

PORTLAND COUNTRY DANCE COMMUNITY CONTRA DANCE ETIQUETTE

PCDC Contra Dance strives to be an **inclusive dance community** committed to providing a **fun, welcoming, and safe environment** for everyone. Please take a few minutes to look over the following guidelines to help everyone have a great time. If your experience falls short of that in some way, please let us know.

GENERAL

Anyone may ask anyone to dance. We generally change partners for each dance. So go ahead, ask someone new! We especially encourage folks to ask dancers who have been sitting out, and experienced dancers to ask new dancers, so that everyone gets a chance to dance and to learn the ropes.

Give the caller your full attention. Listen attentively to the caller and refrain from conversation. Talking over the walk-through is impolite to the caller, and is distracting to others in the hall trying to listen.

Folks of any gender may dance either role, or both. It is polite to ask which role your partner would like to dance. If you would like to dance a specific role, you might say “I’d like to dance the Lark (person on the Left at the end of a partner swing) role, is that OK with you?” If you know how to dance one role and want to learn the other, plenty of folks in the hall will be happy to partner with you and help you out.

Dance with whoever comes at you in the line. Don’t assume which role someone is dancing based on their gender presentation or past dance role, even during the same dance. If you meet a pair of dancers in line and they seem confused, you can nicely ask which role they are dancing and help them get back on track.

Dance in control and pay attention to your and your partner’s safety. For instance, if you like to spin or twirl your partner quickly, you need to be there to stop their momentum.

CONSENT

You are always free to say no when someone asks you to dance. You don’t have to give a reason; you can just say “No, thank you.” If you ask someone to dance and they say “No,” take it gracefully and move on. If someone has declined to dance with you, the etiquette in our community is not to ask that person again that same night. If they would like to dance with you, they can come ask you—it’s their turn to do the asking.

Communicate your needs to your partner so they know how to give you the most comfortable dance. You can always speak up if a dancer is doing anything that makes you uncomfortable: for example, “Please swing slower,” or, “I’d like your hand a little higher.” If you feel especially uneasy or unable to communicate such an issue with your partner, please seek out a committee member or the dance floor host wearing the sash—we’re here to help!

Check in with your partner every now and then. Everyone is different. We get dizzy from different things, we have different preferences, we are strong (or not) in different places, etc. Because of these differences, we can’t accurately guess how our dancing feels to our partners; the only way to know for sure is to ask.

If you like to use flourishes, ask first. Even if you have danced with someone on previous occasions, it is good to ask each time. Remember that every flourish is an invitation plus an acceptance; if you are attempting to flourish someone, it is your responsibility to pay attention to their responses, and only carry out flourishes if they accept them. For instance, if you go to twirl someone and they tug their arm down, it means that they do not want to be twirled. If unsure, ask!

Respect people’s space. If you like swinging in a close embrace (a close blues pivot), ask your partner if they too enjoy this before initiating such a swing.

Respect the line. Be safe and be on time. Playing (switching partners mid-dance, etc.) may be fun, but should not come at the expense of others' dance experience. Remember to respect the integrity of the line and others' personal space. Be sure dancers in your line know of and consent to your plans.

Dance-related flirtation. While flirtation is sometimes part of social dancing, it can make dancers uncomfortable and is not an essential part of contra dancing. Be cautious when flirting, especially with folks who are not well known to you. Be extra cautious if the person you are thinking about flirting with is significantly younger than you. Don't continue flirting with someone unless it is well received. Pay attention to verbal and non-verbal signals. When in doubt, ask. Dance flirtation does not translate to anything off the dance floor. If anyone makes you uncomfortable with flirtation, tell the dance floor host.

How to respectfully compliment people you do not know well:

Focus on the choices they've made and not on things about their body. Examples:

- Good: Nice outfit!
- Good: I like your dancing style
- Problematic: You have pretty eyes
- Problematic: You're really attractive

HELPING NEW DANCERS

Use gestures and physical demonstrations to show new dancers how something works, and keep verbal instructions to a minimum (never shouting); it's hard for newer dancers to listen to you, the caller, and the music all at the same time! If you notice that your partner or neighbors are struggling, try to get in position for the next move early so they know where they need to go next.

Experienced dancers are always welcome at the Newcomers Session to help show new dancers the ropes, so if you feel like showing up early, please do join us! It's a great way to introduce new dancers to our community and help them pick up contra as quickly as possible.

Refrain from twirls, spins, and other flourishes with newer dancers. Please make sure new dancers have a solid base for understanding contra before adding any extras. Please also refrain from flourishes during walkthroughs as it is confusing to newer dancers who are trying to learn the basic steps. But don't assume that someone is new to contra because you've never seen them at our dance before. Ask if they are new and would welcome help.

Don't fret if your hands-four gets mixed up. If you're really mixed up, just take a beat to think about where you need to be to dance with the next couple, move there, and wait for them to come to you.

HYGIENE!

Please don't wear perfume or use scented products during the dance. Many people are sensitive or allergic.

Please give care to your personal hygiene! Shower, wear fragrance-free deodorant, and make sure your breath is fresh. If you are prone to sweating, bring additional clean shirts to change into over the course of the evening. Please wash your hands before the dance and during breaks.

**We are all constantly learning and evolving as dancers and members of the contra community.
We can do this best if we have an open dialogue with each other about dancing.**

Ask, express yourself, be respectful.

Enjoy yourself! We're so glad you're part of our community!

portlandcountrydance.org

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