

Letter to Students & Parents re Children's Tests

We would like to share with you our ideas about testing children to earn colored belts in Aikido.

Kids enjoy the recognition that a colored belt provides. They should have recognition for their achievement. Preparing children in our classes for a test takes time. It takes time, focus, and lots of practice to earn each color in our program.

Every person learns at their own rate, as we all know, and our goal is for each student in our school to come away from their classes at Open Sky Aikikai having been changed in a positive way by what they have learned about themselves and their bodies. Aikido is an internal martial art and demands a process of internal change.

An Aikido test does not simply measure a memorized set of movements. We can feel when the kids have a movement in their body and that is the change we are looking for, that they "own" the movement because their center is developing. On top of that, we are asking them to hook the movement with a Japanese name and for some of us that is no easy task.

When we have rushed to give someone a raise in their rank, we found they were open to getting injuries. They were not truly ready to be thrown harder. The habits of self-protection were not in their body.

Also, we don't want students comparing their belt colors to other students and especially not from other martial arts. Belts do not have the same meaning from school to school, or sometimes even from person to person.

CHILDREN'S TESTING PROCEDURES

What does it take to get invited to take a test at Open Sky?

1. Children need to demonstrate politeness through proper Aikido etiquette in every class. They need to know the standing and seated bows.
2. We know they have the keys to learning when they are able to sit in **seiza (like a rock)** with head raised, eyes relaxed, shoulders down, belly breathing, legs folded beneath them with three fists distance between their knees, and fingers open in a relaxed fashion on their lap. Each piece of the seiza position adds up and to a relaxed state of mind and an ability to focus on learning what is before the student.

The outcome of proper etiquette and concentration is safety on the mat. Concentration and aikido etiquette enable clear learning and increase cooperation between classmates.

3. **Attitude** Students need to show a willing eagerness to learn the art. These are minimum criteria for inviting children to take a test for a belt.

Rolling Requirements

Students need to show that they are internalizing the habit of tucking their chins to protect their head when they roll. This causes a rounding of the spine, which protects their head. Further skill will show them automatically extending their legs and holding their arms in a circle beneath them to prevent a hard blow when they fall or are thrown.

Comparison to Adult Testing

Open Sky Aikido is a member of the United States Aikido Federation (USAF). USAF adults take five tests to demonstrate their increasing proficiency and they stay a white belt until they earn their black belts. This can take a minimum of 5 years of hard practice. Many adults take 10 years to get their black belts. The USAF does not require testing for any student.

We do not give black belts to children.

Formal Procedures for Test Taking

Test takers are called by name by the sensei. They shiko walk to the center of the mat. Wait until all the people in your group are in the center.

Bowing Order

Remain kneeling during the bows .

1. Bow to O'Sensei's picture.
2. Bow to the teacher.
3. Partners bow toward each other.

Wait for directions after bowing.

At the end of the test reverse the order of bows: first to each other, second to the teacher, last to O'Sensei. Shiko walk back to your place on the seiza line to watch the rest of the tests.

Test Fees

Testing fees are \$25 and include the new belt. Fees are due the day of the test.

Earning Stripes

Students can earn a stripe on their belt toward the next colored belt. The teacher and student will discuss prior to testing which parts of the test will be acceptable to earn a stripe. In this way we “down chunk” the whole test so that the student can really be proficient in the mastery of each piece of the test.

Advice for Preparing for Tests

Do ask the teachers any questions about Japanese words or any thing you are unfamiliar with on your test.

Ask **before** class time for help so the teacher can include this material in class for everyone to work on together.

Practice with other students again and again until the technique is second nature to you and ask senior students to go over the techniques with you.

We want our students to do well and feel proud when they demonstrate what they have learned for a test. We want them to feel prepared and ready so they can enjoy showing their families what they have learned.

By preparing in advance, asking relevant questions, coming to class early and practicing with others, the testing process accelerates the progress of the whole school. Everyone tests when the student tests. We all improve ourselves by working together.