



Helpful Hints and Etiquette for New 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.

With this in mind, we offer you these helpful hints on how to have a fun and quality experience while being kind and taking care of others.

TOP FIVE TIPS:

- **Listening:** All dances in contra are taught by the Caller, and you'll learn best by being alert to the other dancers on the floor. Listening with your ears and watching what is happening around you will help you know what to do and when to do it.
 - **Helpful hint! *Timing*** Most contra dance tunes are written in very audible 8-beat phrases. Listen for the beat and dance each figure within its musical phrase.
 - **Helpful hint! *Mistakes*** We all make them. If you make a mistake or miss a figure, don't worry about it—it's all in fun! Instead of rushing to get it right, simply 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.
- **Shared Weight:** Picture the tension you might give when helping someone who is seated rise to standing. In contra, we call this "shared weight", and it's a tool for both keeping our own center of balance and helping guide others on the floor. To "give weight", ensure your body is supported by your feet and legs (think like a tree in the breeze: you should be able to move gracefully while being rooted) and then "meet" your partner or neighbor's needs by providing counterbalancing tension.
 - **Helpful hint! *Squeezing*** A gentle touch is safer than a grip (especially if you need to move from point A to point B quickly!). When holding hands, giving weight, or guiding others, use a cupped "mitten" hand with closed fingers.
 - **Helpful hint! *Smooth and gentle*** Move with an easy walking step. Bouncing, skipping, and jumping can be unsafe and tiring for you and your partner.
 - **Helpful hint! *Eye contact*** Eye contact reduces dizziness during swinging and is a way contra dancers connect with one another. We recommend it. Should you feel uncomfortable giving

eye contact, simply look at a static spot on your partner or neighbor's face or their ear so you stay safe!

- **Voicing Your Needs:** Dancing should be fun and enjoyable. Before the dance begins, you might tell your partner if you have needs, such as "Can we go slowly? I'm dizzy." or "My left shoulder is bothering me. Can we not twirl?" This will help them help you. You might also ask them if there is something you need to know about their needs. If your partner or anyone else is doing something that hurts or makes you uncomfortable or embarrassed, do not hesitate to let them know. In the moment:
 - Say "no", "stop" or "I don't like that."
 - Use physical cues, such as stepping back, holding your arm down to indicate no twirls, or shaking your head "no".
 - Remove yourself from the situation. Leave the line.
- **Helpful hint! *Saying no*** Remember that contra is community-focused; you're encouraged to dance with a lot of different people and remain cordial. And, everyone has the right to dance when they'd like and decline to dance when they'd like for any reason. If someone asks you to dance and you'd like to decline, a simple "No, thank you" is best. No need to make excuses! It's also okay to ask someone else after you say no or to say yes to another person.
- **Helpful hint! *Asking for help*** We want you to have a great time. If you have an uncomfortable experience for any reason, don't hesitate to ask the caller or dance manager for assistance. We have a policy on appropriate dance behavior and we expect all dancers to abide by it.
- **Learn the Basics First:** If possible, attend the beginner's lesson, as it's the best way to learn style tips that will serve you as you grow your skill. As you get started, focus on doing the basics well and the dance will be more satisfying for both you and those you dance with. Flourishes may be added gradually over time.
 - **Helpful hint! *Ask the experienced*** It's a custom in contra dance to switch partners every dance, and everybody asks anybody to dance. You're encouraged to ask those whom you perceive to be more experienced than you to dance; it's the best way to learn! Even if you have come to the dance with a partner, if you are both new to contra dancing, you will learn faster if you dance with more experienced dancers.
- **Dress for Fun:** Certain clothing works best for dancing contra. We sweat, so wearing wicking clothing is best. Please do not wear loose clothing, heavy jewelry such as rings or bracelets, purses, sleeves, scarves, or shawls. These items can catch arms and hands or even tear the flesh.
 - **Helpful hint! *Wear soft-soled shoes*** Wearing shoes with soft soles protects your body and the dance floor. A pair of gym shoes, leather-soled light dress shoes, or fancy dancing shoes all work!
 - **Helpful hint! *Avoid scents*** Many people have allergic reactions to perfumes and other scents. It's best to avoid wearing this to dances.

Have fun! And if you have a question, ask! We hope you come join us time and time again.