



MENTAL KARATE™

LEADER GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

A LETTER FROM MAWI

Dear Leader,

A 7th grader named Alias taught himself basic French in 30 days.

An 8th grader earned an “A” in math for the first time in her life.

A sophomore living in a group home wrote letters to his incarcerated mother.

These three students had one thing in common: They had an adult like you in their life who challenged them to take action. **Whether you are a teacher, counselor, principal, afterschool program director, parent, or just someone who cares about youth, you have tremendous power to inspire young people.**

Think of the most inspiring speaker you’ve ever heard - someone who moved you and changed the way you view the world. **I believe that you can be more inspiring to students.** Guest speakers come in and out, but you can encourage students over time and ensure follow-through. Guest speakers can address many students at once, but you can know your students intimately and leverage the power of relationship.

I’ve experienced first-hand the power of educators and mentors. I came to the United States as a refugee from East Africa. I grew up on welfare and lived in subsidized housing. But I was able to earn a scholarship to Harvard University and graduate because educators and adult mentors like you cared about me, challenged me, and supported me.

Now I’m here to support you as you empower our next generation of students. And fortunately, you don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Mental Karate has already been used by hundreds of leaders across the United States and Canada. Just follow the system described in this guide and adapt it as necessary for your situation.

If you have any questions or if you have a great new idea to share with other Mental Karate leaders, please know that you can contact us at anytime at Info@MentalKarate.com. We are here to serve you at all times.

Thank you in advance for the gift of your time and energy. I deeply appreciate your partnership in uplifting our youth.

Blessings,



Selamawi “Mawi” Asgedom
Founder, Mental Karate

OVERVIEW OF MENTAL KARATE

BASIC PHILOSOPHY

Schools use many methods to inspire students: speeches, books, multi-media, posters, and citizenship days to name a few. Although there are many positive things about these methods, almost all these methods are passive. For example, I've spoken at more than 1,000 schools, and while I've always tried my best to involve students, the fact remains that I'm speaking and the students are listening. Passive methods of inspiration are easier, faster, and require less energy. But both common sense and an avalanche of research indicate that just sitting and listening does not result in much learning.

Much of the learning research can be summarized by one simple rubric called the 70-20-10 rule: 70% of learning comes from experience; 20% comes from reflection and discussion; and 10% comes from passive listening. If a student hears a lecture on the quadratic formula, that's only 10% of learning. If they can apply the quadratic formula and use it themselves, that's the lion's share of learning at 70%. And if they can round out their understanding through discussion, that's 20%. In every possible way, Mental Karate is designed to teach basic principles of empowerment through an active process that covers the entire spectrum: listening, experiencing, and reflecting.¹

Mental Karate's focus on action is indebted to research by Dr. Martin Seligman, past chairman of the American Psychological Association.² Dr. Seligman's studies convincingly demonstrate that students gain confidence and resilience not by hearing that they are great, but by acquiring mastery of skills - doing rather than hearing. In the coming pages, you will be equipped to unlock new levels of confidence and resilience in your students by connecting proven character principles to action – that's what Mental Karate is all about: **CHARACTER ACTION**.

THE BELTS

Students of Mental Karate are responsible for selecting and planning a series of actions they will complete to earn each of five belts. Each belt represents a proven principle of empowerment. Mental Karate's five principles were selected with great care, and are based on the leading empowerment thinking of our time. For example, consider the principle behind White Belt (Initiative). Virtually every respected leadership manual, such as *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, asserts that our most basic power is our power to act. **Each of us, regardless of our background, can take action to improve our circumstances.** In the same way, Mental Karate's other core principles of Contribution, Discipline, Courage, and Awareness are widely acknowledged as proven success principles.

¹ Much of the research behind the 70-20-10 rule was developed by Lominger International.

² Dr. Seligman's marquee text is *The Optimistic Child*.

OVERVIEW OF MENTAL KARATE

LEADER'S ROLE

Your role is to lead students on a journey from White Belt to Black Belt, facilitate discussions, and reward students as they earn each belt. Your job is not to select or judge students' actions, but rather to guide them through the decision making process. For example, you may have students who select goals that you do not find valuable (getting better at their favorite video game, for example). While you may be tempted to tell them to pick another goal, resist the temptation. By selecting his or her own goal and planning how to accomplish it, the student will be invested in taking action and will learn the value of that principle. On the other hand, if a student picks a goal that is unwise, unhealthy, or unreasonable - gently redirect them to something more appropriate. In Mental Karate, students are judged not by the subject matter of their goals, but by their willingness to take meaningful action related to each attribute.

Focus on *progress* rather than *perfection*. Not all students will accomplish all of their goals. If a student didn't accomplish the goal he or she wanted to reach but showed diligence in taking action and exhibited an understanding of the concept, you should award them the belt. At the end of the day, *you* are the Mental Karate expert at your school. Take ownership of the program and have confidence in your judgment of whether or not a student should receive a belt. Just remember – the belts must be *earned*.

The best way you can lead your students is by example. You should go on your own Mental Karate journey and track your progress in the Student Journal. Although the program focuses on personal development, there should always be a common understanding that the class is on the journey together. Many leaders have reported that the camaraderie Mental Karate helped create was as powerful as the actions taken by students.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

We know you are busy professionals, so our team has worked hard to make implementation of Mental Karate as turnkey as possible. Key resources available to you include:

- **This Leader Guide:** 32 step-by-step lessons complete with discussion points, classroom activities, and teaching tips that are in sync with the Mental Karate Student Journals.
- **Student Journals:** All essential readings and worksheets are included in the journals. This will greatly reduce your prep time.
- **Award System:** Five colored bracelets and certificates you can award to each student upon completion of actions.
- **Online System:** Access to a tracking system you and your students can use to record your actions. Additional teaching tools are also available through the online system.

We are always here to support you and provide avenues for you to network with other Mental Karate leaders around the world.

Please do not limit yourself to the information contained within the covers of this book. Character action training is fluid and intended to be adapted according to your schedule and the needs of your particular group of students. If you don't have time to cover some suggested activities, skip them. Feel free to combine lessons or spend extra time on parts that require additional attention. **Take the resources provided in this guide and the Student Journal and strategically implement Mental Karate in the way that works best for you and your students.**

TEACHING MENTAL KARATE

THE INSPIRATION WHEEL™

The Inspiration Wheel is a simple and powerful tool that you will use to lead students through every belt. The Inspiration Wheel has four components: Explore, Plan, Act, and Reflect.



- 1. Explore:** When you start a belt, you will first need to explore the meaning of the belt's principle. For example, White Belt represents Initiative. You and your students will explore initiative by reading and discussing a passage we provide in the Student Journal.
- 2. Plan:** Next, you and your students will plan clear, specific actions that unlock the power of that character principle. For example, during White Belt, your students will plan to take three specific acts of initiative.
- 3. Act:** Your students will implement their action plans. For White Belt, your students will take action and record their progress on their acts of initiative.
- 4. Reflect:** You and your students will review what has been learned from taking action.

The Inspiration Wheel covers all aspects of the 70-20-10 rule. Exploring is passive learning (10%); planning and acting are experiential (70%); and reflecting is 20%. To teach Mental Karate, just follow The Inspiration Wheel for each belt. You will notice the format of the thirty-two lessons is based on helping you get around the Inspiration Wheel for each belt. You will also see that in Lesson 1.3 students are introduced to The Inspiration Wheel.

LESSON SEQUENCE

Mental Karate begins with three introductory lessons. During these lessons, students become familiar with the Mental Karate system and the Inspiration Wheel. The lessons will also help students think broadly about their own dreams and goals. Capitalize on this opportunity to build rapport with your students. Also focus on establishing a safe classroom environment. If students do not feel free to discuss their personal journeys, they cannot learn and grow with their classmates.

After the three introductory lessons, you will take it one belt at a time starting with White Belt and ending with Black. Each belt follows the same sequence of lessons based on the Inspiration Wheel.

Exploring: Exploring is the first lesson of each belt and often requires the most teaching time because you are introducing students to a new concept and brainstorming actions.

Planning Actions: The planning lesson can also take significant time because students need to discuss and select their actions.

Taking Action and Tracking Progress: Students will spend most of their time on the ACT part of the Inspiration Wheel, simply because it can take weeks to complete certain actions. If you are short on teaching time, you can have students track their actions quickly without spending as much time on discussion or activities during this phase.

Reflecting: The last lesson of each belt, reflecting, is when you will award students their bracelets and certificates.

Mental Karate concludes with two lessons about the Jigna award. Jigna is an award presented each year to up to five Black Belts who have taken exemplary actions throughout their Mental Karate journeys. Winners of the Jigna award each earn \$200, a certificate and an opportunity to be featured on the Mental Karate website. The Jigna lessons walk the students through the process of planning and writing the Jigna essay required for consideration.

LESSON FORMAT

Each lesson includes the following sections:

OBJECTIVE: Begin your lessons by clearly sharing the lesson objective with the students. You may also want to revisit the objective at the end of the lesson by encouraging students to self-assess whether or not they have met the objective.

DISCUSSION: The discussion is a critical piece of the program. You will be covering many new concepts and ideas with students, and it is important they have an opportunity to explore the concepts through dialogue. Mental Karate is designed to be very student-centered. As the leader, your role in the discussion is to facilitate student ideas and conversation. The discussion is a great opportunity for you to get to know your students – their goals,

challenges and aspirations. The more you know about your students, the more successful you will be in leading them to success in Mental Karate (and in life).

ACTIVITY: The activities are designed to reinforce the discussion. Many of these activities relate directly to understanding the definitions of the Mental Karate attributes. Other activities involve opportunities to extend learning in creative ways, either through skits, posters, or songs.

STUDENT JOURNAL: This part of the lesson will direct you to the readings and worksheets you need to cover in the corresponding Mental Karate Student Journal. The journal is the heart of the Mental Karate experience: Students will plan their actions, record their accomplishments, and reflect on their progress in their journals. You should have your own copy of the journal where you can follow along with readings and track your own Mental Karate journey.

TEACHING TIPS: The information contained in the teaching tips section at the end of each lesson is invaluable advice from seasoned Mental Karate instructors.

In addition to the above sections, the cover page of each belt contains book suggestions related to each attribute. The books range in length and reading level and provide you with an opportunity to make literacy connections. These texts are also a great springboard for a more in-depth discussion about the belt principle.

PLANNING THE LESSONS

Like any instruction you provide, running a successful Mental Karate program requires a certain amount of leader preparation before each class. **In fact, the single most important determinant of how much students gain from Mental Karate is your level of enthusiasm and preparation as the leader.**

This Leader Guide includes thirty-two detailed lessons. Take time before each class to read through the lesson and plan your teaching strategy. You can also plan ahead at the beginning of each belt by familiarizing yourself with all the lessons. Note that the cover page for each belt offers planning tips such as materials you may need and additional reading suggestions.

The lessons are designed to be taught once a week over the course of a school year. Most lessons take about forty minutes to complete. If you don't have a block of forty minutes, it can also work well to break up the instruction into two 20-minute sessions every week. In this case, you'll want to use the first 20-minute session to cover discussion and group activities. The second 20-minute session can then be dedicated to giving students time to complete worksheets in the Student Journal. For Green and Black Belts, where students will be taking many small actions, you may want to give students five minutes each day to record their actions.

PLANNING THE SCHOOL YEAR

There are two keys for success in leading Mental Karate: *organization* and *communication*. Before you start Mental Karate, look over your school calendar to determine start and end dates for each belt. Think ahead about how you

TEACHING MENTAL KARATE

would like to celebrate belt ceremonies, guest speakers you'd like to invite, and field trips you could incorporate. Use the *Sample Teaching Schedule* included in Appendix B of this book to chart out the year. The appendix in the Student Journal also includes a chart for students to fill in key dates. Be sure to communicate to students when they are expected to start and complete their actions to earn each belt.

If you are doing Mental Karate as a school, try to put the whole school on the same schedule. Be purposeful about communicating with all staff members regarding teaching methods and a timeline for going through the belts. Consider creating a Mental Karate committee to plan assemblies or other activities to support the program throughout the year. Even staff members who are not directly involved with Mental Karate instruction should be in the loop, so they can provide encouragement to students. Investing upfront in organization and scheduling will pay dividends the rest of the year.

A common schedule for many Mental Karate schools is to start Mental Karate on October 1, complete White and Yellow Belts before Winter Break, and then complete the rest of the belts by May 1. Avoid the holidays, avoid finals, and avoid school testing. As an inspiring start to Mental Karate, some schools choose to start in September by reading Mawi Asgedom's memoir, *Of Beetles and Angels: A Boy's Remarkable Journey from a Refugee Camp to Harvard*.

SOME CHALLENGES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER

Students Falling Behind: Let students continue to the next belt with their classmates, but do not do so if they are more than one belt behind.

Discouragement: Sometimes students get discouraged if they don't take their actions. Be very clear that no one should ever feel bad with Mental Karate— we will all fall short sometimes. The key is effort and resilience. Help students create a plan to get back on track.

Student Resistance: Let students know that everyone, including their leader, is going on the journey. Make award ceremonies exciting. Do not tolerate students ruining Mental Karate for their classmates. Add peer accountability. Recognize that every student is on their own developmental timeline and will respond to Mental Karate in their own way.

SOME HELPFUL HINTS

Keep Materials in the Classroom: Do not let students take their Mental Karate Student Journals home, as some will lose them.

Create a Timeline: Present deadlines upfront for each belt's completion. Have students fill in the due dates on the last page of their journal in the chart titled Key Dates.

Always Provide an Adult Leader: Avoid situations where a student has to do Mental Karate alone.

Dedicate Consistent Time: Set aside consistent Mental Karate time each week. For Green and Black Belts, you may want to have five minutes a day for tracking, or several times a week.

Timing: Select a time when students and teachers are happy to do Mental Karate. For example, if you select a time students currently use to catch up on homework or talk to their friends, expect some resistance.

One Belt at a Time: Do not jump ahead – just take it one belt at a time.

Require Specifics: Students often select vague goals such as: “My Yellow Belt goal is to work on myself.” Push students to set specific, measurable goals such as, “My Yellow Belt goal is to save at least \$100,” or “To improve my science grade from D to B.” See the “SMART” Goals worksheet in Lesson 2.2 of the Student Journal.

Awards Ceremonies: Make these fun and festive with music and even food if possible. Students can receive their belts in front of the class and share about their accomplishments.

Beware Advisory/Homeroom: Advisory seems like a natural place for Mental Karate but the time frame is typically too short and often broken up by school announcements. Some advisory teachers may not want to teach Mental Karate and advisory time may already be perceived as “chill” time, “quick homework catch-up time,” or prep time for educators. **It is best to select several extremely passionate educators who want to teach Mental Karate and give them time and space to instruct, rather than force Mental Karate in a time and place where it becomes an afterthought.**

Support: Even if only a few staff members are leading Mental Karate, be sure to provide information about the program to all staff members, as their support is essential for students’ success.



WHITE BELT - INITIATIVE

DEFINITION

Initiative is taking purposeful action to improve your life.

WHITE BELT CHALLENGE

To earn your White Belt, take three actions to improve your life. Actions should include efforts to overcome a personal challenge, pursue a hobby you've been interested in developing, or get closer toward accomplishing a life dream.

PLANNING TIPS

Time: Lessons 2.1 and 2.2 may take more time.

Materials: Lesson 2.1 requires chart paper.

Guests: Invite speakers to share about initiatives they have taken.

Additional Resources: Listen online to CD #1 from Mawi's CD set *Nothing is Impossible*.

ADDITIONAL READING SUGGESTIONS

The Dog Poop Initiative, Kirk Weisler

The Breadwinner, Deborah Ellis

Habibi, Naomi Shihab Nye

Nobody's Family is Going to Change, Louis Fitzhugh

Amazing Grace, Mary Hoffman

Stone Soup, Marcia Brown

Because of Wynn-Dixie, Kate DiCamillo

Swimmy, Leo Lionni

An Apple for Harriet Tubman, Glennette Tilley Turner



2.1

WHITE BELT ■ INITIATIVE

EXPLORING INITIATIVE

EXPLORE

OBJECTIVE

Students will be able to define initiative and develop a preliminary list of actions they may take to earn their White Belt.

DISCUSSION

Before you do anything else, grab student's attention by having them read *The Turbo Button* story in the Student Journal, Lesson 2.1. After they read the story, review the requirements to earn White Belt and the student examples in the journal. Actions can be small, but should be meaningful. Students can use all three actions to work on one area of their life, or focus their actions on several different areas.

Have students think about what the word initiative means. Have students discuss with a partner what they think the word means and generate a definition. Then, have groups share their definitions with the class.

Review the Mental Karate definition of Initiative with the students: *Initiative is taking purposeful action to improve your life.* Ask the students to think of examples of people - either people they know or famous people - who have taken initiative, and share with the class.

ACTIVITY

Explain to the class that to choose acts of initiative for their White Belt, they first need to identify their own personal challenges, interests and dreams. Divide the class into 3 groups and give each group a piece of chart paper. Label the chart paper with "Challenges" (group 1), "Interests" (group 2) and "Dreams" (group 3). Have each group generate a definition for their word (they may look up the word in the dictionary if they get stumped). As a team, have them generate a list of challenges, interests or dreams that a student in their grade level might have. Have each group share with the class and hang the lists on the wall.

JOURNAL

In Lesson 2.1 of the Student Journal, go over *The Turbo Button* reading and review the student examples at the beginning of the belt. Give students time to complete the *Brainstorming White Belt Actions* worksheet. You might want to take this opportunity to discuss with students what "brainstorming" means. Let them know they will be developing a plan for taking action during the next class, but for now the sky is the limit. Think big!

TEACHING TIPS

As students begin to generate their brainstorm of dreams, interests, and challenges, teacher support and interaction is critical. Some students may have difficulty identifying their own personal dreams, interests and challenges, or may want to copy what a classmate selected. Encourage students through conversation to select dreams, interests and challenges that are meaningful to them personally. This will set them up for success as they move into Lesson 2.2.

WHITE BELT ■ INITIATIVE
PLANNING WHITE BELT ACTIONS



OBJECTIVE

Students will select three concrete acts of initiative they will complete in the next week to earn their White Belt.

DISCUSSION

Review the definition of initiative with students. Explain that today they will select and plan the actions they will take to show initiative and earn their White Belts. Tell the students to revisit their initiative brainstorm sheet in their Mental Karate Journal. Ask for a volunteer to share one challenge she or he identified. Have students brainstorm together about potential actions the student could take to address the challenge. Next, ask for another volunteer to share one interest she or he identified. Again, have students brainstorm together about potential actions the student could take to explore his or her interest. Ask for a third volunteer to share one dream he or she identified. Have students discuss potential actions the student could take to pursue his or her dream. This is a good opportunity for you to share with your class about a challenge, interest, and dream you have. Let them know this is a valuable exercise even for adults.

Using the journal, Share the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rewarding, and Timely) goals framework with the students. Model for the students how they could plan the actions discussed above in a SMART goals format. For example, if one of the groups suggests a classmate practice soccer to help him pursue his dream of becoming a professional soccer player, the teacher can walk the class through how to apply the SMART goals format to that goal. (Ex. Specific: During the next week I will spend at least four hours practicing soccer after school.)

ACTIVITY

Divide the class into five groups. Assign each of the groups one of the letters in SMART. Explain to students that each group will have to test goals to see if they are SMART. Write the following goals on the board:

- I will be nicer to my sister for the next seven days.
- I will learn to cook better.
- I will attend a prestigious university.

For all of the goals, have each group determine whether it meets the criteria for a SMART goal. The “S. Group” should decide if it is specific, the “M. Group” should decide if it is measurable, and so forth. Then, together as a class rewrite each goal so that it meets the SMART criteria.



PLANNING WHITE BELT ACTIONS (continued)

PLAN

JOURNAL

In Lesson 2.2 of the Student Journal, go over the *Create SMART Goals* page. Give students time to complete the *Selecting White Belt Actions* worksheet. Remind students of the deadline (i.e. belt awards ceremony) when they need to have completed all three actions.

TEACHING TIPS

Since this is the first time students are selecting actions, they are going to need significant support. Take time to talk with students about their goals, and make sure they meet the SMART Goals criteria. In White Belt it is important to set students up for success to build excitement for the program. White Belt actions don't need to be super ambitious. The main goal is to show students they can be active players in their lives and get them comfortable taking action. Once students have selected their actions, move quickly through White Belt, as other belts will be more challenging and require additional time.

WHITE BELT ■ INITIATIVE

TAKING ACTION AND TRACKING PROGRESS



OBJECTIVE

Students will discuss their actions and learn how to track their progress in their Mental Karate Student Journal.

DISCUSSION

Revisit the definition of initiative with students: *Initiative is taking purposeful action to improve your life.* Ask students to share the acts of initiative they have taken so far. Ask how these actions have made their lives better. If they have not already seen improvement in their lives, discuss how they anticipate their acts of initiative might improve their lives in the future.

ACTIVITY

Explain to students that next week they will have their White Belt award ceremony. Give students choices for how they could contribute to the ceremony. One group could make a poster to demonstrate the meaning of initiative; another group could make up a skit, and so forth. Give students time in class to prepare for the celebration.

JOURNAL

In Lesson 2.3 of the Student Journal, go over the *White Belt Action Tracker* worksheet. Students should have completed all three actions by now. If they have not, allow for a one week extension to the day of the awards ceremony. Give students time in class to fill in their progress. It's not advised to let students take their journals out of the classroom. Once they leave the classroom, journals are liable to get lost or fall into the hands of someone whom students don't want to view their personal goals.

TEACHING TIPS

The Mental Karate journey is designed to progressively challenge students as they move through the belts. White Belt actions are less involved and can typically be accomplished within one or two weeks. However, note that for some of the following belts, time spent taking action and tracking progress may be drawn out for up to four weeks.



2.4

WHITE BELT ■ INITIATIVE

REFLECTING ON WHITE BELT

REFLECT

OBJECTIVE

Students will reflect on their accomplishments during White Belt, and consider how they can continue to use initiative in their lives. Students will also be awarded their White Belts. Celebrate!

DISCUSSION

Ask students to share the three acts of initiative they have completed to earn their White Belts. Have them share how taking action improved their lives. Ask students to identify which of the actions they completed had the most significant impact. If students say the action did not improve their lives, have them explain their assessment.

ACTIVITY

Have the class work together to plan the White Belt awards ceremony and hold it sometime within the next few days. If you are running Mental Karate school-wide, this is a great opportunity for an assembly with all grades. Invite parents and make a big deal of the event. If time and space restrictions force you to hold a smaller ceremony, make the day fun with snacks, games, and other classroom perks.

Make a point to publically acknowledge students' successes throughout White Belt, and encourage students to praise each other's success. An easy way to do this is to have students vote for a couple of students to share his or her essay in front of the group at the awards ceremony.

JOURNAL

In Lesson 2.4 of the Student Journal, go over the *Continuing Initiative after White Belt* reading. Have students reflect on their accomplishments in the *White Belt Reflection Essay* section. If you are running Mental Karate in an English or Language Arts class, the reflection essay is a natural way to integrate writing instruction. Some teachers also assign typed five paragraph essays, with an intro, a body, and a paragraph for each of the initiatives. Go ahead and grade students' grammar and sentence structure, but don't grade them based on the actions they selected or the success or failure of their goals. If your students struggle to write full paragraphs, provide them with writing prompts, or do an art project that will allow them to communicate their success.

REFLECTING ON WHITE BELT (continued)**REFLECT****TEACHING TIPS**

You may have students who do not complete their White Belt by the deadline. These students should not be allowed to participate in the celebration, but should be given the opportunity to complete White Belt while they're also working toward Yellow Belt with the whole class. (Students can sit in a study hall during the award ceremony.) Help individual students make a plan to complete their actions as soon as possible. It's important no one falls more than one belt behind the rest of the class. Keep the tone positive and encouraging. If students are frustrated by their lack of progress, help them understand failure is something we face all throughout life. Many people don't attempt to take action, because they are afraid of failing. Helping a student process failure can, at times, be a more valuable lesson than helping a student celebrate success.