

DANCERS GUIDE TO CONTRA DANCE ETIQUETTE

Contra dancing is and should be fun! In order to help maintain a safe, friendly atmosphere, TCD offers the following helpful explanations and hints to our dancers, both new and experienced.

GENERAL

Dancing is more fun when you get to know other contra dancers. We all share a common love of dancing, and there are many wonderful, friendly people with whom to socialize during and after a dance. Anyone may ask anyone else to contra dance. Same-gender dance partners are common, especially when the numbers of men and women are unequal.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Contra dance etiquette can be confusing to a newcomer. Contra dancing is highly social by nature and provides the opportunity for friendly interaction with an entire roomful of people.

You'll observe experienced dancers flirting to various degrees during a dance—some flirting might be meaningless fun or completely serious. You'll also notice dance partners holding hands while forming lines. This usually occurs between dancers who know and trust each other. It is not required, and many experienced dancers neither flirt nor engage in non-dance handholding. As with all personal interactions, respect, discretion, and common sense are your best guide to what is or is not appropriate.

PERSONAL SPACE

Eye contact is an integral part of contra dancing and can help to prevent dizziness during swings or allemandes. Eye contact is also fun and part of the friendliness of the dance. Contra dancers like to

look into each other's eyes, a practice that can be unnerving to newcomers. We recommend holding eye contact if you are comfortable doing so; if not, you may focus on your partner's ear, chin, collar, etc. – being careful not to focus your gaze anywhere that might make your partner uncomfortable. Holding one person after another in your arms all evening is also an experience unique to contra dancing. It is important to maintain firm physical contact with your partner to provide support (not force) during the dance figures. Appropriate places to rest your hands are: lower back, upper back, shoulder, upper arm or waist.

CROWDED DANCE HALL

At crowded dances, it is very important to dance "safely": getting an elbow in the face or ribs is not enjoyable and can also result in a serious injury. During a swing, try to keep your left elbow (men) and right elbow (women) close to your body. Be aware of dancers close to you in your line as well as the line behind or next to you. While embellishments can add much to your dance, keep them in control to prevent injuries to others. If you like stomping your feet, make sure no one's foot is under yours.

IMPROVISING

Many experienced contra dancers improvise or "style" during a dance. TCD encourages artistic expression and experimentation, but reminds dancers that being on time and helping your partner be on time is always more important than embellishments in contra dance. Do your best to maintain a sense of "place" within your line to safeguard the safety of those around you.

CHILDREN

Contra dances are family environments and sometimes dancers bring their children along. Children are welcome to attend beginner classes and learn to dance if they are interested. To maintain a safe environment for all, we request that parents keep non-participating children off the dance floor during the dance, as this is extremely dangerous for everyone.

SENSITIVE ISSUES

Most of us are uncomfortable or unwilling to confront another person about their hygiene or behaviors, regardless of how well we know them. We present this subject here in the hope of preventing the need for one-on-one conversation that might be considered embarrassing or confrontational.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

Contra dancing, unlike most sports, promotes close physical contact with multitudes of other people. This proximity requires us be a bit more aware of ourselves than we might be otherwise.

Some of our dancers are hypersensitive or allergic to highly scented products such as perfume, after-shave, cologne, and some deodorants. Please do not wear these types of scented products to a dance. Other dancers are reactive to odors such as spices, onions or garlic. Out of sensitivity to others, many dancers avoid eating highly spiced food before a dance. It is always preferable to arrive freshly bathed and in clean clothing. Some of us bring an extra shirt to change into since it is much more fun to dance in a dry shirt (and probably a lot more fun for our partners, too.)

D.U.I. (Dancing Under the Influence)

Another extremely sensitive issue at dances is the ingestion of substances that might cause a dancer to lose the focus required to remain safely in control. Contra dancing is an activity that requires accurate body movement and precise timing in order to be safe and fun for all. Please exercise personal responsibility and sensitivity. In the extreme case of a dancer who is out of control and endangering others, the organizers will ask that person to leave. Triangle Country Dancers works hard to promote a safe, friendly environment we can all enjoy, and we welcome anyone who wishes to become a part of this dance family. We also welcome feedback on these guidelines. Any board member will be happy to hear from you and in particular, help address a specific concern of the type described above that might arise at a dance.

Happy dancing to you all!