

Being a Sempai



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Experts say that students learn as much OR MORE from their peers (fellow students) as they do from their teachers. In the dojo, the role of the Sempai or “senior student” is extremely important. The dojo’s Sempai help to foster an environment where all students can learn the true essence of Bushido or the “warrior spirit.”

Are you a Sempai?

Any student who started training before you did is your Sempai. They should be treated with respect as they can help you achieve your goals in the martial arts. The more senior the Sempai, the more respectful you should be towards them.

On the other hand, any student who started training after you did is your “Kohai” or junior. You are the Sempai of all of these students! You are important to those students because, like it or not, they WILL learn from you. All of the things that you say and do in the dojo has the potential to influence them.

Setting the Example

Senior students must be careful of their actions in the dojo as they set the example for all of the lower ranked students in all areas of dojo conduct. Sempai should be very familiar with the behavioral guidelines for the dojo (i.e. the Dojo Code, the Dojo Rules, General Knowledge, etc.) They should actively demonstrate the best dojo conduct for others to follow ANY TIME THEY ARE IN THE TRAINING AREA. This includes attendance and timeliness, being respectful to senior students and instructors, following directions, working hard in class, and ALWAYS demonstrating good form, strength and spirit in their karate.

Leadership

A Sempai should take the initiative to help other students (especially newer students.) This includes helping them with learning the customs of the dojo such as bowing, marking their attendance, being respectful, listening to instructions, using equipment properly, etc. The Sempai should take the initiative to help students with exercises before a class begins or do their best to lead when given a group or individual student to work with in class.

When helping others the Sempai should practice their leadership skills. They should speak clearly in a helpful tone. They should be familiar with the correct methods of practice and be sure to help others accordingly. As a leader it is also important to model good form, strength and spirit in everything that you do!

Black belts should consider helping with classes and should periodically sit on Kyu test boards. It is considered appropriate to “give back” and return the consideration that was given to them by their Sempai as they progressed through the lower ranks.

Positive Attitude

Successful training in the martial arts depends heavily on a safe and supportive environment for every student. Sempai must strive to help provide a mutually supportive environment where each student can achieve their goals. It is very important that Sempai students



consistently demonstrate a positive attitude towards their practice, their fellow students and instructors in the dojo, and do their best in every class. Remember, others are watching to see how to conduct themselves!

Discipline

Some of the most valuable traits that the student can learn from the martial arts are focus, self-discipline, and perseverance. In training, it is extremely important for students to have self-control and listen to their instructors and assistants in order to provide a safe and productive environment for all students.

There are expectations for behavior in and out of the dojo for each student age group. The Sempai should help other students familiarize themselves with the "Dojo Rules" and the "Dojo Code." These are guidelines for behavior which must be learned and followed. As you know the Dojo Code has five principles:



- 1) **Respect** - Students must treat themselves, their instructors and those around them with courtesy and consideration.
- 2) **Self-Defense** - Students must use the combative skills they learn for self-protection only.
- 3) **Perseverance** - Through effort and dedication students will do their best to succeed and reach their goals.
- 4) **Honor** - Through increased awareness students will strive to have good moral character.
- 5) **Responsibility** - Students will strive to make good choices and take care of the needs of

themselves and those around them.

Dojo policy is that there are appropriate consequences for the student's behavior. Good student behavior is rewarded with privileges and promotions. Poor behavior may result in a loss of privileges; delay in promotions; or, in extreme cases, suspension from the school.

A few important area of dojo etiquette that the Sempai should help with are:

- students and families are asked to be neat and clean, and keep the noise level reasonable in all areas of the dojo,
- students may enter the training room to practice before their class begins, but only after any earlier classes are finished, students should ask an instructor for permission before using any training equipment,
- No shoes are allowed in the training area! Before entering the training room, shoes should be placed in the shoe rack and jackets or hats should be hung on the coat racks, any personal belongings in the changing rooms should be kept neat as well.
- only bottled water is allowed in the training area to drink. Empty bottles must be discarded properly. No food is allowed in this area.
- Students must be especially respectful to Senior students and Instructors.

When the Sempai notices a student who is not familiar with these rules they should feel free to speak to that student in confidence or get the attention of an instructor to help make a correction. The Sempai should be careful to not disrupt the class too much while helping in this way.