

## **Aikido Hibiki (Portland, OR)**

### ***Introduction***

A martial arts dojo is more than a gym; it is a "place of the Way," a place of immersive learning where discipline, respect, and character development are as important as physical techniques. For parents, understanding and supporting dojo culture is crucial for their child's success. The dojo is not a daycare, and a parent's role is to reinforce the values of respect, perseverance, and focus that are taught in class. The dojo is a refuge from the outside world, which should be mentally 'left behind' as you enter.

### ***The core principles of dojo culture***

1. The atmosphere and philosophy of a dojo are key to your child's positive experience. While specific rituals may differ between martial arts styles (like Judo vs. Karate), these principles are universal:
2. Respect: The cornerstone of dojo culture is respect—for the space, the instructors (often called Sensei), senior students (sempai), peers, and oneself. All interactions within the dojo begin and end with a bow. Students bow to the training area, the instructor, and their training partners as a sign of respect and gratitude.
3. Discipline: The dojo is a structured and focused environment. Students are taught to follow rules and focus on their training. Students are expected to arrive on time, wait respectfully for class to begin, and follow the instructor's directions without talking or acting out.
4. Humility: A true martial artist seeks to grow, not to prove their strength. Humility teaches students to learn from mistakes, accept criticism gracefully, and treat their training partners with care.
5. Persistence: Training is challenging, both mentally and physically. Dojo culture encourages children to persevere through adversity and not give up when a skill or task is difficult.
6. Personal growth: The dojo provides a supportive environment for students to develop qualities like confidence, resilience, and self-control that they can use outside of class.

### ***Dojo etiquette for parents***

Parents are the most vital dojo members and play a crucial role in creating a supportive community. Your behavior sets an example for your child and the entire school.

1. Enter the dojo and model the good behavior!
2. Observe respectfully: Stay quiet while watching class. Avoid talking on the phone, engaging in loud conversation, etc.
3. Respect the dojo space: Remove your shoes before entering the training area and encourage your child to do the same. Keep the area clean by tidying up after your child.
4. Understand the rules: Review the dojo's specific rules regarding uniforms, bowing, and other customs. Most dojos prohibit food, gum, and jewelry on the training floor for safety and respect.

### ***The benefits for your child***

1. Adherence to dojo culture offers numerous benefits that extend far beyond the martial arts mat.
2. Improved discipline and focus: The structured environment and emphasis on following instructions help children develop self-control, which can translate to better performance in school.
3. Increased confidence and resilience: Achieving goals, such as earning a new belt, builds a deep sense of accomplishment and self-esteem. Learning to overcome setbacks teaches them resilience.
4. Enhanced social skills: Training with a partner and working within a group teaches teamwork, cooperation, and good communication skills.
5. A strong sense of community: The dojo often feels like a second family, providing a positive and supportive network for your child and connecting them with peers who share their interests.

### ***How you can help your child at home***

1. Tying the 'obi' (belt) should be practiced at home as homework until successfully acquired.
  2. Keep a consistent routine. Consistency is a "secret sauce" for success. Make sure your child's uniform is clean and their equipment is ready for each class.
  3. Discuss what they learned. Ask your child about what they enjoyed in class and how they felt, rather than just focusing on their progress.
  4. Practice with them (if you choose to). Making martial arts a family activity can strengthen your bond. If you are not a martial artist yourself, focus on fun, basic exercises.
  5. Model the virtues taught in the dojo. By demonstrating perseverance, respect, and emotional self-control, you reinforce the values your child is learning.
  6. Be observant of "the spark." If you notice positive shifts in your child's behavior—such as increased focus, confidence, or courtesy—continue to support their training. If you observe negative tendencies, it may be time to discuss it privately with an instructor.
  7. Maintain open communication with the instructor. If you have concerns, address them privately with the Sensei after class, not during.
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