



Safe Sparring Policy

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March 2025

To be reviewed March 2029

Safe Sparring Policy

Sparring is recognized as an integral part of martial arts training and is seen in Saber Academy as vital for the student's development. It is recognized that sparring has a higher risk of injury than other types of training. Sparring must always be supervised by a qualified instructor. Mandatory protective equipment must be worn during all sparring sessions. Any blood indicates excessive contact and lack of control. The student code of conduct applies and the infection control policy must be implemented immediately. Sparring carries a risk of infection, injury or even death. Participation in sparring requires acknowledgement and acceptance of this risk.

Definitions

Sparring - Sparring is where two or more practitioners engage in the motions or semblance of fighting, using any part of the body or a weapon, without the landing of heavy blows that might otherwise cause unnecessary bodily harm. With the intention of safe training, the practitioners concentrate on timing, distancing and the use of various fighting techniques.

Free-sparring - Free-Sparring is sparring where the use of fighting techniques by one or more of the practitioners is not predetermined or advised. The purpose of free-sparring is to test a practitioner's ability to respond spontaneously and effectively to unforeseen attacks (self-defense) or competitive situations.

Kata/One-step-sparring - Kata or One-step-sparring is sparring where the motions of fighting are predetermined and known to each participant, with the intention to drill the practitioner's ability and to utilize one or more specific fighting techniques. Control-sparring includes any specified attack-defense routine being practiced by two or more practitioners to develop the skill of the practitioners in executing the technique.

Heavy Armored Sparring/Gekiken Practice - Heavy Armored Sparring or Gekiken practice is full-contact sparring in protective armor that allows for strikes to the head and face when wearing appropriate protective headgear. This practice may include throws, submissions, take-downs, and disarms. Practitioners must have a minimum of 2 years of training before participating in full-contact sparring.

Light Armored Sparring - Light armored sparring involves controlled contact with protective equipment. It is open to all students but does not include throws, submissions, or take-downs.

Sparring Supervision - Students must be under the direct supervision of a qualified instructor at all times. In addition to the provisions for sparring in general and in accordance with the first aid policy, one certified instructor/assistant instructor with a current First Aid certificate must be present to supervise every sparring session. Practitioners must be closely monitored to check on their physical and mental state. Particular attention to the following policies:

- Hydration policy
- Infection control policy
- Pregnancy policy

Free-Sparring Restrictions

Children (4-12 years of age) may not engage in free-sparring with any degree of deliberate head or facial contact except in light armored sparring with appropriate protective headgear. In addition to normal sparring, there are equipment requirements for children in these age groups. This includes the wearing of correct head-guards to prevent head injury in the event of a fall when participating in an organized tournament.

Protective Equipment

All participants in sparring must wear appropriate safety equipment according to the specific form of sparring. The use of safety equipment is to protect against accidental contact and is not a green light to attack with intent. This behavior will not be tolerated as outlined in the Student code of conduct.

Approved Safety Equipment

Unless otherwise specific, all safety equipment:

- Must be proprietary based i.e., not home-made
- Must be maintained in good working order, preferably to manufacturers' standards
- Must be regularly cleaned with proper attention to hygiene

Additional equipment for Light armored, Gekiken and Heavy Armored Sparring:

- Full face helmet with proper protection
- Padded body armor covering vital areas
- Appropriate protective gloves
- Additional padding for joints and limbs as required

The following safety equipment is not compulsory but is highly recommended:

- Breast guard

Participant Matching

In a competitive setting, all free-sparring participants must be matched as close as possible according to age, height, weight, maturity, skill levels, and experience. For training and practice free-sparring, participants of different age, height, weight, maturity, skill levels, and experience are desirable to provide the broadest possible range of training experience. Strict controls and supervision are required to maintain safety and prevent excessive contact.

Sparring Intensity

Light Intensity: Controlled touch contact to the armor only, suitable for beginners and all levels of students.

Heavy Intensity: More forceful contact with proper protective equipment, only permitted for advanced students with a minimum of 2 years of training.

The intensity level must be clearly communicated and agreed upon before sparring begins, and should reflect the class, division, and level of protection worn.

Sparring Rounds

The number and duration of rounds that a practitioner is required to participate in must be controlled by a qualified instructor and reflect the level of skill and experience of the practitioner.

Rules - Prohibited and Permitted Targets

Light Armored Sparring

Refer to Saber Skirmish ruleset

Gekiken and Heavy Armored Sparring

Permitted targets include those in Light Armored Sparring plus:

- Head and face (when appropriate protective headgear is worn)
- Throws, submissions, take-downs, and disarms are permitted

Prohibited techniques in all sparring:

- Eye gouging
- Spitting
- Neck strikes
- Finger & joint locks (except in Gekiken or Heavy Armored sparring with submissions)

Allowable Contact

The level of contact is determined by the type of sparring:

Light Armored Sparring: Light contact only, defined as controlled touch contact

Gekiken and Heavy Armored Sparring: Moderate to full contact depending on the protective equipment worn and the experience level of participants

All contracted instructors and affiliated clubs must comply with this policy when conducting sparring sessions under the Saber Academy banner.

Immunizations

Hepatitis B is a serious illness transmitted through blood contact. It can be prevented by vaccination, and you are strongly advised to see your doctor about getting vaccinated.