Helpful Hints and Etiquette for Contra Dancers

For All Dancers

Respect the caller: When the caller asks for hands four, comply promptly, so that sets will be established without confusion or later regrouping. **When the caller is teaching**, pay attention, follow the instructions, and be patient while others learn.

The importance of hands and giving weight: 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.

Adjust to each dancer's needs and abilities continuously. If you dance with 30 people in line, big or little, older or younger, you'll need to dance 30 different ways. Please hold yourself and your partner so each of you is comfortable. Remember that your partner's comfort zone may be different than yours. Aim to please every person (of any gender) that you dance with.

Couples should join the line at the bottom, rather than inserting themselves in the middle or at the top. If during the course of a dance you need to drop out of a line, do so when you reach the top or bottom because dropping out midline is disruptive to everyone else in it.

Long line, short line. Nobody's happy when a line is too crowded to dance comfortably and freely. When joining a line, join the shortest set, so the sets stay approximately the same length.

Finding partners. When looking for another partner after a dance ends, thoughtful dancers will look to the sidelines to see if there is someone who sat out the last dance and would like to dance the next. Generally, dancers wait until a dance is over before asking someone for the next dance. Everyone has the right to decline to dance.

Mistakes are OK. When helping other dancers, keep the atmosphere light. New dancers will relax when they sense your enjoyment and that you are more interested in being part of the flow than in perfection.

Respect others' personal dance space. Be energetic in your dancing, but remember that arms, feet, and swinging need to be controlled so as not to encounter someone else's body or someone else's feet. This is especially important in a crowded dance hall.

Twirling is a common and popular embellishment in contra dancing. ~~The man typically leads the woman into a twirl, but it is the~~ ***~~woman's prerogative~~*** ~~to follow the lead or override it, or, if followed, to limit the number of twirls.~~ However, not everyone likes to twirl and it may be physically uncomfortable for some. Feel free to request no twirls either verbally or if your partner starts to initiate a twirl, you may lower your arm.

Please do not wear loose clothing or heavy jewelry. Sleeves, scarves and shawls can catch arms and hands. Heavy rings or bracelets can scratch a partner or even tear the flesh.

Dancing generates heat and keeping clean and dry can be a challenge. As a courtesy, consider packing a hand towel and fresh shirts.

Some dancers become ill when exposed to **perfumes.** Please do not use perfumes or scented lotions prior to a dance.

Helping newcomers

If you are an experienced dancer, please **ask a newcomer** to dance. You were new once, and learned from others. Pay that forward.

> **When dancing with a newcomer, refrain from twirls, spins, and other flourishes**. This can be disorienting, slowing the learning process for your partner, as well as for other less experienced dancers around you who are watching for clues as to what they should do next.
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> **Help newer dancers face the right direction and smile!** Keep verbal instructions to an absolute minimum. Point, tap on the shoulder, use other signals, or call their name. It is hard for newer dancers to listen to you, other dancers, the caller, and the music all at the same time.

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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