



Iaido Swords and the Law

What students need to know about iaito, shinken and 'ninja swords'

For use in England and Wales | Current at 14 August 2026

The short version: You may be able to keep, carry and use an iaito or shinken for genuine iaido training. However, you must have a real *training* reason, follow your club's rules, and transport the sword responsibly.

This guide explains the main rules in everyday language. It is not personal legal advice.

1. Which swords does this guide cover?

- An iaito is a curved practice sword. Its cutting edge is not sharp, but its point may still be sharp.
- A shinken is a real, sharpened katana. It may be used for supervised Tameshigiri, or cutting practice.

Most full-size iaito and shinken have a curved blade that is at least 50 centimetres long. They are therefore covered by the law on prohibited curved swords. The blade is measured in a straight line from the top of the handle to the tip.

The law does not only apply to sharp swords. A blunt-edged iaito can still be a prohibited curved sword because of its shape and length.

2. The law is about possession, not just ownership

Possession means having a sword in your custody or under your control. You do not have to own the sword.

- If you borrow a club sword, you possess it while it is under your control.
- If the sword is at your home, you normally possess it there.
- If it is in your car, you may possess it there.
- You may still possess a sword stored somewhere else if you continue to control it.

Ownership is different. Someone can own a sword without holding it at that moment. However, putting a sword at another address is not an easy way around the law if you still control it.

Remember: the law also controls selling, hiring, lending, giving, making and importing some swords.

3. Why can an laido student possess a sword?

The law provides a defence for a prohibited curved sword possessed for a genuine sporting activity. A defence is a legal reason that can make the possession lawful.

Bona fide laido is capable of being treated as a sporting activity. Properly organised Tameshigiri may also qualify when it is part of martial-arts training. The activity should be organised and covered by suitable public liability insurance.

Useful evidence includes:

- your current club or association membership;
- your instructor's name and contact details;
- details of the class, seminar, grading or cutting session;
- confirmation that the activity is insured; and
- a receipt or other information about the sword.

Important: club membership is useful evidence, but it is not a sword licence. The full circumstances still matter.

4. Is an iaito legally 'blunt'?

Not always. The legal meaning of 'blunt' is stricter than the everyday meaning. A sword does not count as blunt if it has a thin cutting edge, a sharp piercing point, or another part made for cutting or piercing.

If your iaito has a blunt edge but a sharp point, you should assume that it does not qualify for the legal blunt-item defence. Your main legal reason for having it will normally be genuine, insured laido training.

A shinken has a sharp edge and normally a sharp point. It does not qualify as blunt.

5. Keeping a sword at home

The law applies at home as well as in public. Keep the sword only for a lawful reason, such as your genuine laido or Tameshigiri training.

Good practice is to:

- keep the sword in its saya and in a closed bag or case;
- store it securely and out of sight;
- keep it away from children and people who do not have permission to use it;
- secure a shinken especially carefully; and
- keep evidence of your training and club membership.

Never: keep or carry an iaito or shinken for protection, even if you got it principally for laido. Unless it is entirely for training, you are unlikely to have a lawful explanation for having it.

6. Travelling to training

It is an offence to have a blade or sharply pointed article in a public place without a good reason. Travelling to or from a real laido class, workshop, or event may be a good reason. It is not an *automatic* exemption.

Before travelling:

1. Put the sword in its saya and in a closed, secure sword bag or case.
2. Keep it out of sight and not ready for immediate use.
3. If travelling by car, use the locked boot where reasonably possible.
4. Take a reasonably direct route and avoid unnecessary stops.
5. Carry details of the class or event, your instructor and your club.
6. Keep the sword with you or under secure control. Do not display it in public.

A locked case, a locked car boot and a direct journey all help to show that you have a good reason. None of them is a guaranteed legal safe pass. The police and, if necessary, a court will look at the whole situation.

This is serious: public possession without a good reason can carry a sentence of up to four years in prison.

7. At the dojo and during Tameshigiri

Only take the sword out of its bag in a proper training area and with your instructor's permission.

Tameshigiri should only take place:

- at a suitable private or controlled venue;
- under a competent instructor's supervision;
- as part of organised training;
- with suitable safety rules and an exclusion area; and
- where the activity is covered by insurance.

Extra rules may apply if a dojo is inside a school, college or other educational building. The instructor should have the venue's permission.

8. Borrowing a club sword

If your Instructor lends you a sword, you possess it while it is under your control. The club or the Instructor personally may still own it, but that does not remove your responsibility.

A loan should be part of organised and insured training. The club or the Instructor should keep a record:

- who has the sword;
- which sword has been lent;
- the reason for the loan;
- when it must be returned; and
- where it may be stored and used.

Do not lend your own sword casually to a friend. Speak to your instructor first.

9. What is a 'ninja sword'?

A 'ninja sword' is now a separate prohibited type of sword. The legal definition is based on the sword's actual shape and measurements, not the name used by a shop or website.

To fit the legal definition, a 'ninja sword' must have all of these main features:

- a blade between 14 and 24 inches long;
- a straight main cutting edge;
- a second straight cutting edge;
- a blunt spine; and
- a tanto or reverse-tanto style point.

A normal iaito or shinken is usually different. A katana normally has a curved blade, one cutting edge and often a blade longer than 24 inches. It will not normally meet the full ninja-sword definition.

But remember: a standard katana may not be banned as a 'ninja sword', but it is still legally restricted as a curved sword if its blade is at least 50 centimetres long.

10. If the police ask about your sword

- Stay calm and keep your hands away from the sword.
- Tell the officer that it is secured in its bag or case.
- Do not open the case unless the officer asks you to do so.
- Explain where you are going, or where you have come from.
- Show your class, event, club and instructor details if asked. LCTKD's class locations and times are on the class pages of its website, and events and workshops are listed on the events page.

11. Students under 18

Retailers must not sell most swords or other bladed articles to anyone under 18, and LCTKD does not allow any student under 18 to come into possession of a sword without that happening with the full consent of a parent or guardian, and the parent or guardian is the person responsible for the safe and legal care of the sword.

Quick checklist

Make sure before you travel anywhere with your sword, you can answer “Yes” to all the following.

- I have the sword because I am in training in laido with LCTKD.
- I am carrying the sword for a class, workshop or event relating to that training with LCTKD.
- The sword is in its saya and in a closed (and preferably locked) bag or case.
- I have my instructor and class, workshop or event details to hand, or can show them on the LCTKD website.
- My journey is reasonably direct from home to the class, workshop or event.
- I understand that borrowing a sword still means possessing it legally, and that means the law applies to me even if the sword is not mine.

Where to find the law

These official sources contain the detailed rules. They are included for instructors, parents and students who want to read further.

1. [Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(Offensive Weapons\) Order 1988, as amended](#)
2. [Criminal Justice Act 1988, section 139 - blades and points in public places](#)
3. [Criminal Justice Act 1988, section 141A - sales to people under 18](#)
4. [2025 Order adding the 'ninja sword' category](#)
5. [2026 Order correcting the 'ninja sword' definition](#)
6. [Crown Prosecution Service guidance on knife and weapon offences](#)

Please note: this guide gives general information for England and Wales as at 14 August 2026. If the police are investigating an incident, or if there is doubt about a particular sword, get advice from your Instructor. LCTKD can give more detailed advice if required.