

The CDSS Safety Task Group aims to support local communities in their efforts to provide a safe environment for music, song, and dance events. We are working to provide advice and resources that will help organizers develop the policies, procedures, and supporting documents needed to understand and facilitate safety in their communities.

As CDSS, we are not prescriptive in regards to what your community ‘should be doing’. We recognize and value the range of living traditions practiced by our communities.

TOOLKIT

As such, we are working to develop a TOOLKIT of resources.

- **Structure** – building blocks to help community organizers facilitate a safe environment
- **Clearinghouse** – Existing examples of the building blocks
- **Writing Guide** – Synthesized ideas and language options to get you started and make pulling your resources together easier
- **Additional Literature** – More in-depth literature on conflict resolution, positive communication, dealing with bullies, how to stage an intervention, dance technique, etc.

We hope that you will pull out and adapt the language and policies that work for your community.

WORKING DEFINITIONS

As we worked, we realized that we needed some working definitions for the concepts we were grappling with.

Safety

Safety is freedom from physical, mental, emotional or sexual harm or fear of harm in one’s immediate environment.

Inclusion

An inclusive community has a culture of welcoming; such a community provides a warm embrace. It strives to provide a safe, inviting environment for all individuals regardless of sex, age, race, ethnicity, physical abilities, body shape, sexual orientation, financial means, gender identity, education, political views, and more.

Courtesy

Courtesy is practicing common manners and polite behavior, such as saying “please,” “thank you,” “excuse me,” etc.

Etiquette

Etiquette is the set of rules and behavioral expectations specific to a particular group; these are expectations that go beyond common courtesy, e.g., joining a line at the bottom of the set, or norms for finding a partner.

Respect

Respect is showing due regard for the feelings, wishes, rights, or traditions of others. Respectful interactions do not draw undue or negative attention to a person’s difference or disability.

Building a safe and welcoming event space includes providing for everyone's physical, mental, and emotional well-being and sexual safety. This can include addressing a range of problems, from feelings of discomfort to perceived discrimination to actual bodily harm. Organizers can develop procedures to handle problems along this spectrum.

Communities should consider having the following set of documents to facilitate safety in its many nuances:

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY VALUES

This is where you describe the environment you are strive to create.

- *Your values are the justification for policies and actions that uphold them.*
- *This is in addition to a mission and vision statements, as part of your organizing documents.*

CODE OF CONDUCT

This document codifies behavioral expectations, specifies what behavior will not be tolerated, and outlines what the consequences will be for infractions.

- *This is a policy document (not by-laws), based on community values.*

COURTESY AND ETIQUETTE LITERATURE

Tips and guidance (preferably in DO rather than “don’t” language) that help prevent offenses from occurring.

- *This could be a family of pieces:*
 - *General tips*
 - *Nuances on elitism vs. self-protection (making the dance welcoming and safe); booking ahead; when it's ok to say no.*
 - *Requesting, giving, and receiving feedback to/from others*

COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

These outline the ways and means of handling complaints and infractions.

- *Who to complain to; who follows up; how complaints are handled; timeliness of response; confidentiality; due process; documentation; legal concerns; levels of severity; pathways for improvement and pathways for ultimate removal.*

PART ONE: SHAPING YOUR LOCAL DANCE CULTURE

This writing guide provides example language for local leaders to pick and choose as they build their own “Courtesy and Etiquette Guidelines.” These are one element of creating a safety “structure” for your community that will help prevent problems from occurring, and address problems when they do occur. These go hand-in-hand with a Statement of Community Values and work in concert with a Code of Conduct and Complaint Procedures.

We have tried to include several examples for each topic, representing a range of ideas. For this reason, there is some repetition. These examples illustrate how different communities have said relatively the same thing, but with slightly different nuances. When we have excerpted language directly, we have cited the source.

INTRODUCTORY LANGUAGE

The dance community tries to be welcoming to all, and relies on dancers and leadership to support that goal. Everyone plays a role in building community.

COMMUNICATION

General

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! [CDNY]

If any one does anything that makes you feel uncomfortable, we encourage you to let them know right away. Sometimes it is inadvertent, based on mismatched comfort levels. It is part of our culture to give feedback in the moment. However, if you do not feel comfortable giving someone feedback, we encourage you to report any offensive or discomfoting behavior to the organizers.

Before the dance

Check in with your partner every now and then. Everyone is different. We have different joints, we get dizzy from different things, we get tired at different times, 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. [CDNY]

Ask questions of your dance partners and people in your circle. For example:
Dip?
Is it OK if I _____?
How do you feel about _____?

During the Dance

If someone is doing something you don't like, it's okay to say “Stop!” or “I don't like twirls.” or “Please move your hand towards the centre of my back.” or “You're swinging too close.”

If you encounter a painful or uncomfortable situation in the middle of the dance, saying a firm “Ouch,” “No,” or “stop that” can be the quickest way to indicate a problem. If you feel that you are in immediate danger, **YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO LEAVE THE LINE.** You are more important than the dance. [BACDS]

Be aware of and respect the physical needs, skill level, and energy of your partners and neighbors as you dance. [Scout House]

Responding

If anyone asks you to stop doing something, apologize and stop doing it.

“So sorry; thanks for telling me.”

DANCE ATMOSPHERE

General

We're all here to have fun. Be aware of and respect the physical needs, skill level, and energy of your partners and neighbors as you dance. Try not to be judgemental; hold your tongue even if you FEEL judgemental.

Support community culture and don't support clique culture. Don't book ahead, and don't run across the hall to catch a suitable hottie for the next dance. Just turn to whoever's closest and ask them to dance. And consider saving the highly sexual dance flourishes for actual night-clubs that have age limits.

Eye Contact

Eye contact can be fun but keep it light. Remember that your partner's comfort zone may be different from yours. Err on the side of being respectful.

Eye contact is fun except when it isn't. On moves like swing and allemand, eye contact helps avoid dizziness. If it's uncomfortable for you, look at a shoulder, ear, or forehead. [Scout House]

Smiling and eye contact are part of the fun, but predatory or intimidating behavior is not allowed.

Flirtation

While flirtation is often part of social dancing, it can make dancers uncomfortable and is not an essential part of contra dance. Please limit flirtation to dancers who are known to you and with whom you have built a rapport! If you're at all unsure, ask!

Flirtation can be fun, but also off-putting. It is important to build rapport with each and every individual partner or neighbor before you add flirtations beyond standard dance moves.

Flourishes

Ask and receive verbal consent before doing anything with a partner or neighbour beyond the moves of the dance dictated by the caller (e.g., "Do you like twirling?" "Can we swing like this?")

Dipping or lifting your partner on a crowded contra dance floor can be unsafe for you, your partner, and the other dancers around you. Please make sure your partner is willing, and the moves can be executed safely. Also, please note that some local dances don't allow dipping and lifting.

Each dancer has both the right and the responsibility to maintain control of their body. Do not lift another dancer off the floor. Do not lift children. Do not dip people without their explicit permission. [BACDS]

Asking People to Dance

Anyone may ask anyone to dance. You may refuse any invitation to dance for any reason. If someone refuses your invitation to dance, just say "okay!" Then find another partner.

Persistently ignoring or challenging another dancer's expressed wish to not interact during the course of an evening is harassment, and is not acceptable.

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 some communities 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.

Ask a partner kindly. Accept their answer cheerfully. If you are repeatedly declined by a prospective partner, it is best to give them space.

Feel free to decline a dance with someone with whom you feel uncomfortable. If you would prefer not to dance with them, a simple "no thanks" is appropriate. We encourage you to dance with a variety of people both new and familiar, but your safety and comfort come first. (BACDS)

Asking People to Dance...continued...

If you don't want to dance with someone at all, don't make excuses ("I'm resting"). That implies that you'd be happy to dance with them later. Be kind but firm. If they ask you why, tell them with kindness. For example: "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but when we've danced in the past, I've been uncomfortable" or "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but I'm very sensitive to scents, and you have a strong scent that triggers me," etc.

Roles

You may dance whichever role you prefer, gent/lady/ right/left, lark/raven, etc etc etc

Be aware that it is common for any gender to dance either role. It is helpful to point beginners to the right position if they are inadvertently switched. At the same time, experienced dancers may be "switched" on purpose and do not want to be doubted or corrected. It is a fine line to balance, whether to attempt to be helpful or not. Consider a quick inquiry -- "are you on the left on purpose?" Or let them know, "I'm the Robin."

You should trust that the dancer coming towards you is dancing the role they prefer and respond with the called moves for your role. (Note: Some communities use visual cues, such as wristbands or neck ribbons, to ID who is dancing which role.)

Our dance roles are just that -- a role, not an identity. Gender identity does not matter in choosing a partner. Anyone can ask anyone. In many communities, it is common to dance either role. Some folks dance one role or the other for a whole dance; some dancers switch back and forth during the dance (but this is more challenging). Many beginners find it easier to pick one role and stick with it for a while.

NOTES:

This document is an early version of a work in progress.

*This section on **Shaping Your Local Dance Culture** will also include the following sub-headings (and more):*

Listening

Mistakes in the dance

Respecting Space

Scent

Bathroom Access

Hall Access

Attitude

Promoting culture of consent

Promoting safety & inclusivity

Take care of yourself

WRITING GUIDE OUTLINE

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