



Helpful Hints and Etiquette for Experienced Contra Dancers

Portland Intown Contra Dance (PICD) is a community where dancers of any level of experience may feel safe and accepted. It is important to us that everyone who participates in PICD events maintain a physically and emotionally safe and nurturing community in a manner that is consistent with learning, mutual respect and the fun-loving nature of the PICD dance culture.

Thanks for dancing with us! Regular contra dancers like you are the reason contra is thriving - and will continue to into the future. **You** are the reason new dancers decide to come back. The helpful tips below are reminders of how best to dance generously and safely with everybody.

TOP REMINDERS:

- **Take Care of the Whole:** In contra, we dance with the whole room, which means we balance our personal needs with the needs of everyone. To that end:
 - **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. Wait until a dance is over before asking someone for the next dance, rather than booking ahead. New dancers will come back if they feel welcome and well taken care of, so consider dancing with inexperienced dancers for a portion of the evening. If someone declines a dance, don't take it personally - and know you have the right to decline dances, too.
 - **Ask and tell:** Every dancer's need is different based on their body and preferences. If you have a need, tell your partner before the dance begins. In service of your partner's safety and comfort, ask them what needs they have prior to the dance, too. If something changes during the dance, be vocal.
 - **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 and neighbors so each of you is comfortable. Remember that your partner's comfort zone may be different than yours.
 - **Mind the sets:** 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. Join the line at the bottom, rather than inserting yourself in the middle or at the top. Take hands four promptly. When the caller is teaching, pay attention, follow the instructions, and be patient while others learn.
- **Be Thoughtful about Your Impact:** You likely have ways you prefer to dance - and reasons contra is compelling to you. Every dancer's needs and preferences are different, so to ensure mutually satisfying experiences:

- **Give shared 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. Avoid squeezing too tightly or bending your partner's wrists.
- **Respect others' personal dance space.** If you're energetic in your dancing, 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.
- **Be careful with flourishes like twirls and dips.** Before twirling or dipping anyone, ask and gain consent. It is the recipient of the flourish who decides whether to follow the lead or override it, or, if followed, to limit the number of twirls. Respect their decisions, as they know their body best. If you do decide to twirl or dip with your partner, ensure there is enough physical space and time to ensure both safety and courtesy as you head into the next figure. Do not execute a flourish if it will make you and the person you are dancing with late for the next figure.
- **Dance with New Folks - and Do So Kindly:** If you are an experienced dancer, please ask a newcomer to dance. You were new once, and learned from others. Pay that forward. When you do dance with new dancers:
 - **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.
 - **When dancing with a newcomer, refrain from twirls, spins, and other flourishes.** Flourishes 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.
 - **Mistakes will happen.** 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.

Thank you for being stewards of this delightful tradition. Have fun! If you have thoughts, suggestions, or questions, let us know.