

Safeguarding in Martial Arts: Safe Practice

Martial Arts are activities where safe practice is essential to help prevent injury to adults and children. Children are particularly vulnerable as they are still developing mentally and physically, so training methods need to be modified as described below. (*also includes Adults at Risk)

Concussion and Head Injury Protocols (2025-2026)

- **"If in Doubt, Sit Them Out":** Strict adherence to the UK Grassroots Sport concussion guidelines.
- **Mandatory Rest Period:** No return to competition for at least 21 days following a concussion, and anyone with symptoms after 28 days must seek medical advice.
- **BMABA Standard:** A 28-day minimum exclusion period for suspected concussions in many, unless cleared earlier by a specialized medical practitioner

New Age and Division Rules (Kickboxing GB 2025)

- **Junior-to-Senior Transition:** Effective immediately (as of late 2025), junior athletes may only compete in senior divisions if they are **18 years or older on the day of the event**.
- **7-9 Year Old Divisions:** Light contact divisions for 7-9 year olds are being removed to improve safety for young fighters.

Included in our safe practice policy, are:

1. Warm ups

All activities should first include a thorough warm up which is appropriate for the activity taking place. To help reduce the risk of injury, specific attention should be paid to those muscle groups that will be used during later activity.

2. Martial Arts involving throwing, grappling and strangling

Some examples are: Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

The risks include but are not limited to:

Falling on unsuitable surfaces; landing on the head; damage to the joints from locks; strangulation.

At Epic Martial arts and Fitness some classes will involve take downs to the ground. This is generally taught in the run up to students grading for their higher belts.

These moves are taught by very experienced martial art coaches that have all achieved their black belts and have been teaching for many years.

Safe practice should include, but is not limited to:

- Checking the matted area for suitability, particularly where the mats have been joined.
- Checking that there are no hard surfaces or sharp/hard objects around the matted area.
- Having an experienced instructor who will ensure that children are not taught to use locks, throws or strangles which will cause injury.

3. Martial Arts involving strikes, punches and kicks

The risks include but are not limited to: concussion (brain injury) from heavy blows to the head; damage to internal organs and joints from heavy blows; injury from inappropriate stretching and other exercises.

- There are some key points to consider in this section, particularly around head contact for under 18s.
- Is age a consideration in regards to head contact?

Yes, age consideration in regards to head contact is critical in kickboxing. Because children's brains and skulls are still developing, they are more vulnerable to long-term damage from repeated head impacts. Medical experts and regulatory bodies strictly restrict head contact for minors, with many banning it entirely for younger children.

- To what degree is head contact allowed (e.g. controlled light contact, no follow through)?

In light contact and point-fighting kickboxing, head contact is strictly regulated to promote safety, generally allowing only controlled, light contact where techniques land without significant power or follow-through. Excessive contact, or "brawling," to the head is prohibited and often penalized with warnings, point deductions, or disqualification.

- Is equipment a consideration when sparring or in competition?

Yes, equipment is a critical consideration during both sparring and competition. Proper gear is essential for safety, injury prevention, and compliance with rules.

- Is the age of the participants/athletes a consideration when sparring or in competition?

Yes, the age of participants and athletes is a critical consideration in both sparring and competition across almost all combat and contact sports. Age is used to ensure safety, fairness, and proper development, particularly in organizing competition brackets, determining contact rules, and matching opponents.

- Is height or weight of the participants/athletes a consideration when sparring or in competition?

Yes, both height and weight are critical considerations in combat sports, though weight is the primary factor used for official competition categorization. These factors exist to ensure safety, fairness, and competitive balance, as significant disparities in size can create insurmountable advantages.

- What considerations are taken with mixed gender sparring and competition?

Mixed gender sparring and competition in combat sports are generally managed through strict safety protocols, focusing on skill, weight, and intensity matching rather than gender. While mixed-gender sparring is common in training for skill development, competitive mixed-gender fighting is rare and usually heavily regulated or prohibited to prevent serious injury.

- Is supervision of the athletes considered when sparring or in competition?

Yes, supervision of athletes is a critical and mandatory consideration during both sparring and competition in combat sports and martial arts. It is considered a fundamental aspect of safety, duty of care, and proper training.

- What floor covering (e.g. mats) is considered when sparring or in competition?

Yes, supervision of athletes is a critical and mandatory consideration during both sparring and competition in combat sports and martial arts. It is considered a fundamental aspect of safety, duty of care, and proper training.

- Is appropriate, correctly fitting, protective equipment being worn, if no headguard or gumshield then the student will not be able to participate.

Yes, it is considered best practice and often mandatory in contact sports for appropriate, correctly fitting protective equipment—specifically headguards and mouthguards (gumshields)—to be worn for participation, as they significantly reduce the risk of serious injuries.

What are the steps taken if head injury occurs? Also see concussion protocols above.

If a head injury occurs in martial arts, the immediate action is to stop the session, remove the person from play, and conduct a thorough, urgent assessment for signs of concussion or severe trauma, such as loss of consciousness, disorientation, vomiting, or severe headache. "If in doubt, sit them out" is the standard policy.

Immediate First Aid & Action Steps

- **Stop and Remove:** Immediately stop sparring or training. Do not allow the individual to return on the same day.
- **Assess Symptoms:** Monitor for symptoms like confusion, dizziness, nausea, blurred vision, or emotional changes.
- **Emergency Care:** Call 999 or seek immediate emergency medical care if there is any loss of consciousness (even brief), severe confusion, vomiting, or worsening symptoms.
- **First Aid:** Treat immediate injuries (e.g., scalp wounds) with pressure, and apply a cold, wrapped pack to swelling, but this does not treat the concussion itself.
- **Do Not Leave Alone:** The injured person should not be left alone for at least 48 hours.

Return to Play Protocol

- **Medical Evaluation:** A medical professional must provide clearance before returning to any training.
- **Rest:** A 24-48 hour period of physical and cognitive rest is required.
- **Mandatory Suspensions:** Depending on the severity (TKO vs. KO), there are standard minimum suspensions (ranging from 28 days to months).
- **Graduated Return:** Return to training must be gradual, starting with light, non-contact activity, only proceeding if symptoms do not return.

For more detailed information, you can read the [Concussion & Head Injury Management Policy](#) from the British Martial Arts & Boxing Association (BMABA)

Martial Arts involving weapons

Safe practice in weapon-based martial arts requires strict protocols, including no live blades in the training hall, using approved training weapons (e.g., foam, wood), comprehensive supervision by qualified instructors, and adequate spacing. Prior student suitability assessment and constant risk analysis are also essential

- **No Live Blades:** Strict prohibition of sharpened or live blades within the training hall.
- **Safe Equipment:** Use of appropriate training weapons such as foam, rattan, or wooden weapons (e.g., bokken, jo).
- **Supervision:** High-level supervision by instructors.
- **Instructor Expertise:** Instructors must be qualified to teach the specific weapon.
- **Suitability Assessment:** Assessing student experience and discipline before allowing weapon training.
- **Age Appropriateness:** Weapon training is often restricted to adult or advanced classes.
- **Environment Check:** Maintaining sufficient space to prevent accidents during training.
- **Constant Monitoring:** Constant, ongoing risk assessment during the session

Above all, safe practice means having a suitably qualified and experienced instructor who will ensure that children are not exposed to the above risks and who can make a training session enjoyable whilst maintaining the discipline essential to learning a Martial Art.