



SHIN GI TAI

MARTIAL ARTS ACADEMY



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Guide to Choosing a Martial Arts Club

by Lindsey Andrews

Ladies Kata Double Karate World Champion 2013
Winchester and District Sportswomen of the Year 2012
Basingstoke and Deane Professional Sports Coach 2012
Basingstoke and Deane Volunteer Sports Coach of the year 2012
Hampshire County Sports Awards Junior Volunteer of the year 2012
Hampshire and IOW Sports Club of the Year 2011
Basingstoke and Deane Sports Club of the Year – 2010
Sport England Clubmark Accredited – Quality Kitemark - 2010

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Quick Summary

Thank you for requesting information from Shin Gi Tai Martial Arts Academy. This guide will help you to understand the key points that you need to consider and that you must discuss with any Martial Arts Instructor before either you or your child takes part in a class with them.

The summary advice below on this page is from Sport England and provides a summary of things to check:-

Does the Club.....?	✓ or X
Currently hold, or is it working towards, the Clubmark award or equivalent governing body 'best practice' award	
Have an acceptable ratio of coaches to participants	
Provide competition within the club or against other clubs that is appropriate to you / your child's needs and requirements	
Invest time and training in coaches, staff and volunteers	
Ensure the coaches are trained appropriately to support the needs of the participants	
Ensure the venue and equipment are safe and appropriate for the age group using them	
Have well-run management that communicates effectively with its volunteers, parents and members	
Have a child protection / welfare officer or designated person to deal with emergencies and incidents appropriately	
Have a good reputation within the community	
Have a good, solid ethos that meets your own views and needs (eg on equity, competition, selection of players etc)	
Provide the opportunity for you / your child and family to socialise with other members	
Provide fun and enthusiastic sessions for you / the children and young people participating	
Have participants that you / your child knows or provide a welcoming environment to new members	

Introduction

Lets look at some of the tougher questions to research, before you join a club

Some of the key points you will need to consider are:-

- Is the instructor **actually qualified** to teach you Martial Arts? Ask to see their teaching qualification. Being a Black Belt doesn't make someone a qualified instructor, it denotes only a technical level.
- The Instructor **must be a Black belt** (or equivalent) in the art that they are teaching. Watch out – some clubs use a Black and White to denote an instructor who is not a Black belt and may have only been training themselves for mere months.
- Does the instructor have **insurance** in place? Are the other **members properly insured?** Can you see the certificates/policies?
- Do the instructors have an enhanced **CRB check** and also a **First aid qualification?**
- Are the **costs clear** at the outset? Ask about fees upfront - Schools shouldn't be reticent to give you this information before you start with them. Consider carefully, whether you want to join a club that insists you take out a 'contract' with them, that will tie you into paying the fees for a specified period with them through a formal credit agreement.
- Ask how many years the Instructors have been training and **how many years they have taught classes on their own** to gauge their level of expertise. Ask the instructor how regularly they get trained by their instructor now.

Specifically for a Children's class

- You should be welcome to **stay and watch** your child's first class at least and ideally other classes too.
- You also need to consider whether you are happy for your child to participate in a mixed class with adults or whether you prefer **specialised a class** for children.
- A good children's class should have **discipline** and it must be **fun** for the kids to do.
- Have the instructors taken the **specific training courses** recommended by **Sport England** to help them safely and successfully coach children?



Why do you want to learn a Martial Art?

Decide before you buy

People choose to learn a Martial Art for many different reasons, the reasons are personal to them, but often include Fitness, Health, Weight / Fat Loss, Self Defence, Confidence, Well-being and Social Interaction.

You need to decide on what your goals are from learning a Martial Art, before you start to research them. For example,

1. if you want to become a Champion full contact fighter or to learn how to maim someone in reality based self defence then a family focussed Martial Arts class isn't the best place for you to train.
2. if you're over 35 and want to improve fitness levels and get some outside of work relaxation you probably aren't going to start to learn a full contact Martial Art.
3. Or if you want your child to learn a traditional Martial Art with all the traditional aspects of discipline involved, then you're probably not going to send them to a class teaching Cage Fighting.
4. If you get claustrophobic, then learning an art where you end up on the floor with someone on top of you may not be ideal.

Martial Arts is a broad area – It gives options for fitness, flexibility, weight loss and relaxation, in addition to the more well known aspects of self defence and protection. Traditional Martial Arts training also includes the values of calmness and discipline, the humility to learn from anyone, respect, effort, concentration, attitude and the development of skill and finesse. So decide very clearly what you want to do and go and find a club that suits you and your objectives.

What type of Martial Art?

Ranges involved	Range involves	Martial Art Involved
Standing	Kicks, punches, strikes and blocks.	Karate, Taekwondo, Kung Fu (some styles), Kickboxing, K1, Choi Kwan Do, Tai Chi
Close Range	Throwing and sweeping someone to the floor and wrist / arm locks	Judo, Aikido, Karate (some styles) Kung Fu (some styles)
Groundwork	Essentially 'wrestling' on the floor to get your partner to submit.	Judo, Kung Fu (some styles) Wrestling, Brazilian Ju Jitsu
All ranges	A combination of all of the above	Kung Fu (some styles) MMA, Ju Jitsu

Key factors in making a choice

Convenience

Don't choose a martial arts school simply because it is closest to home or the cheapest. It's the same as when we shop for a new mortgage or insurance, we search and compare different options.

Remember, you or your child could train in martial arts for the rest of your / their lives so getting them off to the right start is of tremendous importance.

Research local schools to see what they offer in terms of instructors, facilities, classes and pricing. They should be happy to talk you through any questions you have and you should be made welcome to visit a class to observe or try it out before making any commitment.

Instructors

Should be at least a full black belt level but preferably 2nd Dan (traditionally Japanese instructors used to say that 3rd Dan was the first teaching grade) or above as this indicates that they have been a black belt for at least 2/3 years. Best practice is to have more than one instructor coaching to make sure that communications are good and to provide an extra pair of eyes.

Some schools work on a franchise system and although they may appear to be owned or governed by senior black belts, it is unlikely that they will have much involvement in the teaching or running of the school so it is important to ascertain exactly who will teach the class which your child would be in. Is it a senior instructor with years of experience, or is it a junior grade who has been rapidly promoted to a 'teacher' grade?

Also beware of people 'selling' their classes who tell you that their instructor is super duper 'the best thing since sliced bread / The British champion or whatever, it's not going to be them that you are training with. If they rely on promoting someone else's name, consider why they aren't telling you more about themselves.

It is also worth enquiring as to other qualifications each instructor holds. Do they hold coaching qualifications or have other teaching experience? Being good at martial arts does not automatically make you good at teaching. Each instructor should also be first aid trained, fully insured and CRB checked to an enhanced level as a minimum requirement. Sport England also insists that clubs registered under the quality kitemark scheme also take children specific coaching courses.

It is vitally important that instructors are enthusiastic, welcoming and show positive encouragement to the children they teach. They become role models for your child so make sure they are someone both you and your child have confidence in.

Key factors in making a choice

Facilities

Venues will vary from one school to another but should always be clean, safe, (remember training is done in bare feet), well lit and comfortable for both students and waiting parents alike.

Many schools will use local community facilities, such as village halls or school halls, others may have their own premises. Although distance to home is not the most important factor in your decision, bear in mind that often children train twice per week so you will be making the journey very regularly.

A good school should also be able to provide a full range of equipment for student use including pads, safety gear and fun stuff for kids. This helps to ensure that lessons are varied and skills can be tested under various circumstances. Please note that pads and bags are different for adults and kids, hard adult equipment is often dangerous for kids to use, so they need specialist equipment to safely train with.

Classes

Should be well structured and there should be clear communication links between instructors and parents detailing what classes entail and what will be expected of students in their curriculum.

Children should be taught separately from adults to ensure they are taught following an appropriate curriculum. By this, I mean a curriculum which is designed to teach individuals according to their age and developmental stage, i.e. if children are taught alongside adults it is impossible to make the lesson challenging to everyone. The adults will be bored because it's too easy, or the children will find it too difficult and become restless and therefore the whole class is compromised. (The exception to this is where you have a focussed family class for parents to train together alongside their children and share an activity.)

Do you want to be able to view your child in class? Some schools welcome parents to stay and watch, others will expect you to leave – so check the policy and decide which you prefer.

Does the school have awards other than belts and if so, what are they for? Do they focus on those in the class who are most physically capable or are they also recognising children who show other attributes, such as good behaviour, good effort and good manners?

Key factors in making a choice

Pricing

Pricing will vary considerably between schools and it is up to you to establish what constitutes reasonable service and value for money. Professional schools (run by full-time martial artists) are likely to cost you more but should be providing you with an increase in service for the extra money. For example, a better choice of class times and extra opportunities such as courses and seminars.

To gain a fair view it is important that you visit each school and discuss with an instructor exactly what you are paying for, what services they offer and any extra costs involved.

When visiting a school, make sure you watch how the students in the class interact with the instructor. Are they happy, motivated and having fun? They should be respectful to their instructor who in turn should be respectful to the students. When making a decision, follow your instincts. You will know the right school when you see it, so if you're not sure – keep looking.

To re-emphasise some of the key points you will need to consider

- ✦ You should be welcome to stay and watch your child's first class at least and to watch if required a class before you try it.
- ✦ If the instructor isn't wearing a Black Belt then they aren't a qualified black belt. (someone wearing a black and white belt may have only been training themselves for mere months.)
- ✦ Ask to see the Instructor's CRB forms, Insurance forms, first aid certificate and their Instructors coaching Qualifications (A piece of paper saying someone is licenced to 'such and such' an association isn't a qualification.)
- ✦ Ask how many years the Instructor has been training and how many years they have taught classes on their own.
- ✦ Beware of schools that insist you take out a 'contract' with them that will tie you into paying the fees for a specified period with them through the credit agreement.
- ✦ Ask about fees upfront - Schools shouldn't be reticent to give you this information before you start with them.
- ✦ You also need to consider whether you are happy for your child to participate in a mixed class with adults or whether you prefer specialised classes for children.
- ✦ A good class both for adults and kids should have discipline and it should be fun too.

Biography of Author

Lindsey Andrews



- Ladies Double World Karate Champion 2013
- Karate England National All Styles Champion Ladies Open Karate Kata 2012/2013
- Ranked Ladies #1 2011/2012 UK Ladies Shotokan Karate
- Basingstoke and Deane Sports Awards 3rd place Ladies Sportswoman 2012
- Coach of Hampshire and IOW's Sports Club of the Year 2011
- Basingstoke and Deane Sports Awards runner up Ladies Sportswoman 2010
- 3rd Dan Black Belt in Karate
- National Level Coach
- Coaching Assessor for Martial Arts Standards Agency
- Member of Karate England National Team

Lindsey has over 20 years experience in martial arts and 30 years experience in dance and choreography this makes her an outstanding kata specialist and lead to the creation of the children's combat groove classes.

Alongside the martial arts experience Lindsey has also undergone formal teacher training aimed at all ages and is a qualified college lecturer, giving her a professional insight into teaching. Lindsey is responsible for much of the way in which the classes are taught so that they are not only fit for the purpose but also so that each student will get the most they can out of each class on a physical, emotional and social level and in particular that the children's classes mirror that of some of their educational key stages. Lindsey was also instrumental in designing and running our highly successful Ladies only Self Defence course.

Lindsey is also a driving force behind the clubs continuing education of children in other aspects such as the successful 'Don't Bully Me!' courses.

Lindsey has competed herself over the years in various regional, national and international competitions and after competition successes in 2012 was chosen to represent the England All Styles Karate team. In 2013 and also 2013 As a member of the current National Squad, she trains and compete for her country with a specialist focus on Kata and also coaches and competes with the Shin Gi Tai competition squad.

Lindsey also has a passion for fitness and in 2010 she undertook the training in order to qualify as a fully licensed Body Combat instructor, a martial arts based fitness programme which is run at the centre. In August 2012 Lindsey also qualified to teach Zumba at the centre which suits her fitness and dance background perfectly and is a welcome new addition to Shin Gi Tai.

