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## HOW TO BE A GOOD TRAINING PARTNER

When learning martial arts, you will encounter all different kinds of training partners. Some are great, and others can be hard to work with. The truth of the matter is that you need a good training partner in order to grow. Without a good training partner, your growth will be very limited.

If you want to find a good partner, you have to be someone who others want to train with. You can't be the guy everyone avoids in class when it is time to pick a partner. This is usually the guy who goes too fast, doesn't feed you right, and thinks he knows better than the instructor, so he tries to teach you his version of the technique.

Don't be like that guy. Follow the tips below to be a great training partner.

To be a great training partner, you need to build trust with and show concern for your partner by observing good etiquette, cooperating so that you both can learn, and by following safe training practices.

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### Etiquette

- Follow the drill that the instructor assigned to you. Stick to the drill, it is part of a progressive plan to develop your skills. Focus on the objective of the drill in order to build a foundation for the next phase of the training.
- Don't try to improve the drill or add-on additional moves, unless that is part of the exercise. It's tempting to show off the other things you know. Don't do it. When you do, you are not helping your partner because you are taking away from his ability to practice and focus on what the instructor is teaching.
- Be a partner, not another instructor. When in class, help your partner, but don't take over the drill time by teaching him as if you are the instructor. You may think you are helping your partner by teaching him, but you may be taking him off course or just overwhelming him.
- Each situation is different, sometimes it is appropriate for you to help a little more, such as when you are partnered with a new student. Just make sure you are not overdoing it. When in doubt, just check in with your instructor.
- Respect your gear and that of others. Don't throw your stick across the room when you are done with it. Go place it in your bag. Don't step on other people's gear, even if they left it out. Put it to the side if it is in the way, or find out who left it there, and return it to them. Don't do anything that would damage your partner's gear.





- Use sticks that match the weight and size of your partner's sticks. Don't think you are cool crushing everyone's sticks with your training log. Swing that thing in the air or hit tires to develop your power. You don't need to use it for partner drilling. If you use a stick that is grossly mismatched to your partner's stick, you will just destroy his stick, and you may even lose a training partner.

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## Cooperation

- Communicate with your partner. While training, check in with your partner to make sure that you are moving at the right level of intensity for him. Are you moving too fast? Are you hitting too hard? Communicate with your partner to understand each other's limitations or injuries, and to agree on parameters of training, such as intensity level and what activities and types of contact are acceptable. When in doubt, it's better to start light and add intensity, than it is to begin too hard and catch your partner unprepared.
- Let your partner know when he is going too hard, too fast, or hurting you. Let him know right away so you don't get hurt or build up frustration as the issue repeats itself. Often, he will not even know he is doing it. He may just be trying to keep up with you. When doing this, make sure you slow down as well. If you are moving fast, so will your partner.
- Use the right intensity for the drill. Just because you ultimately will perform a technique at full speed in a real situation does not mean that you need to drill everything at full speed. When learning movements and techniques, it is appropriate to simplify, slow down, and reduce force. This allows skill to grow from a rudimentary level to to a level at which it can be successfully performed at full speed. Intensity can be ramped up as appropriate.
- Help your partner improve. You and your partner need each other to train. If he gets better, you get better. Don't worry about him learning to counter your favorite techniques. Even that will make you better. Help him whenever you can. Be mindful and give him your best when he is practicing on you.
- Feed your partner the right attack. Don't give him a lazy feed. Use the correct angle, pressure, and follow-through when feeding your partner for a technique.
- Don't think you are helping your partner by striking unrealistically wide or off-target. By striking off-target, you are preventing your partner from learning to recognize the correct stimulus or cue for the technique he is practicing. In order to perform well, he must learn to recognize the attack. If your feed is not consistent with the actual attack, he will not be able to fine tune his ability to react to it.
- At the same time, you don't need to hit your partner in the face every time he makes a mistake. Be ready to withdraw power and speed from your attack if he is not responding correctly.
- Be open to feedback. Because you are practicing on your partner, he can give you direct feedback on how precise and effective your techniques are. Don't miss this opportunity. This





information is paramount for you to improve. When performing a technique on your partner, ask him if it looks and feels right.

- Offer feedback to your partner. Tell your partner when he is performing the technique right. Let him know where he can improve. Give your partner the feedback while he is practicing, so he can make adjustments right away.
- Some people react emotionally to feedback. If you are working with a new partner, you may want to ask him if would like some feedback before you actually give it. Asking will often keep the partner open and minimize the chances of a negative reaction.
- Give useful and brief feedback. Useful feedback may include short tips that help your partner adjust an angle, a position, body mechanics, or the direction of force applied in the proper execution of a technique. It includes any relevant information that helps him perform better. Useful feedback also includes corrective directives, such as "move to the side," "rotate your hips more," or "keep your weapon up."

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## Safety and Health

- Use control. Be courteous toward your partner and use control when executing two person drills. Do not move beyond a speed that you can control. Do this to help avoid injuries.
- When you are reckless, your partner is often the one who suffers. He gets hit, when you do not control your strikes. He gets hurt when you go too fast while practicing a lock or takedown. When your partner is voluntarily leaving himself exposed so you can practice on him, he should be able to trust you to keep his safety in mind while you practice.
- Be responsible for your partner's safety when applying techniques. When practicing any technique, if you first consider what may happen if you make a mistake, you can easily avoid serious accidents.
- If you execute a takedown or throw, you are responsible for controlling your partner's fall. Be sure to look where you are throwing or directing someone. Anticipate and avoid collisions with other students, walls, or any property near or in your training area.
- Apply locks and breaks slowly and gradually. Don't apply them explosively. Give your partner time to tap or roll with them.
- Use caution when striking in the air near your partner as you practice follow up strikes and combinations. Don't strike close to your partner's face without protective gear. One mistake with your stick, and he may get hit in the eye.
- Don't surprise your partner during training. Unexpected quick movements can surprise your partner and possibly cause an injury. If the drill calls for variables or improvisation, be sure your partner is ready for that. If you are about to try something very different from what he expects, let him know what is coming so he can protect himself from injury.



- Make sure the gear you are using is safe for the drill you are doing. Be cautious not to use unsafe training weapons or inappropriate gear.
- A metal training knife may be good for slower drills, but it is not suited for sparring. Sharply pointed training knives may look more realistic, but could end up scratching or cutting your partner. Before training, make sure there are no splinters or sharp edges on your sticks and training weapons that could cut your partner during practice. Rattan sticks can easily be taped when they fray, but other woods may be more risky to use when they are damaged because they tend to have sharper splinters and edges.
- Remove jewelry and clothing with sharp parts before practice. Rings can hurt or cut, necklaces can choke, exposed zippers and body jewelry can rip off skin. Sometimes your personal items or clothing can be a potential injury to your partner and yourself. Remove jewelry before practice to avoid cuts, tears to you, your partner and training equipment as well as damage to your jewelry itself.
- Maintain general hygiene as a courtesy to your partners. Keep your fingernails and toenails trimmed to avoid cuts and scrapes. Shower or clean up before class if you are already dirty from a long day at work or a hard workout earlier. Keep any cuts or wounds covered. Nobody wants your blood on them.
- If you are sick, stay home. Do not come to train. Avoid spreading any contagious illness to your partners by coming to class when you are not well. You may feel like you can tough it out during class, but it is inconsiderate to train with others when you are contagious.

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## Bonus Points

Here are just a few more things you can do to be a great training partner:

- Have some bandaids and athletic tape on hand for anyone who gets blisters or small knuckle scrapes. These small injuries happen often. It's better to keep open wounds covered, and treating them right away will allow you or your partner to get back to training quickly.
- Bring electrical tape to class for taping up fraying rattan sticks. It seems like it always runs out when you need it. Bring two rolls so you have plenty to share.
- Keep an extra stick and knife in your bag that you can loan to new students, or anyone else who may need one during class.
- Be there as a friend for your training partners outside of class. Give him a ride, check on him if he is sick or missing. Often our training partners become our closest friends.





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## Final Words

- Being a good training partner is largely based on just being mindful, respectful, and helpful. Keep your partner's safety in mind. Treat your partner like a friend. Be invested in helping your partner learn. Do these things, and you will be a good partner, not the guy everyone avoids in class.

