

FGD Courtesy and Etiquette Guidelines

The Friends of Greenfield Dance

January 2022

I. Introduction

Everyone plays a role in building an inclusive community—dancers, organizers, musicians, callers, instructors, spectators, and more! Our dance community is committed to being welcoming to all and relies on everyone to support this goal.

II. Communication

We are all constantly learning and evolving as dancers and members of the dance community. We can do this best if we have an open dialogue when we dance.

A. Before a Dance

Check in with your partner. Everyone is different. We have varying physical abilities, we get dizzy from different things, we have different preferences, we are strong (or not) in different places, etc. Because of these differences, we can't accurately guess how our dancing feels to our partners; the only way to know for sure is to ask.

Ask questions of your dance partners and people in your circle.

For example:

Do you like to twirl?

Dip?

Is it OK if I . . . ?

How do you feel about . . . ?

B. During a Dance

If someone is doing something you don't like, it's okay to tell them by saying, "Stop!" or "I don't like twirls," or "Please move your hand towards the center of my back," or "You're swinging too close."

If you encounter a painful or uncomfortable situation in the middle of the dance, saying a firm "Ouch," "No," or "Stop that" can be the quickest way to

indicate a problem. If you feel that you are in immediate danger, you can leave the line. Your safety is more important than the dance.

Be aware of and respect the physical needs, skill level, and energy of your partners and neighbors as you dance.

Non-verbal communication: Be aware of signals from your partner that they may not be enjoying something. Pay attention to body language and facial expressions. For example, if someone pulls away, it suggests they don't like being so close. Respect their unspoken feedback.

It is common for people with injuries to call attention to them visually (for example, a brace, or a pin with a word like "ouch" on it). Please respect these and ask if you need more information.

C. Responding to Feedback

If anyone asks you to stop doing something, apologize and stop doing it. For example, "So sorry; thanks for telling me."

III. Dance Atmosphere

Support community culture by trying to create a dance atmosphere that you would feel welcome at as a newcomer.

We're all here to have fun. Be aware of your environment, and try not to be judgmental.

A. Asking people to dance / responding to invitations

Historically, some dancers were taught that they must sit out when they decline a dance. This is no longer expected. As our norms evolve, we strive to balance consent and safety with care for inclusion and community.

1. Asking

- Anyone may ask anyone to dance.
- If someone refuses your invitation to dance, just say "okay!" and then find another partner.
- Ask a prospective partner kindly. Accept their answer cheerfully – it's not personal. If someone declines to dance with you more than once, it is best to give them space. If they would like to dance with you, they will ask you later—it's their turn to do the asking.
- Often, people who would like to dance are sitting on the sides.
- Consider asking someone new to dance. If you are an experienced dancer, consider asking a beginner. It can lead to delightful experiences and connections, and it also creates a welcoming dance environment.

2. Responding

- You are free to say no when someone asks you to dance. You don't have to give a reason; you can just say "No, thank you."
- If someone who makes you uncomfortable asks and you would prefer not to dance with them, a simple "no thanks" is appropriate.
- We encourage you to dance with both new and familiar people. Delightful dance experiences come in all shapes and sizes. Give that new partner a chance! Remember that some people are shy, and hearing "Yes!" can help welcome them into the community.
- If someone persistently ignores or challenges your expressed wish to not interact during the course of an evening, you may report this as harassment to the dance organizers (see Section VI. "Dealing With Problems").

B. Eye Contact

Eye contact can be fun, but keep it light. Remember that your partner's comfort zone may be different from yours. Err on the side of being respectful.

On moves like swing and allemande, looking at the other person helps avoid dizziness. If eye contact is uncomfortable for you, look at a shoulder, ear, or forehead.

C. Flirtation

While friendly flirtation can be a part of our social dances, it may make some dancers uncomfortable and is not an essential part of our dances. Please limit flirtation to dancers you know or with whom you have built a rapport. If you're at all unsure, ask.

D. Respecting Space

Always dance with the safety and comfort of other dancers in mind. While our dancing is often exuberant and fast moving, dancers should never be out of control. There is a fine line between playful shenanigans and interference with others.

Respect people's space. For example, if you like swinging in a close embrace, ask your partner/neighbor if they enjoy this too before swinging. If you see a person do this with someone else, it still doesn't mean they want to do it with everyone — ask.

Be sure to keep your dancing within your "designated" dance space; don't invade others' space with wild moves.

E. Basic Body Mechanics / Developing Dance Technique

Connect with other dancers with equal and opposite tension: this is the concept of shared weight. Support yourself by keeping your weight over your own feet. Guide others rather than dragging them.

Use open-handed grips that are held together by the tension and input of both dancers; avoid grips that squeeze or encircle another person’s thumb, hand, wrist, or body in a way they can’t escape.

These are critical dance skills, which also include checking in with your partner/neighbor when you’re unsure.

F. Flourishes

Flourishes (e.g., twirls, spins, swing variations) are optional embellishments. We recommend waiting to add flourishes until you have learned the basic mechanics. This will help avoid injuries.

Listen to your partner for what they may need from you (e.g., not too many twirls, no twirls at all, or even more twirls). Ask and receive consent before doing anything with a partner/neighbor beyond the moves of the dance as taught by the caller/instructor.

Dipping or lifting your partner on a crowded dance floor can be unsafe for you, your partner, and others around you. Please make sure your partner is willing, and the moves can be executed safely and on time. Better never than late!

Each dancer has both the right and the responsibility to maintain control of their body. Do not lift another dancer off the floor or dip them without their explicit permission, especially children.

G. Roles

Our dance roles are just that—a role, not an identity. Gender identity does not have to matter in choosing a partner. Anyone can dance with anyone. In many communities, it is common to dance either role. Some folks dance one role or the other for a whole dance; some dancers switch back and forth during the dance (but this is more challenging). Many people find it easier to pick one role and stick with it for a while.

By default, you should trust that the dancer coming towards you is dancing the role they chose and respond with the called moves for your role. However, they may be a new dancer who needs help. It can be helpful to point beginners to their intended position if they are inadvertently switched (see Section [III.I](#), “Offering to Help Others”).

H. Learning Advice for New Dancers

Most importantly, pay attention to the caller/instructor! It is courteous to everyone to refrain from conversation when the caller/instructor is talking.

Watch and follow others for visual cues, paying attention to where and how they move. See if you can adjust your movement accordingly.

If you are confused, look to your fellow dancers for helpful gestures or directions.

It is not necessary to bring a partner with you to the dance. It is the general practice to switch partners after each dance, though some people might dance together several times throughout the evening. New dancers often learn faster when they dance with more experienced partners.

It is important to keep yourself and others safe. Be aware that some dancers have different needs for physical safety and comfort, and be responsive to changes in holds or movements that they are making.

Be aware of your own need for safety and comfort, and know that it is okay to make adjustments to your dancing to protect yourself.

If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe at any point, we encourage you to speak with an organizer as soon as possible (see Section VI. “Dealing with Problems”). If you don’t know who the organizers are, ask the person at the admissions table - they can direct you.

Please wear clean, non-marking shoes to protect the floor. We recommend smooth-soled shoes for good gliding. Basic sneakers are okay, but rubber soles stick rather than slide. A good solution is to wear old socks *over* the toe of the shoe. We also recommend breathable clothes that allow easy movement. Nothing fancy is required!

I. Offering to Help Others

Help all dancers listen to the caller/instructor by being attentive to them yourself, especially during the walk-through. Refrain from conversation.

The best dancers help others by gesturing: offering a hand in an obvious way, gently guiding in the correct direction to go, indicating the correct path or spot on the floor, etc.

Be mindful that new-to-you faces may not be new dancers. Don’t assume they need help. This applies to children as well as adults! Treat children with the same respect as adults; don’t be condescending.

It is a fine line to balance whether to attempt to be helpful or not. If you offer assistance, try to be graceful and brief.

J. Mistakes in the Dance

It’s only a dance. Just have fun. Mistakes happen to everyone, and the dance goes on.

Don’t fret if you get mixed up. As you gain experience, you will learn strategies for recovering from mistakes. If things really unravel, just take a breath and get in place for your next neighbors and you’ll be back on track. Don’t worry, be happy!

IV. Health and Hygiene

A. Health

Hand contact during dancing can pass germs. Please be sure to wash your hands often, and/or use hand sanitizer. If you need to sneeze, please use the crook of your elbow.

Be careful not to touch your face or eat until after you've washed your hands.

Please stay home from dance events if you have any symptoms of illness or think you may have been exposed to anyone who is ill. Better safe than sorry. Dances can be powerful vectors for spreading contagion.

Masks can be useful tools for protecting yourself and others. If you wish to wear a mask, feel free. If you see someone else wearing a mask, please respect that there are many reasons they may be doing so.

B. Hygiene

Because dancing involves close contact, please be sure your own body and clothing are clean. Dancing is a physically vigorous activity, and keeping clean and dry can be a challenge. As a courtesy, consider bringing a hand towel or fresh shirts.

Some of our dancers are hypersensitive or allergic to scented products such as perfume, after-shave, cologne, or tobacco. Even scented deodorants, laundry, and hair products may cause an adverse reaction. Please be mindful of this when preparing to come to an event, and try to refrain from using strongly scented products. If you have a spray applicator, please don't use it in the main hall or around other people's belongings.

V. Inclusivity

A. Awareness of Physical Abilities

We aim to be welcoming to everyone. This includes participants with any ability or disability.

It's our culture to communicate with each other openly. We encourage dancers to inform and ask each other about any physical limitations and to accommodate each other as needed, graciously. Consider that some physical challenges are not obvious.

Be aware that other dancers may be modifying their movements to accommodate their individual situations; trust that dancers know their own bodies and needs.

If someone is skipping moves or taking other shortcuts without disrupting the dance, presume they have a reason for doing so and don't try to "fix" them (see Section III.I. "Offering Help to Others").

B. Insensitivity and Harassment

Harassment and predatory behavior are not tolerated in our dance community. Please seek out the dance organizer if anything makes you uncomfortable at the dance (see Section VI: Dealing with Problems).

Please refrain from sexual innuendo. Be aware that flirtation can be in the eye of the beholder and stop if the other person isn't receptive (see Section III.C., "Flirtation").

Think carefully before commenting on a dancer's appearance, ethnic heritage, or any other potentially sensitive topic.

C. Welcoming Marginalized Populations; Being Aware of and Avoiding Microaggressions

Definition: Microaggression is a term used for brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly marginalized groups.

Stereotypes and assumptions about, or evaluations of, people based on their appearance can be unconscious, and when they come out in conversation they can be very hurtful and make people feel uncomfortable. These can be about race and ethnicity, religion, age, class, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, and many other qualities.

We value diversity and strive for respect for everyone. We encourage our community to be aware of individuals' differences and try to avoid any microaggression on or off the dance floor.

1. Body Comments

Unsolicited comments, even well-intended ones, about any aspect of appearance, can make people uncomfortable. For example, directing someone to smile can be offensive. It's a boundary thing. When in doubt, leave it out.

"That's a pretty dress" or "great shirt!" is better than "that dress looks great on you." Comments about clothing are less personal. Focus on the person's clothing or style, rather than their physique.

2. Gender Language

In our community, dancers identify with a variety of genders and pronouns. All our community members have different levels of experience with trans- and nonbinary-friendly gender language. We strive to be welcoming and considerate in our interactions.

How to Ask for Pronouns

- If you aren't sure of someone's pronouns, you can ask them! A script for this is: "Hi! My name is – and I use – pronouns. What pronouns do you use?"
- One way to make our dance community more welcoming is to put your pronouns on your name tag. When you share your pronouns, it makes it easier for other folks to do the same!

How to Correct Mistakes with Pronouns

- If you realize you've made a mistake about someone's pronouns, a quick apology and correction is all that's needed.
- If someone corrects you with their pronouns, offer a brief "Thank you", correct your mistake, and move on.
- If someone makes a mistake about your pronouns, feel free to offer them a correction.
- If someone uses the wrong pronouns for a friend of yours, you can quickly and politely correct them. A script for this interaction might be: "She was dancing—" "They were dancing," "Thanks, they were dancing..."
- It might seem tricky to use the right pronouns at first, but even if you mess up, keep trying. It gets easier with practice and it's a great way to make our dance community more welcoming to everyone!

More Resources on Gender-Inclusive Language

- [The basics of personal pronouns](#)
- [Gender inclusive language, beyond pronouns](#)
- [Why using correct pronouns is important](#)
- [Understanding non-binary people](#)
- [Understanding transgender people](#)
- [How to support transgender people \(how to be a good ally\)](#)
- [Gender vocabulary definitions](#)

D. Booking Dances Ahead

A culture of consistently "booking ahead" – asking partners to reserve future dances – works against community building. Dancers who mostly book ahead are minimizing their connection to the larger group—a new friend is waiting to meet them tonight!

Balance your selection of partners between favorites, new friends, and people who have been sitting out.

VI. Dealing With Problems

The Friends of Greenfield Dance encourages and promotes inclusivity, safety, respect, and welcoming new dancers (see Friends of Greenfield Dance Statement of Values).

If anyone makes you feel unsafe, uncomfortable, or embarrassed, you can address it with them directly during or after the dance.

If you're not comfortable addressing it with them, we encourage you to approach one of the organizers. If you are unsure who the organizers are, the person at the admissions table can direct you. The organizers will work with you to resolve the situation in a way that helps you feel safe and comfortable. This will typically involve the organizers reminding all parties of our community standards, and asking them to change their behavior if necessary.

If someone treats you in a way that is intrusive, unwelcoming, or makes you feel unsafe, we want to know. We won't know that there is a pattern of inappropriate behavior unless people report incidents.

VII. References

- <https://www.cdss.org/resources/resource-portal/toolkit>
- <http://www.friendsofgreenfielddance.org/resources/safe-dancing-etiquette/>
- http://amherstcontra.org/Amherst_Contradance/Safety_Policy.html
- <http://www.hands4dancers.org/statement-of-principles/>
- <http://cdny.org/what-is-contra/contra-etiquette/>