



American Karate-Do Shotokai

Frequently Asked Questions



Mission Statement:

We seek tranquility in the midst of conflict or danger and strive to control our bodies, minds, and emotions to be able to avoid conflict when possible, defend ourselves when necessary, and protect others when able.

Q: How is AKDS different/similar to other martial arts?

A: Like many other styles, Karate-Do Shotokai uses kicks, punches, blocks, and other self defense techniques. There are, however, differences in the way these techniques are employed. In particular, we emphasize more relaxed and fluid movements while maintaining necessary speed and penetration. Training courses and practice sessions are held regularly—come join us and experience the difference for yourself!

Q: What is your focus?

A: Self defense. In the process one can also gain flexibility, strength, relaxation, control, skill, and awareness.

Q: What is a typical practice session like?

A: An average session lasts two hours and has three main parts:

- *Kata*: Set patterns of techniques used to gain focus, relaxed body condition, and to develop proper musculoskeletal control;
- *Kihon*: Various exercises demonstrated and practiced with numerous partners to develop fluidity, relationship, timing, distance, focus, power, speed, placement, etc.
- *Kumite*: Applied exercises in a more free and realistic setting for testing ones ability.

Q: What do you wear to practice?

A: A white uniform called a 'gi' ('gee' with a 'g' as in girl) and colored ranking belts similar to other martial arts. Until you have a gi, loose pants and a t-shirt are fine. Do not wear jeans, shorts, watches, rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, etc.

Q: How can I buy a gi or other equipment?

A: Discounted orders are placed for AKDS members on a regular basis. Your instructor can assist with sizes and other questions.

Q: What karate etiquette do you follow?

A: Following are some basic precepts we adhere to:

- bowing as one enters or leaves the dojo (training hall) is accepted, but not required;
- running off to get a drink during a practice exercise is not appropriate—opportunities to do so will be provided;
- changing the exercise or stopping to talk or rest during a practice exercise is not appropriate—just keep moving!;
- fingernails and toenails should be trimmed;
- asking questions after demonstrations and during practice for understanding is acceptable and encouraged;
- general idle chatter is not only rude, but dangerous as it interferes with comprehending practice exercises;
- partners bow to one another at the end of each training exercise before switching partners.

Q: Do you shout when you attack?

A: No. We develop methods of releasing explosive energy without the tensing effects created by the 'kiai.'

Q: Do you wear any special protective gear?

A: No. We practice barefoot, on smooth hard surfaces, and do not wear protective gear to avoid the unrealistic distances and timings it creates.

Q: What about tournaments and competition?

A: We do not participate in tournaments/competition because the goals of such activities differ from those of self defense. Instead of training 'against opponents' for points, we train 'with partners' in order to understand the workings of the human body and use that knowledge for self-defense (*see mission statement*).

Q: Do you train with weapons?

A: Yes, some. To aid in training and the development of proper body condition we use the bo (staff) and the bokken (wooden practice sword).

Q: Is practice safe?

A: Yes, very. Because experience and abilities are developed over time in controlled but focused exercises, participants progress in a safe, relaxed setting. The only injuries one is likely to incur are aching muscles and minor bumps and bruises. All participants must have proof of insurance to practice.

Q: What about age, gender and experience?

A: Club membership is open to both men and women age 18 years and up, with a few AKDS classes for children in certain areas. Because all exercises are based on repeated, simple, true principles of body mechanics, one can start training with any club at any time regardless of ability or prior experience.

Q: What does it cost?

A: AKDS is an official 501c3 non-profit organization created for the furthering of karate-do and to improve local communities. No AKDS instructors or administrators are paid, but freely donate their time and expertise. Annual AKDS membership fees, as well as local club dues, are collected to cover operating and travel costs, certificates, equipment, etc.

Q: Where can I get more info?

A: The following websites and books are good sources of information on Harada Sensei's methods and philosophy: www.karatedoshotokai.com; www.shotokai.org; *Karate Master: The Life and Times of Mitsusuke Harada*, by Dr. Clive Layton; *Reminiscences*, by Dr. Clive Layton; and *The Voice of the Mountain Dragon: Practising with Harada Sensei*, by Bernard Mathieu.