

DANCING AT THE GUIDING STAR GRANGE

The Guiding Star Grange and Friends of Greenfield Dance are concerned for the personal safety and comfort of the people who attend events at the Grange hall. It takes the cooperation of all in the community to help us keep events joyful and fun.

All the dancers in our dance community deserve/want to be safe and dance in a space free from the fear that they will be subjected to inappropriate behavior. Certainly accidents happen but, working together, we can minimize the risk and ensure a safe, comfortable dance environment by implementing some basic guidelines.

- 1) If someone is dancing in a manner that hurts you (too tight grip; arm wrenching; yanking; pushing; stomping; etc.) or in a manner that exposes you to inappropriate touching (holding you too close; non-accidental and/or repetitive brushing against you; un-invited “sleaze dancing”, etc.) please tell them to stop. If you are not comfortable telling them yourself, to get more help, please tell the organizer of the dance.
- 2) If a dancer or someone else approaches you to discuss your dancing or behavior, please hear them out. Even if you disagree, think about how you might modify your behavior to help others feel safer and enjoy the dance more.
- 3) Don't leave your child, especially infants or toddlers, unattended. Please note that even though there are people on the stage, the band and caller are not babysitters – please leave your child with an adult specifically dedicated to childcare on the sidelines.

HELPFUL HINTS AND GUIDELINES FOR ALL CONTRA DANCERS

For all dancers

When the caller is teaching, be quiet and give them your full attention. When the caller asks for “hands four”, this should be accomplished as quickly as possible to avoid confusion and later regrouping. Avoid flourishes during a walkthrough because they confuse beginners who are watching you to see what you do.

The importance of hands and giving weight. Let your partner's hand rest lightly in yours. Give just enough weight with your arms (or your hands) to keep your connection while you move through the contra figures. This requires mutual sensitivity and adjustment. Don't squeeze too tightly or bend your partner's wrists. If your partner or neighbor is moving away from you, let their hands go and do not try to pull them toward you. Remember that each figure is very short.

Adjust to each dancer's needs and abilities continuously. If you dance with 30 people in a line, big or little, older or younger, you'll need to dance 30 different ways. Aim to please every person (all genders) that you dance with, including all your partners and neighbors.

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.

Long line - short line. Nobody's happy when the line is too crowded to dance comfortably and freely. When joining a line, join the shortest set, so the sets stay approximately the same length.

Finding partners. When looking for another partner after a dance ends, dancers might look first to the sidelines to see if there is someone who sat out the last dance who would like to dance the next one. Turn and say, "Would you like to dance?" or offer a hand and smile. Booking ahead may have the unintended consequence of freezing some dancers out of the lineup.

It's OK to say no. 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. This is true for all interactions. If you are turned down for a dance, take it in stride and seek another partner. Persistently ignoring or challenging another dancer's expressed wish NOT to interact with you during the evening is harassment and is not acceptable.

Contra dancing can be quite aerobic, and, especially during hot weather, some dancers work up a good sweat. If you perspire heavily, please bring extra clothing. Remember to bring a water bottle and drink often.

Some dancers become ill when exposed to scents. Please do not use scented products prior to a dance. Cigarette smoke and liquor on the breath are also a problem for some. Smoking and drinking alcohol are not permitted anywhere on Grange property during a contra dance.

Dancing should be fun and enjoyable. If your partner or anyone else is doing something that hurts or makes you uncomfortable or embarrassed, don't hesitate to let them know. If needed, ask the person at the door for help.

Help protect our new wood floor. Please wear clean shoes that you keep only for dancing. Do not wear your street shoes on the dance floor.

Especially for New Dancers

Top five styling tips to become a good dancer. Timing: Dance each figure within its musical phrase. A good dancer is always on time for the next figure, and makes sure his/her partner is as well. It helps to anticipate the next figure. **Giving weight:** Keep arms firm to support each other through the figures. **Eye contact:** Eye contact is an important and fun part of contra dancing. It can reduce dizziness during a swing to look at some point of your partner's face. **Smooth and gentle:** Move with an easy, smooth walking step. When swinging, keep it smooth and level - no bouncing. **Alert:** Be sensitive to others' needs and preferences and dance with the whole set in mind. Dance in your own space and keep your limbs and movements constrained and controlled. For timing and safety, less is more..

Asking for a dance. It is the custom to change partners for each dance. You may invite ANY other dancer to dance. While in other dance scenes it is traditional for men to ask women, here it is also common for women to ask men, men to ask men, women to ask women, and those who identify as any gender asking anyone of their choosing as well.

Learn the basics before trying to put in the extra flourishes. For example, a smooth courtesy turn is more satisfying than an awkward twirl (twirls may be inappropriate at times but a courtesy turn never is). Points of style can be absorbed gradually while you enjoy the dancing. If you would rather not twirl, keep your hand low as a signal to your partner. It's okay to resist their invitation.

If you make a mistake or miss a figure, don't worry about it - It's all in fun! Smile, and instead of rushing through the botched figure, skip it and go on to the next. You'll get more chances, because all the moves in the dance repeat. It is more important to the people you are dancing with that you be on time for the next figure than for you to complete each figure.

Couples join the line at the bottom rather than inserting themselves in the middle or the top. If during the course of a dance you need to drop out of a line, do so when you reach the top or bottom because dropping out midline is disruptive to everyone else in it. If you must drop out in the middle, the couple you are dancing with should go to the bottom of the set to rejoin the dance.

Ladies and Gents - Based on historical contra dancing, these terms refer to roles rather than gender. Many dancers are comfortable dancing either role. Regardless of the gender of the person you find yourself dancing with, just dance your role with its normal hand and arm positions, and dance with whoever walks towards you – don't try to "coerce" a fellow "gent" if she's coming toward you, she's the "gent".

Demystifying the terminology:

Contra is French for opposite as in "partner opposite you".

Top (of the hall): End of the hall nearest the band.

Hands four: After lining up, the top two couples join hands in a group of four and the rest of the line follows.

Opposite or neighbor: Opposite role person in your group of four who is not your partner. For example, if you are in a hands-four and dancing in the Gent role, your neighbor is the person

dancing the Lady role who is NOT your partner. Similarly, if you are dancing the Lady role, your neighbor is the person in the Gent role who is not your partner.

Number Ones or Active Couples: After taking hands four, actives have their backs to the band and work their way down the hall with each repetition of the dance figure, becoming Twos and changing sides at the bottom of the line or set.

Number Twos or Inactive Couples: In a four, they face the band and gradually work their way up the set, becoming Ones and changing sides at the top of the set.

Proper dance: Traditional formation with the Gents role on the left in one line and Ladies role on the right in another line.

Improper: Within the hands four, the Ones change places so roles alternate in the lines (lady always on right when facing the direction of progression).

Right and Left Through: Couple walk across the set by using right hands to pull by, with a courtesy turn to face into the set again on the other side.

Hey: A weaving figure creating an 8 on the floor. Walk across the hall presenting alternating shoulders until you get to the other side. Make a loop and reenter back to your starting position. Most often you pass the same role person with the right shoulder and opposite with the left. If confused, go back to your starting position and wait for the next call.

Promenade: Partners assume a skater's hand position and walk together to the other side as a couple, executing a courtesy turn to face in.

California twirl: Gent role raises joined inside hands so the Lady role can walk under this arch to change sides and direction

Box the Gnat: The couple take right hands, balance, raise joined hands so Lady role can walk under to switch places.

Cast off: When coming up the set, the active person puts arm around the waist of the inactive person in their foursome and walks around them to the place below in the four. There are variations on this but they all achieve the same purpose - moving down one place.

Becket Formation: A variation of the starting position. After taking hands four with Ones crossed over, rotate the group one place to the left.

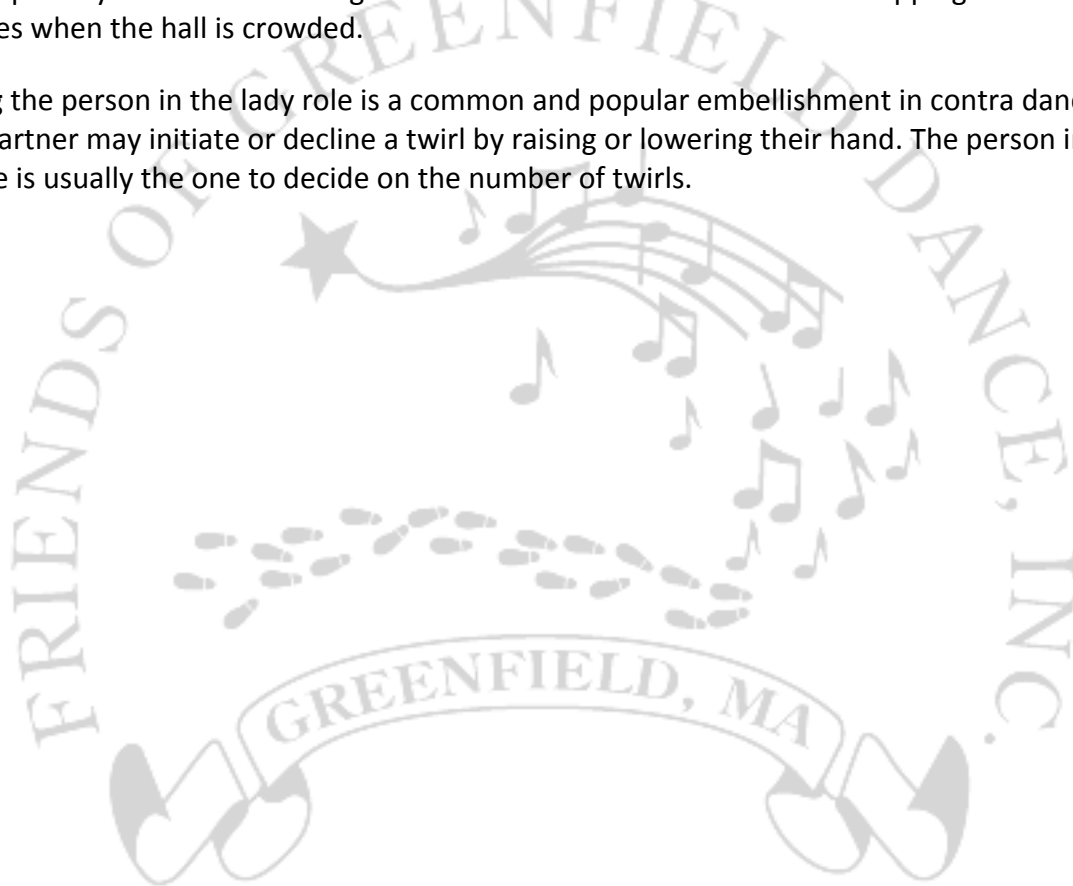
MOST IMPORTANT - HAVE FUN, ENJOY THE MUSIC AND THE PEOPLE!!!

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. The goal is to help new dancers face the right direction and smile. Keep verbal instructions to a minimum. Pointing, tapping on the shoulder, using other signals or calling their name is often more helpful. It is hard for newer dancers to listen to you, other dancers, the caller, and the music all at the same time.

Refrain from twirls, spins, and other flourishes with newer dancers as such moves can be disorienting for them. If you are with an experienced partner and you have inexperienced neighbors, tone down your flourishes so that the newer dancers can watch you for what to do next. This is especially true in walk throughs. A considerate dancer refrains from dipping or other large flourishes when the hall is crowded.

Twirling the person in the lady role is a common and popular embellishment in contra dancing. Either partner may initiate or decline a twirl by raising or lowering their hand. The person in the lady role is usually the one to decide on the number of twirls.



With thanks to Glenside, Princeton, Old Farmer's Ball and Cincinnati for their documents on this topic.

