

3 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY MORE INCLUSIVE

When I talk to coaches and parkour leaders around the country, I often hear that folks want to make their classes and communities more inclusive but don't know where to begin.

There's a lot to learn and unlearn in order to be truly inclusive, and anyone who wants to see the parkour world expand beyond just elite athletes and parkour enthusiasts needs to put in the time and effort. However, there are a few simple steps you can take right now that can create big change in making more people feel comfortable in a parkour environment.



Plan your classes
for everyone



Pay attention to
your language



Give people a way
to get involved

1. PLAN YOUR CLASSES FOR EVERY BODY.

I've noticed that many coaches will have a general plan for a class and only come up with modifications if they're needed, and usually on the spot. These modifications often are sloppy and can make students feel extremely self-conscious. How? For me, it happens when it appears I am taking up a disproportionate amount of the coach's time by pulling their attention away from the rest of class so they can think up a modification for me. Worse, many

times the “modification” is simply doing an exercise off to the side, away from everyone else. This serves to heighten my awareness of my differences and feel both disconnected from the class and worse about my lack of abilities.

Here are a few ways to help facilitate a healthier space:

(A) From Strength to Creativity

When watching coaches and other high level practitioners train, I’ve sometimes seen them play the physical game of, “how could I do this move or route with one arm/one leg/eyes closed/etc.?” This is actually a very useful game for planning an inclusive lesson, except instead of it being a challenge of physical strength, it becomes a challenge of intellect creativity.

(B) Plan For All Body Types

When planning your lessons, ask yourself how you can modify them for all kinds of bodies and limitations; you never know who is going to show up to your class or what restrictions they might be working with on any given day (physical and mental). Consider whether the modified activity can be executed in the same space as the primary activity, and plan for how you will make sure students using the modifications stay involved with the class.

(C) Invite Choice

When you present the activity to a class, present the modifications as options that anyone can choose. Even your strongest student may have an injury, invisible illness or disability, or just be tired on any given day but may try to push themselves too hard if they feel worried about drawing attention to themselves or looking weak by having to ask for a modification. Making modifications a normal part of class, and making sure you’ve come up with sufficient modifications to cover most circumstances, goes a long way towards making your class accessible to a wider variety of ability levels.

2. PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR LANGUAGE.

Often our language is littered with assumptions that we don’t even notice.

One time I was hanging out with a group of practitioner and someone said, “Back then I couldn’t even do a kong.” With that simple sentence, she implied that (1) a kong is a *basic* move and that (2) not being able to do one is a bad thing or a sign of incompetence.

However, as we hopefully believe, you don’t have to be able to do a kong (now or ever) to be a parkour practitioner. **If parkour is really about mastering one’s own movement, then it isn’t what moves you can do that should determine one’s value.**

(D) Be Conscious of Value Statements

Watch out for words that imply valuation or judgement. For example, don’t refer to things as, “easy.” What’s easy for one person may be very difficult for another and can set someone up for embarrassment when they can’t do the “easy” move. Instead, use words like “simple” or “foundational” if you’re trying to explain a fundamental concept.

Also, try to avoid using assumptive language. If you’re a coach presenting those modifications we talked about earlier, try to avoid phrases like, “*if you can’t do [main activity]....*” or, again, “*if you need to make this easier...*” That phrasing sets the modification up as a **lesser value** alternative, which again can be embarrassing or hurtful, and may lead to people who **SHOULD** use that modification to avoid using it.

Instead, presenting things as equal options allows people to choose the one that’s right for them based on the criteria they want to use and how they’re feeling about their training on that particular day.

3. GIVE PEOPLE A WAY TO GET INVOLVED.

Many folks come to classes and jams because they’re looking for a community and want to take advantage of a movement environment that tends to be more social in nature - otherwise, they’d just be at the gym / training on their own.

Belonging is a fundamental (but not easy!) human need.

(E) Get To Know Your Community, and Support Them in Knowing Each Other

As a coach or leader in your community, start by learn people's names and pronouns and create space for them to share those with other community members as well. Start class or even jams with a circle for warm-ups and end with a circle for stretching as well. These moments give folks an opportunity to all do an activity together that everyone should be able to participate in.

In the PK Gen community in Boston, we'd often play a name game at the end of class where someone would have to go around and try to name everyone else and for each one they got wrong, we'd do some kind of exercise. This was a great way to encourage community members to interact and learn each other's names throughout the class.

(F) Find Opportunities for Volunteer Give-back

Aside from creating those basic opportunities for people to connect, it's likely that folks who want to get involved more deeply will eventually tell you or at least drop hints about how they want to be involved. They might ask if you need hands to help set up the equipment for your big weekend-long event, or offer to scout out some new locations for your next jam, or start a conversation with you about your gym's social media marketing plan.

Let them help!

You may have someone in your community with awesome event planning or editing or marketing or photography skills who isn't ever going to be a coach but wants a way to contribute and feel more connected.

TO WRAP IT UP

Being inclusive isn't always easy, but it can be very simple. While most parkour coaches work hard to train their bodies, it's equally important to train your brain so you can recognize opportunities to be more inclusive and better serve students and practitioners of all kinds.

Trying to be more aware of the feelings and experiences of others and developing an understanding of how your words and actions impact different people differently can have a tremendous impact on the experience of your current and future community members. It may even be the deciding factor in

whether they decide to continue training parkour or seek out another movement discipline.

By incorporating the three concepts above into your leadership philosophy and teaching practice, you'll be taking the first step towards creating a more inclusive parkour landscape, not only increasing parkour's reach, but also helping more folks understand how parkour can enrich their lives.