

## That Kid is DRIVING ME NUTS!

### 5 Tips for dealing with a distracting student

*We all claim to be open to all different types of students. Martial arts is for everyone! After all, we aim to build tolerance, open-mindedness, respect, and empathy for every citizen. But when we are faced with that one child in class who fidgets and fumbles, and chatters and babbles on, we find ourselves shaking our heads and wondering how we can cope.*

*Yes, yes, we have all heard of ADD and ADHD. Our world seems riddled with children on and off Ritalin. Some of these kids have a legitimate chemical imbalance and others are simply eating too much sugar, not getting enough sleep, testing disciplinary boundaries, or having trouble paying attention due to recent disturbing events in their lives.*

*What in the world are we supposed to do?*

- (1) **Find out the problem:** Talk to the parents about the child's challenges with paying attention. Find out if they are aware of anything that might be contributing to his or her behavior. Has this been an ongoing problem? Has any new food been introduced into their diet lately? Are they taking vitamins and getting good nutrition? Have they been able to sleep? Are they watching a lot of television? Have there been any recent changes at home that would be impacting the child's ability to pay attention? Uncovering the problem can lead to solutions.
- (2) **Have ways for the child to check himself:** Anchors in the classroom are excellent for children who have trouble with focusing on tasks. The term "check yourself" should be connected with a specific position that the child can resort to when they are losing focus. For example, "check yourself" can mean "sitting down with crossed legs and hands on knees," "attention stance," "guard stance," or "horse stance" depending on the art or the interest of the teacher. Simply tapping a child on the shoulder or the utterance "check yourself" can lead to the desired position. It will give the child a moment to collect him or herself, stop the annoying behavior, and give the child something constructive to do.
- (3) **Don't berate or embarrass:** Typically, these children are not doing annoying behaviors to frustrate you. They may have trouble controlling themselves or they may simply need to know the boundaries and the ways to correct them. Yelling at a child in front of their peers does not serve a constructive purpose. Pull the child aside or talk to them after class when the behavior is first identified. Then use the "check yourself" procedure in subsequent classes. Be stern and direct, yet kind and calm. Children want to impress you so let them know how they can get your attention with positive behaviors.
- (4) **Know your limits:** If you find that the child is unable to control himself and is compromising the safety of other children, you may want to evaluate if the program is a good match for the child. You are likely running a private facility that does not offer extra resources for children with severe special needs. While we aim to serve as many types of children as we can, some children require additional services and aids that you may not offer. Discuss these issues with the parent as it pertains to the safety of the child as well to the child's ability to feel successful. Experts in your area can help you and the parents identify other more appropriate programs that are better equipped with special needs resources.
- (5) **Get some help:** Many instructors attempt to lead a large class by themselves without the assistance of any teen helpers of instructional staff. Just as schools provide aids to assist teachers, you, too, deserve help. Assistants can provide extra help to those who need it and extra attention to those who require it. You will be left to teach your classes instead of feeling like you need to divide your attentions between one child and the rest of your students. Realizing that having an assistant is not a negative reflection of your abilities, but rather, a positive step towards providing your students with what they need to be successful.

So you have a child in class that is driving you crazy? It is not too late to employ these techniques. It may take some getting used to, however, in the end, everyone will feel a lot more relaxed.