

## **AIKIDO TRAINING FOR CHILDREN**

We offer Aikido training to children ages 5 and older. Allow me to address several questions which you probably have: What exactly is Aikido? What benefits does martial arts training in Aikido offer to children? Why practice Aikido instead of a different martial art? Will my child be eligible for rank advancement?

Aikido is a martial art which originated in Japan. Created by Morihei Ueshiba in the 1930's, Aikido is a synthesis of a centuries old martial arts tradition of Japanese jiu jitsu and various sword arts. The Aikido curriculum includes defenses against strikes and grabbing attacks. Students learn to "throw" attackers and to immobilize them with locks of the wrist, elbow, and shoulder. The techniques are considered to be "defensive" in nature, meaning that they are used in response to an attack. Focused striking ("atemi") is often used during a technique to create a desired response in the attacker. Contrary to what you may have heard, Aikido is not necessarily a "soft" art. It can be practiced with a "hard" edge, meaning that great energy can be put into techniques and the attacker will need great skill to safely receive the technique. It is for this reason that Aikido practice includes "ukemi" development. For practice to be conducted safely, the attacker must learn how to "fall" out of a throw and "sink" into a joint lock. This is why so much time is spent on proper form for falls: forward rolls; backward rolls; breakfalls. For Aikido to be fun and exhilarating, students must master these basic skills.

Unlike many other martial arts, Aikido focuses on absorbing the energy of the attack and using it against the attacker. The defender learns to move in such a fashion that the attacker becomes off-balanced. Strength and size become irrelevant. We are not meeting force with greater force. Instead, we are dissipating force through circular movement, through over-extending the attacker, and through weight shifting. As you can imagine, the subtleties of these principles can take decades to master. The more serious the student is about training, the quicker these principles become engrained and effective in self-defense.

Aikido differs philosophically from any other arts in that there is a desire to "protect" the attacker. Rather than destroy the attacker by breaking a bone or rendering him unconscious, Aikido students learn about the "compassionate" use of force. Aikido techniques permit one to control the attacker completely. Conflict can end peacefully without inflicting permanent injury.

Aikido is taught in a traditional style. Students are taught the importance of etiquette, both as a way to insure safety while training, and as a way of showing respect for teachers, training partners, and the art itself. Rigorous physical practice instills discipline, self-control, and allows students to overcome challenges. Students will improve their cardiovascular and muscular development and hand to eye coordination. It is correctly said that Aikido practice helps unify right and left brain cognition. As with any other art form, one gets from it what one puts into it. Focused practice will yield more results than a haphazard approach to training.

We do understand that children need time to play. Hence, we incorporate aikido based games into our classes. The games utilize the rolling and movement patterns that are integral to

aikido technique. Learning how to fall safely is a skill that will benefit your child outside the dojo on the playground, skateboard, bicycle, and elsewhere.

While testing for rank advancement is important, we place less emphasis on testing than we do on development of skills. Rank has significance in our art. We do not bestow rank to students who have not demonstrated an adequate understanding of technique. Social promotion does our students a disservice and we will not ask a student to test who is not capable of passing. As a frame of reference, please note that it takes adults who practice eight hours per week an average of seven years to attain black belt rank. Hence, you will not find any ten year old black belts in our dojo. The minimum age for a black belt is sixteen.

All our black belt level instructors receive their rank from Aikido's governing body in Japan. Each of our children's instructors has extensive teaching experience and are wonderful with children. They are demanding, but tailor their approach to our young students. You should feel very comfortable in having your children learn Aikido under their direction.

Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you ever have any questions about our Aikido program.

Mike

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