instructors can teach your child for a few hours a week. You are with them for the rest. The children who get the most from martial arts almost always have a parent who is fully on the team.*

After more than fifty years of watching families, we can tell you with confidence which children reach Black Belt and get the life-changing results you have read about in this book. It is not the most athletic children. It is not the most naturally confident or the most disciplined at the start. It is the children whose **parents are committed partners.**

Here is what those parents do.

The ten habits of a Black Belt parent

1. Set the goal with your child, at the start. The families who reach Black Belt decide early that Black Belt is the goal. Some schools invite parents to sign a banner or a goal sheet that says "I will be the parent of

a Black Belt." One father still remembered doing it years later. Make the goal a family goal, and talk about it like you talk about finishing school.

2. Make attendance non-negotiable. Consistency is everything. Two or three classes a week, on set days, built into the family calendar. Treat class like school: you go unless you are sick. Children who attend regularly progress faster, enjoy it more, and are far less likely to want to quit.

3. Be on time and ready. Arrive a few minutes early, dressed for class, with water. Rushing in late and frazzled starts the class badly. A calm arrival teaches your child to respect the commitment.

4. Train with them, or watch with them. Your child will look over to see if you are watching. The best thing you can do is train beside them in our family classes. If you can't, watch class with your eyes up, not on your phone, and stay engaged: learn what they are learning and practice it with them at home. A thumbs-up from the bench can mean more to a seven-year-old than any trophy.

5. Let the instructor coach. This one is hard for loving parents. Please don't call out corrections from the side or review mistakes on the car ride home. Leave the coaching to the instructor. Your job is to be the biggest fan. If you have concerns, share them privately with the instructor, not in front of your child.

6. Ask the right questions. On the way home, skip "Why didn't you kick higher?" Try these instead:

- "What was the best part of class today?"
- "What did you learn that you could teach me?"
- "Did you help anyone today?"
- "What was hard? What will you do about it?"

7. Support practice and home assignments. A few minutes of practice at home makes a big difference. Sign challenge sheets and home assignments. Notice your child's acts of self-discipline before they tell you about them.

8. Speak well of the instructors and the school. Children take their cues from you. If you respect the instructors, your child will too. If something bothers you, address it directly with the school, away from your child.

9. Celebrate the milestones. Come to promotions, belt ceremonies and tests. Bring grandparents. Take pictures. Put the certificates on the wall. Children work hardest for the things their family celebrates.

10. Be patient with the plateau. Progress is not a straight line. There will be weeks when your child seems stuck. That is when your steady support matters most.

When to really worry

There are times when a child's reluctance points to a real problem: an injury, a conflict with another child that adults have not noticed, an anxiety that needs attention, or a school that simply is not a good fit. Listen to your child. Talk openly with the instructor. A good school will want to know, and will work with you to solve it. What we are urging is not to ignore your child, but to avoid letting a bad day make a permanent decision.

"I want to quit."

At some point, almost every child says it. When your child does, how you respond can shape not only their martial arts journey but how they handle difficulty for the rest of their life. Here is the approach we recommend, refined over thousands of families:

1. **Stay calm and listen first.** Say, "I hear you. That sounds frustrating. Tell me what's going on." First make sure nothing is seriously wrong (see "When to really worry" above). If it is ordinary frustration, go to class and talk about it afterward.
2. **Find the real reason.** "I want to quit" almost always means something more specific: *this new technique is hard, I didn't get promoted, my friend stopped coming, I'm tired, someone in class bothered me.* Ask gentle questions until you find it.

3. **Talk to the instructor right away.** Good instructors deal with this every week. They can give your child extra help, a new challenge, a leadership role, or simply a word of encouragement. Often the issue passes quickly.
4. **Remind your child of the goal.** "Remember, we decided you're going to be a Black Belt. Black Belts are just white belts who never quit."
5. **Hold the line, kindly.** You would not let your child quit school in third grade because fractions are hard. A child who learns that hard things are temporary, and that they can push through, has learned one of life's most important lessons.

And one parent's advice to other parents was simply: *trust the method. In the end, the results are very worth it.*

The long view

One mother who trained as a child and later brought her own son put it best. As a child, she learned "not just confidence, but the discipline and work ethic, the whatever-it-takes attitude, perseverance to get through hard things." Those lessons "stuck with me as I got older." When she became a parent, she wanted the same for her son.

That is what you are really giving your child: not a hobby, but lessons that will stay with them long after they hang up their uniform.

> *"I truly believe that these classes are one of the most important gifts we can give our kids."*
>
> **— MAKAYLA B. D., MOTHER, FOUR YEARS IN**

MILE HIGH KARATE THORNTON FAMILIES SAY

"I was a student at MHK when I was a kid and the life lessons I learned stuck with me as I got older. When I became a parent, I wanted my son to have those same life lessons. Not just confidence, but the discipline and work ethic, the whatever it takes attitude, perseverance to get through hard things. My son is very introverted and struggled a lot with social anxiety. Since he has been in karate, our extended family compliments him all the time on his confidence and leadership abilities. … karate is really our second home. … I love how supportive the MHK community is and I encourage everyone I meet to try martial arts. No matter your age. I am 45 and still training, I like to try to keep up with the kids!"

— MINDY DAVIS, PARENT AND FORMER STUDENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW

"There is no enough words to express how awesome this Karate School in Thornton is. Family run, with that unique old school touch that makes you feel welcome and at home. You don't have to spend much time at this place to capture the dedication and passion the students radiate. Been a parent of two is hard to be able to give what my kids need in all areas of their development and wellbeing. Joining this school has been the best complement for our kids. They've been able to learn structure and discipline in a fun way. Our oldest son have found great role models that have inspire him, and we've seeing so many amazing attributes flourish in him, in just a couple of weeks. … Thank you Mile High Karate in Thornton for all you do for the community."

— JULIAN ROMERO, PARENT, THORNTON, GOOGLE REVIEW



CHAPTER 14

Questions Parents Ask

> *These are the questions we hear most often from parents. For schedules, uniforms and tuition at Mile High Karate Thornton, call or text (303) 280-1839.*

What is the best age to start?

There is no single best age. Children as young as four can begin in our Little Ninjas program, a class designed for their age, focused on listening, coordination and simple safety skills. Ages seven to twelve are the heart of Karate for Kids. Teens benefit enormously too. The right time is when your child is interested and your family is ready to make a real commitment. See Chapter 11 for more.

How often should my child train?

For most children, two classes a week is the standard we recommend, and some train three. Once a week is usually not enough to build skills and habits, and progress feels slow, which can discourage a child.

Consistency matters far more than intensity.

My child is very shy. What if they won't participate?

This is very common, and good instructors are experts at it. Many shy children watch the first class or two before joining in. Some do better starting with a private introductory lesson. Let the instructor take the lead, stay nearby where your child can see you, and don't force it. Most shy children are soon fully participating, and many of the most confident Black Belts in this book started exactly this way.

Will martial arts make my child aggressive?

A quality program is built to prevent that. Children learn self-control, conflict avoidance and the rule that their skills are for self-defense only. Confident children rarely need to prove anything. See Chapter 6.

Is it safe? What about injuries?

A well-run children's program puts safety first: proper warm-ups, careful supervision, controlled contact and protective equipment for striking practice. Sparring is introduced gradually, only once children have learned control, and every child learns to stop the instant a partner or instructor says stop. Bumps and bruises can happen in any active pursuit. Ask us about our contact rules, how it matches partners, and what it does when a child is hurt. Always tell the instructor about any medical conditions or past injuries.

Does my child need to be athletic or in shape?

No. That is one of the best things about martial arts. Children start where they are and are measured against their own progress. Many children who never found their place in team sports thrive here. Fitness is a result of training, not a requirement for starting.

My child has special needs. Is martial arts right for them?

Many children with ADHD, autism, sensory differences, anxiety or coordination challenges do very well in a structured martial arts class. Talk with the instructor before you start about what works for your child at home and at school. Some children benefit from a few private lessons first. You will find several of these families' stories in Chapter 7.

Why does a quality program cost more than a recreation-center class?

This is a fair question, and you deserve a straight answer.

A professional martial arts school is a very different thing from a once-a-week class in a gym. You are paying for trained, coached instructors, a dedicated facility, a structured curriculum that runs from white belt to Black Belt and beyond, regular progress tracking, character education, leadership training, and staff who call you when your child misses class. The best schools invest heavily in instructor training, because the quality of the teacher matters more than anything else.

One grandfather, who paid for his granddaughter's training, did the math himself:

> *"When you look at the rate versus the number of hours of training available, it was very competitive to what Mom pays for her dancing."*
>
> **— STEVE D., GRANDFATHER**

We also believe parents should never be "nickel-and-dimed." Mile High Karate keeps things simple: a clear tuition that covers what your child needs, explained up front, with no surprise charges. Before you enroll, ask us exactly what is included, such as uniforms, belt tests, equipment and special events.

It is a real investment, and it should fit your family's budget. We will explain your options honestly, without pressure.

Why does Mile High Karate offer longer programs instead of month to month?

Because the results in this book take years, not weeks. Mile High Karate starts new families with an introductory program, so you and your child can experience the training before making a bigger decision. Once your family knows the school and has seen results, you may be invited to commit to a longer-term goal, such as Black Belt. That second step is not about locking you in. It is about committing, together, to a goal worth reaching.

Ask us to explain every program and policy clearly, in writing. You should understand exactly what you are agreeing to. A school that is confident in its teaching will be happy to answer every question.

What happens if we miss classes for vacation or illness?

We offer make-up classes and flexibility for illness, vacations and family events. Let us know when you will be away, and we will help your child catch up when you return.

Can my child do martial arts and other activities?

Absolutely. Many students play team sports, music and more. Martial arts often makes children better at other activities, thanks to improved focus, coordination and fitness. The key is protecting a consistent martial arts schedule so progress continues.

Should I train too?

Yes, we strongly encourage it. Family classes at Mile High Karate Thornton let you train right beside your child, and the families who do it tend to see the biggest results. See Chapter 10. Either way, we ask parents to stay engaged: watch class when you can, talk about what your child is learning and support practice at home.

What should my child wear to the first class?

Comfortable exercise clothes, with no shoes on the mat. No experience or special fitness is needed. Bring water, and remove jewelry. Long hair should be tied back. All minors should be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

What style does Mile High Karate teach?

American Freestyle, which grew from Grand Master Jhoon Rhee's Tae Kwon Do. It combines Korean kicking, traditional forms and practical self-defense, and it rests on the three foundations Grand Master Rhee taught: practical self-defense, personal development and the art of the forms. Grand Master Oliver trained under Jhoon Rhee, and Grand Master Smith was a Jhoon Rhee Black Belt before he became a world champion. In the end, though, the style matters less than the teaching: whether the program teaches character alongside technique, has well-trained instructors, and gives your child a clear path of goals.

How do belts work at Mile High Karate?

Students earn stripes in class and colored belts at belt graduations, each time they meet the written requirement for their rank. Near the top come Black Belt preparation, then Conditional Black Belt, then Certified 1st Degree Black Belt, and after that higher degrees for those who keep training. Rank is earned, never bought, and never tied to payment.

How long does it take to earn a Black Belt?

About 36 to 48 months of consistent training, at least two classes a week, finishing with the pre-tests, a written exam and the three-day Black Belt Retreat in Breckenridge. Steady attendance, home practice and an involved family make the difference.

How will I know it's working?

Watch for small changes early on: more eye contact, a stronger voice, better listening, more “yes, ma'am” and “thank you,” chores done without being asked, owning up to mistakes, asking for help, pride in a new stripe. Ask your child's instructor for regular progress updates, and keep an eye on report cards. Many parents tell us the first person to notice the change is a teacher or grandparent.



CHAPTER 15

Choosing the Right School and Your First 30 Days

> *Not all martial arts schools are alike. Visit, watch a class, ask questions, and trust what you see.*

We wrote this book to help you understand what martial arts training can do for your child. But results depend on the school. Here is how to tell a great one from an ordinary one, and how to get your child off to the strongest possible start. We invite you to hold Mile High Karate Thornton to every item on this list.

Visit and watch a class

The best way to judge a school is to watch a real children's class, ideally one your child would join. Arrive a few minutes early, sit where you can see everything, and notice the details.

The parent's checklist

The instructors

- ☐ Instructors use children's names often.
- ☐ Corrections are positive and specific, without yelling or embarrassing anyone.
- ☐ Instructors are dressed professionally, on time, energetic and respectful.
- ☐ The school can tell you how its instructors are trained and who coaches them.
- ☐ The instructors are patient with beginners and with children who are struggling.

The class

- ☐ Class starts and ends on time and follows a clear plan.
- ☐ Every child is active most of the time, with little standing in line.
- ☐ Children are clearly having fun, and the class is still disciplined.
- ☐ Character lessons are part of the class, not just techniques.
- ☐ Safety is visible: warm-ups, close supervision, protective gear for sparring, and clear stop rules.
- ☐ The school can explain its contact rules and how it matches partners by age, size and skill.
- ☐ Student helpers are always supervised by an adult instructor.
- ☐ There is a clear plan for injuries, and an easy way for children and parents to raise a concern.

The program

- ☐ There is a clear path from beginner to Black Belt and beyond, and the school can explain it.
- ☐ Promotions have real standards, and children earn their ranks. The school can tell you where its lineage comes from.
- ☐ Schoolwork and behavior at home matter to the school.
- ☐ There are leadership opportunities for students as they progress.

- ☐ Self-defense and safety lessons are age-appropriate and emphasize avoiding conflict.

The school and the people

- ☐ The facility is clean, safe and well kept.
- ☐ Staff greet you, answer your questions and explain how things work.
- ☐ Other parents seem happy, engaged and friendly.
- ☐ Tuition and policies are explained clearly and in writing, with no pressure.
- ☐ The school offers an introductory program so your child can start before you commit long term.

Questions to ask

- ☐ "What do the first few weeks look like for a new student?"
- ☐ "How do you handle a child who is shy, or who is having a hard time?"
- ☐ "How will I know how my child is progressing?"
- ☐ "Who trains your instructors?"
- ☐ "What exactly is included in tuition?"

If a school checks most of those boxes, you have probably found a good home for your child.

Read the reviews, but read them well

Online reviews can help. When you read them, look past the star ratings for the themes we found in our study of 2,677 reviews: Do parents talk about instructors who care? A family atmosphere? Real changes in their children? Those are the signs of a school that delivers. You can read more than 300 reviews and stories from Mile High Karate families at MileHighKarate.com.

Your first 30 days

The first month sets the tone for everything that follows. Here is how to make it count.

Before the first class

- Tell the instructor anything important about your child: shyness, special needs, medical conditions, recent changes at home, what motivates them.
- Talk to your child about what to expect: greeting the instructor, listening, trying new things, and that it is fine to feel nervous.
- Arrive early so your child can see the school, meet the instructor and get comfortable.

Week 1: Make it a great first experience

- Stay for the whole class. Your presence is reassuring. Better yet, ask about joining a family class so you can train together from the start.
- After class, ask what they enjoyed most. Praise their courage for trying something new.
- Help them learn the Mile High Karate Student Creed at home. It is often their very first assignment.

Weeks 2 and 3: Build the habit

- Set your class days and stick to them. Put them on the family calendar.
- Ask your child to teach you one thing from class each week.
- Start the home assignments: practice, challenge sheets, acts of self-discipline.

Week 4: Look at the progress

- Ask the instructor for a short progress update.
- Look for early changes: posture, voice, listening, manners.
- Celebrate the first stripe or belt.
- Talk with your child about the next goal, and the big one: Black Belt.

The moment that matters

Many parents tell us there was a moment, often in the first few weeks, when they knew they had made the right choice. Sometimes it is a teacher's note home. Sometimes it is hearing "Yes, ma'am" without a reminder. Sometimes it is simply the look on their child's face after earning a first stripe.

One boy described his first day in uniform. He had just finished a short after-school program, and his father brought him to the main school to continue:

> *"I was told to put it on, and then I had just put on my very first uniform. When I put the uniform on, I thought in my head, 'This is way too big for me,' and that this would start the journey to my Black Belt. And from that point on I wanted to obtain my Black Belt."*
>
> **— MATTHEW TRUJILLO, WHO STARTED IN THIRD GRADE**

Watch for that moment with your child. When it comes, you will know.

Ready for the first visit?

You don't need to have every answer before you start. Book an introductory lesson, bring this checklist, and see the teaching for yourself. The first visit commits you to nothing.

Book your child's first class at Mile High Karate Thornton →



PART FOUR

Stories and Next Steps

The stars who love it, the students and families who lived it, and a closing word from the authors.



Did You Know? The Stars Who Love Martial Arts

> *Movie stars, pop singers, athletes and business leaders could spend their free hours on anything. A surprising number of them spend those hours training. And when you listen to why, they talk about the same things parents tell us they want for their children.*

We want to be clear about why this chapter is here. A famous name doesn't make an activity right for your child. What makes it right is good instruction, a safe and positive school, and a family that stays involved.

Still, it says something when people who could do anything choose the training floor, week after week and often for years. Many of them started as children. Some started as nervous adult beginners. Here is what they say they got from it, in their own words.

Confidence that is earned, not given

Taylor Lautner took his first karate class at age six, in a small-town school in Michigan. By age 11 he had won three junior world championships, and a few years later he was a star of the *Twilight* films. Looking back, he credits his training for what came after.

> *"It gave me the confidence, the discipline and the hard work."*
> **— TAYLOR LAUTNER, ACTOR, TO ROLLING STONE**

Sydney Sweeney, one of the most in-demand young actresses in Hollywood, started training at age 12 and kept at it for years. She has said she fell in love with it, and she describes what it gave her as something she carries everywhere:

> *"It's a really cool skill and strength and power that I hold."*
> **— SYDNEY SWEENEY, ACTRESS, TO L'OFFICIEL**

Supermodel Kate Upton earned the first stripe on her white belt, and she posted about it with a line every child who has ever tested for a stripe will understand:

> *"I get a lot of belts for free but this one I earned!"*
> **— KATE UPTON, MODEL AND ACTRESS, ON INSTAGRAM**

That is the heart of it. Confidence that is handed to a child is fragile. Confidence a child earns, one stripe and one belt at a time, lasts.

Actor Michael Jai White started training at age seven. He went on to earn black belts in seven different martial arts, and he is plain about what training meant to him as a boy:

> *"I was an insecure kid growing up in a harsh environment. Martial arts was my armour."*
>
> **— MICHAEL JAI WHITE, ACTOR, TO COACH MAGAZINE**

Ke Huy Quan, who played Short Round in *Indiana Jones* as a child and won an Academy Award decades later, earned his black belt as a young man. He told NPR that getting it left him "so eager to go out and show the world what I can do."

And Halle Berry, after months of hard training for an action role, summed up what so many students feel the first time they finish something they thought was beyond them:

> *"This process really taught me what I'm made of."*
>
> **— HALLE BERRY, ACTRESS, TO FLICKS**

Focus in a distracted world

Our children are growing up surrounded by screens that are designed to pull their attention in a hundred directions. Many stars say training is the one place where that stops.

> *"When you're doing [it], you can't think of anything but [it]. You have to focus fully on it."*
>
> **— HENRY CAVILL, ACTOR, TO MEN'S JOURNAL**

Robert Downey Jr. began training in 2003 and has kept training for more than 20 years. On *The Oprah Show* he described what it does for him:

> *"It improves your focus. It just does so many things. It makes you feel you're a part of something you respect."*
>
> **— ROBERT DOWNEY JR., ACTOR, ON THE OPRAH SHOW**

Basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar trained with Bruce Lee while he was a college star. He credits that training with making him a better athlete:

> *"As a result, I became stronger, faster and a much more intense player."*
>
> **— KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR, FROM BECOMING KAREEM**

Mark Zuckerberg, who started training in his late thirties, told podcaster Lex Fridman that activities which demand full attention are "really important to my mental health and the way I just stay focused."

Discipline and hard work

Ask a Black Belt what training taught them, and "hard work" almost always comes up. The stars are no different.

> *"It taught me a lot of things at a young age — discipline, hard work — nothing comes without hard work."*
>
> **— TAYLOR LAUTNER, ACTOR, TO E! NEWS**

Pop star Demi Lovato trained for years and earned a belt rank, something she never expected of herself. On *The Joe Rogan Experience* she put it simply: "I'm a singer... and then hard work pays off."

Michelle Yeoh, the Oscar-winning actress who has done her own fight scenes for decades, describes the standard she holds herself to:

> *"Either you do it properly or you don't do it at all."*
>
> **— MICHELLE YEOH, ACTRESS, TO ALAIN ELKANN**

When Jackie Chan worked with a young Jaden Smith on a film, he was so impressed with the boy's talent that he gave his father a piece of advice:

> *"Don't waste your son's talent — continue training."*
>
> **— JACKIE CHAN, TO THE BBC**

Respect, humility and kindness

This may surprise parents who have only seen martial arts in action movies. The people who know it best talk far more about respect and kindness than about fighting.

Jackie Chan has trained since early childhood. His advice to parents could hang on the wall of every good school:

> *"When you are learning about a martial art, it is about respect. You have to find a good teacher. If you knock somebody down — stop. Bring them up."*
>
> **— JACKIE CHAN, TO THE BBC**

Jet Li, one of the most skilled martial artists ever to appear on film, said the same thing in a different way:

> *"I never want to hurt people. That's not a true martial art."*
>
> **— JET LI, ACTOR, TO THE SEATTLE TIMES**

Film director Guy Ritchie has trained for more than 20 years. He says the training "becomes a way of life," and that "what it teaches you is humility and respect."

Nick Cannon started training at age five. He talks about the values it gave him, and about the instructor who modeled them:

> *"It teaches you values like integrity and perseverance and courage and respect."*
>
> **— NICK CANNON, ENTERTAINER, TO YAHOO**
>
> *"Doing the right thing, even when no one is watching — that's what it means. I pass that lesson on to my children."*
>
> **— NICK CANNON, ON HIS CHILDHOOD INSTRUCTOR**

Calm under pressure

Many of these stars live under enormous pressure, and many say training is how they handle it.

British music star Tinie Tempah has trained for years and earned a purple belt. He doesn't single out any one style:

> *"Any martial arts discipline is great for the mind, the body, the soul."*
>
> **— TINIE TEMPAH, MUSICIAN**

Demi Lovato told Us Weekly, "I feel the most confident when I'm in the gym." And Henry Cavill, Robert Downey Jr. and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar all describe the same thing: a place where the noise stops and the mind gets quiet.

When the parents train too

Some of the most moving stories come from stars who started training *because of their children*, or who started as nervous adults.

Mario Lopez, the TV host, trained as a boy. As a father, he wanted the same for his son:

> *"When I had my first son, he was very hyper and I wanted to teach him discipline, respect and self defense — all great attributes in life. Once I got him into it, I wanted to get into it too."*
>
> **— MARIO LOPEZ, TV HOST, ON THE VIEW**

He says he trains "for the sanity rather than the vanity," and that it teaches him "patience, humility, and problem-solving." That is exactly why we encourage parents to join our family classes. You get the same benefits, and you share the journey with your child.

Tom Hardy started training at about age 40. He admits he was intimidated at first, and his encouragement to adult beginners is worth reading twice:

> *"You're never going to be the best, it's impossible. But you can be better than you were, by coming, just coming and there's nothing to be scared of."*
>
> **— TOM HARDY, ACTOR**

Ed O'Neill, beloved as the dad on *Modern Family* and *Married... with Children*, trained faithfully for many years and earned his black belt. He said of the first class, "I was humbled on that first day. It changes you." He has called his black belt the greatest achievement of his life, apart from his children.

Bob Odenkirk trained for more than two years for a film. He is honest that the hardest part was feeling awkward as a beginner, and he describes training as a discipline "that you use your mind and body together." Every parent who steps onto the floor with their child will understand both halves of that.

Don't stop before Black Belt

Finally, a word of warning from a professional. Action star Scott Adkins trained in several martial arts as a boy, but stopped one of them before reaching Black Belt. Years later, after a long career in martial arts films, he still regrets it:

> *"I actually should have stayed and got my black belt but I didn't."*
>
> **— SCOTT ADKINS, ACTOR**

We hear the same thing from parents who quit as children. Chapter 8 shows how to help your child through the hard weeks so they don't end up with the same regret.

Where it started for us: a teacher of champions

Both of us learned from Grand Master Jhoon Rhee, the pioneer who brought his martial art to America in the 1950s and taught here for more than 50 years. His book, *Trutopia*, records some of the remarkable people who trained with him.

Muhammad Ali. In 1976 Grand Master Rhee worked with the heavyweight champion before his title defense against Richard Dunn. He taught Ali a fast, precise punch he called the "Accu-punch." When Dunn went down in the fifth round, Ali told a worldwide television audience exactly where it came from. Ali later said:

> *"Master Rhee taught me Accu-Punch; it is so fast, you can hardly see it."*
>
> **— MUHAMMAD ALI, QUOTED IN TRUTOPIA**

Bruce Lee. The two met at a karate championship in 1964 and became close friends. Bruce Lee stayed at Grand Master Rhee's home on his visits to Washington, and the two traded techniques: Lee shared his punching, and Rhee shared his kicks.

Tony Robbins. The motivational speaker met Grand Master Rhee at one of his own seminars and became his student. He earned his Black Belt, breaking four boards at his test in 1989. He later said of his teacher:

> *"I learned a deeper sense of joy for life from you."*
>
> **— TONY ROBBINS, QUOTED IN TRUTOPIA**

Rasta Thomas. The world-class ballet dancer earned his Black Belt with Grand Master Rhee. Parents of young dancers and gymnasts, take note:

> *"Learning Martial Arts from Grand Master Jhoon Rhee and receiving my black belt gave me the foundation to become a world class dancer."*
>
> **— RASTA THOMAS, BALLET DANCER, QUOTED IN TRUTOPIA**

Members of Congress. Starting in 1965, Grand Master Rhee taught free early-morning classes on Capitol Hill. Over the decades more than 350 members of Congress, from both parties, trained with him, and 19 earned their Black Belts. One of his first students from Congress was Joe Biden, who later became Vice President and then President. His students also included three Speakers of the House: Tom Foley, Newt Gingrich and John Boehner. Others included Senators Ted Stevens, Barbara Mikulski and Jim Jeffords, Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Carolyn Maloney, and Xavier Becerra, who later served as Secretary of Health and Human Services. Among his Black Belts were Mike Espy, who became Secretary of Agriculture, Senator Ted Stevens, Senator Jim Jeffords, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney and Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. Jackson lost more than 30 pounds preparing for his Black Belt test. In 1975 he even staged friendly Republican-versus-Democrat exhibition matches before 5,000 people in Washington, and the event made the cover of *Parade* magazine.

One of those Black Belts, former Congressman Bob Livingston, wrote that he "had never been athletic as a child." He trained at 7:00 a.m. three mornings a week for years, and he remembers it this way:

> *"One of my proudest memories was when I finally emerged with a Black Belt."*
>
> **— BOB LIVINGSTON, FORMER U.S. CONGRESSMAN, IN TRUTOPIA**

Grand Master Rhee summed up everything he taught in a short verse that his students around the world still learn. It is a fine thing for any child to memorize:

> *"When I am truthful, my heart is beautiful. When my heart is beautiful, people love me. When people love me, I am happy."*
>
> **— GRAND MASTER JHOON RHEE**

What this means for your child

None of these people needed martial arts. They had money, fame and every other choice in the world. They chose to train because of what it gave them: confidence they earned, focus in a noisy world, the habit of hard work, respect for others, and calm under pressure.

Your child doesn't need to be famous to get the same benefits. They need a good school, a good instructor, a family that stays involved, and the patience to keep going.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME

- Ask your child who their heroes are, then look up together whether that person trains. You may be surprised.
- Read one of the quotes in this chapter aloud at dinner and ask, "What do you think they meant?"
- Point out that every one of these stars started as a beginner who couldn't do much at all.
- When your child earns a stripe, remind them what Kate Upton said: some things you get for free, but this one you *earned*.

The quotes in this chapter come from published interviews, broadcasts and the stars' own social media posts, as noted after each quote. No celebrity named here is connected with this book or with any school that uses it.



In Their Own Words

> *Before a student tests for Black Belt at Mile High Karate, they write an essay: "What Martial Arts Has Done for Me." We have read more than a thousand of them. Here are some of our favorites, along with letters from parents, shortened but otherwise in their own words.*

"A skinny little twig with lots of muscles"

> *"Before karate I was a small, skinny little nobody who had no muscle and could barely defend himself. My school was having an after-school activity that I went to, and I was immediately hooked. Afterwards I joined and took to it like a fish in water.*
>
> *First, karate has given me something to do during the week besides play video games all day. It gives me something to look forward to because I know that I will have fun. Next, I had friends before I started karate, but now I have even more. I have made ten new friends since I started a little over two years ago. They are my friends and will always be my friends.*
>
> *Karate has also given me something else to cheer about: my massive muscles! I used to be a skinny little twig with no muscles at all. Now I am a skinny little twig with lots of muscles. I have also gained a lot of endurance, and I am able to withstand a lot both physically and mentally. I am really grateful for karate and all of the things that it has given me."*
>
> **— SEAN ROBINSON, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

"A sheltered, shy little girl"

> *"Karate has given me self-confidence. I used to be afraid of what other people thought and always did what I thought other people wanted me to do. Before I came to karate I was a sheltered, shy little girl, but after a while I started warming up to people and I came out of my shell. Now I'm running groups in class and warming up the classes at the beginning of class.*
>
> *Since I started karate I have had better focus at school. I had so many troubles focusing in school before, but now I can focus a lot better. Karate has given me the willpower to do anything I put my mind to.*
>
> *Karate has also shown me how to be a leader. I've learned how to lead by example, not only in karate but in my personal life also. Kids my age tend to do the wrong things just to fit in, and I have learned that I can be the positive influence for them. Karate has inspired me to do the right thing for myself and other people."*
>
> **— RACHEL SMITH, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

"I control my own life"

> *"I started when I was 5½. Since beginning karate I have learned self-discipline by completing the self-discipline sheets, book club cards, attending classes and tournaments, and being part of a team.*
>
> *I have a better understanding of the dangers of the outside world. During class we have worked on what a stranger is and what to do if a stranger approaches and uses 'lures,' like 'I have some candy' or 'I lost my puppy, can you help me find him?' I know it is okay to make a lot of noise and say 'Stranger! Stranger! He's not my dad and he's trying to get me to go with him!' to draw attention and get help. I have also been grabbed during school recess and am able to easily get out of the grab and free myself.*
>
> *Karate has helped me gain confidence in public speaking and performing. I participated in a school talent show last year and had a lot of fun. Every month I memorize the word of the month and its definition and recite it to one of the Black Belts. Although there were times I didn't want to complete my conditioning log or homework cards, I am glad that I did.*
>
> *One of the most important things karate has done for me is help me understand that I control my own life. I am in charge of my future and the path I take to get there."*
>
> **— MATTHEW GASSER, AGE 8, BLACK BELT CANDIDATE**

"A better brother, son and friend"

> *"I started taking karate when I was 5 years old. It was something that looked and sounded really fun and cool. I had no idea that it would help me grow and become a better, stronger person. It has shown me how important it is to show respect not only to others, but to myself as well.*
>
> *On my journey to becoming a Black Belt, I have gained more confidence and knowledge about what kind of person I want to become... Some of the lessons have helped me figure out how to accept the things that I can't control, and change the things I can.*
>
> *Through karate I have gained the ability to accept criticism and advice from many different people in a positive way. I have been pushed out of my comfort zone in more ways than one to achieve my ultimate goal of becoming a Black Belt. I have been a better brother, son and friend because of what I have learned, and I will continue to strive to be a better person every day. This is what karate has done for me."*
>
> **— DOMINIC CONNELLY, STARTED AT AGE 5**

A father's letter

> *"Martial arts training has had a profound effect on my life and my family. My son came home from school with an after-school session flyer. He wanted to join, and I agreed to look into it. I watched him train for about three weeks before I finally had to join in myself. The moment I stepped onto the floor, my life changed for the better.*
>
> *I watched in amazement as my son and I both worked through the many stages of training. I saw the benefits my son was getting as he learned to follow instructions and, most notably, to speak to people with respect.*
>
> *The people around us are all in the process of doing something positive with themselves. This holds especially true for my son. He is surrounded by adults and peers that are motivated and working hard on something very wholesome.*
>
> *Life issues such as success, failure, big tests and seemingly insurmountable problems can all be experienced in an environment where the consequences aren't that detrimental. As my children go through the trials of their own lives, as young people and even in adulthood, they will have an excellent body of experiences to reference. How do you place a value on that?"*
>
> **— RICH O'MARA, FATHER OF TWO**

What parents wrote

"The best decision we made for our sons. Consistent character, leadership and personal development. Sustained athletic and intellectual growth. Owners and adult leaders who genuinely care about your kid."

— ELIZABETH GALENTINE, MOTHER OF TWO

"My son started two weeks before he turned 5. The staff has been nothing but outstanding in guiding my son into the little man I see today. He is now 10, and almost a 1st Degree Black Belt."

— JENNIFER WING, MOTHER

"We chose the right place for our son's journey to Black Belt. The confidence he has learned to have in himself would be worth it on its own, but that is not all."

— ANGELA COVINGTON, MOTHER

"They have become like family for the past eight years. My daughter started when she was 6, and I couldn't imagine where we'd be without karate. They have helped all of us grow, both physically and personally."

— KADEE KLINE, MOTHER

"Has done amazing things for all three of my children. All three of them, 13, 8 and 5, have begun to excel in school and around the house. The instructors genuinely care about each and every student."

— ANDREA FALKFINO, MOTHER OF THREE

"My daughter has learned mental and physical toughness, along with life skills that will last a lifetime."

— DOYLE DAVIS, FATHER

"Joining has been the best complement for our kids. They've been able to learn structure and discipline in a fun way. Our oldest son has found great role models who have inspired him, and we've seen so many amazing attributes flourish in him."

— JULIAN ROMERO, FATHER OF TWO

"The values our boy is learning are lessons that he will use throughout the rest of his life. I am so happy that we found this place."

> — JASON ANDERSON, FATHER

And one last line

We will close this section with the shortest essay ending we have ever loved. It was written by a nine-year-old boy, and it is exactly what we want for your child too:

"Karate makes me proud of myself."

— A NINE-YEAR-OLD STUDENT, PREPARING FOR BLACK BELT

A Closing Word

Dear Parent,

You have now met dozens of children and parents. A shy girl who broke her first board through tears while her team chanted her name. A boy who trained all day for a belt he knew he wouldn't get that day, because he wanted his instructor to see he would not give up. A girl who was cut twice and came back stronger. A mother who said “Nope, no way” and ended up preparing for her Black Belt beside her daughter. A father who wanted his children to remember watching him struggle and overcome.

None of these families were special when they started. They were ordinary families who made a decision, found good teachers, and kept showing up.

Your family can do the same.

Mile High Karate Thornton is part of the Mile High Karate family of schools that began in Lakewood in 1983. Amanda and Stephen Christensen and their instructors teach the same curriculum, character lessons and Black Belt standard you have read about in this book, and Grand Master Smith oversees instructor training and Black Belt testing. The school is also certified by the National Association of Professional Martial Artists (NAPMA) and Martial Arts Professional magazine. Certification is a commitment to keep improving, so ask us how it shows up in your child's classes.

Here is our invitation, and it is just one step: book your child's introductory lesson. Watch the teaching, ask every question you have, and look at your child's face as they step off the mat. Then decide.

Book your child's first class at Mile High Karate Thornton →

And if you decide this is right for your family, make the decision that every Black Belt family in this book made at the beginning: **set the goal.** Decide, together, that your child is going to be a Black Belt.

The moment you commit, everything changes.

We look forward to seeing your child on the mat, and one day, wearing a Black Belt.

With respect,
Grand Master Stephen Oliver and **Grand Master Jeff Smith**
with **Amanda and Stephen Christensen**, Mile High Karate Thornton

About the Authors

Grand Master Stephen Oliver, MBA

10th Degree Black Belt, Tae Kwon Do and Karate · Founder and CEO, Mile High Karate and Martial Arts Wealth Mastery

Grand Master Stephen Oliver began training in 1969 at the Jhoon Rhee Institute in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was teaching by 1974, and in 1975, at age 15, he opened his own school. In 1978 Grand Master Jhoon Rhee, the Father of American Tae Kwon Do, awarded him his 1st Degree Black Belt, and later his ranks through 6th Degree. While studying at Georgetown University, where he graduated cum laude in 1982, he worked as a head instructor and branch manager for the Jhoon Rhee Institute in Washington, D.C.

On August 6, 1983, with Grand Master Rhee's blessing, he founded Mile High Karate in Lakewood, Colorado. It grew to five schools within 18 months and six within 36 months, and he remains its Founder and CEO. Over five decades he has watched more than 1,000 students, from age 5 to age 76, earn their Black Belts.

He worked closely with Chuck Norris and Kick Drugs Out of America (now Kickstart Kids), which teaches martial arts to middle school students, and received a personal letter of thanks from Norris in 1996 for his fundraising for the program.

A school owner since 1975 and a business coach since 1985, he is the Founder and CEO of Martial Arts Wealth Mastery, one of the martial arts industry's leading coaching and consulting organizations for professional martial arts school owners, BJJ academies and MMA gyms. He also serves as CEO and Chairman of NAPMA (the National Association of Professional Martial Artists) and Publisher of *Martial Arts Professional* magazine. He earned his Executive MBA through the Executive Program at the Daniels College of Business at the University of Denver, and he is the author of 12 books.

He was promoted to 10th Degree Black Belt in April 2026 and inducted into the Official Taekwondo Hall of Fame in August 2026. Learn more at MartialArtsWealth.com and StephenCOliver.com.

Grand Master Jeff Smith

10th Degree Black Belt, Karate and Tae Kwon Do · Chief of Instruction, Mile High Karate and Martial Arts Wealth Mastery · Former PKA World Light Heavyweight Champion

Grand Master Jeff Smith has been in the martial arts since 1965, when he talked his way into Jhoon Rhee's college karate club in Kingsville, Texas, as a junior-high paperboy. He became one of the greatest fighters of his era. On September 14, 1974, he won the Professional Karate Association (PKA) World Light Heavyweight Championship, and he held that title until 1980, defending it seven times. On October 1, 1975, he defeated Karriem Allah in a heavyweight title fight on the closed-circuit card of the Muhammad Ali–Joe Frazier "Thrilla in Manila." He finished his professional career with a record of 32 wins and 1 loss, with 16 knockouts, and was the first recipient of the Bruce Lee Award.

He trained with Stephen Oliver at Jhoon Rhee's headquarters in the 1970s and sat on the board that tested him for Black Belt. He founded Jeff Smith Karate in 1981, was promoted to 10th Degree Black Belt in 2016, and serves as President of Sports Operations for PKA Worldwide. As Chief of Instruction for Mile High Karate, he is responsible for instructor training, Black Belt testing and development, and curriculum oversight, and he coaches Martial Arts Wealth Mastery member schools on teaching, student development and curriculum design. He is the co-author, with Stephen Oliver, of *Extraordinary Teaching*.

Like Stephen, he worked closely with Chuck Norris and Kick Drugs Out of America (now Kickstart Kids), which brings martial arts to at-risk middle school students.

His favorite lesson for students and instructors alike: "A *good instructor will motivate, but a great instructor will inspire.*"

Amanda and Stephen Christensen

4th Degree and 3rd Degree Black Belts · Owners and Instructors, Mile High Karate Thornton

Amanda Christensen, a 4th Degree Black Belt, and Stephen Christensen, a 3rd Degree Black Belt, own and operate Mile High Karate Thornton. They have taught martial arts to families in the Thornton and Westminster area with Mile High Karate since 2003, shortly after they began training alongside their two daughters.

For more than 20 years they have worked hand in hand with the community. They run before- and after-school enrichment programs in the Jefferson, Adams and Brighton school districts that teach character lessons through quality martial arts instruction. The programs give back 100 percent of the funds raised to the schools, and Mile High Karate donates its instructional time and materials.

Through the Mile High Karate system of instruction and leadership, the Christensens have developed an experienced team of Black Belt instructors who spend as much time training their teaching, communication and leadership skills as their martial arts skills. That team is led by their oldest daughter, Ali Christensen, a 4th Degree Black Belt and head instructor in Thornton. She began teaching the school's Little Ninjas at age 14, served six years in the Colorado Army National Guard, and worked four years as a registered behavioral therapist for children with autism.

Their mission is simple: recognize all positive growth, and give every student the tools to develop strong martial arts skills along with the skills they need to be successful and happy in life.

What the Research Says

> *Parents deserve more than testimonials. Here is a plain-English summary of what scientists have found, including where the evidence is strong, where it is mixed, and where it stops.*

The strongest evidence: randomized trials

In a randomized trial, children are assigned by chance to martial arts or to something else, usually regular physical education, and independent measures are taken before and after. These are the most trustworthy studies.

- **207 children, kindergarten to grade 5, three months.** Children taught traditional Tae Kwon Do with a deliberate focus on self-control improved more than PE children in self-regulation, prosocial behavior, classroom conduct and mental math (Lakes & Hoyt, 2004).
- **240 children, ages 7 to 11, an 11-week beginners' course.** Teachers rated the Tae Kwon Do children as having better attentional self-regulation and fewer conduct problems. Several other measures did not change (Ng-Knight et al., 2022).
- **721 children, 20 schools, five countries, one year.** Karate in place of PE produced small gains in grades, fewer conduct problems, and better fitness and balance (Pinto-Escalona et al., 2024).
- **Judo, three months.** Children improved their ability to stop and think before acting, independent of fitness gains (Ludyga et al., 2021).
- **283 young teens, 10 weeks.** A martial arts program improved resilience and self-confidence in their own abilities, but did not change aggressive behavior (Moore et al., 2019, 2023, 2024).
- **60 high-risk middle school boys.** A traditional martial arts course improved a number of behavior measures compared with a waiting list (Zivin et al., 2001).

Supporting evidence: university dissertations

Doctoral dissertations are reviewed by university faculty but are usually smaller and less often randomized. They add useful detail:

- **ADHD.** In a Hofstra University study of boys ages 8 to 11 with ADHD who trained twice a week, most of the predicted improvements appeared, including better homework completion, grades and class preparation, and fewer rule breaks (Morand, 2004). Smaller studies at UNC Greensboro and elsewhere reported gains in children's sense of competence and in attention.
- **What we know, and still need to learn, about sustained training.** A Wright State University evaluation of a martial arts program for children found behavior problems went down the longer children stayed (Esterman, 2011). An LSU study found no broad academic benefit from simply participating, but sustained participation was linked to higher reading scores (Kelley, 2019).
- **Teens.** Teenagers who trained in traditional martial arts reported less risk behavior, including less drug and tobacco use, than a national sample (Goldsmith, 2013).
- **How it is taught matters.** A Belgian study found that the style and teaching context made more difference to young people's aggression than years of training (Vertonghen & Theeboom, 2012).

What the evidence does not show

- Martial arts is not a treatment for ADHD, autism, anxiety or any medical condition. It can be a helpful complement to professional care.
- Results on aggression are mixed. A review of 12 studies found no overall link either way between martial arts participation and acting-out behavior in young people (Gubbels et al., 2016).
- Results depend on the program. Traditional, character-focused teaching has the best track record.
- Most studies are short. Long-term, Black-Belt-length studies are rare, which is why we share what we have seen over five decades as

experience, not as science.

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PARENT WORKBOOK

Worksheets for Your Family

Set the goal, track the habits and celebrate the milestones together.

SuccessfulKids.com

WORKSHEET 1

What We Want Our Child to Gain

Before you visit any school, decide what success looks like for your family. Tick what matters most, then write it in your own words.

Goal	Matters to us
More confidence, speaking up	☐
Better focus at school and at home	☐
Respect and self-control	☐
Handling bullies and staying safe	☐
Fitness and coordination	☐
Not giving up when things get hard	☐
Something we can do together as a family	☐

In our own words, the change we most hope to see:

WORKSHEET 2

Questions to Ask on Your First Visit

Bring this page with you. Write down the answers so you can compare and decide with confidence.

What do the first few weeks look like for a new student?

How do you handle a child who is shy, or who is having a hard time?

Do you offer family classes where I can train with my child?

How will I know how my child is progressing?

Who trains your instructors, and how often?

How is character taught in class each week?

What exactly is included in tuition, and are there any other costs?

How many classes a week do you recommend, and what if we miss one?

What does the path to Black Belt look like, and how long does it usually take?

WORKSHEET 3

What We Observed at the First Visit

Fill this in right after the introductory lesson, while it is fresh.

What to watch for	Yes	Not sure
The instructor learned and used my child's name	☐	☐
Every child was active, not waiting in long lines	☐	☐
Mistakes were corrected kindly and specifically	☐	☐
Character was taught, not just mentioned	☐	☐
Partners were matched sensibly and supervised closely	☐	☐
Parents were welcome to watch or join	☐	☐
My child left wanting to come back	☐	☐

What my child said on the way home:

WORKSHEET 4

Your First 30 Days

Tick each item as you complete it. The first month sets the tone for everything that follows.

Week	Action	Done
Before	Tell the instructor about your child: personality, needs, what motivates them	☐
Before	Talk with your child about what to expect: greeting the instructor, listening, trying new things	☐
Week 1	Stay and watch class whenever you can	☐
Week 1	Help your child learn the student creed or school rules at home	☐
Week 1	Ask about joining a family class	☐
Week 2	Put class days on the family calendar and keep them	☐
Week 2	Ask your child to teach you one thing from class	☐
Week 3	Start the home practice and character challenge sheets	☐
Week 3	Train beside your child in a family class	☐
Week 4	Ask the instructor for a progress update	☐
Week 4	Celebrate the first stripe, belt or milestone	☐
Week 4	Set the Black Belt goal together (Worksheet 8)	☐

Changes I have noticed this month:

WORKSHEET 5

Acts of Self-Discipline Log

Every time your child does something helpful at home, at school or in the community *without being asked*, write it here. Many schools recognize every ten verified acts, with an attitude stripe, a certificate or a word of praise in class.

#	What I did without being asked	Where	Parent initials
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

WORKSHEET 6

Family Training Log

Record every class you attend together, or every lesson you stay to watch. Consistency is one of the strongest predictors of success.

Date	Who trained	What we worked on	Best moment

WORKSHEET 7

Belts, Stripes and Milestones

Record each new belt, stripe or skill level your school recognizes, and how your child grew along the way. One day, this page will be one of your family's treasures.

Belt, stripe or milestone	Date earned	What my child learned

WORKSHEET 8

Our Family's Black Belt Goal

Every Black Belt family in this book made the same decision at the beginning: they set the goal. Fill this in together, sign it, and put it where your child will see it every day.

I, _____, am going to earn my Black Belt.

I will train _____ times every week, do my home practice, and never quit on a bad day.

Our next milestone: _____

When we will review progress with the instructor:

_____

The reason this matters to me:

_____

_____

_____

As my parent, I promise to train with you in our family classes whenever I can, to stay and watch whenever I am able, to cheer at every promotion, and to help you keep going when it gets hard.

_____ STUDENT

_____ PARENT

_____ INSTRUCTOR

_____ DATE

WORKSHEET 9

A Letter to My Future Black Belt

Write a letter to your child today. Seal it, give it to the instructor, and ask that it be read on the day your child earns a Black Belt.

Dear _____,

REFERENCE

A Parent's Glossary

The words your child will start using at home, explained for parents. Ask your instructors about any others you hear in class.

American Freestyle
The style Mile High Karate teaches. It grew from Grand Master Jhoon Rhee's Tae Kwon Do and combines Korean kicking, traditional forms and practical self-defense.

Attitude stripe
A stripe for character, not technique. Students earn one by completing a seven-day Home Challenge signed off by a parent.

Belt graduation
The ceremony where students receive a new belt in front of their families.

Black Belt and Beyond
The goal every Mile High Karate student sets: earn a Black Belt, then keep training, leading and teaching.

Black Belt Club
The program for committed students on the path to Black Belt, with its own levels and assigned reading.

Black Belt Extravaganza
The annual graduation show, held since 1990, where new Black Belts receive their belts on stage.

Black Belt Retreat
The three-day retreat in Breckenridge, Colorado, that completes every Mile High Karate Black Belt test.

Black Belt Success Skills
The eight skills taught in The Black Belt Mindset, from Goal Attainment to Positive Respect.

Bow
A sign of respect when entering and leaving the training floor, and to instructors and partners.

Community service project
A service project every candidate completes before the Black Belt pre-test.

Conditional Black Belt
The first Black Belt rank, a period of fine-tuning skills and discipline before Certified 1st Degree Black Belt.

Form
A set pattern of movements performed from memory. Forms build focus, memory, balance and precision.

REFERENCE

A Parent's Glossary (continued)

Home Challenge
A seven-day behavior challenge at home, signed off by a parent, that earns an attitude stripe.

Intramural tournament
A friendly Mile High Karate tournament in forms and sparring, held since 1985.

Key Word and Mat Chat
Each week's character lesson: a Key Word and a three- to four-minute talk at line-up.

Leadership Team
The program that turns Black Belts into team members, then leaders, then teachers.

Little Ninjas
Mile High Karate's program for children ages 4 to 6.

Pre-test
The informal and formal tests, plus a written exam, that come before the Black Belt Retreat.

Principles of the Black Belt
Modesty, Courtesy, Integrity, Perseverance, Courage and Indomitable Spirit.

Sparring
Controlled practice with a partner, with protective gear, introduced only after children have learned control.

Stripe
A small piece of tape on a belt marking progress toward the next rank.

Student Creed
The pledge written by Grand Master Stephen Oliver that every Mile High Karate student says in class.

Yes, sir / Yes, ma'am
How Mile High Karate students answer instructors, and soon, parents.

NOTES

Notes






"Karate makes me proud of myself."

— A NINE-YEAR-OLD STUDENT, PREPARING FOR BLACK BELT

What will martial arts really do for your child, and how do you choose the right school?

- What good training builds: confidence, focus, respect and resilience
- How to handle shyness, bullying, plateaus and "I want to quit"
- Why family classes multiply the results
- A first-visit checklist, so you can judge any school with confidence

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Written by Grand Master Stephen Oliver, founder of Mile High Karate, and Grand Master Jeff Smith, its Chief of Instruction, 10th Degree Black Belts with more than 100 years of combined teaching, with Amanda Christensen, 4th Degree Black Belt, and Stephen Christensen, 3rd Degree Black Belt, owners of Mile High Karate Thornton.

Mile High Karate Thornton is certified by the National Association of Professional Martial Artists and Martial Arts Professional Magazine.

Book an introductory lesson
MileHighKarate.com · ThorntonMHK.com