

DEAF & HARD OF HEARING KARATE

Practical guidance for clubs and instructors



Deaf and hard of hearing karateka can train, progress and compete in karate. The key is accessible communication. Some people use speech, lipreading, hearing technology, British Sign Language (BSL), visual cues or a combination. Ask what works for the individual.

Insight

Communication first

Deafness is not one experience. Hearing levels, language, identity and communication preferences vary widely.

Do not assume that somebody lipreads, uses BSL, wants to wear hearing technology, or needs the same adjustment as another deaf person.

Good coaching makes information available in more than one way: face-to-face explanation, demonstration, visual cues, written keywords or agreed signals. Accessible communication benefits the whole class.

Ask how they communicate. Build that into the session.

Barriers

- **Missing spoken information**
Instructions given while facing away, moving around or demonstrating can be difficult or impossible to follow.
- **Noise and poor acoustics**
Echoing halls and background noise can make speech harder to distinguish, including with hearing technology.
- **Visual access**
Poor lighting, covered mouths or blocked sightlines can prevent lipreading, signing or visual cues being seen.
- **Unfamiliar terminology**
Japanese terms and new technical vocabulary may be difficult to identify without demonstration or written support.
- **Missed starts and changes**
A whistle, shouted command or verbal change of drill may not be accessible without an agreed visual signal.
- **Communication assumptions**
Not every deaf person signs or lipreads. Speaking to a companion instead of the karateka can exclude them.

ASK YOUR MEMBERS

“What is the best way for us to communicate with you during training?”

FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE

Use these prompts as a starting point. The right response will always depend on the individual and the activity.



Breaking down barriers

Get attention first

Use an agreed visual cue, wave or other method before giving information. Make sure the karateka is looking first.

Face the karateka

Keep your face visible, use good lighting and avoid speaking while turned away. Speak naturally; do not shout.

Show as well as tell

Demonstrate techniques, use agreed hand signals and write down unfamiliar words where useful.

Check understanding

Ask the class to demonstrate the task or check privately without unnecessarily singling somebody out.

Plan signal cues for karate

Agree visual cues for start, stop, changes and safety instructions. Teach relevant referee signals where appropriate.

Support BSL properly

If an interpreter is used, speak to the karateka. Allow time for interpretation and provide terminology in advance.

Put it into practice

"They cannot hear my instructions during kumite"

Do not solve this by shouting. Agree a clear visual stop or attention signal and make sure both partners understand it.

They use hearing aids or a cochlear implant

Ask what they prefer during training. For contact activity, follow device-specific advice from their hearing team.

They use BSL and we don't know sign language

Ask what support works. Demonstration, written information and agreed gestures can help; consider interpreting support.

They missed a change in the drill

Treat it as an access problem, not inattentiveness. Explain the change accessibly and review future signalling.

Quick club check

- ☐ We ask how each person prefers to communicate.
- ☐ Coaches face the group when giving instructions.
- ☐ Demonstrations support spoken information.
- ☐ Written or visual information is available when useful.
- ☐ Digital video uses captions where possible.
- ☐ We speak directly to the karateka with an interpreter.
- ☐ Lighting and sightlines support visual communication.
- ☐ Start, stop and safety signals are visually accessible.

If information is only available through hearing, make the information accessible, do not expect the karateka to work around the barrier.

Further resources

UK Deaf Sport - Inclusion Course

[Open >](#)

UK Deaf Sport - BSL for Sport

[Open >](#)

NDCS - Team Sports

[Open >](#)

National Deaf Children's Society

[Open >](#)