

SAFETY ON THE MAT

The following is a summary of dojo safety guidelines. These are based on our experiences at Traditional Aikido Sarasota and some of the collected wisdom of Aikido Journal readers.

- **“MATTE” or 2 loud clasps means STOP immediately.** You may not see what is going on that warrants stopping your technique, even midway!
- **Do not try to be the instructor.** Let the “instructor be the instructor!” Giving students the wrong information **can create a safety problem now or later.** Less talk, more training is a good **motto.**
 - The spirit of collaboration can be shown by one’s intention and style, even more than with words.
 - Minor assistance can be helpful, but if a student cannot get the technique, raising your hand can signal the instructor.
- **Uke and Nage have a training contract.** In committing to help each other learn, uke also agrees to give a “committed attack” but NOT to stop nage from executing a technique. Both are learning to blend or merge. When uke or nage uses excessive force, the chance of injury is increased.
- **Each student should assess with whom they are training.** Is the person smaller than you? Are they as physically strong? Are they wearing red tape indicating an injury or an area that has been dealt with sensitively? Remember, we are training to help each other learn, not to fight or to show someone how strong you are.
- **The Uke on the ground has the right of way.** All other students should strive to find an open space to take their falls.
 - Ukes have the responsibility to protect themselves, including their heads, by looking into their shoulders when being thrown in shihonage, taking safe ukemi rolls and falls, etc.
 - It is everyone’s responsibility to try to avert collisions. Seniors are not to assume the “right of way” in the moment before the impact.
- **Encourage people to smile while they practice.** When “lighter” students naturally relaxed and alert at the same time. Smiling is consistent with O’Sensei’s saying “train with a light heart.”
- **Know everyone’s first name.** Being able to call out to another Aikidoka when you see you’re in danger of hitting them, can buy a split second, preventing an accident or injury. Try to have your name on your left shoulder of your gi.

- **When training with weapons, avoid strikes to the face or neck.** Remember the strike of a bokken, jo, or tanto to the head or neck can cause serious injury. Instead, strike “mune” or to the middle section or below (except to the groin).
 - When training with weapons, no matter where one is striking, be able to stop the bokken or jo safely and well away from your partner's body
- **Walk away from any training partner who refuses to train safely and/or slowly.** Let the instructor know right away if there is problem training with your partner. Do not escalate. Senior students should intervene if you see two partners fighting each other or resisting too strongly or bring the situation to the attention of the instructor immediately. The same protocol applies if a student is thought to be intoxicated on the mat.
- **Teach students to take ukemi properly.** Learning how to fall correctly is a student's first line of defense against injury.

Ukemi: learning to do basic ukemi is fun and essential for safety. We recommend learning and practicing basic ukemi in the following order, always with a qualified senior student or instructor to monitor and help you:

 - Back rolls first - Begin from a seated position, then progress to starting from a standing position.
 - Next, practice face down falls, usually from a kneeling position
 - When comfortable doing steps 1 and 2 above, proceed to practicing low forward rolls
 - The senior student in the practice pair must make sure junior student can safely do the ukemi for the technique
 - NOTE: **Soft** crash pads are excellent training tools, but again, newer students should always practice with a qualified senior student or instructor to who can monitor and help.
- **Minimize forward rolls under crowded conditions.** Big rolls are used mainly in demonstrations and are not realistic in most situations. The application of martial techniques, especially Iwama Style Aikido, is designed to gain complete control of Uke's body. Most techniques in Aikido training involve backward rolls or face down falls, as such, they don't require nearly as much space as forward rolls.
 - **Always** throw toward the outside of the mat. When throws and forward rolls are called for, throws should occur along parallel planes away from the centerline dividing the mat
 - Use short compact rolls, keeping the feet and legs tucked under like in shikko (knee walking).
- **From time to time, “oyo” techniques will be shown** which are dangerous on the tatami, but possibly good on the street. And explain why and how these are different and how they can be executed safely (on the mat) yet efficiently.
- **When the mat is crowded,** it may be a good idea to train in small groups.