



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, Jodo and Iaido sessions. It forms part of (and should be read in conjunction with) the Aikido Alliance UK Health & Safety Policy and Risk Assessment documents.

This document does not constitute legal advice of any kind.

INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of Jodo and Iaido in Aikido is justified because it honours the heritage from which Aikido has evolved. These disciplines offer technical depth, philosophical insight, and a historical continuity that enriches Aikido beyond physical self-defence and syllabus technique. Practicing Jodo and Iaido not only supports aikido skills practice but also nurtures the values of respect and harmony which are central to Aikido's purpose as a path of peace through disciplined movement. The use of a range of wooden weapons is also justified within this document.

RATIONALE FOR PRACTICING JODO IN AIKIDO

- Ueshiba included jo kata and kumijo in his practice, many of which were developed or formalised during his time in Iwama in the post-war period.
- These forms include principles such as blending with the attacker, redirecting force and compassionate control, which are central Aikido's traditions.
- Jodo practice enhances maai (distance), tai sabaki (body movement) and awareness of line and angle—skills directly transferable and relevant to Aikido.

RATIONALE FOR PRACTICING IAIDO IN AIKIDO

- Aikido's body mechanics are deeply rooted in sword movement.
- Iaido fosters zanshin (mental presence), kiai (spirit focus), and kamae (readiness stance), all of which enhance the execution and understanding of Aikido techniques.
- It supports the idea of "katsujinken" (the life-giving sword) which aligns with the compassionate principles within aikido.
- Ueshiba regarded the sword as a sacred object. He often performed sword kata as a form of meditative movement.

NB Iaido is only allowed in the form of solo practice or solo demonstration subject to the guidelines in this document. There is no rationale or historical justification for pairs training in Iaido, and this is not permitted within the Aikido Alliance.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF WOODEN WEAPONS IN AIKIDO

Wooden weapons are an integral part of Aikido, reflecting its deep historical roots in traditional Japanese martial arts. Morihei Ueshiba studied and integrated elements from classical weapon systems such as Daito-ryu Aiki-jujutsu, all of which included extensive weapons training. Ueshiba emphasised the unity of armed and unarmed combat, and so weapons practice remains essential in transmitting the principles of Aikido including: maai (distance), aiki (harmonising energy), and kokyū (breath power).

Each weapon and method of practice—solo, paired, or freestyle—reflects Morihei Ueshiba’s vision of Aikido as both a martial and spiritual discipline. Training with weapons deepens technical understanding, hones practical skills, and supports Aikido’s ultimate aim: to resolve conflict through awareness, balance, redirection of energy and harmonious movement.

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

Wooden weapons which may be used in class: Bokken, Jo, Tanto, Kubotan, Tanjo (short stick).

Wooden weapons can be used for solo practice e.g. Jo Kata, Bokken Kata. They can also be used for pairs work e.g. Jo freestyle, Jo/Jodo pairs kata.

In all circumstances, risk assessments and risk mitigation/control measures must be in place as per the guidance in this document.

RATIONALE FOR SOLO AND PAIRS WORK USING WOODEN WEAPONS

Solo Practice (Kata and Suburi):

Solo weapon practice was used by Ueshiba to instil spiritual discipline and precision. Suburi (repetitive cutting drills) and kata cultivate proper form, breathing and focus and reinforces correct posture, timing, and awareness. Ueshiba often practiced alone with the bokken and jo, integrating martial movement with personal development.

Pairs Practice (Kumitachi, Kumijo, Sotai Dosa, Tanto-dori):

Pairs practice reflects traditional training from kenjutsu and jujutsu, where kata was practiced with partners to develop kuzushi (off-balancing), timing, and rhythm. It allows for real-time application of aikido principles such as blending. It fosters mutual respect, timing, and distance control, echoing the cooperative spirit found in aikido. These drills ensure safe exploration of conflict and conflict resolution within martial boundaries.

Freestyle and Adaptation (Randori, Jiyu-waza):

Weapons practice, including jo or bokken randori allows practitioners to test their understanding through controlled freestyle practice. This reflects the historical transition from form to function, and aligns with Aikido’s adaptive, flowing nature. Ueshiba used these methods to train readiness and martial presence, asking students to respond without hesitation yet with compassion. In modern Aikido, freestyle with weapons tests the depth of integration between mind, body, and weapon—and the ability to maintain centred and calm.

RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIFIC WOODEN WEAPONS

Bokken (Wooden Sword):

Many of Aikido’s techniques originate from sword movements. Ueshiba trained extensively in kenjutsu and often demonstrated how entering, blending, and cutting motions from the sword translated directly into irimi and tenkan (entering and turning) movements.

Jo (Wooden Staff):

The jo was said to have been integrated into Aikido practice through Ueshiba’s personal adaptations and exposure to various classical staff systems. The circular and thrusting movements of the jo embody blending and redirection—the core of Aikido’s philosophy.

Tanto (Wooden Knife):

The tanto reflects the need for realistic training against armed attackers, especially in close quarters. Historically, tanto-dori (knife defence) techniques were taught in jujutsu systems to deal with real threats. Ueshiba incorporated tanto work to maintain a connection to these traditional defences, focusing on the ability to disarm, and control without resorting to excessive force.

Kubotan

While the kubotan is a modern item it aligns with traditional tanjojutsu principles (short stick self-defence method). Incorporating the kubotan into Aikido practice provides a bridge between traditional principles and contemporary dojo training in self-defence techniques.

Tanjo (Short stick):

The tanjo complements the concept of non-lethal control and adaptability, reflecting Ueshiba's later emphasis on Aikido as a compassionate path of peace, harmony and protection. It has clearer links to the challenges found in modern society and allows for scenario-based practice.

USE OF METAL WEAPONS

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 and insurance guidelines.

TRAINING WITH METAL TANTO

Previous versions of this policy made provision for **Instructors ONLY** to use dull metal-bladed tanto in pairs work to demonstrate aspects of technique. **THIS IS NO LONGER PERMITTED.**

Metal-bladed tantos (dull or sharp) are not permitted in any circumstances under the terms of our insurance policies

TRAINING WITH SHINKEN (SHARP/LIVE BLADE)

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

Shinkens (aka "sharp", "semi-sharp" or "live" blades) are not permitted in any circumstances under the terms of our insurance policies

TRAINING WITH IAITO (DULL BLADE)

Iaito swords have dull blades (blunt/unsharp) and are most commonly used in Iaido classes. They may also be referred to as "practice swords"

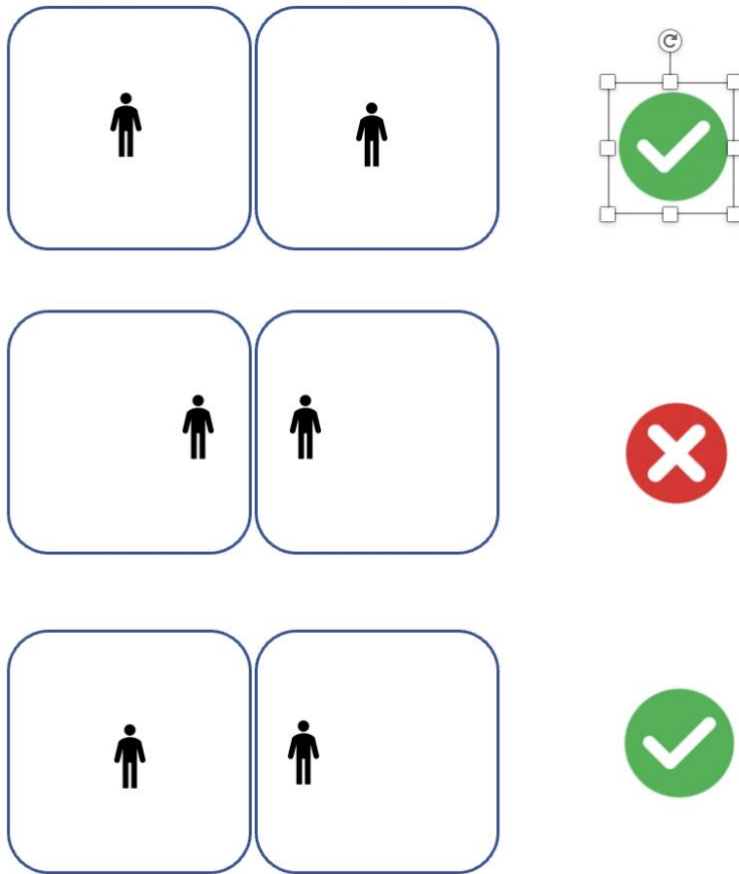
Iaido as an art related to aikido is allowed under the terms of this policy. Additionally, as the use of the traditional Japanese sword has links to the origins of aikido, they can sometimes be used in aikido classes for solo demonstration and solo practice as a means of understanding and exploring technique.

Shinkens (aka “sharp”, “semi-sharp” or “live” blades) ARE NOT permitted in any circumstances under the terms of our insurance policies

iaito (aka “dull” blades, “blunt” blades or “practice” swords) ARE permitted FOR SOLO PRACTICE AND SOLO DEMONSTRATION ONLY. Risk assessments must be undertaken, and risk mitigation measures must be in place

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

1. Pre-practice safety checks must be undertaken before every session. These should include clothing and equipment checks as well as the usual dynamic risk assessment of the space being used. Safety briefings should be used to reinforce safe practice parameters.
2. 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.
3. When using iaito for solo practice, a 9m² area per person (3x3) should be allocated as a minimum. Rotational practice should be implemented if the training area cannot accommodate all present.
4. The 9m² should be considered a dynamic space (i.e. it should move with the participant). Generally speaking there should always be at least 1.5 metres between participants. However consideration must be given to the length of any individual sword and the length of the person’s arm as clearly these can be significant variables.



MISCELLANEOUS

Rubber knives and replica “simulated” weapons (e.g. empty plastic water bottles) may be used in simulation/scenario 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 / dull blade / practice sword)	Yes	Solo Kata and solo practice only Demonstration of technique (solo)	Solo Kata ONLY No pairs work or contact of any kind
Metal Tanto - blunt blade	NO		Not permitted. Not covered insurance.
Metal knife "live" blade i.e. sharp blade	NO		Not permitted. Not covered insurance.
Shinken (live/sharp sword blade – including semi-sharp iaito)	NO		Not permitted. Not covered insurance.
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". Decorations to surface add further risk – e.g. piercing skin
Kubotan (wooden dowel type)	Yes	Self-defence techniques	Willing participant (as tori or uke)

GENERAL 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

CLASS RULES

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

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

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

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
V4	June 2025	Clarification that all metal-bladed weapons are now excluded with the exception of dull-bladed iaito (practice swords) which may be used for solo practice and demonstrations only (under risk assessed and risk controlled situations) Addition of new statements to highlight the rationale for use of weapons in solo and pairs practice