



Karate and Hearing Impairments

Advice for Instructors

ENGLISH KARATE



FEDERATION

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Sign for 'Karate' in British Sign Language



What is a hearing impairment?

A hearing impairment is a partial or total inability to hear. A deaf person is somebody who has no ability to hear or such a low ability that they are medically defined as being deaf. There are a range of hearing impairments which can affect people and each individual will be different on what they can hear. Hearing impairments can affect one or both ears.

Whilst hearing aids can go some way to rectifying hearing impairments, instructors are reminded that some people may choose not to wear them during lessons. It is also important to note that they neither correct nor restore perfect hearing.

How common is it?

It is documented that there are approximately 8 million people in the UK who have some form of hearing impairment whilst there are approximately 24,000 people whose first language is British Sign Language.

Communication skills

Communication skills are everything. The ability to coach people with a hearing impairment appropriately is heavily dependent on the coaches ability to communicate with their student(s).

As with any disability, if a student wishes to join your club then you should initiate a conversation with the participant as to what their particular needs are with regards to training and communication. By having this conversation beforehand, you will have agreed on a mutually acceptable form of communication which will aide both the coach and the participant. There are a variety of ways in which to have this conversation and bare in mind that many people with a hearing impairment can lip read or may only be partially deaf and the assistance of hearing loops and aids can assist greatly. Where you are struggling, offer a pen and paper or use basic gestures. Liaising with the members next of kin or family and friends is also a good idea.



Inclusivity

Ensure you make the participant with a disability involved in every aspect of the class. One suggestion could be to have the participant at the front of the group when discussing plans or instructions. Coaches may often undertake demonstrations of techniques and their use with a crowd of students around them. Ensure that the participant is advised to make their way to the front of the circle when demonstrations are occurring as to avoid bringing them to the front at the beginning of each demonstration and thus drawing attention to the hearing impairment.

Karate classes are characterised by coaches providing student with verbal instructions. Students need to be students. In order to ensure that this style of teaching is as sufficient as possible for students with hearing impairments, coaches should ensure that the karateka with a hearing impairment fully acknowledges the instructions before commencing a sequence of moves, katas or kumite. Those with a hearing impairment will usually signal their understanding through physical gestures. There may even be the possibility (following a number of sessions and a good working relationship) for karate specific signals to be developed between coaches and their students. However, if it is clear that the student does not understand what is being asked of them then the coach should rephrase their instructions accordingly and repeat where necessary.

Promoting the message

Given those with hearing impairments often suffer no other disabilities, all usual forms of communication are available to clubs to promote their karate classes as being inclusive. Social media and websites will be as successful for those with a hearing impairment as it would to those without. However, please bear in mind that any videos that are posted would benefit from the option of having subtitles enabled.

Practical considerations

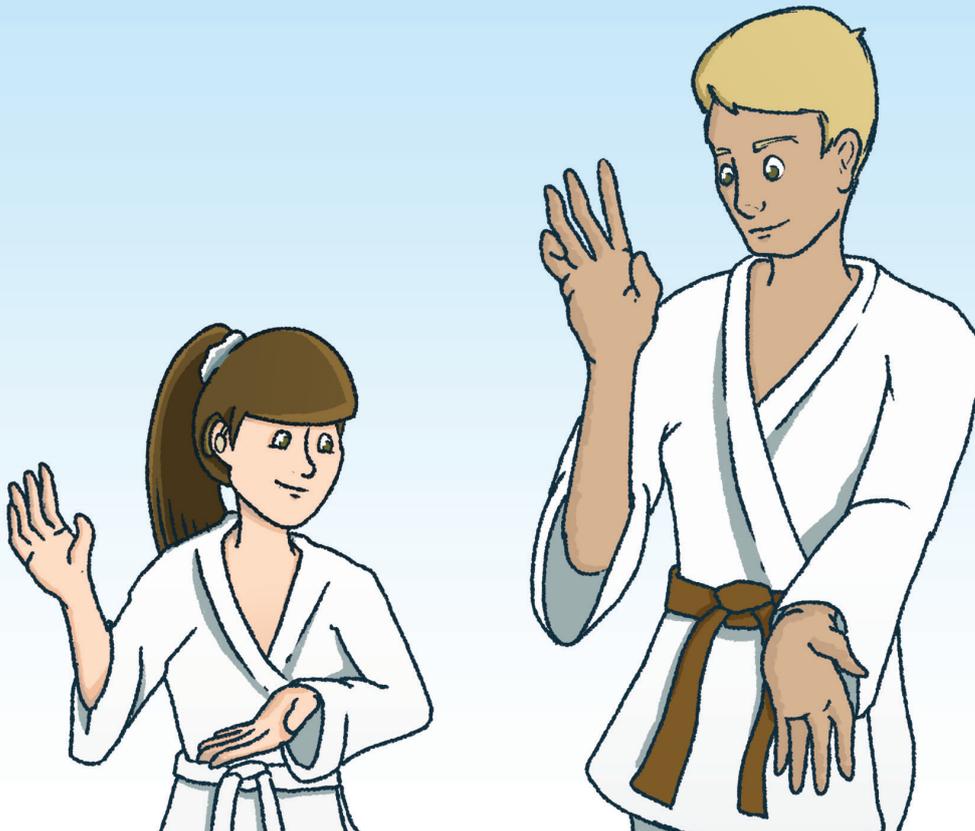
There are a number of councils in England who are heavily investing in ensuring that their leisure centres have hearing loops installed for the benefit of the communities they serve. Southampton Council for example have committed to a £54,000 scheme to ensure that all public buildings have a hearing loop available (2019). Whilst this is the ideal solution, the EKF acknowledge that not all councils are in this position and that many karate coaches have their own dojos and these pieces of equipment can be expensive. However, there are easy practical solutions which can be utilised to enhance the listening experience of those with hearing impairments with the most important one being attempting to reduce noise levels where possible i.e. ensuring karateka show respect and not talk whilst others are talking. By reducing the noise levels where possible and appropriate to do so, this will ensure that hearing aids work as they should.



Do's and Don'ts

When speaking in front of the karate class, there are a number of adaptive communication methods that you should and should not do:

Should	Should not
Repeat the Japanese phrase in English afterwards (for new members who are new to Japanese terminology this will be impossible to lip read and interpret correctly). Use whiteboards and write down key words if required	Hide your mouth when speaking e.g. touching your face
Present one format of visual information at a time	Speak and undertake the technique at the same time (the karateka with a hearing impairment may be reliant on reading your lips and thus not take full account of what you are trying to demonstrate)
Demonstrate techniques and/or corrections as much as possible thus reducing the need to rely on interpretation and hearing	Stand in front of light reflective surfaces e.g. mirrors or windows
Before delivering instructions ensure the karateka are aware they are being communicated with i.e. a nod or a wave would suffice	Speak fast
Have an awareness that facial hair can impede lip reading capabilities	Exaggerate lip movements
Involve the rest of the club including students and parents to support each other and the students with hearing impairments	Don't shout



Karate specific considerations

Hearing aids and cochlear implants are sensitive pieces of electronic equipment and risk being broken if they fall out of the ear during physical activity, specifically contact sports. For this reason some deaf people will choose to take part in sport without using their aids.

However, others prefer to wear them, particularly if they are taking part in karate lessons in a mainstream environment where they can use them to hear instructions or calls from the instructors and other karateka.

It is generally accepted that people can use their hearing aids and cochlear implants when playing sport and participating in karate, provided they are comfortable and securely fitted. If in doubt, advise students and/or parents to ask for further advice from their audiologist (hearing specialist).

People who use hearing aids may use head protection (karate helmets) when training. This may be relevant if you have an athlete participating in partner work or kumite. For a participant with a cochlear implant, the main risk is suffering a blow to the head on or around the site of the internal package which risks damaging the internal package or external parts (when worn) or the skin around the area. Although the risk is very small this could mean that it becomes necessary to have repeat surgery to replace the package. Like hearing aids, the external equipment is sensitive and risks being broken if it falls off. The British Cochlear Implant Group (BCIG) advises “It may be advisable to remove the external parts of the system. If there is some risk of blows to the head the external parts should be removed and a form of head protection worn (for example, a scrum cap).”

Participants with a cochlear implant should therefore take this into consideration when taking part in events such as partner work or kumite where there may be impact to the head and to either take part in these events at their own discretion and/or for external parts of a cochlear implant to be removed

Working with Sign Language Interpreters

If you want to work with an interpreter (SLI) make sure s/he knows enough words in SL about your martial art. Establish prior to your lesson that the SLI should leave the technical part entirely to you. Always wait until the SLI is ready to sign before you continue and do not assume that the karateka is now quite clear about what is expected. To help the SLI, make a list of all the techniques in your language with a description of what each entails.



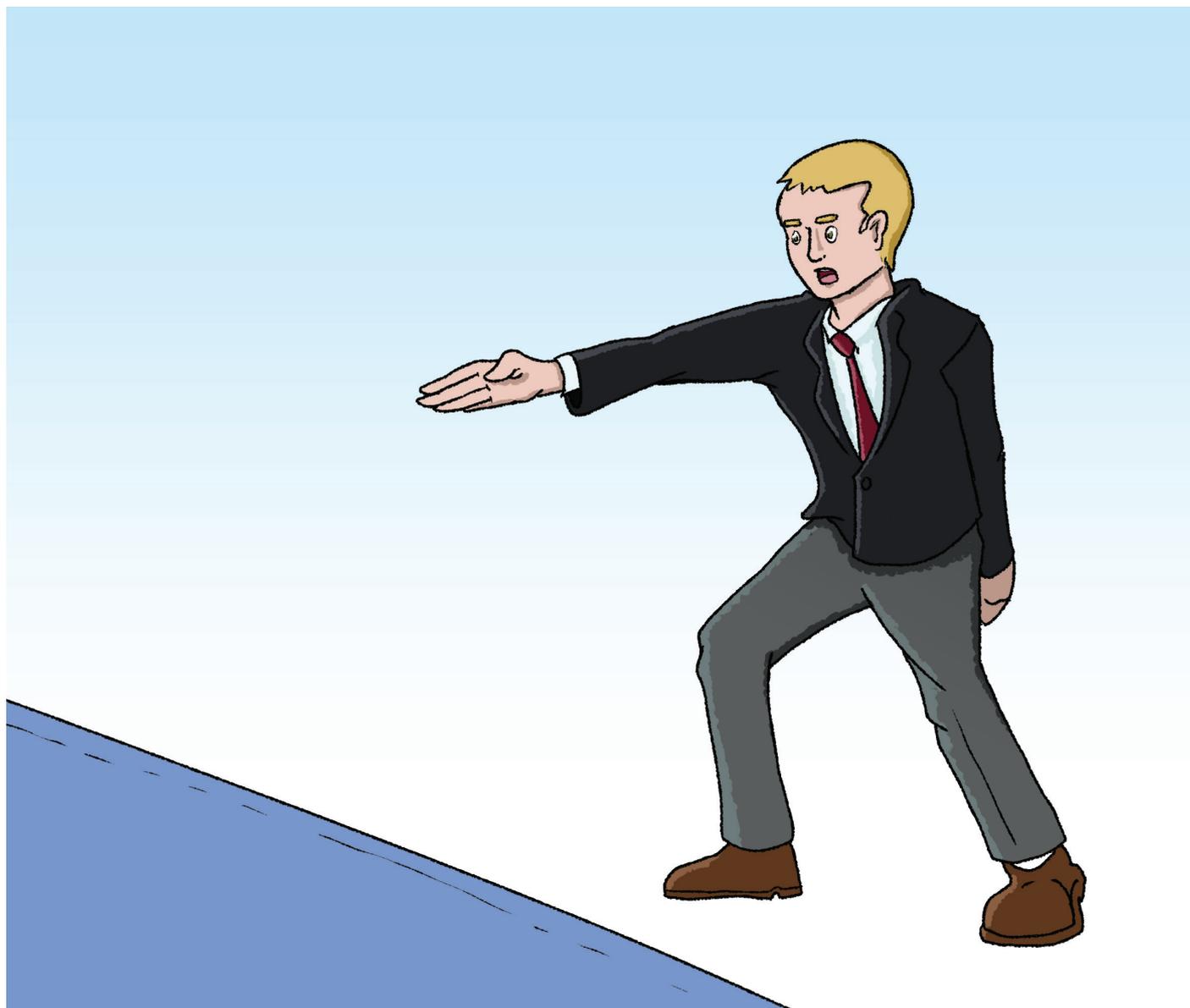
Competitions

Those with a hearing impairment are at a much more significant disadvantage to those without disability due to the nature of karate. Karate relies heavily on physical demonstrations yes, but largely upon verbal instructions, feedback, corrections, advice and guidance etc.

Whilst not an official WKF Para Karate competition category there are international WKF competitions which have specific hearing impairment categories. The category accommodates:

Deafness with a hearing loss of at least 55 Decibels in the best ear. The athletes are not allowed to use any hearing aids during the competition.

During competitions, both kata and kumite refereeing includes key hand signals which can be learnt and understood by all karateka, but these are of more particular importance for those with a hearing impairment. It is therefore vital that the coach ensures that the student is familiar with these signals.



References

- UK Deaf Sport, 'Impairment -specific Top Tips, People with Hearing Impairments'.
- Participation, Recreation and Inclusion through Martial Arts Education A Practical Guide for Coaches (2018) by PRIME Partnership
- Deaf Friendly Athletics Resource – England Athletics





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