

Ju-Jitsu: Self-defense for children in the danger zone

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A predator grabs a child from the back with a choke hold. In seconds, the attacker is on the ground under control of the victim. And the child is the victim no longer.

This is one of the self-defense movements taught by Rick Fowler, owner and lead instructor of Self Defense Solutions of Cleveland. Fowler has studied martial arts since 1983 and has achieved rank and certifications in Black Belt Bando, Black Belt Lethwei-Muay Thai (kick boxing) and Third level Blue Belt Gracie Jiu-Jitsu. He is a certified personal protection specialist and is the lead instructor in Defense Lab (DNA fight science) and phase 2 instructor in Alan Baker's Civilian Tactical Program. A graduate of Executive Protection Institute of New York, he is a member of Nine Lives Associates as well. Fowler is currently employed with International Protection Group of New York City.

Fowler continues his martial arts education under the direction of Sifu Alan Baker, Chief Armando Bermudez and the instructor team at Atlanta Martial Arts Center in Woodstock, Georgia. He has received and continues to receive Church Security Training under direction of Lieutenant Bob Hanshaw of Cleveland and is co-director of security at Living Word Church.

In his Self Defense Solutions studio on Spring Place Road, Fowler teaches adults, teens and children "to achieve personal betterment through positive lifestyle changes and self-defense," according to the goal stated in his mission statement. "Self Defense Solutions is to provide reality based self-defense, martial arts, personal safety and fitness training. Students are given a clear path to their goals of physical fitness and personal protection through certified training curriculum. Students can expect an improved lifestyle; multiply health benefits, and greater confidence."

Fowler said he wants to provide a safe family friendly and professional environment for students to train. And his special love is the kids' and youth programs designed to teach children discipline, confidence and self-esteem through fun-filled exercises. Children, he added, will enhance fitness as they play games to simulate dangerous scenarios. At the same time, they can make new friends and learn valuable defense skills.

Deanna and David Hewitt sought this for their two daughters, Kaitlyn and Kristyn, so they enrolled them in the Kids Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu classes which are held each Wednesday afternoon. The classes make training in fundamental techniques fun for children in a non-threatening atmosphere.

Fowler said the Kids Program is designed to teach discipline, confidence and self-esteem. He has a 30-minute class for younger kids and an hour for the older ones.

"I really appreciate Rick working so diligently with patience with my girls," said Deanna, who attends every session to watch her girls go through the routines — joining in the fun. She said Fowler has shown a great deal of knowledge in teaching them and he explains to me what the reasoning is for each technique.

"My girls, Kaitlyn and Kristyn," she continued, "have come such a long way." She said Kaitlyn is far more confident now in dealing with situations such as kids attempting to bully and standing up to them. She told of an incident where they went to the vice principal concerning some girls on the bus.

"Normally she wouldn't have had the courage to stand up to them, but to sit down with the vice principal and describe all those involved was amazing."

Deanna said Kristyn, the younger, is far more focused since she began the training. "Before she took this class, she struggled with attention so much so that the teacher was questioning if she had a learning disability — and she's an amazing teacher."

She said now Kristyn is making A's and B's. "I've watched Rick with the kids and he honestly cares and has a heart for these kids. I'm definitely happy with all that he's done to help my girls."

During a recent afternoon session, Fowler was working with three girls, Kristyn, Kaitlyn and Olivia, and one boy, Haiden. The classes started with a functional warm-up to build strength — the students did two laps running and one lap crawling. "Sometimes," Fowler explained, "you can escape a problem by running."

From the warm-up, different scenarios were played with each student receiving personal attention, with Fowler explaining and helping each one practice the escape moves.

Games included such games as Riding the Horse, King Kong, Snake Bite, Angry Ankles, Sleeping Bear, Tumbleweed, Disco Game, Sweep it up, Tag and Barrel Roll — each one teaching a different mode of escape. The self-defense tactics often went to offense to control the predator. Teeter-totter and push-ups ended the classes.

Fowler has had this school operating two years. He has been in martial arts for 30 years. He said in his childhood, he was picked on and he needed to know how to defend himself, so he has been serious about self-defense for some 40 years. He has three children — ages 22, 15 and 10.

He said he would advise self-defense training for any child. Fowler said kids are his favorite and make better students of the arts. "They're less inhibited and they ask questions." Fowler said they are more absorbing and their learning to use these things "always make me feel good."