

Youth Dance Weekend 2008

Discussions focused on topics relating to community culture (e.g., gender roles, intergenerational dancing, appropriate behaviour, etc)

*Original Post: <https://youthdanceweekend.org/resources/bread-butter/>
(Reposted on the CDSS website with permission)*

FROM THE YDW ORGANIZERS:

During Youth Dance Weekend 2008 we had a great discussion about a wide range of issues related to youth involvement and leadership in dance and music. We brainstormed a long list of questions together, wrote them up on large sheets of paper all around the room, and then spent a while walking around and writing down our individual ideas and suggestions.

The exercise was meant to start discussion about these various topics. There are a lot of great ideas here, and not everyone agrees about every answer. Some of the topics overlap in interesting ways. We hope you'll take what you can from this brainstorm, try it out in your community, and keep talking with others about what works. You can leave comments at the bottom of each topic page, where it says continue the conversation...Enjoy!

GENDER ROLE ISSUES WITHIN COMMUNITY...

- I heard of a dance somewhere where anyone who wanted to dance the lead/ "man's" role would put on a necktie. There was a basket of neckties available and it got rid of any confusion because anyone without a necktie was assumed to be a follower and it all worked out somehow.
- (someone else starred "necktie")
- Callers could take note if there is a gender imbalance in the hall, and encourage folks to try the "other" role, it's fun!
- I enjoy/appreciate the gender-fluidity in contra dancing – switching roles, even in mid-dance. It also makes me a better dancer and better leader to do both roles. I'd like to preserve this "do what you want" freedom and not have to pick one – even with neckties or wristbands or ribbons.
- Callers can use words such as "leaders" and "followers" rather than "ladies" and "gents." When you pass someone dancing a reverse-gender -> encourage them.
- I really appreciate when callers refer to roles as "gender-roles" rather than just "gender" or "sex". "lead" and "follow" is good too.
- It isn't fair necessarily, but I think one thing we can do as gender switches (especially mid-dance) is be extremely confident and clear in your dancing – people I think get less annoyed if they are less confused.

HOW TO DEAL WITH GENDER IMBALANCE...

- Smile. Do you want to dance or sit out?
- Learn to dance the other gender role.
- Familiarity breeds acceptance. I dance whatever gender role I feel like at regular dances, and over the last 10 years the contra community in New England has become more accepting of this as more people do it. (despite very occasional clashes)
- Our community has a bunch of red ribbons we use to turn ladies into designated gents (could be vice versa, whatever). By formally introducing it this way, (the caller announces “Here are these ribbons, wear them to tell me you’re dancing the gents part”) seems to tell people it’s ok – same gender folks can dance together.
- Same concept, but pre-tied open neck ties make the concept obvious without explanation.
- Sub-question: some of us don’t believe in neck ties (it “marks” same-sex dancers) – alternatives?
- Caller can help here – remind people (esp. if switching is common) that they are dancing “places not faces” i.e. if a woman comes flying at your side in the new set, that’s your new lead. Maybe also more education for beginners about structure (i.e. they need to think about the whole dance, not just where they go next)
- Callers use leaders and followers language rather than “ladies and gents”
- This occasionally gets confusing, but it is nice.
- I’ve found that frequently women are more comfortable dancing together than men, particularly older ones – I’m not sure this is something we can completely “fix” since it’s so culturally embedded.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR...

- ways to say no... “I think I have another partner”
- If it’s true!
- Please don’t say “I’m sitting this one out” or “I have a partner” if it’s not true. IT IS OKAY to just say “No thank you” without an excuse.
- If guys are too creepy, don’t just smile, say something.
- How can we respectfully communicate our social values? (There is an unspoken taboo about alcohol and folk dance that doesn’t get clearly communicated to beginners in many cases.)
- Be clear.
- Maybe talk during the break about what we do and don’t like – sweaty shirts, too tight grips, extra twirls, etc. Offer a discussion circle to express preferences.
- Reject those who consistently make you feel uncomfortable, without offering up an excuse.
- And if someone does ask why, just say “I don’t feel comfortable dancing with you” and don’t feel bad about it. It’s hard, but it works.
- If the way your partner is dancing makes you feel uncomfortable (physically or it’s just creeping you out), stop the swing/courtesy turn/whatever and say “please don’t hold me like that.”
- A side strategy would be to reassure people (esp. beginners) that it’s ok to turn down an offer to dance. NO EXCUSES NECESSARY!
- If a partner is doing something that is harmful or dangerous, physically move them (their hand, the distance, etc.) into a more safe/comfortable position.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE INTERGENERATIONAL DANCING? HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY COMMUNICATE RE: INTERGENERATIONALITY TO YOUNGER DANCERS?

- Encouragement from the caller between dances
- Floor leaders who lead by example
- Telling friends about good older/younger dancers
- Dance with everyone! Others will follow the example, hopefully
- Ask someone to dance
- Bring your parents (or kids!) to a dance and dance with them.
- Encourage young dancers to dance with older dancers by pointing out that maybe they could learn something from their wise elders.
- Discourage older men from being overly flirtatious with younger women (3 people
- seconded this idea with checkmarks) on the other hand, it can be disappointing to dance with someone overly reserved because they're worried about how they'll be perceived – focus should be on paying attention to your partner; we're not all the same!
- Callers should try to avoid letting there be “young” and “older” sets.
- People don't even know how good a lot of the older dancers are, because they never even rotate through them. (Could try a goal of an “average age” per set and move people).
- When you do ECD, playing up the flirtation is kind of fun, as long as both parties
- KNOW it's only for the duration of that particular dance
- Encourage older people to dance with more energy!
- This is offensive

HOW TO HELP OTHERS DANCE UNDER CONTROL...

- Show by example (during dance). Talk to them well after an observed uncontrolled dance move (so you aren't angry)
- Don't do it during the dance or when you are angry. They probably don't know they are being a dance menace.
- “It's more comfortable for me if you do/don't do X.” (or during dance “Please do/don't do X” – explain more after the dance that it can hurt people, etc.)
- Callers can help! Callers can warn about dangerous moves or figures, especially with newer dancers. Buzzword: “safety talk”
- Callers can also call attention to observed uncontrolled or dangerous dancing without calling out a specific person, which can be a problem with #1 above.
- Individuals and the community should praise/respect/laud in-control and otherwise good dancing
- When someone hurts me during a dance, I say “ow.” If I have a chance afterward I'll let them know what happened.
- Callers can give style/safety tips by saying: “It's more fun if you...”
- (three checks by above)
- Use the twirl with caution – always guide the “twirlee” into the next move. Make sure they are not thrown off-balance.
- (star next to above)
- Teach “giving weight” in swinging! Teach beginners style! Because otherwise they're like limp noodles.