

The following is adapted from the NAPMA World Conference General Assembly Presentation of Dr. Ruth Peters. For over twenty years, Dr. Ruth Peters has specialized in treating children, adolescents and families. Her focus has been upon teaching parents how to control their difficult children, as well as how to motivate kids to reach their academic potential.

One of the solutions I attempt when working with ADHD or children with other behavioral problems is to send them to a martial arts school. It's one of the first things I do rather than fill them up with Ritalin.

But, let me tell you what you owe me, the teachers, preachers and the other folks who are sending these kids to you. We demand and we expect that you will teach our children focus. I don't personally care if they learn to defend themselves. Other people do, but I want you to teach my kids how to focus, how to manage their anger and how to develop self-discipline. Then if they learn self-defense, that's just the icing on the cake.

Hopefully, with the focus, anger management and self-discipline, they won't be "in your face" kids. They will learn their boundaries and they won't be the subject or the brunt of bullies because you've taught them to be good people. Now that's what I want.

It Has to Work At Home Too

I don't know how much you deal with the word "generalization." but when I get a mom and kid in, I'll suggest martial arts because I think that generalization is the key. This means that if what you teach them to do in your classrooms works beautifully in your school but doesn't work for me as a mom or for me as a teacher then I have wasted my referral.

I am being very harsh here but I have seen kids go into a martial arts establishment and it's "yes, sir" and "yes ma'am" and a polite handshake. There, they are wonderfully behaved. That doesn't mean a hill of beans to me as a mom if the kid comes home and is non-compliant or as a teacher if the child does not listen. I need you to help them generalize this into the home because that is what is going to help me and it is also what is going to help keep those kids in your schools. It's going to help your retention rate. As the teacher, you have to think, how am I going bring this to the home?

Yesterday, a four-year-old bit me. I was trying to teach him to shake hands so he bit me. This is just an example but you go up to a nine-year-old, hold out your hand and they give you the wrong hand. These kids don't know how to shake hands. But those who have martial arts training do. I don't need them to bow to me, but I need them to say, "Hello, how are you?"

I don't think you could get a better program than NAPMA's Random Acts of Kindness. Any of you who are not utilizing this program, please get it and use it. It is initiating a kind action and process that helps the child realize it's not always about them; it is about other people. This helps kids to be polite and kind outside of the martial arts classroom.

As a professional referral agent I want this good behavior to come back to me, to the school and to the moms. So generalization is key. It must become a general part of their lives, not just within the walls of your martial arts school.

Does Martial Arts Help?

People ask me, “Does martial arts work?” Well, the answer is sometimes. I’d say about 50% of the time it works and 50% of the time it doesn’t. And you know why? I’ve come to find out it’s because of the personalities of the instructor and the child. Ineffective teachers who are not compassionate and kid smart—knowing kid’s human nature—or have firm, strict rules, can actually damage a child’s composure and self-esteem. So the goal, I believe, is for those children to attain and maintain respect not only for their teachers but also their parents.

Who are these kids that I am sending to you? They are Attention Deficit kids and uncooperative kids. Anybody here know an ADHD kid or an uncooperative kid? I do.

Did you know that about 10-15 percent of our population has been diagnosed with having ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)? There are more boys than girls with ADHD. The ranges go from 4 to 1, to 8 to 1. Personally, I think it’s about 4 or 5 boys to each girl. You’ll see that the girls are the more inattentive, spacey, quiet, less disruptive and the boys, of course, are the more hyperactive.

In the U.S. population, about 10-15% have ADHD, but in your school population the percentages will be higher. In a class of 15 students about 7 students have already been diagnosed with some form of ADHD. Plus you’re going to have some kids who have not been diagnosed yet. One of the top characteristics you’re going to see in these kids is defiance. A lot of the times they are defiant because they have grown up being put down by adults and other kids. When they get in trouble, they are criticized and they are extremely defensive. Anybody ever notice that?

Classes of ADHD

The Bible of psychology and psychiatry is called *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, or DSM-IV. It classifies three types of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder:

The Hyperactive/Impulsive Children: This is pretty easy to identify. Like when a kid comes into your office and your stomach starts churning? These are the kids that are moving all over the place. The average age for kids diagnosed in this class is 5-7 years old.

The Inattentive Children: The average grade that inattentive kids are diagnosed is fifth grade. Why? Because these kids are not causing problems. They’re just sitting there. They’re staring into space. And do teachers really get upset by quiet kids who are sorta’ zoned out? No, they’re busy grabbing Johnny and putting him back in his seat.

The one thing that I tell people is if you want to make sure you don’t have an ADHD kid of your own, there’s one thing that you can do: Don’t name them Jason. How many of you have an ADHD kid you’re working with named Jason? And then there’s Zachary.

Hyperactive/Inattentive Children: These poor critters are a combination of the first two types. Running through the hyperactive/impulsive characteristics, you have to have at least six of these:

Fidgets with hands or feet

Squirms in seat

Leaves seat in classroom when expected to sit

Runs about or climbs excessively

Has trouble engaging in activities quietly

Acts as if driven by a motor

Often talks excessively

Often blurts out answers before questions are completed

Often has difficulty waiting their turn Interrupts or intrudes on others

These are the characteristics of the inattentive type:

Fails to give close attention Difficulty sustaining attention

Doesn't seem to listen when spoken to directly

Doesn't follow through

Difficulty organizing tasks or activities

Avoids engaging in tasks that require sustained mental effort

Loses things necessary for tasks

Distracted by extraneous stimuli

Forgetful in daily activities

If you do not treat ADHD, I will guarantee you that 4 out of 5 of these will happen:

Poor social adjustment

Behavioral problems

School failure

Drop out/delinquency

Possible substance abuse (the greatest percentage of teenagers who are substance abusers have ADHD that is not being treated)

How to Treat ADHD Children

Behavior management

Medication

Social Training

Academic remediation

The first thing I recommend to mom when she brings Jason into my office is martial arts training. And folks, whether you like it or not, all of you are therapists. Like it or not, your role for Jason is that of a therapist. You are no longer just an owner or an instructor. You are a therapist in addition to that.

Social training teaches these kids that we reward and acknowledge appropriate social behavior. It does happen once in a while, so you've got to catch them while they're being good.

I have watched Melody Shuman's Little Ninjas tapes, and she does a great job getting her kids to line up. They're not running around bumping into each other. There is no comparison between her stuff and a regular kindergarten or first-grade class. In kindergarten you say "line up kids," and what do they do? Everybody's gotta' be first! Then there's the real shy one that has some other issues who's in the back. Then of course there's Jason over there who wasn't listening, so he's not lining up at all.

But what you see with Melody's kids as you watch the Little Ninjas program is that they're all standing there. They've got body space. They've got a box around them in space, and that's one of the things that you, as therapists, are expected to teach these kids that I send to you. They are keeping their hands and feet to themselves.

Five Tips for Working With Kid's Human Nature

1. Use intermittent reinforcement —Pretend that you have stopped at a red light that you stop at every day. It's a really long light and you are the first one there. Do you kind of have a feel for how long you're going to be sitting there? Yes.

What do you do? You know it's going to be about seven minutes because of the way your city's traffic control works. Are you sitting there looking at that red light? No. When do you first look up at that light to see if it's turned green? Six and a half minutes. Our human nature is to sit there until we get that "feeling" that it's about to change. We're not going to look up and down and up and down. We wait until we think that the time has come. Now that is one type of reinforcement. The reinforcement is the green light.

Now, imagine you're at a new light that you've never been to and you don't know if it's a quick light or a long light. Are you going to sit there and take out your makeup and wait six and a half minutes before you look up? No. You're going look up and down and up and down.

How does this analogy relate to our ADHD kids? If we are predictable, are they going to be paying attention the whole time? No. They're going to be dazing out. Intermittent reinforcement, when you don't know exactly when that traffic light is going to change from red to green, keeps our attention. One of the hardest things for ADHD kids to do is to give you their attention. One of the tricks to working with ADHD kids is to be unpredictable. Call on them intermittently and you will get much better attention.

2. Effort Praise vs. Person Praise —work for the Today Show and I get to pick what I do. It's really cool. Anytime I can, I will do effort praise vs. person praise. There's a woman named Carol Zweckat Columbia University who did this huge study for about a year. She found out that if you want children to apply the most effort, be the most perseverant, give the most attention to a task, then raise them without saying, ' Oh, Johnny, you're so good. You're so smart. You're beautiful. You're handsome. You've got big muscles. You've got a high IQ.' When this type of person gets into a challenging situation, they give up.

So tell the ADHD child," I like your effort. That was a great try. You kept going even though it didn't work out. I like the way you didn't give up." Studies show that these are the kids that rise to the challenge. These are the kids that make a decision not to quit every single time.

So if you want Jason to keep going, give him effort praise and not person praise. Use frequent feedback.

3. Intense Consequences. — We have found that kids with ADHD don't necessarily hear you the first time. They need intense consequences. Try to use incentives before punishments. Non-verbal signs like a noogey to the head (not too hard) or a thumbs up. Or verbal approval: "I like it when you try hard." Try to praise what they are doing well. Correct, and then zap in there with praise.

4. Clickers and counters — If you're working with a particularly tough kid who needs a lot of reinforcement, you can put an umpire's clicker in your pocket and you tell the kids, "I will click once for every time you do something correctly. If you get at least ten good clicks, then we are going to give you a sticker at the end of class." Stickers are wonderful things. I use this technique in my practice all the time.

One of the things I suggest is that in your school store, reward the kids who get enough stickers or points by allowing the child to pick something out. Rewarding kids with tangible things is very, very motivating.

5. The Child's Success Team — To encourage success and retention as owners, I would suggest that you form a team with the parent and the child. It has to be sincere to work. I would give very frequent feedback to parents. Again, a token system at the school store and praise the parents for their efforts in getting the kids to practice and to the school for class.

My goal as a psychologist is to help kids build self-discipline. That is how they're going to develop good character and be successful as adults and parents themselves. M. Scott Peck, and many of you have read his book, *The Road Less Traveled*, says that, "self-discipline is the basic set of tools we require to solve life's problems. Without discipline, we can solve nothing, and with some discipline we can solve only some problems. With total discipline we can solve all problems."

Your job as therapists is to help Jason feel good about himself, to use these tips, to work with kid human nature, and to help these kids learn self-discipline and to generalize it to the home and to the school so that we build a better bunch of kids for tomorrow. •

Dr. Ruth Peters has written several books and has an audio cassette series helping parents teach good behavior that will last a lifetime. These books and cassette tapes can be purchased through NAPMA. For more information please call 1-800-973-6734