

Helpful Hints
Especially for Experienced Dancers

Experienced dancers should welcome newer dancers into our community by asking them to dance, and helping them to have a fun, satisfying evening. Refrain from extra twirls, spins, dips, etc. This can be disorienting, slowing the learning process for your partner, as well as for other less experience dancers around you who are watching for clues as to what they should do next.

The goal is to help newer dancers face the right direction and smile! Keep verbal instructions to an absolute minimum. Point, tap on the shoulder, use other signals, or call their name. It is hard for newer dancers to listen to you, other dancers, the caller, and the music all at the same time.

Flourishes: Twirls, dips, cuddles, and other moves that are led-and-followed are borrowed from couples dancing (swing, tango, etc.). They are not part of the basic or traditional contra dance repertoire, although mixing these moves with contra dancing is an example of the traditional evolution of the folk art process, and is enjoyed by many dancers. Please remember that:

- **Flourishes are added by mutual consent** with each partner, by dancing with that person several times and developing an understanding of preferences.
- **A lead is an invitation, which may be accepted or declined.** Some dancers love to twirl (or dip or spin or cuddle), while others do not. Some may choose to add flourishes with particular partners and not with others. Newcomers who are unaccustomed to twirling may be prone to motion sickness from lots of twirling and swinging. Never force a move on any partner if they don't follow the lead or otherwise signal resistance.

- **Master the basics first:** Flourishes should be completed in time to move on to the next move with the music. Holding a dip past the end of the musical phrase, or twirling out of a swing too late, makes you unavailable for your neighbors. This is inconsiderate and is considered selfish dancing.
- **Advanced dancing** does not mean doing the fanciest dancing all the time; rather, it is **having good judgment** for when flourishes are appropriate and when they are not – for the flow of the dance, the ability of your partner, the crowdedness of the hall, the personal rapport you have with your partner, the style of the music, etc.

Old Farmer's Ball Board of Directors, 2005

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Thanks to the Glenside Thursday Night Dance, Philadelphia, PA, from whom many of these guidelines are reprinted or paraphrased.

Welcome to the Old Farmer's Ball Dance Guidelines

The Old Farmer's Ball is for all who wish to enjoy a sociable evening of music and dance.

OFB believes in tolerance, and is open to all regardless of age, race, gender, beliefs or life-style.

Participants are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that shows respect and consideration for the welfare of other dancers and the dance community – a community that includes families and children.

If anyone ever feels uncomfortable or endangered by another participant, we encourage the following:

Let that person know. Use the "Tips for Defensive Dancing, on the inside of this brochure.

Feel free to approach any member of the Board of Directors for assistance in approaching and addressing concerns with another dancer.

The OFB Board of Directors has adopted the following guidelines for participation.

Anyone who fails to adhere to the guidelines will be made aware of the problem and will be given suggestions for correcting the problem.

Repeated or blatant disregard for these guidelines may result in a dancer being asked not to attend the Old Farmer's Ball.

Guidelines:

Every dancer has the right to decline to interact with another dancer, whether on or off the dance floor, without explanation or repercussion. Persistently ignoring or challenging another dancer's expressed wish NOT to interact during the course of an evening is harassment, and is not acceptable.

The OFB accommodates a wide variety of dance styles, and recognizes that innocent flirtation is common to contra dancing. Nevertheless, sexually



suggestive, lewd, or indecent behavior on or off the dance floor, or any sexually harassing behavior, is not acceptable.

Contra dancing is a fast-paced and energetic activity that is done in close quarters. On rare occasions, the physical actions of the dance can result in accidental inappropriate contact. However, a pattern of such inappropriate contact is not acceptable.

While contra dancing is often exuberant and fast moving, and includes the possibility of inadvertent bumps and the occasional minor bruise, for safety's sake it should never be out of control.

Pursuing individual style is not license to risk injury, or to inflict pain or discomfort on fellow dancers. Dancing in a manner that hurts or disregards the safety or comfort of other dancers is not acceptable.

Members of the Board of Directors, as well as many members of the dance community as a whole, are available to anyone who would like suggestions on dance techniques that are less likely to cause injury, pain, or discomfort. In addition, the Board encourages anyone who is interested in polishing his/her dance style to seek suggestions from experienced dancers, and to recommend/request workshop topics to Board members.

Reports about any of these matters may be made in confidence to any member of the Board of Directors, who, acting with other members of the Board, will make a timely investigation of the complaint and determine the appropriate course of action.



General Etiquette for All Dancers

When the caller is teaching, please be courteous and give your full attention. When the caller asks for hands-four, do so as quickly as possible to avoid confusion and regrouping.

Mistakes are OK. When helping other dancers, keep the atmosphere light. New dancers will relax when they sense your enjoyment, and that you are more interested in being part of the flow than in perfection.

Finding partners: When looking for another partner after a dance ends, thoughtful dancers will look to the sidelines to see if there is someone who sat out the last dance who would like to dance the next.

Generally, dancers wait until the dance is over before asking someone for the next dance. Other dancers like to line up a partner ahead of time (booking ahead) for the next dance, or even subsequent dances in the evening. Either way is acceptable. Do not feel obligated to accept when someone tries to book ahead with you if you prefer to wait until the dance is at hand.

There is no pressure to accept a dance request. Everyone has the right to decline a dance without feeling guilty or having to explain why. If you are turned down for a dance, take it in stride and seek another partner.

Couples join the line at the bottom, rather than inserting themselves in the middle or at the top.

Long line, short line. Crowded lines are less fun. Don't squeeze into a line that is already full. Dance etiquette calls for always joining the shortest line, so that the lines develop to equal lengths. If the caller asks for some sets of 4 to join a shorter line, several sets at the bottom of the line should do so agreeably.

Dropping out. If you need to drop out, try to wait until you reach the top or bottom of the set. If you must drop out mid-line, warn the couple you and your partner are currently with so they can drop out at the same time. This allows the



progression of the line to continue without disruption. The couple that dropped out with you can rejoin at the bottom of the set.

Giving weight. Let your partner's hand rest lightly in yours. Give just enough weight with your arms or hands to keep your connection while you move through the figures. This requires mutual sensitivity and adjustment. Don't squeeze too tightly or bend your partner's wrists. In most figures partners give equal weight. Help support your partner, but at the same time, don't hang on them.

You're all wet. Contra dancing can be quite aerobic. Some dancers work up a good sweat, especially during hot weather. If you perspire a lot, please bring an extra shirt, towel off, etc.

Dance hygiene: It is recommended that you wash your hands well after dancing, especially before touching food or touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Tips for Defensive Dancing or

How to say

PLEASE BACK OFF



Dancing should be fun and enjoyable for everyone. If anyone makes you feel unsafe, uncomfortable, hurt, endangered, or embarrassed, please don't hesitate to **let them know** immediately.

Whether you feel someone is torquing your

shoulder, stepping on your Achilles, too close for comfort, looking down your dress, placing their hands in the wrong place for you, hanging on your arm (making you do all the work), there are several ways to let them know. (Note: these are useful for either gender).

A) Non-verbal cues:

- Move their hand to where you prefer it.
- Move your hand from around their back and push them away.

- If both their arms are around you (in a cuddle-style hold), rather than one arm out to the side – reach back and take the appropriate hand and move it to the side, where you prefer it.
- If you don't care to twirl, pull the arm back down when it is raised to lead the twirl.
- If someone is not supporting their own weight sufficiently, give less weight yourself – don't let them fall, but don't hold them up quite so firmly. This will force them to stand more upright (not lean back so hard). Also, swing slower. This reduces the centrifugal force and places less force on your arm if you're holding them up.

B) Verbal cues (just tell them):

- I need more space please.
- Could you back up a bit?
- I prefer a regular swing.
- It would help me if you could hold me like this (move their hand to where you prefer it. (e.g., for women – higher or lower around your back; for men -- behind the shoulder blade, rather than hanging on the bicep).
- OUCH!

If needed, ask a member of the Board for further assistance.

Anyone who is interested in polishing his/her dance style is encouraged to seek suggestions from experienced dancers, and to suggest workshop topics to Board members.

Helpful Hints

Especially for New Dancers

Top five styling tips:

- **Smooth and gentle:** Move with an easy walking step
- **Timing:** Dance each figure within its musical phrase (general multiples of 4, 8, or 16 counts)
- **Giving Weight:** Keep arms firm to support each other through the figures.
- **Alert:** Be sensitive to others' needs and preferences.

- **Eye Contact:** There's lots of eye contact in contra dancing. It's part of the safe, playful flirtation that is part of our dance culture, and it reduces dizziness during swinging. However, if the strong eye contact makes you uncomfortable, look at your partner's ear or shoulder to reduce dizziness without directly looking them in the eye.

Everyone asks everyone, so ask experienced folks to dance with you. You will learn faster, and it can be flattering for your partner to be identified as someone you can learn from. They'll help guide you during the dance and accelerate the learning process. Some dancers book ahead, so if you ask someone to dance and they are not available, ask if they'll save the NEXT one for you. If they do not care to book ahead with you, take it in stride and ask someone else.

Learn the basics before trying to put in extra flourishes. Notice the smooth dancers who help those around them to look good and enjoy themselves. This will help you develop your sense of what good dancing is.

- Many of the twirls, dips, and cuddle-style holds you see others doing are flourishes. Flourishes are added by mutual consent with each partner, by dancing with that person several times and developing an understanding of what the other enjoys and where the other's boundaries are.

- Flourishes should not interrupt the flow of the dance for others. Dancers are encouraged to master the timing of the basic moves before adding flourishes, so that they are added within the timing of the move.

- Points of style can be absorbed gradually while you enjoy the dancing.

If you make a mistake or miss a figure, don't worry about it – it's just a dance. Smile, and instead of rushing through the botched figure, just skip it and go on to the next. That's what the experienced dancers do. It's more important to the people you are dancing with that you be ready for the next figure than for you to complete or correct a past figure.