

Staying safe when wolk dancing

All wheelchair users

Check your wheelchairs in advance — ask for assistance if necessary.

Make sure your wheelchair has 'anti-tipping' bars or castors fitted at the back and that these are in full working order.

Tighten up any loose parts (you may need an Allen key set for this).

Ensure that pneumatic tyres (tyres which have air in them) are pumped up as firmly as possible, because this makes the chairs move much more easily. The easiest pumps to use are the large ones that stand on their own and you push down on a handle to put the air into the tyre.

Adjust your push handles, backrests and footplates as necessary for comfort.

Remove all bags from your wheelchairs that are not essential.

Some wheelchair users use their feet to help propel them in daily life so don't have foot plates on their chair, or may have these missing for other reasons including not being able to afford to replace damaged ones. However, to move quickly enough to dance, it is essential to have your feet off the floor. Dangling feet can become caught under the chair, and keeping feet raised is bad for wheelchair users' backs, so some form of footrest is essential. If a footrest can't be fitted to a wheelchair, we have found that tying a bungee cord across makes a good substitute.

Make sure you warm up before you begin each practice; a warm-up is available in the Resources section of the website.

Please note that there is no upper body movement involved in wolk. If you have one or both hands free, please don't intentionally move them around to the music as you may hit another dancer.

Pushers and anyone who gets dizzy easily or otherwise has difficulty turning should dance the shortened spins.

Take responsibility for your own safety and for other people's.

Manual wheelchair users

Wheelchair users who are self-propelling, and people pushing wheelchairs, should wear gloves to avoid blisters. Special fingerless gloves are available which have an enclosed thumb and a strengthened palm.

Manual wheelchair users should fit 'push rim covers' to their chairs. These are made out of silicon or plastic and prevent your hands from slipping on the rims.

Many manual wheelchairs are not set up correctly for self-propelling when they are put together by the manufacturers. To self-propel efficiently and without damaging your shoulders, your arms should touch the centre of the wheels when your arms hang down at your sides. You are then able to move the wheelchair correctly by pushing down with the palms of your hands on the front of the tyres. If you need to reach back and pull the wheels forward with your fingers, your wheels are set too far back and need adjusting. This can often be done at home with a spanner or Allen key.

Powered wheelchair users

Controllers for powered wheelchairs are generally set at very slow speeds by the manufacturers, which can be frustrating for dancing and dangerous when crossing roads. There is also a built-in delay between travelling forwards and travelling backwards, and there is often also a delay between moving the joystick and the chair reacting.

Most controllers can be adjusted by an engineer on request, always for speed and sometimes to remove the delay as well. Many controllers can also have more than one 'profile', in which case an engineer can optimize a profile for dancing, increasing the speed both over distance and when turning.

Powered chair users who continue to experience delays in chair responses should anticipate the movements with their joysticks to avoid starting late.

Warning: No one should touch a joystick other than the wheelchair user because they are not safe to be used for dancing and performance in this way. If a powered wheelchair user needs additional input from a support worker, dual controls can be fitted to the back of the chair.

Wheelchair pushers

As above, ensure that pneumatic tyres are fully inflated and you are wearing gloves.

Always make the shortest turn possible within the choreography, as it is slower to turn when pushing and the chair feels heaviest at this point. So for example, if a dance allows for one-and-a-quarter turns, just do a quarter turn.

Walking on the beat will make it easier to keep in time. When you need to go backwards, you will find it easier if you rock back so you begin again on the same foot you started with.

Encourage the wheelchair user to join in as fully as they can, with eye contact and acknowledging other dancers when they meet. If the wheelchair user is more experienced than you, encourage them to direct you as much as possible.

Some people may need pushing only for the parts of the dances that travel furthest. Keep walking behind them to stay in the dance.

Always let the wheelchair user decide how much movement they are capable of on the day; Disabled people's energy and mobility levels can vary greatly from hour to hour.

Always be aware of the dancers; focus on the dance and not on the wheelchair user you are pushing.