

WOMEN & GIRLS IN KARATE

Practical guidance for clubs and instructors



Karate can offer far more than competition: it can build confidence, self-defence skills, discipline, fitness, friendship and community. Women and girls should be able to enter a dojo, train and progress with the same sense of belonging, respect and opportunity as anyone else.

Insight

BELONGING MATTERS

Women are not one audience. Age, income, culture, caring responsibilities, confidence and life stage can all shape participation.

Karate already attracts many women and girls, but the wider gender activity gap remains. Judgement, time, money, energy, confidence and safety can affect whether women take part and whether they return.

The response is not to treat women as a special category. It is to make the dojo safe, welcoming and flexible enough for women and girls to participate on their own terms.

Right welcome. Right environment. Equal opportunity.

Barriers

- **Judgement and confidence**
Worries about ability, fitness, appearance or being watched can make joining or returning feel intimidating.
- **Safety and harassment**
Feeling unsafe, being stared at, inappropriate comments or harassment can change where, when and whether women train.
- **Timing and caring responsibilities**
Work, school, childcare and caring responsibilities can make rigid training schedules difficult to sustain.
- **Cost and practical access**
Membership, equipment, grading, competition and travel costs can make participation harder.
- **Life stages and health**
Periods, pregnancy, postnatal return and menopause may affect comfort or training. Needs vary by individual.
- **Club culture and representation**
A male-dominated atmosphere, few female role models or behaviour dismissed as 'banter' can make a dojo feel unwelcoming.

ASK YOUR MEMBERS

“What would help you feel comfortable, safe and able to keep training 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

Make safety visible

Have clear standards of behaviour and a simple route for reporting harassment or inappropriate conduct. Take concerns seriously.

Offer a welcoming first step

Explain what happens in a session, what to wear and what it costs. Beginner-friendly entry points can reduce uncertainty.

Build flexibility where possible

Consider session times and realistic expectations around attendance. Life interrupting training should not mean losing belonging.

Create choice without segregation

Women-only sessions can provide another route into karate where there is demand, without creating a lower or separate standard.

Talk about health without embarrassment

Periods, pregnancy, postnatal return and menopause are normal. Listen, protect privacy and adapt where the karateka says it helps.

Develop women throughout the club

Encourage women and girls to progress as competitors, coaches, officials, volunteers and decision-makers.

Put it into practice

She does not feel safe going home after evening sessions.

Discuss practical options such as leaving together, waiting inside for transport or reviewing session arrangements and venue safety.

She needs to reduce training for a while.

Keep the door open. School, work, caring, pregnancy, health or other responsibilities can change. Belonging should not depend on perfect attendance.

A comment from another member made her uncomfortable.

Listen privately, record and respond appropriately. Do not require her to confront the person or minimise the concern.

We want more women and girls to join

Ask local women what would make the club appealing. Review timing, cost, safety, imagery, coaching culture and the first-session experience.

Quick club check

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| ☐ Women and girls can see that they are welcome here. | ☐ Women have routes into coaching and leadership. |
| ☐ Our standards on harassment and conduct are clear. | ☐ Our imagery and communication represent women and girls. |
| ☐ People know how to raise a concern. | ☐ Safety is considered inside and beyond the dojo. |
| ☐ We consider time, cost and caring responsibilities. | ☐ Health and life-stage conversations are handled privately |

A woman or girl should not have to become tougher, quieter or less visible to fit the club. Improve the environment, not the person.

Further resources

This Girl Can

[Open >](#)

Sport England - Gender

[Open >](#)

Women in Sport

[Open >](#)

Safer Spaces to Move

[Open >](#)