



POLICY AND GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF WEAPONS

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This Policy and Guidance has been provided to assist instructors and students in the use of weapons in Aikido and Iaido sessions. It forms part of (and should be read in conjunction with) the Aikido Alliance UK Health & Safety Policy and Risk Assessment.

This document does not constitute legal advice of any kind.

Please also see separate section in this document regarding the additional restrictions re the use of metal-bladed weapons

TYPES OF WEAPON

WOODEN WEAPONS

The use of wooden weapons is covered under the Alliance insurance policy providing that the guidance in this document is followed.

Examples of wooden weapons which may be used in class: Bokken, Jo, Tanto, Kubotan, Tanjo.

METAL WEAPONS

The use of metal weapons is covered under the Alliance insurance Policy providing that the guidance in this document is followed.

Examples of metal weapons would include those with a metal blade e.g. Tanto, Iaito

Please note: the use of metal bladed weapons is restricted under the terms of this policy. Please ensure you read all sections to ensure you stay within Alliance guidelines.

TRAINING WITH METAL TANTO (DULL METAL BLADE)

These may be used by **Instructors ONLY** to demonstrate aspects of technique. Participants in class must use wooden tanto.

Instructors wishing to use metal tanto for demonstration (instruction) purposes should ensure that their uke is both willing (i.e. has provided informed consent) and suitably skilled.

Tantos with sharp blades are not allowed under the terms of this policy

TRAINING WITH SHINKEN (SHARP/LIVE BLADE)

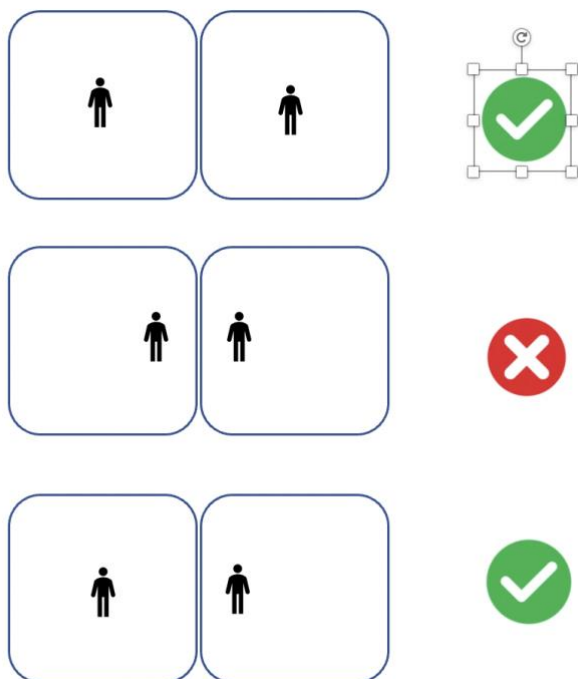
It is Alliance policy that Shinken (aka "live" or "sharp" Iaito blades) **may not** be used. This restriction applies in **all** circumstances.

TRAINING WITH IAITO (DULL BLADE)

Iaito swords have dull blades (blunt/unsharp) and are most commonly used in Iaido classes. **Iaido as an art related to aikido is allowed under the terms of this policy.** Additionally, as the use of the traditional Japanese sword has links to the origins of aikido, they can sometimes be used in aikido classes for solo demonstration and solo practice as a means of understanding and exploring technique.

To ensure alignment with other national guidelines the following must be adhered to

1. An iaito should never be used in a demonstration against another person where an accidental injury may occur through being in close proximity. Any demonstration involving other people should utilise bokken in place of metal blades.
2. When using iaito for solo practice, a 9m² area per person (3x3) should be allocated whether in the dojo or at a seminar. Rotational practice should be implemented if the training area cannot accommodate all present.
3. The 9m² should be considered a dynamic space (i.e. it should move with the participant). There should always be at least 1.5 metres between participants.



MISCELLANEOUS

Rubber knives and replica weapons of various kinds may be used in simulation exercises, again subject to adherence to this guidance document.

Some participants may not want to use weapons for any number of personal reasons. Instructors should be sensitive to this and not force any participant to use weapons – or be the partner of someone using a weapon.

GUIDANCE TABLE

Examples are for information, **and in all cases, a risk assessment plus mitigation measures (following any relevant guidance in this document) must always be implemented prior to any training session.** Instruction must be from a qualified coach who will also supervise the whole session

WEAPON	ALLOWED?	EXAMPLES OF USE	LIMITATIONS/COMMENTS
Tanto (wooden)	Yes	Self-defence (knife simulation) Set grading techniques	Willing and suitably skilled participant (as tori or uke)
Bokken (wooden)	Yes	Self-defence (sword simulation) Set grading techniques Solo practice (set kata/suburi) Pairs work	Willing and suitably skilled participant (as tori or uke)
Jo (wooden)	Yes	Jodo (pairs work) Jo pairs work Jo freestyle Jo solo Kata (e.g. 13, 31, 22, 25)	Willing and suitably skilled participant (as tori or uke)
It is also acceptable to practice jo against bokken and vice-versa (subject to stated limitations) and a risk assessment + risk mitigation as required.			
Iaito (metal sword – blunt blade)	Yes	Solo Kata Demonstration of technique (solo)	Solo Kata No pairs work of any kind
Metal Tanto - blunt blade	Yes	Demonstration only Please note – the use of metal tanto for pairs work in class is not allowed	Instructor ONLY to implement the use of metal tanto and must have a willing and competent (suitably skilled) participant as uke
Metal knife “live” blade i.e. sharp blade	NO		Not permitted. The risk outweighs any benefit.
Shinken (live/sharp sword blade – including semi-sharp iaito)	NO	As an alternative to a blunt blade (iaito).	Not permitted. The risk outweighs any benefit.
Kubotan (metal)	NO	Self-defence techniques as per wooden kubotan	A metal kubotan could potentially be considered an illegal weapon if carried on the person. Much harder to substantiate use for martial arts as often portrayed as a “key fob”.
Kubotan (wooden)	Yes	Self-defence techniques	Willing participant (as tori or uke)

GUIDANCE TO BE FOLLOWED IN ALL CASES

RISK ASSESSMENT

Before starting a training session, the instructor should carry out a risk assessment. Students should also be made aware of their duty of care to keep themselves and others safe.

Risk assessments should include the following:

1. The Dojo floor should be clean and dry with no trip hazards; check for holes, gaps etc in the mats (if used) and potential slippage from sweat or spills etc.
2. The height of the ceiling should be sufficient to allow free use of weapons and the training area should be free from (or away from) obstructions such as pillars, heaters and any electrical items etc.
3. It is very difficult to give a minimum space requirement for planning practice with weapons (other than iaido which is covered in a separate section). Instructors should consider, for example:
 - a. The level of skill of the student
 - b. The technique or kata being performed
 - c. The total number of students in the class
 - d. Is the practice solo or in pairs?
 - e. The type of weapon being used
 - f. The space required including space *behind* the students
4. Ensure students know how to check their own equipment and understand how to use it safely.
5. Weapons and any related equipment should be checked for safety
 - a. WOODEN, PLASTIC AND RUBBER WEAPONS: check for cracks and splits, perished rubber, sharp edges etc
 - b. IAITO: check for cracks and splits in the metal blade. Particular attention should be paid to the security of the handle, ensuring that it is not loose. The tsuba should be firmly attached with no evidence of loose movement. Remember that the pin securing the blade to the handle may work loose and so these should be checked before every practice.
6. The student's gi and hakama (if relevant) should be worn correctly to avoid the risk of tripping and to avoid weapons becoming entangled in clothing.
7. Additional risk mitigation measures should be in place where there are other "users" sharing an area, particularly in sports hall or leisure centres, where access routes are shared with other activities.

It would be best practice to record a separate risk assessment for working with weapons – or to at least ensure it is included within your general class risk assessment

TRAINING WITH WEAPONS

1. The instructor should ensure the students always practise what is being taught and not permit any deviation during the training session. The concept of progressive practice should be used where appropriate to the grade and skill of the students.
2. There should be an atmosphere of study and concentration
3. Be aware of sweaty wrists and palms
4. Under no circumstances should any weapons be left lying on the dojo matted area. ALL iaito must be in their scabbards when not in use.
5. Where they might be other people present in the vicinity of the matted area (e.g. spectators, other venue users passing through) there must be at least a 2 metre safety zone around the training area
6. The instructor shall be responsible for all persons present, whether on or off the mat.

TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE

The law regarding the carrying of weapons in a public place is contained in SECTION 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 and SECTION 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

- If a member of an Alliance-affiliated club is stopped by the Police whilst carrying weapons, they should give every assistance to the officer(s) and offer a full explanation as to why such weapons are being carried. No attempt to conceal the fact that weapons are being carried should be made. Members carrying weapons are advised to carry their Club or Association confirmation of membership (e.g. membership book, licence registration slip, membership card)
- Weapons should be carried directly to and from a practice and should not be left in a vehicle either permanently or overnight.
- Weapons must be carried in a secure bag and never left unattended. Iaito must always be transported in their scabbards
- When transporting weapons in a vehicle they should be in a suitable weapons bag and then secured in the boot/out of sight.
- Avoid travelling on public transport when carrying weapons.
- Students must take weapons home: any weapons left at the dojo or training venue will be at the owners' risk and responsibility

THE LAW: OFFENSIVE WEAPONS

Section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 prohibits the possession in any public place of an offensive weapon without lawful authority or excuse.

The term 'offensive weapon' is defined as: "any article made or adapted for use to causing injury to the person, or intended by the person having it with him for such use"

These could include weapons such as original and replica "samurai swords" (i.e. curved blades of 50cm or over in length from handle to tip) and tanto, and under the 2008 Amendment to the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) could include weapons made from wood, alloy, carbon fibre or even plastic.

The use of approved weapons is covered by the Alliance's Insurance policy, subject to strict adherence to this Weapons Policy.

THE LAW: METAL BLADED/POINTED WEAPONS

Under section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 it is an offence for a person to have with him/her in a public place any article which has a blade or is sharply pointed, except a folding pocket knife with a cutting edge of three inches or less.

Meanings:

Public place is any highway or premises to which members of public have access at the time whether permitted to have access by payment or not. Examples are cinema, leisure centre, dojo, car park.

With him/her means possession and possession can be to have it on your person. However, there is also something called “constructive possession” which means that you have control over it even though the weapon may not actually be on your person. For example, if someone else is holding the weapon for you. In this scenario it could be said that you have control over the item while the other person holds it and so you could both be accused of the offence.

A blade means the blade of a knife or sword. It does not matter that the blade is not sharp.

THE LAW: SWORDS

The sale, manufacture, hire, loan, importation or donation of certain types of weapon is prohibited by section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order 1988, SI 1988/2019 (as amended). The following definition is taken from this list of prohibited weapons:

- *a sword with a curved blade of 50 centimetres or over in length; and for the purposes of this sub-paragraph, the length of the blade shall be the straight-line distance from the top of the handle to the tip of the blade.*

Weapons that would otherwise fall into this category are excluded from the prohibition if they are “antiques”. For these purposes, a weapon constitutes an antique if it was manufactured more than one hundred years before the date of the alleged offence.

In respect of swords that would otherwise be covered by the description above, a person charged will have a defence if they can show that:

- the weapon in question was made before 1954 or was made at any other time according to traditional methods of making swords by hand; or
- his conduct was for the sole purpose of making the weapon available for the organisation and holding of a “permitted activity” (defined as a historical re-enactment or a sporting activity requiring the use of the weapon) for which public liability insurance is held.

DEFENCES

It is a defence for a person to prove that he had good reason or lawful authority for having the article or weapon with him in a public place ¹

Although there are defences, they may not protect you from arrest if the police believe that an offence has been committed.

¹ researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN00330/SN00330.pdf

Whilst the words “reasonable excuse” and “good reason” may provide a defence in relation to the carrying aikido/iaido weapons, it will be for the individual, not the police, to prove that they had a reasonable excuse or good reason for possessing the item.

DISCLAIMER

By providing this information, the Aikido Alliance is not providing legal advice or any indication as to what might or might not be an acceptable defence should you be stopped by police whilst carrying a weapon.

This information is supplied in good faith for information only and should not be considered an alternative to professional legal advice.

CHANGE LOG

Version change	Date	Details
V2	October 2021	Clarification around terms applied to metal blades with specific reference to metal tanto. Removed term “live knife” as this could be confused with “live blade”.
V3	November 2024	Further clarification around the terms “live” including a specification regarding a dull-bladed tanto. Other minor amendments