

Middle positions are ideal for most interactions. End positions are appropriate in specific situations.

Concrete wall:

Extremely direct and straightforward engagement at a 90° angle; going straight toward a point or idea that the other person is already prepared to block or deflect. Engaging straight on at 90°.

1

Not as direct:

Still quite direct engagement; Using a slightly softer angle and beginning to move slightly with the other person, rather than directly against them; still holding your point firmly and approaching the other person at about 70°.

3

Ideal balance:

Able to engage in a way that is clear and reasonably direct, while also approaching and hearing the other person with care; emphasizing both points that you agree with and moving toward points of difference from a 45° angle, rather than straight on.

5

Engaging more flexibly:

While continuing to clearly express your point, thoughts, or feelings, you are creating more space for what the other person is saying; putting more energy into hearing them rather than speaking directly against their point at about 30°.

7

Being flexible or movable:

While still mentioning what you want or wish for, you are mostly allowing what the other person wants to come before what you want; engaging through moving with them instead of against them, probably at about 10°.

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Aikido Continuum: Engaging with Different Levels of Resistance

Too Rigid

Most Ideal

Too Flexible

2

4

6

8

10

Slightly less rigid:

Very direct engagement with the other person that includes a small level of curiosity about their point; most of the focus here is still about having your point heard from about 80°.

Starting to be flexible:

Directly stating your point and also making room for what the other person is saying; beginning to focus on both recapping the other person and adding your point; engaging with them at about 60° and recognizing that both points can coexist.

Ideal balance:

This level of engagement is one where you are really hearing the other person and interacting with them from a 40° angle related to your own point; beginning to be noticeably more flexible.

Focusing on listening:

This level of engagement is noticeably gentler, giving more and having more flow as you move more with what the other person is saying and push back much less, maybe at about 20°.

Flowing like water:

Being completely engaged with or receptive to what the other person is saying; not stating your own point, thoughts, or feelings; moving along with the other person's point fluidly as if water is going around you or between your fingers. Engaging mostly through listening from less than 5°.

Aikido is a Japanese martial art. In conversation, it's about recognizing the other person's presence and intention, while responding from an angle that is softer than going directly against their point.