

English Karate Council: *Teaching Karateka with a Disability*

A Guide for Club Instructors

“Disabled people should have every opportunity to be as active as non-disabled people”
Charter for Change – English Federation of Disability Sport.

1 Introduction

The English Karate Council is committed to promoting and, through its members, providing a high quality karate experience for all ages and abilities.

In the EKC Development Plan 2014-18 (published on the EKC website) there is an Action to: “Establish and disseminate specific advice and guidance relating to the delivery of high quality karate to participants with a disability”

This guide builds on;

- a) the experience of Karate Instructors in EKC Karate Associations who have taught karate to participants with special needs over a number of years;
- b) the guidance of the English Federation for Disability Sport as set out in their “Talk to me: Principles in Action” document (published on the EFDS website);
- c) feedback from Karateka who have a disability.

2 Challenges for participants

Karate can sometimes be perceived as entailing aggression and possible injury which can be off-putting for potential students, whatever their abilities. The reality is different as many students have discovered and they have been able to enjoy lifelong participation in this healthy, rewarding sport which builds confidence and self-respect.

Karate is unfamiliar to many people for example the wearing of the gi and the use of Japanese terms. The fear of “crossing the threshold” must be recognised and reassurance given by the club instructors. This reassurance is particularly important when the student has a disability and may be worried about how they will cope with the training.

3 Challenges for Instructors

Whilst all Instructors would welcome a student with special needs, many are unsure of how to approach the task of teaching a student who has (the list is not exhaustive) Autism, Asperger's, Cerebral Palsy, Down's syndrome, a hearing or visual impairment, or is wheelchair-based.

The guidelines that follow are designed to help overcome this challenge for Karate Instructors.

4 Guidelines for Instructors

4.1 Within the dojo instructors should:

- i) seek advice from colleague Instructors who have good experience of teaching special needs students; ask to watch or preferably assist them during a class;
- ii) consider attending a course on Disability Coaching organised by Sports Coach UK or equivalent recognised bodies and taught by an accredited tutor. These are generic courses for all sports coaches and offer valuable insights. In the future the EKC will consider organising specific karate courses to enhance the teaching of students with a disability;
- iii) offer a warm welcome to a new student: making sure that they ask the students about themselves, what they feel are their limitations, allay their fears and think about how they can help them learn and enjoy karate;
- iv) develop their knowledge about the conditions listed above and how they impact on a person. This will help the Instructor to help them and integrate them into the class;
- v) adapt the syllabus they are teaching so that the student can perform to the best of their ability. For example a student with cerebral palsy may not be able to perform a kick because they cannot balance - so hand techniques can be substituted;
- vi) consider the length of the class. It may not be physically possible for some students to take part in a 90 minute session. Many youngsters with Attention Deficit Disorders may struggle to concentrate for longer than 30-45 minutes, so careful planning is required for those participants.
- vii) not be afraid to explain to parents/carers that an integrated class may not be an option - but do offer an alternative such as a private lesson.
- vii) consider special needs only classes

Whilst integration is the aim it may be necessary because of the severity of the condition to have a special class. This can make teaching easier but it is likely to demand a much higher ratio of Instructors to participants. Recent experience by EKC members of the "Active Me" programme showed that 4-6 Instructors were required to cope comfortably with a class of 12 disabled novice adults.

4.2 Within the competition environment

There are a number of examples of karateka who have a mild disability competing in mainstream events and this is to be encouraged. Consideration is being given to appropriate categories for Disability in future EKC championships.

Caution needs to be exercised when considering the participation of disabled karateka in mainstream competition kumite. It is not practical, fair or safe to match a wheelchair competitor with an able-bodied karateka for example. For kata, there will be a section for wheelchair karateka to compete performing adapted kata, which consist of upper body techniques only. This is not to say that a wheelchair karateka could not practice self-defence moves against an able-bodied partner in the dojo but mixing able-bodied with those with severe disabilities in kata or kumite competition compromises both parties and will not be supported by the EKC.

On the other hand, karateka with a mild learning disability, a mild physical disability or a hearing impairment for example could compete in a mainstream event and this should be encouraged.