

# Taekwon-Do as "A Way of Life" during the Formative Years

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How do we become the adults of tomorrow? How and when do we form the personalities that we end up with, the values that we believe in? Psychological and social research has proven that our environment helps to shape us to a large extent. Values and perception are gained by our interaction with the world around us, we are taught our moral codes, our ways of behaviour by our exposure to our parents, our teachers, our instructors, and of course by our peer group. Childhood is a time of great change, a truly formative time of our lives. If we consider this, an activity like Taekwon-do becomes much more than a sport or art, it becomes more a way of life. I would like to discuss the effect Taekwon-do can and should have on a young person's life.

Why is Taekwon-do described as a "way of life"? It is of course a martial art, but the correct practition of this art involves not only the physical, but also the mental and social aspects of life. When a young person starts Taekwon-do, they are taught the value system that this art is based on, and gradually this becomes integrated in your personality, in the way in which you view the world.

A child is open to new ideas and absorbs teaching in a natural way. Exposure to the values of Taekwon-do during this impressionable stage of life will have dramatic effects. There are so many benefits to be gained from continuous learning process of practicing Taekwon-do. In saying this, I do not propose that young people necessarily benefit more than their older counterparts when they practice this art. I simply feel that Taekwon-do has a very strong effect on the minds of young people, as this age also tends to absorb learning easily on a subconscious level. I would like to present some of the valuable aspects of Taekwon-do training to practitioners and explain their effect, from the perspective of being a young person in the association.

The most obvious and important values taught in Taekwon-do are the tenets.

The first value taught, when starting the study of Taekwon-do, is courtesy in the do-jang. In simple terms this means bowing when entering a do-jang, greeting the seniors, allowing seniors to pass through a door first, standing when answering a question and paying overall respect to fellow practitioners. This seems deceptively simple, but actually is all of great beneficial value in the outside world. If a young person adopts this value as part of their personality, it would result in more respect and appreciation for others, and in return, respect for yourself. The simple greeting of people with a respectful "Sir/Mam" will be well regarded by other adults and by the community in general. You are also taught that respect transcends physical age and that is a valuable lesson for life.

If a young person learns to follow the etiquette of respectful behaviour in the do-jang, it would have a very beneficial spin-off for life outside. You need to be able to follow the codes of decent behaviour in society in order to be successful, so this is a lesson important to learn.

Integrity is an essential characteristic for youth to be exposed to, and then to adopt as part of their own being. Being surrounded by people who not only possess integrity and self-honesty is of great benefit to a growing child, as by example you learn not only to be honest and trustworthy in your relation with other people, but also to be true to yourself. A simple example of this in a do-jang would be to correct your own mistakes – when you know you have made a mistake in a pattern, you should do press-ups without being instructed to do so. We need to develop the ability to tell right from wrong, to develop a strong conscience as these attributes are of great importance in life. The ability to practice integrity both in and outside the do-jang builds character. These personality traits enhance a young person's perception of the world, and enable us to deal with both the good and bad aspects present in our society.

Perseverance in Taekwon-do is beneficial in general life. In Taekwon-do you are taught never to give up. An example of this is practicing a troublesome technique, not giving up until the goal is achieved – in this case, a better technique. There is a much wider and important application of this value in the outside world. When a child grows up, they are bound to encounter obstacles that seem insurmountable, just too difficult, and giving up is the easy option. Having learnt to persevere is crucial at such times, and influences our chances of success or failure, and so it defines our standing in the world. It is during our teenage years that we are subjected to the most changes and challenges of life, and a youth who has been exposed to, and has adopted a persevering, determined nature will be better equipped to deal with life. Challenges need to be dealt with both physically and mentally in order to achieve your set goals, and so to progress to the next stage of life. If a young person can be taught to set goals and then to persevere to achieve success, he or she would be ready to face the challenges of the adult world.

Self-control is a valuable characteristic – it is not only an ideal for most people, but a constant challenge to most and a learning process for all that attempt to achieve it. Your actions need to be constantly checked in order to be absorbed in the subconscious, and so control the eventual outcome. The benefits of mastering this technique is boundless and essential in a person's understanding of their own inner being. Self-control is not only important but essential in personal relationships and in interaction with people inside and outside the do-jang. There are also obvious physical benefits to this value. By embracing self-control, your physical life benefits directly from constant training, good eating and drinking habits, correct times of rest, etc.

How can one define an indomitable spirit? I think it relates to always believing in yourself and to be willing to stand up for that belief, even against overwhelming odds. This characteristic builds general character in a person and for young people in particular it is invaluable in teaching us to be courageous and to exercise fair judgement. In the do-jang you are taught to be able to do a pattern in front of the class, without showing fear or hesitation. Outside the world of Taekwon-do a good example would be the ability to speak in public, to assume leadership roles although you might feel insecure inside yourself. This value will be positive to us in later life. It is a value that presents an extremely important mindset in people, enhancing the ability to be just, evenhanded and to be a positive force in society by being willing and able to stand up for just beliefs.

Besides the above, I believe that there are also other values promoted in Taekwon-do that are of particular benefits to the young.

Taekwon-do creates the ideal of humanity, where people can relate to each other as a family, feeling sympathy for misfortunes and rejoicing in success. There are many young people not fortunate enough to experience this level of support in their own homes, and to them this exposure and support will be invaluable. For those who do have support, sympathy and caring, Taekwon-do will help to reinforce these values and they will be able to relate to the values of the do-jang. This wonderful ideal teaches everybody the importance of empathy with others, and to build a close training spirit. Outside of Taekwon-do, one can practice this ideal with siblings, classmates and eventually with the larger society. By attempting to understand other people, one can eventually come to a better understanding of yourself and so improve your relationship with other people.

Righteousness is defined as “the ability to feel ashamed of unjust acts and to do one’s duty to others” This is closely connected to the tenets of integrity and courtesy. Young people need to understand the concept of justice, of action and consequence. In the do-jang you are taught to apologize when you have wrongly corrected the technique of another, in general life you may assist someone with a task they find difficult.

Propriety in Taekwon-do is the definition of status by rank. This definition organises the class and defines the interaction between the students. It sets examples for the young, teaching them how to treat their seniors and their juniors in a respectful manner, and how to interact with people along certain behavioural guidelines. This quality can and should be applied to respect for your peers and teachers as a student, and this will lead on naturally to correct behaviour in the workplace.

The ability to judge oneself is referred to as wisdom. This is a value that is generally attributed to more experienced practitioners. However, all have to attempt to practice it, whether junior or senior. As a young student, you can do this at a basic level, and look at your own pattern instead of another’s, and judge your own performance. On a more complex level, you could judge your own moral behaviour and presentation in Taekwon-do. By attempting to practice this ideal, a student could try to apply it to the conscious world of their schoolwork and to analyse their performance. As they become more mature, they could then attempt to judge their own behaviour on a secondary subconscious level.

Trust is an important characteristic for a student to attain. As a student, it is important to trust your instructor, and then to learn to inspire faith in ourselves. By applying this value to life outside the do-jang, one is able to grow up supported by people who trust us, and when people have faith in us, we can become confident in our surroundings and grow up to perform highly and to live up to all our expectations.

The final benefit I believe youth in particular can gain from Taekwon-do is relaxation. After a long day facing the pressure of school, work and life, it is relaxing mentally and physically to go out and train. There is a need for constant thought when you are training, but the change in thought pattern and the physical release is beneficial. Health studies have proven that training relieves many mental symptoms like depression, anxiety, fatigue and others. It refreshes the mind and body and enables you to return to your work with more energy. For young people this is of great importance as we sometimes feel overcome with the pressures and burdens of our lives.

In conclusion, all these values, ideals and benefits have the effect of making Taekwon-do not merely a sport or martial art, but truly “a way of life”. By learning new techniques, ideas and values we broaden our horizons and shape our personalities. So, how does Taekwon-do affect young people in their formative years? I believe, as illustrated above, that it makes you a more well-rounded person, able to cope with the wide world out there. Of course, the practice of Taekwon-do is a never-ending process and it would be hard to master all these characteristics during your formative years. It is an on-going process, and the practice of the ideals and tenets of Taekwon-do through your life will lead to the development of your personality and will have a strong influence on your eventual life-choices.