

# Aikido

**Objectives:** To introduce participants to Aikido  
To raise participants' awareness of the value of centring in managing conflict.

**Session Time:** 1 hour: Sections A and B

**Sections:** A. Introduction to AIKIDO IV.2

B. Aikido and its Relevance to CR IV.3

**Activities:** Aikido Exercises A.IV.1



# Aikido

## Will you React or Respond?

*This is a valuable addition to the material in Chapter 4. Appropriate Assertiveness, Chapter 5. Co-operative Power and Chapter 6. Managing Emotions.*

*However, it would not be appropriate for trainers who have not had direct experience of these or very similar exercises in a Conflict Resolution or other course, to attempt this material.*

### A. Introduction to AIKIDO

(10 minutes)

*(See Chapter 6. Managing Emotions: Section A.)*

**Question:** When confronted with conflict, do you ever feel overwhelmed, anxious and can't think of the appropriate thing to say or do?

**Question:** What happens in your body? What do you notice?

**Discussion:** Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might explore:

- Our body responses seem to take over.
- We may feel disconnected from what is really happening.
- We may feel off balance.
- We may feel stiffness or tightening of muscles, particularly in our neck, shoulders, jaw and chest.

In this session we are going to explore a technique called centreing to assist us to be less "off balance" when confronted with conflict.

This particular technique is based upon the principles of a Japanese martial art known as Aikido. AI means harmony, KI means energy (as the Chinese "chi" in Tai Chi), DO means the way. So AI KI DO is the way of harmonising energy. As a martial art, Aikido aims to render an attack harmless without doing harm to the attacker. This aligns with the conflict resolution principle of being hard on the issue and soft on the person.

When confronted with conflict, our thoughts may tell us to use a particular conflict resolution skill, although our body reaction may be to attack or withdraw – "fight" or "flight".

The skill of centreing helps us to have our thoughts, behaviour and body responses in greater alignment.



Specifically, centring assists us to:

- focus our thoughts on desired outcomes
- feel balanced and stable
- embrace rather than resist conflict
- relate to the other person as a partner rather than as an opponent
- look for the opportunity that the conflict is bringing
- “flow” with the problem rather than against it.

*The Aikido approach is based upon the key principles of choosing to be centred; accepting our connectedness, and the power of discovery. For exploration of these principles, see Tom Crum **The Magic of Conflict** (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).*

**Group Activity:** ***Aikido Exercises:** participants are taught some simple Aikido exercises to experience the sensation of centredness. (See Aikido Activities, p A.IV.1.)*

## **B. Aikido and its Relevance to CR**

(10 minutes)

**Question:** How might centring be useful to us in our daily lives?

**Discussion:** *Draw out participants’ responses. In addition, you might consider:*

- We may feel more relaxed.
- We may be less stressed.
- We may be able to think more clearly.
- We may be less anxious.

**Question:** How might we apply centring in conflict situations?

**Discussion:** *Draw out participants’ responses. In addition, you might consider:*

- It might help us to be more in control of our body reaction to enable us to respond rather than react to a conflict.
- It might enable us to make an “I” statement more clearly.
- It may help us to handle someone else’s anger because we feel more balanced, more personally powerful and less threatened.
- It might help us harness our own emotions and communicate them constructively.

**Question:** What are some of the triggers that might help us to remember to centre?



**Discussion:** *Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:*

- Say the word "centre" to ourselves.
- Notice our breathing.
- Unlock our jaws.
- Remind ourselves of centring before walking through the door to an important meeting.
- Remember to centre when the phone rings, just before we answer it. This provides an opportunity to practice this skill so we become used to centring, and can do so quickly and easily when it's needed.

**Concluding comments:**

We rarely remain centred for more than a few moments. Regular practice will have a cumulative effect upon our whole system, especially in managing stress. Every time we centre, we consolidate it as a habitual response so that it is more readily accessible. When conflict occurs, we can use centring to be less reactive and more responsive to the circumstances that are presented to us.

*Conclude this session with this story:*

**The Schoolroom**

This is the story of a particular class of high school students, prone to playing pranks on new teachers, just to try them out.

One Monday morning they knew that they were to have a new English teacher. As usual, they all got together to plan a surprise. They decided that at 10.18am precisely, by the wall clock, they would all pick up their books from their desk and drop them loudly on the floor. It should be fun to see her response to that!

At 10.17am the teacher had her back to the class, writing the homework project on the board, a big smile went around the room. BANG! Everyone dropped their books. This was no ordinary teacher. She put the chalk down, calmly walked to her desk, picked up her books, dropped them loudly on the floor, looked up to the waiting students and said "Sorry, I'm late!"

This teacher was able to embrace the conflict with the students and flow with it. She demonstrated that she was her students' partner, not their opponent.



# Aikido Activities

## Aikido Exercises

### Trainers' Information Only

<b>Context:</b>	We all have conditioned body responses to conflict, usually in the form of “fight” or “flight”. Aikido, a Japanese martial art, meaning the way to harmonise energy (AI– harmony, KI– energy, DO– the way) provides a physical parallel for many of the verbal skills in this manual (See <i>Chapter IV, Aikido; Section A</i> )
<b>Time:</b>	40 minutes
<b>Aims:</b>	To provide participants with a physical experience of the “Flow” concept (see <i>Win/Win Approach, Appropriate Assertiveness, Managing Emotions</i> ) by doing a variety of exercises.  To explore the skill of centring.
<b>Requirements:</b>	Clear space in the room so that participants can move around freely. Remove restrictive clothing e.g. high heeled shoes, jackets etc.

**Instructions:** We're going to do a series of exercises to experience the feeling of centredness. We will be working together in partnership, assisting each other to experiment with these exercises.

We need some guidelines that will help to make us feel comfortable and create an environment in which we can learn.

First, we need to remember to touch each other gently and with respect. Work as partners not opponents.

When testing, avoid sharp, jerky movements. Don't take the other person by surprise. Provide a smooth, steady resistance to help them learn a new body response.

Third, the way we experience these exercises is different for each person. There is no right and wrong, and no should or shouldn't. We just need to accept whatever response we get. (*If you have explored the Perfection/Discovery model in Chapter 2. Creative Response: Section C, you can encourage participants to use a Discovery Approach, as discussed there, in experiencing the Aikido exercises.*)

To help us experience the impact of the exercises, we'll use a variety of images and metaphors. As we do the exercises, we may think of other images and metaphors. This is valuable as it makes the experience more powerful, and more appropriate to our individual needs.



*Ask participants to divide into pairs, finding partners who are about the same physical size as themselves. Then lead them through the following exercises. Demonstrate each exercise with a participant as you explain it, before all the participants take their turn.*

## **UNBREAKABLE CIRCLE**

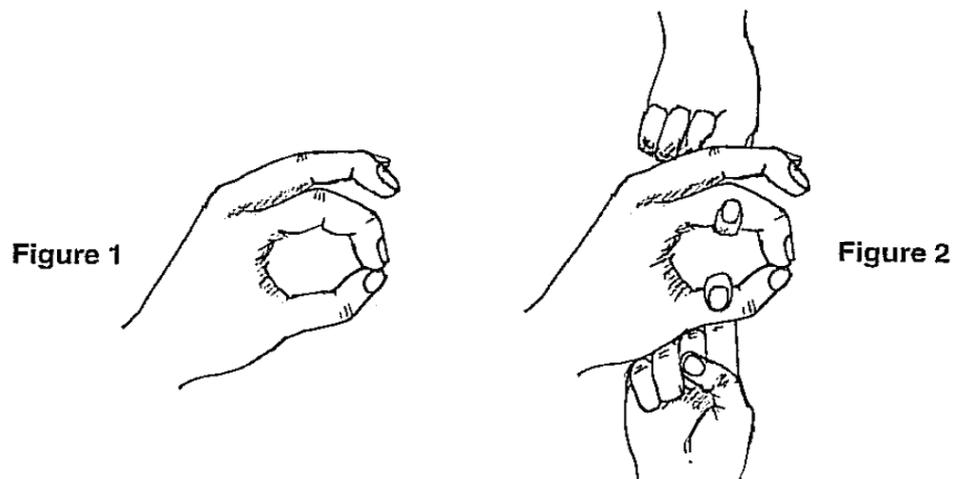
### **Step 1**

In this first exercise, I'm going to ask my partner to hold out his/her hand and make a firm circle with their thumb and forefinger (*as in Figure 1 below.*)

I am now going to try to separate my partner's fingers by taking hold of each of them and pulling them apart: my partner is going to resist me. In other words, he/she is going to try and keep their fingers together, while I try to pull them apart (*as in Figure 2 below.*)

*Demonstrate this.*

We can feel how much strength and effort it takes to resist each other.



*Now ask participants to try this – first one partner, then the other.*

### **Step 2**

This time we are going to do something different. Without using physical strength, my partner is going to hold his/her fingers as before and try to prevent me from opening them. I'm going to ask my partner to do this by imagining as clearly as possible that his/her fingers form a very strong, solid, steel ring that cannot be broken.

It might be helpful to use an image or association, like a wedding ring or a ring on a horse's harness, to help "know" that the steel ring is unbreakable.

*Demonstrate this.*

*Now ask participants to try this – first one partner, then the other.*



**Discussion:** Did you notice any differences between the first time you tried it using strength, and the second time using the image of an unbreakable steel ring? What did you experience?

### **Important Points to Cover**

Our minds are capable of making images that change our physical strength in directly testable ways. We can have a lot of control over our body's energy once we recognise it and give it attention. Energy follows attention.

### **BASIC CENTREING EXPERIENCE**

We are now going to explore a technique known as **centreing**. Once again, it has to do with attention and where we focus energy in our bodies. The centre of gravity of any mass is the infinitely small point of most stability from where it is least likely to lose balance.

This time I want you to work as individuals.

Stand comfortably, balanced on both feet, hip-width apart.

Now relax and loosen your body.

Lift your feet, one at a time, and rotate your ankles.

Bend your knees slightly, making sure they're not locked.

Gently sway your hips, stretch your spine, and lift and lower your shoulders.

Very gently and slowly, lower your head towards your chest, and raise it again, to ease your neck.

Now take a deep breath, hold it for a moment and let it out with a sigh. Then breathe easily. *(Pause)*

Now place your thumb on your navel and wrap your hand around your stomach below this. Nestle your other hand into the small of your back. Between these two hands lies the centre of your body.

*Ask participants to take their full attention to the inside of their bodies between their two hands, and to become more aware of their centres. Ask them to let their breathing drop down to their centres.*

*Participants may first close their eyes to focus their attention fully. Then, ask them to experiment maintaining attention on their centre with their eyes open and looking around the room.*

*Allow 2 minutes.*

**Discussion:** What did you notice?

How did it feel?



## EXPERIENCING STABILITY – CHOOSING TO BE CENTRED

### Step 1

In this exercise, we're going to experience the stability that arises from being centred. First, we'll do what we call the "wobble" test. I'm going to ask my partner to stand with her feet side-by-side, a comfortable distance apart. I'm going to stand to the side of my partner, facing her. Now, I'll place one hand behind her back, but not actually touching her, and the other hand lightly on the upper part of her chest (as in figure 3 below.)

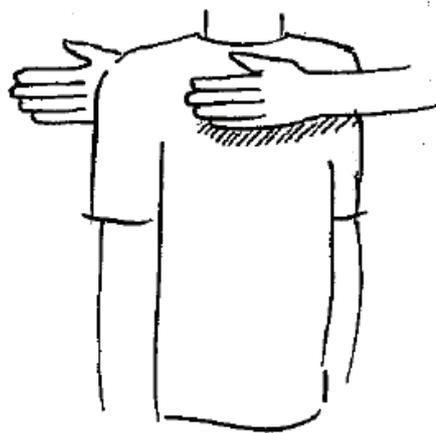


Figure 3

I'm going to gently and steadily increase the pressure on my partner's chest until she loses her balance. I'll keep my hand behind her back to reassure her that she won't fall backwards.

*Demonstrate and then ask partners to try this – first one partner, then the other.*

### Discussion:

What did you notice?

How much effort did it take to unbalance your partners?

### Step 2

We're going to do a similar exercise again. I'm going to gently apply pressure to my partner's chest, with my other hand close to her back to prevent her from falling. But, first I'm going to ask my partner to become centred. I'm going to ask her to unlock her knees, to breathe easily and to put her full attention on the centre of her body. She may like to put her hand near her centre to help focus her attention. There's no hurry. *(Pause)* When she feels comfortably centred, I want her to signal to me *(as in Figure 3 above.)* Now, I'm going to gently and steadily increase the pressure on her chest for a short time. Watch what happens.

*Demonstrate this.*



*Ask your partner what he/she noticed and felt. Also ask other participants what they observed.*

*Now ask partners to try this – first one partner, then the other.*

**Discussion:** What did you notice?

How did it feel?

**Important Points to Cover:**

When we are centred we feel calm and in charge of ourselves. As we go through the day we won't remain centred. However, with practice, it takes only a moment to focus again on our centre.

**EXPANDING STABILITY – EMBRACE CONFLICT**

*This exercise adds more skill to the previous exercise: "Experiencing Stability: Choosing to be centred".*

In this exercise we will practise focusing again on centring. I'm going to ask my partner to think of a current problem that is worrying her. I want my partner to imagine her problem is on the tip of my index finger, which I am holding about 30 cm away from her. When she has all her attention on the tip of my finger, I place that finger on her nose.

*Demonstrate with a partner. Do this light-heartedly.*

Now, we really have a problem. We both look stupid!

I do the wobble test with my other hand, applying pressure to her chest. If all her attention is indeed on her nose (the problem), she'll wobble. Now I ask my partner to centre, while I still have the "problem" pressed on her nose.

I do the wobble test again. If she has centred, she will not wobble. Now without seriously hurting her, I take her attention away from her centre again, by standing on one of her feet – another problem! I do the wobble test. Is she still centred or has she "lost" it? If she has, I give her a moment to centre and, with one finger on her nose, and one foot on her foot (problems everywhere!), I do the wobble test again.

*Now ask partners to try this – first one partner then the other.*

**Discussion:** What did you notice? How did it feel?

**Important Points to Cover:**

Centring is not a philosophical concept. It is tangible and testable. It rests on the intimate relationship between mind and body. Don't expect to stay centred; expect to keep going back to centre. When the going gets tough, centre!



## THE UNBENDABLE ARM – EXTENDING OUR TERRITORY

In this exercise, we're going to experience the idea of extending our energy out from our centre.

### Step 1

I'm going to ask my partner to stand comfortably with his arm held out to one side at shoulder height. I'm going to stand in front of my partner and grasp his arm with my hands. I'll put one hand on top of his upper arm like this, and the other underneath his forearm. He keeps his wrist turned to the front (*as in Figure 4 below*)

Now I'm going to ask my partner to try to keep his arm straight as I apply steady pressure and try to bend it at the elbow (*as in Figure 5 below*). Be careful not to attempt to bend your partner's arm in the wrong direction and cause injury.

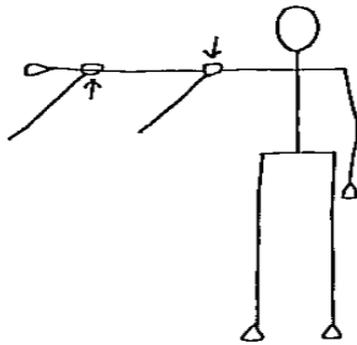


Figure 4

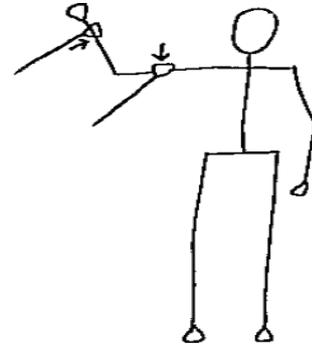


Figure 5

*Demonstrate this.*

**Discussion:** What did you notice?

*Highlight the struggle and the effort involved. Now ask partners to try this – first one partner, then the other.*

### Step 2

This time, I'm going to ask my partner to become centred before I attempt to bend his arm. I want him to use his mind and extend his energy rather than resist me with force and struggle.

So, I'm going to say to my partner: imagine that your centre is an infinite reservoir, gushing water/energy, and that your outstretched arm is a fire hose connected to this reservoir. Your fingers are the nozzle. Now, think of something outside the room that you want to spray water on such as a garden, a pathway or a fire. Turn on a powerful flow of the water/energy from your centre and imagine yourself as a fire hydrant with the water coming from your centre. Your arm will be like a fire hose when the water pressure is on. Keep the elbow slightly bent. Wave your fingers a little to be sure you are not tensing up. This is about relaxed strength, so don't make images that would make you anxious or desperate.



*Encourage your partner to include his own detail, to visualise his own images, and involve his other senses so that the image is real for him.*

When my partner has a strong, clear image, I'll ask him to signal me that he's ready. *(Pause)* Now I'll try, as I did before, to bend his arm. I won't jerk his arm; instead I'll apply a smooth, steady pressure *(as in Figures 4 and 5 above.)*

*Now ask partners to try this – first one partner, then the other.*

Discussion: What did you notice?  
How did it feel?

### **Important Points to Cover:**

Your real strength is strength of mind – a strength that comes from relaxation and a powerful flow of energy into the situation. Often when we are in conflict, we contract and shut down our energy. Aikido teaches us to do just the opposite.

Our energy is not just flowing through our arm, of course; it flows from our centre, through our whole body, radiating out into the situation.

Aikido master Koichi Tohei in *Ki in Daily Life* (Japan: Ki No Kenkyukai H.Q., 1978) says "If you maintain the one point (i.e. centre), even if you do not think that your mental strength is flooding forth, *ki* will be flowing out from your entire body." p49. In other words, the essence of this approach is centreing. From it comes calm, flowing power.

### **TRIBUTARIES – CONNECTING, FLOWING WITH, DIRECTING**

This exercise is an extension of the previous one, and explores our attitude of connecting with the other person, and flowing with her as a partner not an opponent.

This time: I'll ask my partner to do the same as in the previous exercise but first to picture me as her (or his) opponent in a conflict. I'll ask her to imagine again her infinite reservoir of energy/water, her arm as a hose and the water/energy flowing through and directed where she wants it to go. I am trying to bend her arm (as in Figure 4.) She might note how disconnected she feels from me. Here I am huffing and puffing and it seems like she doesn't care at all.

In conflict, this attitude might make us powerful, but it certainly isn't win/win. Win/win is about connecting and flowing with the other person. Now I ask my partner to picture that my hands on her arm are not resisting but are additional hoses adding more energy/water to her own like a tributary flowing into a stream. Now she is connected to me. She is using my energy. She can relate to me. We can make eye contact with each other. My partner makes a shift in attitude, feels good to be helped, knowing there is more water/energy available for the task at hand.



Now ask partners to try this – first one partner then the other.

**Discussion:** What did you notice?  
How did it feel?

**Important Points to Cover:**

Ideally, in conflict, my partner also directs his/her energy to be a support or tributary. Our personal power connects and flows towards successful outcomes. Life doesn't often give us that, of course. Whether or not our partner plays win/win, the skill is to consciously involve ourselves with the other person's energy, flowing with it and directing it positively. A reframing question is an excellent way to do this verbally. After a few times of working with us in conflict, our opponents may well start to get the message. Our aim in connecting is to turn our opponents into partners with whom we create better solutions.

**LIFTING A TREE – CHANGING THE RELATIONSHIP**

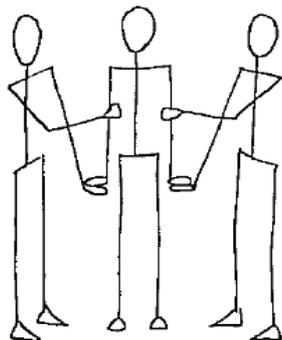
*This exercise is most suitable for physically fit and comfortably dressed groups. Some participants may prefer to watch rather than participate. It can just be a demonstration at the front of the room, without full group participation.*

*You may choose to be the person who demonstrates being centred. Step 1 below is written for when this is the case. In this circumstance, choose two fit, reasonably strong volunteers of roughly equal height. Demonstrate as you explain.*

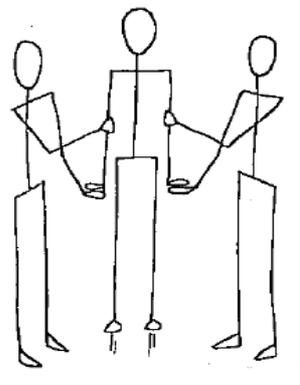
**Step 1**

I need two volunteers to help me. I will stand between the two. I'm going to ask my two volunteers to lift me up. I will hold both my arms straight down. Each of the volunteers will take one of my hands in one of their hands. With their other hand, they will hold my elbow (as in Figure 6 below.) Now I want them to lift me up, and notice how much effort this takes (as in Figure 7 below.)

If the volunteers don't manage to fully lift you off the ground, participants still get an idea of the weight/effort involved.



**Figure 6**



**Figure 7**



## Step 2

This time, I will centre and allow the sense of my body weight to let down and connect with the ground. When I'm ready, I'll ask the volunteers to lift me again.

*It is likely that the volunteers won't be able to lift you, even though you're not actually resisting them.*

*Some participants may want to experience the exercise for themselves. Others may want to watch.*

*The person to be lifted may prefer to use another image of a sturdy, old well rooted tree, put their awareness into the soles of the feet and, as the sense of body weight lets down, to make a connection with the roots, deep into the earth.*

**Discussion:** What did you notice?

How did it feel?

### VARIATION

*If the person demonstrating is light enough to be easily held in the air, he/she can make the image of connecting to the earth after being raised and while still being held up. The supporting partners suddenly and dramatically cannot hold up the person demonstrating any more, or find it much more difficult.*

### Important Points to Cover:

This exercise demonstrates that there is a tangible difference when you acknowledge connection – in this case with the earth. There is an observable change in the dynamics of the situation, when the relationship between the three people and the earth changed.

In conflict you may well need to feel connected with the earth. It gives you a strong sense of being integrally involved in the situation. You don't feel like you're a "pushover".

As you become centred, allowing your energy to flow and connect with others and the earth, the whole relationship changes.

