# Helpful Hints and Etiquette for Contra Dancers

## Especially for New Dancers

**Top five styling tips**.

- ***Timing:*** Most contra dance tunes are written in very audible 3-, 4- or 6-beat beat measures. Listen for the beat and dance each figure within its musical phrase.
- ***Giving Weight:*** Keep arms firm to support each other through the figures. Let your partner's hand rest lightly in yours. Give just enough weight with your arms (or your hands) to keep your connection while you move through the contra figures. This requires mutual sensitivity and adjustment. Don't squeeze too tightly or bend your partner's wrists.
- ***Eye contact*****:** Eye contact is an important part of contra dancing. It's more fun and it reduces dizziness during swinging. If you are uncomfortable with eye contact, focus on your partner's shoulder.
- ***Smooth and Gentle:*** Move with an easy walking step. Skipping and jumping will tire both you and your partner.
- ***Alert:*** Be sensitive to others' needs and preferences.

**Wear clean, soft-soled shoes.** If the dance hall has a wooden floor, it needs protection from heavy or rough-soled footwear.

**We encourage less experienced dancers** to ask those whom you perceive to be more experienced to dance with you. It is the custom to change partners for each dance, and anyone should feel free to ask anyone else to dance. ~~women ask men to dance as often as men ask women~~. Even if you have come to the dance with a partner, if you are both new to contra dancing, you will learn faster, and have more fun if you dance with more experienced dancers early in the evening.

**Learn the basics before trying to put in the extra flourishes**. For example, a smooth courtesy turn is more satisfying than an awkward twirl (twirls may be inappropriate at times but a courtesy turn never is)**.** Points of style can be absorbed gradually while you enjoy the dancing. **If the dance offers a warm-up or beginner session, consider attending one.**

**If you make a mistake or miss a figure, don't worry about it**—it's all in fun! Smile, and instead of rushing through the botched figure, skip it and go on to the next. You'll get many more chances, because all the moves in the dance repeat. It is more important to the people you are dancing with that you be ready for the next figure than for you to complete each figure.

**Everyone has the right to decline to dance.** Maybe you're dizzy. Or tired. Or your brain has been overworked. Yes, you can sit out a dance. But if someone asking you to dance, is making you uncomfortable, or if you are sitting out because someone has made you uncomfortable, speak to a dance organizer or to the caller.

## Are you and your partner having fun? Are you feeling safe and comfortable?

**Dancing should be fun and enjoyable**. If your partner or anyone else is doing something that hurts or makes you uncomfortable or embarrassed, do not hesitate to let them know. If needed, ask the caller or dance manager for assistance. We have a policy on appropriate dance behavior and we enforce it.

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