

Basic Aikido Dojo Etiquette



Guidelines on how to treat yourself, your partner, your teachers and your dojo with respect at the dojo.

Arriving at the Dojo

- ② Arrive **on time** or early.
- ② Students should arrive in their clean **uniform** or quickly and quietly get dressed in the dressing rooms.
- ② Students should be tidy with hands and feet clean and with fingernails trim. Jewelry should not be worn on the mat. Hair should be tied back. Boys may or may not wear simple white or dark t-shirts under their gis. Girls should wear a simple white or dark t-shirt or sports bra under their gis.
- ② When entering and leaving the dojo, students perform a **standing bow** to Morihei Ueshiba's picture on the altar (kamiza/**shomen**). This is a tradition of showing respect to the Founder of Aikido.
- ② Remove and place **shoes neatly** in a row or on shoe shelves.
- ② Students should **wash their hands** before and after practice. Please use slippers when using the restroom.
- ② When observing class, spectators should remain **quiet** out of respect for the instructor and practicing students. They should not eat, drink, chew gum, or talk on cell phones while watching the class.
- ② Spectators should remain **still and quiet** while the instructor is demonstrating or lecturing.

On the Mat

Before Class

- ② Perform a formal **kneeling bow** in the direction of the shomen when entering or exiting the mat. (In seiza, bow forward with back straight and hands in a triangle, gaze lowered)
- ② Warm up and play without roughhousing. Then assemble quietly, in a neat line, a few minutes before the class is scheduled to start. Students should sit **seiza** (kneel) quietly in meditation and await the instructor's arrival on the mat.

Opening Formal Training

- ② The instructor will lead the class with a kneeling bow, facing towards the picture of O-Sensei, followed by two claps. The students should all bow at the same time. The instructor will then lead a kneeling bow, facing towards the rest of the class. This is to allow the class to show respect to the teacher and to ask for him/her to pass on his knowledge. It is customary to say "Onegai Shimasu" and bow at the same time as the teacher. (When bowing to someone, place your left hand, then your right in a triangle, keep your back straight and your eyes on the person you are bowing to. Pick up your right then left hands.)

Formal Class Time

- ② Quietly watch what the teacher does. As the instructor demonstrates the techniques he/she wishes you to practice, sit out of the way, preferably in seiza. If necessary, one may sit cross-legged, after bowing to the shomen but one should never point one's feet at the shomen or have one's back to the shomen.
- ② After instruction, students should **bow** to the instructor, make sure that the instructor's uke has a partner, and find a nearby partner. Uke and Nage **bow** to each other before and after each exercise. Change partners in order to train with as many different students as possible. Less experienced students (**kohai**) should bow to more advanced students (**sempai**) and ask to train with them with "**Onegai Shimasu.**"
- ② If you are **late** you should wait, formally seated beside the mat until the instructor signals his or her permission for you to join the class. Quietly perform a simple seated bow as you get on the mat.
- ② When approaching the instructor on the mat, whether you are asked or called, you bow first and at the end. Never yell out "Sensei" or beckon for instruction. Go to the instructor and **bow**. It is polite to bow and say "thank you, sempai (or sensei)" upon receiving assistance or correction from the instructor.
- ② After receiving instruction from the teacher, students should bow and say "Thank you, sensei" (to the instructor) or "Thank you, sempai" to anyone of higher rank who assists you.

- Ⓢ During class, practicing of techniques is normally done in pairs, with sempai taking four turns as nage and four as uke. If there is an odd number of students in the class, a group of three may be formed and techniques done twice instead of four times.
- Ⓢ If you are struggling with a technique, begin to figure out the movement by **watching others**. Effective observation is a skill you should strive to develop.
- Ⓢ Conversation should be limited, and restricted to the topic of Aikido. **Do not talk** while the instructor is addressing the class.
- Ⓢ Do not engage in rough-housing or needless contests of strength during class.
- Ⓢ Do not injure your partner. Be aware of the ability of your partner so that no injuries occur.
- Ⓢ Respect you sempai. Do not argue about technique.
- Ⓢ If you know the movement being studied and are working with someone who does not, you may lead the person through it. Do not correct or instruct your partner.
- Ⓢ When changing partners during class, you should acknowledge both the partner you are leaving as well as your new partner with a **bow**.
- Ⓢ When straightening out your gi, bow to your partner, **turn away** from the shomen, and then bow to your partner again (standing bow is fine).
- Ⓢ When the instructor is teaching a pair of students, it is not necessary for others to sit down and watch unless instructed to. It is preferable to keep practicing. However, if the instructor is assisting a group in your vicinity, it is appropriate to suspend your own training so that the instructor has adequate room to demonstrate.
- Ⓢ Leave the mat as little as possible. Notify the instructor if you are injured, or need to leave the mat due to some emergency. Sit formally beside the mat until the instructor signals his permission for you to return to class and then bow to the teacher and the shomen.
- Ⓢ Whenever **weapons** are called for, they should be treated with proper respect. When entering the mat the weapon should be held high, blade towards you, for a standing bow to the shomen. When performing a seated bow, the bokken, tanto, shinai, or jo should be placed on the right side, blade towards you. The tanto may also be placed in the belt. When handing a weapon to your partner, the blade should face towards you. Do not step over someone's weapon. Do not use someone's weapons without permission.
- Ⓢ When the class ends, turn away from the shomen, straighten out your uniform, and proceed to seiza. The teacher will lead a kneeling bow towards the picture of O-Sensei. Do the same. Clap twice, all together. The teacher will then lead a kneeling bow, facing towards the rest of class. This is to allow the class to thank the instructor for his/her teachings, and for the instructor to thank his students. Say "**Domo Arigato Gozaimashita**". Bow to the instructor. Students should wait until the instructor has left the mat before getting up from seiza.
- Ⓢ Complete formal training by thanking your fellow students with a **bow**.
- Ⓢ Sweep the mat. Dust the shomen, **clean up** the dojo and close the windows to aid the instructor.

General

- Ⓢ Do not train when contagiously ill.
- Ⓢ Never bring food, gum or beverages onto the mat. Do not eat or drink in your gi.
- Ⓢ All members should pay dues promptly. If you are unable to pay your dues on time, please talk with the person in charge of dues collection.

Sempai/Kohai Relationship

Sempai (literally, "before comrade", a person of higher rank) are responsible for helping kohai (literally, "after comrade", a person of lower rank) learn how things are done. You are sempai to anyone who started aikido after you did, and kohai to anyone who started before you did. Part of the way that senior students pay the debt that they owe their teachers is to help preserve the art by helping and encouraging their juniors. In turn, kohai should be respectful of their sempai and do what they can to help maintain the dojo.