

Welcome to Contra Dancing!

Live music and high-octane dancing in a clean, safe environment – what could be better? Contra dancing is fun, easy to learn, accessible to all ages, doesn't require you to bring a partner, AND it's great exercise!

How to be a Great Contra Dancer

8 Basic Notes:

1. Many dances offer a **Dance Basics Workshop**. If your dance offers one you should make sure to arrive on time. If you arrive late you will either miss some of the teaching or force the instructor and other students to accommodate for your late arrival
2. Contra dancing is a **group activity**. Over the course of a dance, you will interact with everyone, including your “partner,” your “neighbor” and, in some dances, your “shadow.”
3. You need not bring a dance partner. In fact, **if you and your partner are both newcomers, please split up and seek out experienced dancers, especially for the first few dances**. You will both learn faster if you do.
4. Each dance couple is composed of a **Lady** and a **Gent** and the dance normally starts with the Lady on the right. Same-gender dance couples are not uncommon though, especially during an evening in which the genders are unevenly represented. In such cases, the couple decides between them who dances what role.
5. As a line is forming, multiple small sets are created by having two couples (four people) join hands in "**Hands Four**."



6. All dances are completely explained and “**walked through**” by the Caller before they are danced. It is polite to listen quietly during the walk through, even if you are familiar with the dance.
7. **Dress comfortably**. Beyond proper shoes, there is no dress code. Most women and many men choose to wear skirts or kilts. This is only because the Hall can get hot and skirts are cooler and more comfortable than pants. It means nothing more than that.
8. If you make a mistake or miss a figure, no worries! Relax, have fun and remember: **It's only a dance!**

9 Tips on Technique:

1. **Glide, Don't Bounce**: Seek to glide smoothly in your dance movements, as if you were balancing a book on your head while dancing. This is particularly important during a swing ... hanging on to you while you bounce around in circles can be jarring and tiring for your partner.
2. **Make eye contact**: Make eye contact with anyone with whom you are executing any sort of figure, however briefly; it is a polite way of acknowledging their presence as your momentary partner in the dance figure. As an extra added bonus making eye contact reduces dizziness during sustained turns (e.g. swings, gypsies, and allemandes).
3. **Give Weight**: Picture the arm tension you use when helping a seated person stand up. This is called “giving weight” and provides the energy both people use in a swing, allemande, ladies chain, petronella twirl, and many other moves. Don't be a noodle arm!!



4. **Feel the Music / Count the Beats:** Listen for the downbeats and let your body flow with the rhythm of the dance. You may also count to 8 over and over in your head if that helps keep you on time, as each musical phrase is designed to take 8 beats, but the biggest cue will always be the rhythm of the music itself.
5. **Swing Safely:** Make certain that your own feet -- not your partner's arms -- are in charge of supporting your weight during a swing.
6. **Twirl Safely:** Leading a lady into a twirl by (gently, smoothly) raising her right hand should be done as a suggestion only -- it is the lady's prerogative to follow the lead or override it. Never hold her hand so tightly that she can't escape your grip and never "crank" her arm as that can tear her rotator cuff or cause 'frozen shoulder.'
7. **Better Never than Late:** If you get behind in the count, simply shorten or skip a move entirely in order to be ready to start the next move, in time and on beat. Conversely, don't hurry through a move so much that you get ahead of the count -- there are no points given for being the first one finished!
8. **Recovery:** If you lose your place and all else fails, relax!! Simply wait for the next partner/neighbor swing and pick up from there.
9. **Graceful Exit:** If you must drop out mid-dance (this is rare), please try to hang on until you are out at the top or bottom of the set.

10 Points of Etiquette:

1. **Be sensitive to the safety of your fellow dancers:** Never jerk a partner's hand, arm or shoulder, apply excessive force, or do an elaborate "dip" with your partner if you haven't both been trained to do so safely.
2. It is customary to **change partners after every dance.**
3. **When the caller is teaching, silence should prevail.** Just because some people know how to do a move, or have memorized the dance, doesn't mean that everyone has.



4. Everyone, even an experienced dancer, occasionally spaces out during a dance. If that happens don't be shy about offering or accepting (gentle, cheerful) help. **NEVER yank, shove, or bark at a confused dancer**, that only makes things worse.
5. Smiling, eye contact, and innocent flirtation are part of the fun but **predatory or intimidating behavior is not allowed.** Use common sense, discretion, and respect others' personal space!
6. **A delicate reminder:** Dancing generates heat. As a courtesy to all, consider packing a hand towel, fresh shirts, breath mints, and, if needed, deodorant. If you use fragrances, please do so sparingly.
7. Protect our (rented) floor. **Wear shoes with clean, soft soles.**
8. **Anyone may ask anyone else to dance.** Women may ask men, women may ask women, men may ask men, and men may ask women.
9. **Make plenty of eye contact.** It is considered polite to make eye contact with anyone you touch, however briefly, during the dance. For example, if the caller asks you to "balance the line," look at the person on your right as you move towards him/her and then turn to look at the person on your left as you move in their direction.
10. **Always say thank you** -- to partners for dancing, to instructors for teaching, to callers for calling, to bands for playing, to the sound crew for doing sound, to volunteers for helping out, and to everyone else who made your evening a pleasant one.

About Our Dance