



How Martial Arts Increases Coordination In Kids

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Not all children are the same. Some are born with better learning curves and can pick up things independently, without them being told how to – they learn this by observing the actions of others around them. It is the others who get compared to them unfairly.

These children are called ‘clumsy’ or a ‘klutz’ simply because of their poor hand-eye coordination. This is in reality because they do not have enough opportunities to hone their motor skills. In the days prior to the advent of cable television, the only way children could keep themselves entertained was by reading a book, playing outdoors in the park, or taking part in a sports activity. Nowadays, entertaining cartoons and children’s programs on TV, as well on DVD, streaming and youtube keep them glued to the screen for hours at a time. This, coupled with there being fewer public spaces for them to go out and engage in physical exercise, has contributed to them not moving about as they should, resulting in slower reflexes.

Practicing traditional martial arts can change all that. In the *dojo* or place where they are trained, children are taught to wait patiently for their instructor’s next command. They often have to maintain a rigid stance while they do this. The training causes them to be less ‘fidgety’ and more in control of their reflexes.

Martial arts often require the use of both hands, as well as the child’s legs and body – all at once. Constant practice subsequently results in greater hand-eye coordination among children. In fact, the effects are most seen in young children, whose minds are the most impressionable. It is also them who are the most eager to learn – they are always the ones who ask the most questions – and so practicing multiple martial arts techniques helps them further in improving their coordination.

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Physical activity

Unlike sports, where one may suit up only to be left on the bench, or played for a limited amount of time, no one is left out in martial arts. Everyone is expected to participate, and pour his/her heart and soul into it – a mere demonstration will not do. An experienced instructor (referred to as *sensei* in Japanese martial arts or *shifu* in Chinese martial arts) knows when someone is ‘faking’ it – he/she will immediately ask the child to do it again, including ‘emotional content’ (not anger) this time. In traditional martial arts, there is no separation of the mind and body – they are one, and must act together. ‘Fooling around’ in the dojo is also not permitted; however physical games, that are fun and engaging, are often times used to increase certain skills so there really is no option for your child but to develop his/her motor skills and hand-eye coordination.

Memory and retention

Sometimes, what is put down as ‘uncoordinated’ is a child forgetting the sequence of things, not because he is physically incapable. For instance, to drink a glass of water, the sequence is to pick it up, bring the edge of the glass in contact with his/her lips, tilt the bottom of the glass upward slowly so that water enters his/her mouth, bring it down when his/her mouth is full, and then swallow the water. Leaving any one thing out is enough to get him labeled as ‘sloppy’. In martial arts, children practice the same moves over and over again. You will find black belts (this means they have attained the highest level of martial arts expertise) practicing the same moves as entry-level white belts. The constant practice improves a child’s memory and retention capabilities.

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Balance and posture

Those who are 'uncoordinated' may also have poor balance. This is overcome in martial arts training where the right balance is maintained for long periods. Children who spend more time indoors may also have a poor posture – this results from them sitting in cramped positions for long. Martial arts training takes care of this as well. The right posture leads to better cardio rhythms and improved breathing, which in turn has the effect of stimulating the brain. More oxygen to the brain results in better functioning – it has been found that there is a specific area of the brain responsible for helping a child maintain his/her balance.

Children become healthier and more alert, leading to faster responses.

Discipline

This is one of the things that children learn in martial arts training. They begin to have greater respect for 'rules' – what they should do, what they shouldn't, and when. Whether at home, at school, or on the playground, a martial arts practitioner will be more responsible. For example; in playing soccer, they will kick the ball in the right direction and with the right, measured amount of force; or pass it to their teammates – because they know better than to waste others' time and/or efforts.

They also learn about coordination through trial and error, or experience. At age 4, a child had difficulty cutting a circle out from a sheet of paper. By age 5, she learned to hold the sheet of paper closer, and could cut out a circle better. She learnt from her mistakes and improved herself each time.

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They learn to interact better with their peers, and realize the benefits of teamwork – how it can help all of them achieve a common goal if they work together.

Focus and concentration

Martial arts training helps children improve their listening skills. They will be more attentive towards instructions – this comes from patiently waiting for the instructor’s commands in the dojo, and then carrying them out intently. Martial arts training improves attention spans in children.

Even if your child has ADHD or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, martial arts training can help. Kindergarten teacher Carmella Van Vleet enrolled her AD-diagnosed daughter Abbey in taekwondo, which worked wonders – Abbey could break bigger boards than her peers with her kick, and went on to win a martial arts tournament. This served as the basis for her first children’s book, *‘Eliza Bing Is (Not) a Big, Fat Quitter’*.

Thousands of children with poor coordination have already benefited from martial arts training, and your child could be the next.