

Mental Benefits of Tae Kwon-Do

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Martial Arts, and in particular Tae Kwon-Do, are known to be of obvious benefit to people physically by providing a means of physical exercise. In doing so, Martial Arts like Tae Kwon-Do helps people to lose weight, get in shape or stay in shape, and gives them the skills needed to protect themselves from other people while out in the world. But what these obvious boons mean is that many people overlook the plethora of other benefits which Martial Arts, and Tae Kwon-Do particularly, are able to provide in terms of mental wellness and health. Such benefits include the development of positive self-image and character building, mood improvement, relationship building, and even the management of mental illnesses like anxiety or depression in part thanks to the known physical benefits of Tae Kwon-Do but also as a result of the teaching and values instilled in students as a part of the way of life that comes with being a practitioner.

To start, Tae Kwon-Do provides a means of physical activity that, when properly dedicated, can provide an individual with the means and opportunity to work towards their own ideal body. Tae Kwon-Do might be a Martial Art which focuses on being able to punch or kick, but in order to do these tasks successfully, students are expected to be physically capable and maintain in some way the wellbeing of their own body. This helps people to exercise on a regular basis. While this may seem like a primary physical benefit, what this really means is that the

individual can learn to be proud of their body. And the goal is not to simply have a thin body for shallow reasons, but rather to have a body which is strong and capable, whatever that might mean in terms of appearance aside. Tae Kwon-Do encourages pride in what the body is capable of rather than just it's simple appearance, and in doing so gives the individual skills which can make them feel safe in the world around them and which allows them to go forth into the world with a confidence which they may have initially lacked. Additionally, the sense of empowerment brought on by the self-defense skills taught to students can make it easier for individuals to push themselves in their lives outside of Martial Arts, letting them feel comfortable and capable to further explore the world around them.

Furthermore, the roles of both testing and competitions in Tae Kwon-Do allows practitioners to push themselves and strive for betterment. Both testing and tournaments allow individuals to measure themselves and their growth in Tae Kwon-Do, and the results given allow them to self-reflect on their accomplishments or lack thereof. In doing so, they are reactions to these results demonstrate their own strength of character and allow them to acknowledge their own weaknesses. In doing so, they are allowed a choice: use such results to grow and improve as a Tae Kwon-Do practitioner or accept their results and do nothing. For those who go on to take Tae Kwon-Do seriously, this answer is usually the former, and it allows for a growth of character that those who choose to settle simply will not achieve in all

their acceptance. Practitioners who find that they lose in tournaments or struggle to obtain promotions at a rate that they expect will have to determine if they want to put in the work necessary to better themselves and attain their goals. In making the choice to work harder, to push themselves more, they allow themselves to undergo a certain type of personal development. This personal growth can bring a sense of pride and individual worth to a practitioner which is often invaluable for that person.

Tae Kwon-Do can even play a role in developing healthy relationships. Positive and healthy relationships are crucial for one's mental health, and in committing to practicing Tae Kwon-Do, one is guaranteed many an opportunity to develop positive and healthy relationships with a diverse array of individuals. The first piece of evidence for this begins with the student-instructor relationship. Within the art of Tae Kwon-Do, there is a clear set of guidelines for the student-instructor relationship which prioritizes the importance a learning and teaching and defines a healthy and positive relationship. Along with this, the Student Oath itself proclaims "I shall respect the instructor and seniors." Respect is a crucial aspect in any good relationship. Students also learn how to work with their peers, participating in partner work and learning to trust others in their training, and how to be responsible for their juniors by setting a positive example for those around them. In addition to this, many practitioners of Tae Kwon-Do practice with their

family. This allows for a common interest to be shared amongst family members in a healthy and safe environment, where members of a family may grow both independently and together (Croom, pg. 64). Because relationships are so integral when making a place for yourself in the world, these positive relationships can pave the way for relationship building outside of Tae Kwon-Do, and knowing how to have healthy, appropriate relationships can only further the mental well-being of the individual.

Of course, practicing Tae Kwon-Do may also help individuals suffering from mental illnesses and struggles. For one, consistency in training paired with the actual benefits of the physical aspects can help sufferers of depression. Some research suggests that one “hypothesis, however, is based on the observation that physical activity causes the release of endogenous opioids (endorphins – “endogenous morphines”), basically beta-endorphin” (Peluso and Andrade, pg. 62). Along with endorphins, regular physical activity can aid in the production of other important hormones like dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin. This coupled with the potential self-esteem benefits, while not a complete cure, can help to ease symptoms of depression. Additionally, Tae Kwon-Do, like most Martial Arts and as established previously, helps with building self-confidence. This self-confidence can also ease the experience of anxieties which practitioners face on a regular basis. The regular exercise and teachings of both the Tenets and the Student Oath can also help

with the reduction of aggression. This is important because initially many individuals expect Martial Arts to encourage or worsen aggressive behaviors, however research has shown that Martial Arts, and therefore Tae Kwon-Do, actually act as “a venue where they can safely channel their aggression (Marquez-Castillo pg. 104). Practicing Tae Kwon-Do is an excellent outlet for those with temperament issues, allowing for a safe and controlled environment while the mental teachings of Tae Kwon-Do and meditation can help to ease an overly aggressive mind.

The structure and discipline which is provided by Tae Kwon-Do is also excellent in the mental developments of children, particularly those with ADHD. While tasks like focus can be difficult in children, more so for those suffering from ADHD or ADD, consistency and structure are seen as beneficial in helping to learn skills such as self-regulation. Additionally, Tae Kwon-Do also helps these children thanks to the reinforcement of ideals such as courtesy, respect, and also self-discipline (Marquez-Castillo, pg. 102). Tae Kwon-Do also teaches and encourages non-violent conflict resolution, which can help such children avoid potential behavioral issues when learning to socialize and interact with others. An in depth study by Marquez-Castillo (2013) looked into the effects of Martial Arts on children with ADHD and potential benefits which children might be able to receive from regular and consistent training, and it was found that Martial Arts can help children with ADHD improve academic performance, reduce conflict, and improve

hyperactivity, focus, and impulsivity. With an increase in the rate of ADHD diagnosis in children today, this understanding of Tae Kwon-Do as a means of managing ADHD symptoms is incredibly important. It can mean less dependency for children on medication, or even an alternate option for handling the symptoms altogether in young children, where using psychostimulant medications may even be harmful for them and their development.

Ultimately, what we see when considering the benefits of Tae Kwon-Do for practitioners is a long list of benefits which are often overlooked in favor of the more obvious physical benefits that are so easy to consider. However, it is important to be aware of the additional mental benefits, because in doing so one can see that Tae Kwon-Do plays a greater role in the life of all individuals. Tae Kwon-Do's ability to help in personal growth and build self-image, its ability to improve mood, and the way it can work with an individual's mental illness to ease symptoms all make Tae Kwon-Do an excellent lifestyle pursuit for most individuals.

References

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