

UNITING THE WORLD THROUGH **MARTIAL ARTS**

July 2016

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The Joy of Breaking

Should Children Break Boards?

by Master Wiz

All my life I have been the kind of person who wanted to know why and wanted people to prove their statements to me. And what I found over the years is that many of the truisms that my fellow martial artists believed were in fact NOT true or they USED to be true but things had changed yet they stuck to their OLD beliefs rather than upgrading their knowledge and skill.

When I started teaching, one of the truisms was that “kids shouldn’t break boards because it can cause them long-term harm due to impact on still growing joints and tissue.”

We have all seen kids challenging one another to see who can jump from higher up the stairs than the other or off fences, trees, playground equipment or anything they can find to jump off. The impact of a falling body launched off the top step and hitting the ground causes substantially more energy to be absorbed by the body than a failed side kick. Both take impact from the heel and transfer it up through the ankle to the knee, hip and spine. However, we watch the kids do these kinds of activities for hours, and nobody tells the kids to stop jumping and playing (except the parents to keep the noise down). So why is breaking considered bad?

I believe breaking for children developed out of actual safety issues caused by the material and situation of the time. In the bad old days, the boards we used to break were made of solid wood and were 1”x12”x12”. However, in North America this actually became .75”x12”x12” because of the milling system we use. (Many parts of the world still use planks that are actually a full 1” thick.) There were enormous differences in the dryness of the board, depending on the quality of the board and the location they were purchased. The boards from British Columbia (west coast of Canada) often weighed two times the boards we purchased in Ontario (Easterly Canada), and therefore, breaking five BC boards was like breaking

seven or eight Ontario boards. Variables, such the number and placement of knots and the size and thickness of the grain (caused by growth history), could make one board snap like a chopstick while another required a hammer.

Letting children (or anyone) smash their hands or feet into these wood boards and only being able to guess at the power that would be required to break them obviously created situations that were potentially (and often were) harmful. We felt that adults should push through and tough it out, but we decided to protect children by simply prohibiting them from breaking. At that period of our art, I believe it was the right call.

Nobody worries about the kids damaging themselves from jumping down stairs (except the immediate concern of breaking a leg), and nobody seems to worry about long-term damage to kids’ joints when they see them chopping pencils in half off the edge of their desks at school, snapping a stick over their knee or stomping a pop can flat. I believe it is because they see that the kids are unharmed and it’s obvious that the energy from the strikes were absorbed by the object and not the kids, and that the kids are having fun. As I have said before, everyone loves to break things. Especially kids. Remember “Smash it up Derby”, “Rock’em Sock’em Robots”?

Today we have the option of using various styles of re-breakable boards that eliminate ALL the dangers and inconsistencies of wood boards. The breaking strengths are known and are consistent. UMAB has 13 breaking-strength options to choose from so that you can find a SAFE difficulty level for EVERY student, regardless of age, skill or technique. The tongue-and-groove boards often have padding to protect delicate digits, or a flat pool noodle can be used for the UMAB ones. The unique hinge system of UMAB boards actually allows them to flex and absorb impact—even

if the student didn't have enough power for a clean break—which keeps more energy in the board and less going back into the student.

Let your younger students have fun and keep them excited by letting do something that they love that will also increase their skill . . . let them break PLASTIC boards.

(It also shows your commitment to the GREEN movement. Plastic boards can be broken thousands of times and save trees!!)



Master Terry Wisniewski is a 7th-degree black belt in ITF Tae Kwon Do, founder of Tien Lung Tae Kwon Do. He is a full-time professional Tae Kwon Do instructor with three schools. He has trained world champions in patterns, self-defense and power breaking.



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