

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN KARATE

Practical guidance for clubs and instructors



Blind and partially sighted karateka do not need a separate version of karate. They may need information, orientation and coaching delivered in ways they can access. Start with the individual.

Insight

NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL

Sight loss can affect central or peripheral vision, contrast, depth perception and other aspects of vision. Some people have little or no usable vision.

The most useful starting point is not to assume what someone can or cannot see. Ask how they prefer to receive information, move around the venue and learn techniques.

Good coaching combines clear verbal information, predictable spaces and individual adjustments. The aim is not to lower expectations, but to make the information and environment accessible.

Do not coach the impairment. Get to know the person.

Barriers

- **Visual-only demonstrations**
A technique shown without a clear verbal explanation may leave important information inaccessible.
- **Orientation and navigation**
An unfamiliar dojo, moved equipment or an unclear route can make it harder to arrive and take part confidently.
- **Unclear spatial language**
“Over there” or “move to the left” can be unclear without a shared point of reference.
- **Lighting, Glare and Contrast**
Poor lighting, glare, low contrast or visual clutter can affect access for some people with usable vision.
- **Noise and competing information**
Several people speaking, music or other activity can make verbal coaching and orientation harder to follow.
- **Assumptions about independence**
Do not assume help is always needed, or that help is never needed. Ask before stepping in or taking physical contact.

ASK THIS INSTEAD

“What helps you receive information, move around and train confidently here?”

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 what works

Ask the karateka how they prefer to receive information, orientate themselves and learn new movements. Speak directly to them.

Describe as well as demonstrate

Explain what is happening, where the movement starts and finishes, and what the body is doing. Do not rely on visual cues alone.

Make the space predictable

Keep walkways clear, identify key reference points and tell people when the layout, equipment or activity changes.

Use clear spacial references

Use agreed points of reference and precise directions. "Three steps towards the door" is clearer than "over there".

Use touch with consent

Hands-on guidance can help some people learn. Ask first, explain what you are going to do and use the method the person prefers.

Plan the access beyond the tatami

Consider the journey from arrival to departure: contact details, transport information, entrances, changing areas and guide dogs.

Put it into practice

"They cannot see the demonstration."

Describe the technique step by step. Use a tactile model only with consent, allowing the karateka to feel or perform the movement where appropriate.

"The dojo layout has changed."

Tell them before the session, explain what has moved and offer time to re-orientate before training begins.

"They have arrived with a guide dog"

Welcome the dog as a working assistance dog. Agree in advance where it can rest safely while its owner trains and what support is needed.

"They seem to have lose orientation during training."

Pause the activity, give a clear verbal reference and help them re-orientate using the approach they prefer. Do not grab or move them without consent.

Quick club check

- ☐ We ask what helps the individual take part.
- ☐ Instructions do not rely on vision alone.
- ☐ New members know what to expect before arriving.
- ☐ Changes to layout or activities are explained.
- ☐ Spatial directions use clear points of reference.
- ☐ Physical guidance is discussed and consented to.
- ☐ Walkways and training areas are kept clear.
- ☐ Assistance dogs can be accommodated appropriately.

If something is not accessible, change the information, environment or delivery. Always converse with the individual to find out what the barriers are and what could be improved.

Further resources

British Blind Sport

[Open >](#)

RNIB

[Open >](#)

UK Coaching - Blind & Partially Sighted

[Open >](#)

Activity Alliance - Access for All

[Open >](#)