

Scottish Karate Governing Body



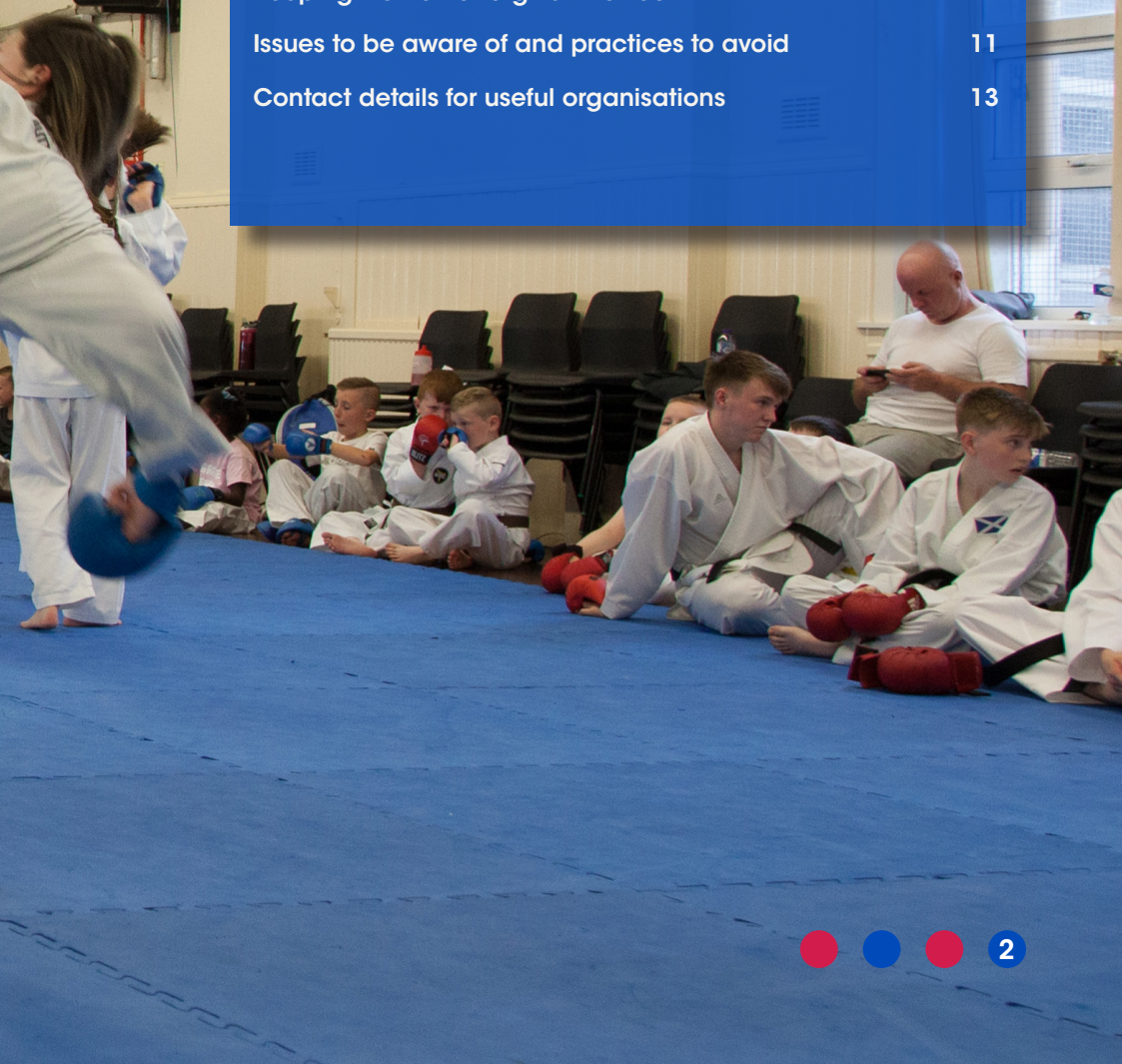
Guidance for Coaching Women and Girls





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Introduction ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Why female membership is good for your club

Karate has a long history of mixed-sex training. The diversity of skills and actions involved in karate, and the diversity of its members, makes karate an exciting and dynamic martial art. Scotland also has a history of successful female karateka as club practitioners, association executive members, coaches, competitors, and referees/ officiating staff. Developing or increasing a female membership can: dilute an aggressive bullying environment that has been found in some male sports; increase class sizes; increase the pool of expertise and talent within your club; aid men/boys developing respectful relations with women/girls; and, ofcourse, bring extra revenue into a club. As such, ensuring your dojo is suited to welcoming and retaining female members is beneficial for women, girls, coaches, and clubs.

Informed by academic research, this booklet aims to help coaches increase and retain their female membership and develop encouraging and empowering dojos for women and girls by:

1. Raising awareness of barriers and issues that affect women and girls decision to take-up karate, or continue their practice, and,
2. Providing guidance of good practice



Benefits of karate for women & girls

There are many benefits of practicing karate for women and girls such as: improved health; increased self-confidence; friendships and social support; family bonding; building a positive relationship with their body; developing assertiveness and leadership skills; and self-defence. Many of these outcomes of karate practice are beneficial for men and boys too, however some have specific or particular benefits for women and girls.

Self defence: In Scotland, 1 in 5 women have experienced domestic abuse, 1 in 10 have experienced rape, and 1 in 5 will experience attempted rape. Whilst knowing combative self-defence techniques alone does not prevent such cases of violence against women, they do give women and girls a better chance of protecting themselves.

Body positivity: Many women and girls suffer body insecurities that stem from societal beauty ideals. Participation in karate can lead to a more positive relationship with their bodies. Through using their bodies to work towards achieving new belts, improving kata, or performing in competition, and seeing themselves improve, women and girls can come to understand their bodies as physically capable and valuable.

Assertiveness and leadership skills: In childhood, girls are less encouraged to display assertive and leadership behaviours than boys. As adults, this can negatively affect women's work prospects and their relationships. Karate develops women and





girls comfort with assertiveness through requiring solo performances and loud kiais where their talents are seen, heard, and actively expressed. Leadership skills are also developed by encouraging female's to take on coaching or demonstrative roles within clubs.

Building respectful relationships with men:

Unlike most sports, karate has a long tradition of mixed-sex training. Mixed-sex training challenges assumptions about women and girls as fragile and as less physically able than boys/men.

This enables women and men to build relationships grounded in a mutual respect for their karate abilities. The mutual respect developed

between women and men within karate can be beneficial

for supporting, and expecting, respectful mixed-sex relationships out-with karate.

Family support: Many karate classes offer spaces where families can train together. A karate class suitable for families to participate together alleviates childcare concerns that often limit leisure time for parents and carers. Women predominantly do the majority of childcare work within families, and as such family-suitable classes can be particularly beneficial for women.

A backdrop to women & sport

In Scotland, only 51% of women, in comparison to 62% of men, participate in any sport or exercise within a 4-week period. The difference in women and men's participation in sport has been attributed to both the historical idea of sport as a male activity, and expectations of women's roles in society. Expectations of women to carry out the majority of domestic work, childcare, emotional care, and to meet beauty ideals still affect many women's everyday lives and can present barriers to women and girl's participation in sport. However, there is an appetite for sport amongst women and girls, as 13 million women in the UK would like to take part in more sport.



Reflecting on the key barriers and motivations for women and girls to participate in sport is beneficial for increasing female membership within your dojo. Key motivations and barriers are:

Barriers	Motivations
Body image concerns	Having fun
Low self-esteem	Alleviating stress
Issues with clothing	Feeling good
Periods/post-pregnancy Incontinence concerns	Nurturing friends and family
Pregnancy/menopause	Developing skills
Lack of time	Achieving goals
Concerns over safety	

Getting women & girls into the dojo

Reflecting on the key motivators and barriers to women and girls participation is helpful for developing a strategy for attracting new female members. Key to this is also bursting the myth that combat sports such as karate are for boys/men.

Marketing materials

Women, more than men, like to research an activity before taking part in it. As such, having good promotional materials such as websites and social media sites can be beneficial for increasing female membership. The factors that motivate women and girls' to engage in sport can be used as central messages in marketing materials to increase female membership. Using images that depict karate women and/or girls in marketing materials can also help de-bunk ideas that karate is only 'for men' and ease anxieties.

Taster sessions

Taster sessions can be a useful way of recruiting new members. Having a woman karateka involved in carrying out taster sessions can be helpful to demonstrate to the audience that karate is a sport for both sexes. Many clubs provide taster sessions in schools, however these could also be carried out for women's groups or work environments that are predominantly female.

Other strategies

- 'Bring a friend' offers and family classes can simultaneously address barriers of low self-esteem and lack of time, whilst tapping into the motivations of having fun and nurturing family and friendships



- Offering beginners' classes can make karate classes less daunting for women with low self-esteem
- Women-only classes ran by women targeted towards women and girls who would not otherwise participate in karate – such as those with extremely low self-esteem; survivors of abuse; and those whose religious and/or cultural beliefs may initially be uncomfortable with mixed-sex training.

As some of the key benefits of karate are building positive relations with men, and men benefiting from training with skilled women, women-only classes are advised to be used as a stepping stone to mixed-sex practice.





Keeping women & girls involved

Key life stages when women and girls leave sport are: transitioning from school; leaving university; changing jobs; pregnancy and parenthood; and increases in other family caring duties. At these different stages, women and girls will experience different reasons for leaving karate and barriers to stay. Girls and teenagers reasons for leaving are often related to increased body-image concerns and the importance of their friendships, whilst for women competing work-family responsibilities often cut into their time for sport.

Whilst coaches cannot control participants' lives outwith karate, the more supported and respected participants feel within a club, the more likely they are to stay during these periods of change. Practices for keeping women and girls involved include:

- **Creating leadership roles and responsibilities** for women and girls such as informal coaching, officiating, or organisational positions. This can build a sense of responsibility and of being valued.
- Using senior women as **role models** to inspire and retain younger girls.
- **Being flexible and understanding** during transition stages where training might become sporadic. Vocally expressing appreciation of their participation can help women and girls feel supported and valued during these periods.
- Providing women and girls **equal opportunities** to men and boys in training and competition

- Structuring classes so that parents/carers and children can participate together, or allowing children to stay in the dojo during an adults' class.
- Holding occasional **social events** that can help women and girls nurture friendships, family, and in turn, feel more connected to the club.

Together these actions can help women and girls feel embedded within a club, valued within a club, respected within a club. As such, this can help retain female membership.



Issues to be aware of and practices to avoid

Attire: It should be made clear that a sports headscarf can be worn during training, and a WKF approved version during competition. Women and girls should be encouraged to wear sports bras during training, and chest protectors during sparing, to protect the breast tissue.

Good practice: Recommend women/parents of girls buy a chest protector/sports bras; Ask senior women within the club to informally encourage women/girls to wear sports bras/chest protectors; stock sports headscarves.

Periods: Alongside bleeding, women & girls often experience cramps, headaches, and fatigue during their period that have been shown to affect female athletes' performances. They may also have anxieties of blood showing on their gi.

Good practice: Keep tampons/sanitary towels in the club first aid box; where appropriate, have a flexible clothing policy to allow women and girls opportunities to wear darker trousers – i.e. in a fitness style class.

Menopause: Symptoms of menopause include: hot flushes, headaches, reduced muscle mass and anxiety. As such, female members experiencing menopause may have fluctuations in their performances and consider leaving sport.

Good practice: Open the dojo door to allow cool air in; vocally promote the benefit of karate to alleviate symptoms of health conditions including menopause.

Weight cutting: Loosing weight to reach a weight category can cause disruption to female athletes' hormonal cycle, that in turn can weaken bone



density leading to increased injuries and potentially osteoporosis. Encouraging weight cutting can also lead to eating disorders.

Good practice: Expect children's weight to increase; Hold-off choosing weight categories for athletes until the deadline; avoid encouraging weight cutting.

Eating disorders: Athletes in weight category sports are at high risk of developing an eating disorder. Societal pressures of beauty ideals also leave women and girls more likely than their male training partners to develop an eating disorder.

Good practice: If a karateka discloses that they suffer an eating disorder, encourage them to seek medical advice; avoid making reference to a karateka's body size; de-emphasise the importance of weight by reinforcing the importance of technical skill.

Sexist language and sexual harassment: Sexual harassment such as sexualised jokes or comments aimed towards women, or inappropriate physical contact should be actively discouraged. Terms such as 'punching like a girl' may also make female members feel uncomfortable and ultimately leave.



Contact details for useful organisations

Beat Eating Disorders

www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk

0808 801 0677

Rape Crisis Scotland

www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

08088 01 03 02

Scottish Women's Aid

www.womensaid.scot

0800 027 1234

Scottish Ethnic Minority Sports Association

<http://www.semsascotland.com/>

Scottish Women in Sport

www.scottishwomeninsport.co.uk

This Girl Can

www.thisgirlcan.co.uk

Scottish Karate Governing Body

www.SKGB.com



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Written by

Chloe Maclean, SKGB director of women and girls' interests

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