

Everyone Benefits From a Parents-As-Partners Day

Introduction

A Parents-As-Partners Day can easily become one of your most popular events and a tremendous opportunity to showcase your school and its programs.

Our Parents-As-Partners Day is a free monthly class that welcomes all registered students and their families. The standard class is 45 minutes, while the Little Ninjas, or preschool, program is 30 minutes.

The Parents-As-Partners Day is a very flexible program, so virtually any school is able to develop it as a special event. Give it your own name or rename it for various monthly themes. Parents-As-Partners Day is only limited by your imagination. For Mother's Day, I name it "Mommy on the Mat Day." For Father's Day, it is "Daddy in the Dojo."

Naturally, we encourage parents to participate on Mother's Day and/or Father's Day; however, if their schedules do not allow them to join us, then we invite the other parent and/or all siblings. In fact, your Parents-As-Partners Day (or whatever you call it) is really a family event, so always invite the entire family. They experience positive benefits that help you to pre-frame family members, or even entire families, to enroll.

We developed a Parents-As-Partners Day to benefit students, their parents and our school's growth.

- The Parents-As-Partners Day has fostered a more family-friendly atmosphere in our school.
- It's an exciting class, with high-energy drills, loud music, cheering parents and "high-fives," as children and parents find new and positive ways to bond.
- Our students' parents have become more committed to their children's training. Parents are motivated to learn how to practice with their children at home.

- Children encourage their parent or parents to participate, since they do not want to train alone during our Parents-As-Partners Day.
- The program has also generated more enrollments for our adult programs, since parents are less intimidated to step on the mat, when they participate with their children.
- Parents are better informed of our school activities, since we take the opportunity to announce those events during the Parents-As-Partners Day.
- Parents are also noticeably more involved and supportive of their children's training and the school's philosophy and curriculum.
- Parents-As-Partners Day also improves retention, since parents experience first-hand the value of our program and martial arts training.

Some parents will be reluctant to participate because they do not feel comfortable, attempting unfamiliar martial arts moves and other physical activities, in the presence of their children. Be sure to communicate to parents in advance that they will be coaching and motivating their children, not performing martial arts techniques. Conversely, invite them to participate to the fullest, if they choose.

I often use the example of Bela Karolyi, who has coached 28 Olympian gymnasts. He has never practiced gymnastics and he is unable to perform a simple hand stand, but he is recognized as a great coach of gymnastics. The local high school football coach wouldn't think of putting on pads and participating in full-contact practice with his team. As a coach, however, he has much to do with making the team successful. Take the time to pre-frame parents with these examples and more of them will attend your Parents-As-Partners Day.

BLACK BELT **MARKETING**

MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR THE OWNER AND INSTRUCTOR

We've organized our Parents-As-Partners Day into five parts or modules:

- Commencement and Introduction
- Assisted Stretching
- Drills
- Holding Pads
- Closing

Commencement and Introduction

Our Parents-As-Partners class is conducted just the same as our regular classes. All students stand in lines off the mat, with their parent or parents and siblings behind them. We first call for the highest rank to enter. As each rank is announced, families run onto the mat together, stand in a line behind their children, and the other students and families give them a round of applause. There's excitement and energy from the very beginning of the class.

When all participants are aligned on the mat, everyone bows and then recites the student creed, while holding certain martial arts positions. Most of the parents will try to take those positions, with various levels of success—the kids love it! The instructor praises the parents for their participation, and then tells them how their parental involvement is so important to the success of their children. Participating in their children's training and attending extracurricular activities contribute much to their children's self-esteem and success.

Assisted Stretching

I recommend that you start your Parents-As-Partners class with warm-up stretches, assisted by parents. Most parents will be able to perform the exercises, which are easily modified.

All stretches are performed in a static position. Instruct parents to hold each stretch for 10 to 20 seconds.

1. Neck Stretch: The parent holds his child's shoulders and stretches the neck to one side and then the other.
2. Shoulder Stretch: The parent stretches his child's arm across his chest.

3. Front Stretch: The student is seated with legs open at a wide angle. The parent gently pushes his back to assist the student with a front stretch.

4. Butterfly Stretch: The child sits with his feet in a butterfly position. The parent gently pushes his knees towards the floor.

There are numerous other partner- or assisted-stretching moves you may add to your routine.

Drills

1. Teach parents how to correct their children's stances and how to assess their punches, blocks and kicks.
2. Ask parents to assist with a balance drill. Each parent slightly holds and touches his child as he balances on a plate or pad. This drill improves balance and concentration and may also be done with kicks.
3. Another fun drill is the falling X-ray drill. The parent holds an X-ray film, magazine page or paper sheet. The parent allows the film or sheet to fall and the student tries to strike it before it reaches the ground.
4. The parent holds a coin in the open palm of his hand. When the child attempts to take the coin from his hand, the parent quickly closes his hand. This is a favorite drill of most parents, since most of them remember the Kung Fu TV series and the teacher's statement to his pupil, "When you are able to take this pebble from my hand, it is time for you to leave."

Holding Pads

Feel free to use any and all of your standard pad and target drills.

1. Start with the parent holding a paddle in a low position.
 - Instruct him to raise the pad slowly, so the child is able to kick higher until he reaches his limit.
 - Command the student to kick or, if you prefer more structure, the instructor commands all students to kick at the same time.
 - Explain the correct method of each kick, so the parent is able to correct the child and help him practice at home. The complexity of your kicking practice depends on the level of the class.

BLACK BELT **MARKETING**

MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR THE OWNER AND INSTRUCTOR

Use a basic front kick, jumping kick or spinning kick.

2. Ask the parent to hold a focus mitt, so the child may work combinations.
3. For variety, position a cone or other obstacles that the child must jump before kicking the pad.

Closing

This closing section is a brief, but very important, opportunity to pre-frame parents. I suggest that, throughout the class, but especially during the end of class, you share the values of the martial arts, motivate parents and family members to continue to participate, and make announcements. We've discovered that these few minutes result in better educated and involved parents. They acquire a better understanding of the value of our program. This, in turn, should help you improve the retention of current students and convince parents and/or siblings to enroll and possibly provide you with referrals. I also recommend that you use this time to distribute flyers, promoting future activities. You are more likely to have a successful event when both students and their parents receive this information directly.

Marketing Your Parents-As-Partners Day

The marketing, or communications, of your Parents-As-Partners Day with students, parents and their families is critical to its success. Naturally, as this program becomes a regular part of your annual calendar of events, more parents should be attracted to it.

Select a day for your Parents-As-Partners Day well in advance because most families have busy schedules. I suggest choosing a day at least one month in the future and start marketing no later than two weeks before the event. (You may want to start marketing your first Parents-As-Partners Day even sooner.)

Create a number of marketing tools and strategies, such as flyers, a poster, a letter to parents, a series of emails, a prominent announcement on your Web site and your school newsletter and ask every instructor to announce it during every class. Develop a schedule or plan of how you will use these various marketing/communications elements.

Be sure your staff members talk casually with parents about the event whenever they are at your school. Talk to the "right" parents and a word-of-mouth campaign will quickly spread the message.

Although your Parents-As-Partners Day is not a "news" story, your local newspaper or TV news editor may think that it is an interesting human interest story. If you've established a relationship with the local media as part of your regular public-relations campaign, then call your contact and tell him or her about your event. Emphasize that there will be plenty of great visual opportunities, as parents attempt martial arts with their children.