

What is Wolk?

Wolk dancing fuses folk dancing with a street dance ethos and is choreographed especially for wheelchair users. Wolk draws on the rich heritage of English folk dance to create complex geometric patterns to traditional folk tunes.

Dancers work in pairs, and dance in teams (ideally four or more pairs). Teams include roles for callers, musicians and costume coordinators as well as dancers. Like street dancers and Morris dancers, teams develop their own unique style and energy and can form their own social circles too.

As with all forms of dancing, Wolk boils down to people moving their bodies through space in time to music — in this case, by moving their chairs in unison through a series of patterns and shapes. Wolk does not require any physical ability other than the ability to move a wheelchair by hand or with a joystick, and people who need to be pushed are welcome to join in.

Like street dance, teams aim to synchronize their movements and to move through the different patterns as precisely as possible. However, Wolk is first and foremost meant to be fun for all concerned; precision is something that can be worked at over time as a long-term goal. Wolk celebrates diversity, and teams are built on cooperation and working together and making allowances for each other rather than on uniformity.

The Folk in Motion demonstration team is available for booking for performances and to lead workshops and participatory wheelchair dance sessions. However, we also aim to provide all of the resources necessary for you to be able to dance without us, whether or not you have taken a workshop first. Our website contains the following free resources:

- Wolk rules and notes
- Details and tips about individual moves
- Choreography and calling sheets for each dance
- Musical scores for each dance
- Specially arranged MP3 tracks in two speeds (slow for learning, and standard)
- We also include videos of the dances wherever possible and will continue to add these. Send us yours too.

We are developing new choreography all the time, and we welcome submissions of 'new' dances from Wolk teams (remember to follow the Wolk rules). The English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) is the best source of information about traditional dances: visit their website www.efdss.org; or in person at Cecil Sharp House 2 Regent's Park Road, London NW1 7AY. Tel: 020 7485 2206. Email: info@efdss.org

If you are interested in developing your team and enjoying different forms of wheelchair dancing, we encourage you to join Paradance UK where you will be able to learn dance forms as diverse as ballroom and Bollywood as well as developing your dance skills and training to be a teacher. <https://paradance.org.uk>

Wolk Rules!

- 1) Wolk is danced in pairs. These can be any gender combination you like. A group of pairs make up a team. Teams of eight are ideal, but there are a number of dances that can be danced with fewer or more.
- 2) Each pair is assigned a colour, with one partner being a dark shade and the other a light shade. For practices, wear a ribbon on your chair so that everyone can see which colour you are.
- 3) Apart from moving your head to acknowledge the person you are dancing with – and moving your joystick or wheels, of course! – there are no body movements in wolk. If you can't move your head, or are being pushed, no matter – it is the eye contact with the other dancers and the people watching that is crucial.
- 4) One team member takes responsibility for each dance, learning it thoroughly so that they can call the detail to the other dancers if necessary as well as knowing the formal calls.
- 5) Keep the dance moving; don't just move from position to position. Unless the choreography requires you to stay still while other dancers move, keep moving at all times.
- 6) Stay aware of the other team members, and the space you are dancing in.
- 7) Teams dance at the pace of the slowest member. If it helps, get the person with the slowest chair to start their movements early; they should appear to lead rather than finish last. (This can also help the rest of the team to know when to move.)
- 8) Power chair users should anticipate the movements with their joysticks to avoid starting late (unless your chair is 'dance enabled' to remove the delay).
- 9) Everyone takes responsibility for each other's health and safety as well as their own – be mindful of each other. Manual chair users should wear gloves to avoid blisters.
- 10) Have fun! This will matter much more to anyone watching than if your dancing is perfect.

Wolk Notes

All you need to run a Wolk dancing session is sufficient space (indoor or outdoor), a music source (live or recorded) and a set of ribbons. (Try light/dark blue, light/dark green, pink/purple, red/orange ...) It will also be helpful to have access to a pump for pneumatic tyres, electrical and gaffer tape and cable ties for short-term repairs, and WD40 for sticky wheels. Using a small PA or karaoke machine for calling ensures that everyone can hear (dancers and audiences).

Start each session with a 5-10 minute warm-up (a sample is included). This will help to avoid injuries as well as ensuring that everyone gets the maximum benefit from the session. Encourage onlookers to join in too.

It is helpful to have a separate caller when you are learning the dances. If necessary, dancers can call the dances that they are responsible for leading (see Wolk Rules! for details), but remember that you will then need a wireless clip-on or headset microphone for connection to a PA or portable speaker so that everyone can hear clearly.

Teams can invent their own kit, but a good staple is a T-shirt in the relevant colour, perhaps with the team logo on it (you can easily buy iron-on transfers for computer printers). Team members should be encouraged to develop their own accessories in 'their' colour rather than trying to look identical.

Adding bells to chairs helps to enhance the performance experience for your audience, particularly those who are visually impaired. You may want to try different sounds for dark and light colours. Look for children's wrist and ankle bells (which come attached to a plastic band that can easily be taken on and off chairs), and Indian ankle bells (which are attached to strings).

If you are part of an existing social, school or college group, remember that not everyone will want to dance. However, they might want to join in as callers, or take responsibility for switching the music on or off, or assist with costumes. Then teams will also find it helpful to have onlookers marking the beat by clapping along, and having the movement changes prompted with a drum as these are on the soundtracks.

Finally, don't allow non-disabled people to dance in chairs; this is too dangerous for everyone concerned. If you are short of dancers, it is better for non-disabled people to take part on foot. But remember that there are lots of disabled people who would benefit from using a wheelchair but who don't have access to one, or who have a manual wheelchair that they are unable to propel themselves rather than having access to a power wheelchair. Think about who you can recruit, and how you can help them to get a chair for themselves. (Try local classified adverts, Freecycle etc – NHS and social services' provision is much more limited than many people believe.)