

Guidelines for teaching children's practice in kendo

Children are not miniature adults.

Problems arise when children are made to conform to an adult concept of sport training and exercise.

Children are more important than the activities in which they are engaged-the game is not the thing, the child is.

Children are susceptible to concussion if hit too hard and if anyone suspects a concussion they need to see the sensei immediately. See the Washington State Lysted Law regarding concussion in school sports.

The following is not intended to be a series of prescriptive statements but guide lines which need to be interpreted in the light of the individual child concerned.

Please note

Children and adolescents are experiencing continuous growth and development.

Their understanding and perception of the world is maturing

Their emotions are being refined, developed and coped with.

They are constantly learning new physical skills.

These things do not happen in synchrony with each other. In individual children the timing and speed of growth and development is unique and has a wide range of normality.

Physical development:

Body shape, size and proportions change. As well as height and weight changes, the relative proportions of head, trunk and limbs change during growth. Children continually have to readjust to a changing body size and its proportions.

Performance will alter as the result of this-sometimes to improve and sometimes to regress.

A poor performance is not necessarily due to indifference, laziness or stupidity.

Recognise that growth related changes affect both physical and psychological performance.

Don' rush kids.

Performance may actually decline during some periods of growth.

They have more joints in their bodies than do adults and their bones are different. The additional joints are the growth plates in bones which vanish at maturity.

These growth plates are cartilage and during periods of rapid growth are relatively wide and are susceptible to injury from blows or overuse.

Being hit too hard and too often can lead to specific growth plate injury not seen in adults.

The difference between adult and child in terms of greater weight, size and power will put most children off.

If the level of experience in terms of time in kendo is not much different, then, in the excitement of jigeiko the inexperienced adult is likely to misjudge their strikes and this can lead to unreasonable discomfort and/or injury.

If you have a junior of between 16-18 years who is able and experienced then practice with adults may be appropriate but again supervision and care need to be exercised because of the difference in adult/child status.

□.

Development of the nervous system is not complete until mid-adolescence. This means that learnt skills are not always consistent (this is in addition to the body proportion changes).

Handwriting (which is a motor skill) does not become consistent until sometime in mid-adolescence

You will get a considerable variation of skill in kendo which is not necessarily a reflection of effort or concentration.

Energy delivery to the muscles, that is the aerobic and anaerobic systems, is different in adults and children. There is not as much spare capacity in the aerobic system of a child as there is in an adult. For example a child can increase their endurance power by a factor of 6 from rest to maximum continuous exercise whereas an adult can increase theirs by about 12.

A child's anaerobic system does not develop adult capacity and power until about the age of 14 or 15. They do not seem to produce much in the way of lactic acid.

Younger child will complain about being out of puff but not in pain. They recover more quickly than adults and will often be willing to go again.

Exercise can suddenly seem to hurt when the lactic acid system kicks in (between about 13 -16 years) and children are not always good at coping with it.

Ability to cope with heat and cold is less than adult. They produce more heat relatively than an adult for a given amount of exercise and they do not sweat as efficiently.

They do not seem to re-hydrate properly if left to themselves. Their sense of thirst does not seem to be as well developed as adults.

It is important to get a child to drink about 150-250 mls of water about every 20-30 minutes, particularly if they are wearing *men*

Psychological development

The psychology of children's learning also needs to be taken into account.

Are they getting involved

- To do something new?
- To do something better?
- To please others?
- To be with others?
- Do they want to show their ability and beat others?

□

These are different kinds of motivation and do not necessarily reflect adult motivations. Teachers/coaches need to create an environment in which the child experiences enjoyment. The children can get this by learning new skills and improving their performance. Compare their performance with their previous performances not with other children. By learning to co-operate (and competition is a form of co-operation) the child can develop their own sense of self worth and gain self confidence.

Something the coach can do is to reduce emphasis on outcomes e.g. winning and concentrate instead upon performance.

For example if the performance of getting in and out of the shiai-jo properly, with good reigi, is emphasized and is done well, you have a success; if you focus on winning and losing then everyone except the winner may feel a failure.

Accentuate the positive things that the child does and provide alternatives for either inappropriate behaviour or specific movements which would improve poor skills.

Be realistic in what you expect in terms of development and encourage realism in the child as well.

As adolescents get into competition, early achievers easily go from wanting to win to not wanting to lose. Especially over time as others catch up.

□ **Match children of similar ability. Too great a difference is of no use to the better child and can be a complete turn off for the lesser skilled. Try to put children with others close to them in age (no more than two years).**

Coaches

What children like in their teachers and coaches are those who are friendly, provide explanations, who consult them, provide support, reward appropriate behaviour and encourage independence.

□ Do teach-

- give instructions on how to,
- be clear concise and simple,
- focus on one thing at a time

Do encourage/distinguish between effort and ability

Show interest-use names

Encourage experimentation.

Young people do not like

not doing enough
having winning emphasised
being yelled at
being injured
not playing with friends
being belittled for making a mistake

Bear in mind that children and adolescents
Can be easily led
Are anxious to please
Are prone to over enthusiasm
Do not mean to make mistakes

The following were identified as the characteristics of good teachers in 1951 and again in outstanding coaches in 2000

They know their material-and continue to learn it

They like their material-they can walk their talk

They know their students-but do not expect the students to be like them

They have wide interests-they aim to see more, think more and understand more.

They have good memories-a teacher with a poor memory is ridiculous and/or dangerous. A creative memory often distinguishes a good teacher from a mediocre one.

They demonstrate will power-learners often do not like work, authority or concentration but the will power of the teacher /coach gets them through it

They are kind-few things will diminish the difficulty, the pain, and the fatigue of learning like the kindness of a teacher

When children practice with adults, the practice must be watched to ensure using safe practice methods in a controlled environment A child must not engage in unsupervised free practice with inexperienced adult beginners because of the risk of injury.

If someone is hurting you speak up – tell them and tell the sensei so they can consul the person about how to practice with children.