

How does junior judo differ to senior judo?

Judo is run with a mixture of theory, competitive fighting and kata, according to the same principles. The principles cover areas such as self-discipline, respect and hygiene, which are expected to be followed regardless of a judoka's age. A junior judoka can start at Blackwater Judo Club at the age of six, in the Foundation Group, or a minimum of eight years old on the main mat, depending on a child's size and experience as sometimes waiting until age ten is more appropriate. When a person reaches the age of 16, they are classified as a senior judoka.

The reason the judoka is on the mat may be different according to the person's age. Children may be on the mat because they want to try out judo, or to join their friend or because their parent thinks they ought to. Both these last two can pose problems; they may primarily want to chat to their friend although it may also be beneficial and lead to some healthy competition! If the junior tries out judo on their parent's suggestion, they may well find they enjoy this new activity but if they are only on the mat to please their parent and they really do not enjoy judo, that is more of a problem. It is extremely hard to teach someone who does not want to be there and they may well disrupt the entire group. Adults who come to judo we can assume choose to be there. However, there may be other problems which are unique to this older group. The senior may be unfit, have injuries or be concerned to avoid potential injuries due to their possible impact on work and home life. Fighting spirit seems to be present in most judokas, however, regardless of age.

Courage is one of the features of the judo code. This is possibly even more necessary in adults who may be more apprehensive about trying out new things, especially in front of others, or being tested. Children are regularly picking up new skills at school and being assessed, so this may be less of a problem during judo, although they may well be intimidated by coming onto a big mat full of scary people of all sizes.

Grading in both groups follows the same colour scheme of belts, white, yellow, orange, green, blue, brown, black. The syllabus is slightly different in that strangles and armlocks are introduced higher up in the belts, amongst other things. Juniors usually received a coloured tab to go onto their belt rather than achieve an increase of an entire belt; this is not possible in adults. They either receive a different coloured belt or they don't. If a junior has obtained a black belt before they are 16, they lose this on their 16th birthday. They go to senior green, but not if they have not reached this grade as a junior. If a junior has the technical skills to obtain a black belt but is not yet 15, they will receive a yuko kuro obi, which is a horizontally striped brown over black belt. Once juniors or seniors have reached the level of a blue or green belt respectively, they are encouraged to work towards instructor qualifications.

Foundation grading is slightly different. They start off with a red and white belt, progress to a blue and white belt, and once thought to be ready to join the main mat they are presented with a red belt, to show that they are novices on the main mat. The red and white striped belt was chosen to represent the circular approach to judo as a 6th Dan grade also wears a red and white belt.

Finally, another difference between seniors and juniors usually occurs during competitions. The fighting time is usually longer for seniors than for juniors and the time for a hold-down to be held before it scores points is less for juniors.