Whether you're experienced or a novice of the martial arts, our Beginner Classes are a great way to begin your Aikido training. Our Beginner classes for women and men are carefully designed to give you a basic understanding of Aikido principles and philosophy. These classes explore the fundamentals of body movements. Selected core techniques are introduced and there is an introduction to Aikido “weapons”: the bokken (wooden sword) and jo (walking stick).

This 6 to 8 week curriculum is taught by experienced instructors and will prepare you for your first rank, or 6th kyu. In the Beginner Class you will learn the art of ukemi - receiving energy with the body. Our practices are used to demonstrate how and why you must blend and connect with an attack. Aikido is the way of transforming aggressive energy into balance.

Our Beginner Classes are a perfect way to take your first steps toward developing your Aikido practice.

We are looking forward to you joining our dojo community!

**Overview of Aikido - History, Purpose, Uniqueness**

Aikido is a Japanese martial art, developed from the skills and traditions of the Samurai. It is known for its philosophy of non-violence and collaboration. Developed by master martial artist Morihei Ueshiba (referred to by Aikidoka as 'O Sensei' or 'Great Teacher'), it is an art involving throws, joint locks and hand-to-hand techniques derived in part from Jujitsu and Kenjutsu.

Aikido places great emphasis on the dynamics of movement, positioning, centering, and balance. Whether it is applicable self-defense techniques, core combat skills, physical health, spiritual development, or peace of mind, Aikido practitioners will find what they seek.

**Important Concepts in Our Aikido Dojo**

**Uke and Nage**

In basic Aikido training (keiko), we form pairs of two partners who take turns receiving and performing throws and techniques as instructed by the sensei (teacher) or sempai (senior students). The partner performing the technique is called "nage", and the person receiving the technique is called "uke".

The relationship of uke and nage is very important in Aikido training. Working in this way gives each student an opportunity to learn to perform techniques, as well as how to properly protect themselves while being thrown. Both uke and nage are learning to connect with each others' energy.

**Training "Contract"**

"If your opponent tries to pull you, let him pull. Don't pull against him; pull in unison with him." - O'Sensei
When training, *uke* and *nage* accept a responsibility to help each other learn. *Uke* offers a committed attack, and *nage* executes the technique with care for *uke*’s wellbeing. *Uke-nage* pairs are often comprised of people of different ages, gender, strength and fitness levels. As such, it is the responsibility of each partner to train in a way that is safe for themselves and the other.

*Uke* should never "give away" a technique; neither should they prevent the technique from working. *Nage* should always have the opportunity to execute a technique using proper form. In this way, both *uke* and *nage* learn "both sides" of a technique, much like a film print and its negative.

Being a good *uke* takes practice, and is about helping one another learn... Hence the statement "*ona gaishimasu!*"

**Levels of Training**

"Techniques employ four qualities that reflect the nature of our world. Depending on the circumstance, you should be: hard as a diamond, flexible as a willow, smooth-flowing like water, or as empty as space." - O’Sensei

We practice 3 "levels" of training, referred to as "*kihon*" (or "rock solid"), "*yawarakai*" (or "flowing like bamboo"), and "*ki no nagare*" (or "flowing like water"). A fourth level, "*takemusu*" (spontaneous form) cannot be directly practiced, but occurs when a technique transcends its basic form and connects with the vast principles of Aikido. The founder regarded *takemusu* as the highest level of Aikido.

Most of our training is done at the *kihon* (rock solid) level. Training this way can be challenging, emphasizing enormous attention to detail for very precise execution of techniques. This allows the student to practice the "perfect form" of a technique, emphasizing clear movements throughout the beginning, middle and end of the technique.

Once a student becomes proficient in movement at a *kihon* level, advancement to *yawarakai* and *ki no nagare* levels becomes possible.

**Importance of Weapons Training in Aikido**

"The concept of Riai (the relation between the weapons and taijutsu)..." - Morihiro Saito Sensei

Weapons training (*buki waza*) is a core aspect of our Aikido training. The weapons we use, the "*bokken*" (wooden sword) and "*jo*" (wooden staff) are derived from the weapons of the Japanese samurai warriors. As such, we respect these tools as dangerous instruments, but do not train with the intention of causing harm to others.

There is a core principle in Aikido called "*riai*". *Riai* is a concept that defines our weapons as extensions of our bodies. These weapons are teachers that give us feedback about our body position, alignment,
breath, extension, intention, focus, and more. Because of the principle of riai, we are actually practicing the same principles with weapons as we are in open-handed (taijutsu) training.

O'Sensei taught that regular weapons training was integral to the training of Aikido.

**Aikido Principles: Tai Sabaki, Ma-ai, Kuzushi, Kokyu-ryoku**

"Ma-ai", sometimes translated as "space-time", refers to spatial relationships, timing, and flow. Through training, you will develop an understanding of your own ma-ai, as well as the ma-ai between yourself and others.

"When an opponent comes forward, move in and greet him; if he wants to pull back, send him on his way." - O'Sensei

"Kuzushi", or "taking balance" is the concept of unbalancing your opponent-- a concept critical to the proper execution of any Aikido technique. Using kuzushi, a student may overcome the attack of a physically larger or stronger person with ease.

"Tai sabaki", loosely translated as "body movement", relates to the principle of moving off of the line of an attack to receive or blend with an attacker (as opposed to retreating or counter-attacking). In Aikido, tai sabaki is a principle of harmony (ai) that allows a student to maintain his or her own safety, while positioning them ideally to resolve an attack without using violence.

"In our techniques we enter completely into, blend totally with, and control firmly an attack." - O'Sensei

"Kokyu-ryoku", often called simply "kokyu", is the concept of "breath power". Using kokyu, students learn to control their breath and begin developing extension, executing techniques powerfully without relying wholly on physical strength.

**Dojo Etiquette**

Strive to be on the mat ready to train at least 5 minutes before class. At the designated class time, please sit quietly until the instructor starts the class. When class is over, wait until the instructor is off of the mat before getting up to get brooms and sweep the mat.

While you are encouraged to ask questions of the instructor, please do not interrupt the instructor while he or she is demonstrating or discussing a technique or issue. Also, when returning to the mat, please do not walk between the students and instructor.
Aikido is about co-operation and collaboration, not about creating unnecessary conflict! During class your instructor or a senior student may coach you on how to do something. Remember, the instructor has the final word on how to do something, so don't hesitate to ask them for clarification if another student confuses you. Finally, please monitor the tone and volume of your voice. Always speak respectfully to your instructor and fellow students.

**Tying the Obi**

![Images of tying an obi](image)

**Basic Dojo Lexicon**

"Hai" - Yes.

"Domo arigato (gozaimasu)" - Thank you (very much).

"Onegai shimasu" - 'May we help each other learn' (implicit).

"Hanmi" - Side body stance. Feet are placed at shoulder width, with front foot facing forward and back foot perpendicular. The heel of the front foot should line up with the arch of the back foot.

"Kokyu" - Breath, or breath power.

"Atemi" - Strike.

"Uke" - Partner that is attacking.

"Nage" - Partner that is doing a technique or throw.

"Sensei" - Teacher.

"Sempai / Senpai" - Senior student(s). 

"Kiai" - Loud projection of energy from center.

"Ukemi" - Falling, rolling, and protecting oneself while being thrown.

"Bokken" - Wooden sword (katana).

"Jo" - Short staff.

"Tenkan" - Turning step, pivoting on forward foot.
"Tenkai" - Front-to-rear step.
"Two-Step" - Version of tenkan, stepping forward off of the back foot before pivoting.

**Basic Positions**

- **“Left Hanmi”**
- **“Right Hanmi”**
- **“Gyakku Hanmi”**
- **“Ai Hanmi”**
- **“Bokken Zanshin”**
- **“Bokken Kamae”**
- **“Jo Zanshin”**
- **“Jo Kamae”**
Japanese Terms

- Tsuki (Strike)
- Dori (Grab)
- Shomen
- Yokomen
- Kata
- Morote (Both Hands)
- Mune (chest)
- Koshiki
- Hara
- Katate
- Kuzushi (Taking Balance)