

DISABILITY & ACCESSIBILITY

Practical guidance for clubs and instructors



Disabled karateka train for the same reasons as anyone else: enjoyment, fitness, confidence, competition, self-defence, friendship and progression. Disability is broad, and two people with the same diagnosis may have very different abilities and support needs. Start with the karateka, not the label.

Insight

ACCESS BEFORE ASSUMPTION

A wheelchair, prosthesis, mobility aid or diagnosis tells you very little about what a person can do in karate.

A better approach is to understand the activity, identify the barrier and work with the karateka on a proportionate adjustment.

That may mean changing space, equipment, distance, pace, stance, movement or how a technique is expressed. It does not mean automatically making training easier or separating the karateka from the class.

Adapt the barrier. Preserve the purpose of the karate.

Barriers

- **Physical access**
Steps, narrow doors, inaccessible toilets, poor parking, clutter or unsuitable surfaces can prevent participation before training begins.
- **Assumptions about ability**
Do not assume a wheelchair user cannot stand, a limb difference prevents a technique, or a disabled karateka needs easier training.
- **Rigid technique delivery**
One fixed stance, range, height or movement pattern may create a barrier even when the underlying karate principle remains achievable.
- **Equipment and space**
Targets, mats, bags and partner distances may be positioned for one body or movement pattern rather than the people using them.
- **Fatigue, pain and sensation**
Some impairments affect energy, temperature regulation, sensation, balance or pain. These may change from session to session.
- **Being helped without consent**
Mobility aids and wheelchairs are part of personal space. Ask before touching, moving, transferring or physically assisting somebody.

ASK YOUR MEMBERS

“Is there anything about the venue or training that we can adjust to help you take part?”

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

Ask, do not diagnose

Ask what the karateka can do, what they want to work towards and whether an adjustment helps. Coaches do not need to become medical experts.

Use STEP when useful

Change Space, Task, Equipment or People where necessary while keeping the learning objective clear.

Make the whole venue accessible

Consider the route from arrival to tatami: parking, entrances, changing, toilets, seating, storage and manoeuvring space.

Respect mobility equipment

Do not lean on, move or hold a wheelchair, crutch or other aid without permission. Ask what support is wanted.

Adapt technique intelligently

Preserve timing, direction, intent and tactical purpose where possible, even when the movement itself needs to change.

Know when specialist advice matters

For medical risk, transfers, strapping or equipment-specific questions beyond your competence, involve appropriate qualified support.

Put it into practice

Can a disabled person still compete?

Yes. Para karate provides a formal competitive pathway for eligible impairments. Competition rules and classification determine eligibility.

They cannot perform the technique exactly as I teach it.

Identify what the technique is meant to develop and find an expression that preserves the relevant principle.

They use a wheelchair but our dojo is covered with mats.

Check whether the surface allows safe movement. Consider wheel cleaning, a suitable training area or mat configuration.

Their ability changes from one session to another.

Ask what is manageable that day and adjust volume, intensity or activity without making assumptions.

Quick club check

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|---|---|
| ☐ The route into and around our venue is accessible. | ☐ Coaches know the limits of their competence. |
| ☐ We ask before touching mobility aids or giving assistance. | ☐ We can discuss para karate pathways when relevant. |
| ☐ Adjustments preserve the purpose of the activity. | ☐ Equipment and space can be adapted when needed. |
| ☐ Disabled karateka train with the group wherever practical. | ☐ We ask the karateka what support works for them. |

Accessibility is not about lowering the standard of karate. It is about removing unnecessary barriers so the karateka can meet the appropriate challenge.

Further resources

Activity Alliance

[Open >](#)

UK Coaching

[Open >](#)

WheelPower

[Open >](#)

WKF Para Karate

[Open >](#)