

Dance Etiquette

Contra dancing is a physical activity that is sometimes more intimate than in mainstream social situations.

While friendly flirtation and general familiarity are a norm, our dance culture is based on an atmosphere of respect for everyone.

The following are guidelines for etiquette in the contra dance environment:

- Both mixed and same-gender partners are common, and anyone can ask anyone else to dance.
- It is common courtesy to accept a dance when asked, unless you have a very good reason for declining. (See Leaflet #1 for more on this topic).
- It is dance courtesy not to book ahead. Occasional exceptions are generally ok. (See leaflet #1 for more on booking ahead).
- It is dance culture to be exceptionally warm, welcoming, and helpful to beginners. Don't be an elitist, dancing only with your personal friends.
- When joining the dance, it is dance courtesy to join the shortest line, and to adjust as needed to form even-length lines. Always join at the end of the line. It is very rude to join at the top, or in the middle.
- Basic good manners and the Golden Rule are our standard. Try not to push. Say "excuse me." If you knock into someone, apologize quickly. Accept an apology graciously. Etc.
- Be respectful to the caller. Listen and follow instructions.
- Good personal hygiene is critical for an activity that involves close physicality.
 - Be aware of your breath odor and body odor and take appropriate measures.
 - Please refrain from using perfume or cologne, as many people are sensitive to scents.
 - If you sweat a lot, bring changes of clothing as needed.
 - Be aware that not everyone enjoys feeling slick bare skin. Muscle shirts on men and camisole tops on women run the risk of giving you a "yuck" factor. Shirtless men are unacceptable.
 - Some people don't enjoy gum-chewing in their face.

- Dance conservatively with anyone you don't know well:
 - Execute the moves the traditional way until you have developed a rapport and you know personal preferences for flourishes, such as twirls and dips.
 - Make eye-contact, but don't be too much in someone's face if you don't know them well.
 - Swing smoothly but not too hard and fast, and not too close, until you know someone well.
 - Support your own weight while also providing a strong dance frame.
- Safety First! Never dance out of control. If you run into others' more than once or twice in an evening, you are probably swinging too hard and fast, or dancing too "big".
 - Be aware of your designated space and don't exceed it. Don't dip when the floor is tight!
 - Wear shoes -- preferably, closed-toe and heel, with straps or laces. This is for your safety (good support) as well as others' (shoes not falling off).
 - Never jerk or torque another dancer, or force them into any move. A flourish is an offer, not a demand. Learn the cues - e.g., hand behind the back for "courtesy turn, no twirl, please" - and other cues that tell you a dancer doesn't want a twirl.
- Dress appropriately for a family event. While the dancing is adult level, the OFB encourages parents with children to attend. We believe children benefit from exposure to the culture of community and creativity of self-made entertainment. In addition, dancers vary widely in age and social views. Err on the side of respect. The OFB is not church, but it also is not a nightclub. Excessively suggestive dress and lewd behavior are not acceptable.

See Leaflet #1 for information on:

- Behavior Policy
- What is inappropriate & how do you know
- When It's OK to say No
- Booking Ahead

Scenario 3: Dancer 1 doesn't like dancing with Dancer 2 because she wears so much perfume.

Dancer 2: *I asked you to dance and you said no, but then I saw that you danced with someone else. Is there some reason you don't want to dance with me?*

Dancer 1: *I would love to dance with you, but I'm very sensitive to scents, and I find your perfume to be too strong. Sorry. I would love to dance with you another evening if you would forego the perfume.*

Dancer 2: *Oh, I had no idea. Thanks for telling me. I will take you up on a dance next week.*

Dancer 1: *Great. Thanks for asking!*

Scenario 4: Dancer 1 finds that Dancer 2 doesn't use deodorant (or it's ineffective), and she just doesn't want to dance with him. He smells bad.

Dancer 2: *I asked you to dance and you said no, but then I saw that you danced with someone else. Is there some reason you don't want to dance with me?*

Dancer 1: *I would be happy to dance with you, but I am very sensitive to scents, and I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but you have a strong, masculine scent that's just overpowering for me. I certainly don't want to get into personal stuff with someone who's not my husband, but that's why. I'm very sensitive to your scent. If you want to ask me again another night, we'll see. Sorry.*

Dancer 2: *OK, thanks for letting me know.*

Dancer 1: *Thanks for asking.*

This is uncomfortable for both parties, so it's probably best to let it go at this point. If Dancer 2 cares about others' opinions, he may take it to heart and change his hygiene. If so, Dancer 1 should reward that choice by asking him to dance another evening if she notices that his manly scent is greatly improved. If he doesn't care and doesn't change, she can continue to decline to dance with him.

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Old Farmer's Ball Dance Etiquette

Leaflet # 2:

- General Etiquette
- How to say "Get a Clue!" with style and finesse



**Ensuring a
Safe and Fun Experience
for Everyone!**

How to Say “Get a Clue!” with Style and Finesse

Contra dancing has a traditional style for executing the various moves, but as a living art form, a great range of individual styles are brought to the floor. Everyone has their own personal threshold of comfort for closeness, eye contact, strength-of-frame, twirling or not, etc.

Each dancer has an obligation to get to know each individual partner’s preferences before straying too far from the traditional style of executing the moves. If you’ve never danced with someone before, don’t twirl them right away, and use a traditional, well-spaced dance position (i.e., don’t get closer than “normal”). Get a feel for how familiar they are with the basic moves, how well they dance in time to the music, and just establish a personal rapport with them before you start bringing in flourishes.

Remember, too, that communication is a two-way street -- it includes what is actually said or done, what is interpreted, and what response is given. Since different people have different thresholds of tolerance for different behaviors, a move or comment or look that is offensive to you may be well received by others. Most of the time, the offender does not realize he/she is making someone uncomfortable. Let them know!!

(See Leaflet #1 for discussion of *When it’s OK to Say No*)

Here are a few examples of how to tell a fellow dancer WHY you don’t care to dance with them:

- Use Scenario 1 as model for either gender if someone makes you feel emotionally or sexually uncomfortable.
- Use Scenario 2 as a model for either gender if someone feels dangerous or you’re afraid of injury from dancing with them.
- Use Scenario 3 as a model for either gender if someone is offensive, rude, or simply has bad manners.
- Use Scenario 4 as a model for either gender if someone has poor hygiene that you find offensive.

Scenario 1: Dancer 1 finds Dancer 2 to be creepy. He holds her too close, and rubs his hands up and down her back:

Dancer 2: *Would you like to dance?*

Dancer 1: *No, thank you. Please ask someone else.*

(Later) Dancer 2: *I asked you to dance and you said no, but then I saw that you danced with someone else. Is there some reason to you don’t want to dance with me?*

Dancer 1: *“I’m sorry to have to tell you this, but in the past when we’ve danced, I’ve felt very uncomfortable. It feels like you pull me in way too close, and when I try to push you back and establish some space, it feels like you just pull in tighter. And I don’t enjoy you rubbing your hands up and down my back.*

Dancer 2: *I’ve never felt like you’ve indicated any problem with how I dance with you. This is news to me. You have to pull in close to get a good swing. And I don’t think I rub my hands up and down anyone’s back except my girlfriend. I may reposition my hand until I find the right place to support your weight, but that’s it.*

Dancer 1: *Well, we must not be communicating well because I feel like I’ve clearly pushed you back a number of times. If you didn’t read that signal, then it’s good we have this chance to talk about it. You can still have a good swing with this kind of a hold (demonstrate spacing that is comfortable).*

Dancer 2: *OK, I’ll try to remember what you like. Sorry if I offended you.*

Dancer 1: *Thank you. I didn’t mean to offend you by turning you down, but I also didn’t want to offend you by telling you how to dance.*

Dancer 2: *OK. Like I said, I’ll try to remember what you like.*

At this point, let it go. The best thing is probably for Dancer 1 not to ask again, at least for a little while, but to demonstrate his attention to her wishes when he meets her as a neighbor. If the problem persists, she can remind him verbally: *“Remember, we talked about not holding so close?”* As she begins to feel more comfortable with him, she should ask him to dance, to indicate that she’s not avoiding him.

Scenario 2: Dancer 1 finds Dancer 2 to be way too much work. She doesn’t support her own weight and hangs on his shoulder when swinging. By the end of one dance, his arm is so sore he has to sit out a few dances.

Dancer 2: *Would you like to dance?*

Dancer 1: *No, thank you. Please ask someone else.*

(Later) Dancer 2: *I asked you to dance and you said no, but then I saw that you danced with someone else. Is there some reason you don’t want to dance with me?*

Dancer 1: *Well, to tell you the truth, I have trouble dancing with you as a partner because it puts too much strain on my arm. Swinging as a neighbor is OK, but swinging every time as a partner, my arm is done by the end of the dance. I need my partner to support her own weight and not lean on me so much.*

Dancer 2: *Well, the callers are always talking about giving good weight so the swing is smooth and fun.*

Dancer 1: *Well, yes, but I guess it’s a matter of adjustment between individuals. I don’t know if it’s our height, or what, but maybe it would be better if we did a walking swing, or just didn’t try to swing so hard or fast together.*

Dancer 2: *That’s fine.*

Dancer 1: *Great. That will help me a lot. Thanks for asking. I didn’t mean to offend you by saying no.*

Dancer 2: *Thank you.*

At this point, let it go. The best thing is probably for Dancer 1 not to ask again, at least for a little while, but to demonstrate her attention to his wishes when she meets him as a neighbor. If the problem persists, he can remind her verbally: *“Can you stand up straighter, and let’s just do a walking swing?”* (He can also change his own gait to a walking swing, and bring his elbow down, so that she HAS to support more of her own weight). As she learns to adjust and he no longer feels in jeopardy, he should ask her to dance, to indicate that he’s not avoiding her.