

# San Diego Contra Dance Etiquette

San Diego Contra Dance is an all inclusive dance community committed to providing a fun and safe environment for everyone. Please take a minute to look over the following guidelines to help everyone have a great time. If your experience falls short of that in some way, [please contact us here](#) and let us know.

## General

**Anyone may ask anyone to dance.** Generally we change partners for each dance. So go ahead, ask someone new! We especially encourage folks to ask dancers who have been sitting out, and experienced dancers to ask new dancers, so that everyone gets a chance to dance and to learn the ropes.

**When the caller asks for hands-four and starts teaching the dance, give them your full attention.** Listen attentively to the caller and refrain from conversation. Talking over the walkthrough is impolite to the caller, and is distracting to others in the hall who are trying to listen.

**Folks of any gender may dance either role, or both.** If you know how to dance one role and want to learn the other, plenty of folks in the hall will be happy to partner with you and help you out. It is okay to **ask which role your partner would like to dance.** If you would like to dance a specific role, you might say, for instance, "I'd like to follow (dance the lady's/raven role), is that OK with you?" or "I'd like to end the swing on the right, how's that sound?"

**Dance with whoever comes at you.** Don't assume which role someone is dancing based on their gender presentation. (If you meet a pair of unfamiliar dancers in line and they seem confused, you can nicely ask which role they are dancing and help them get back on track.)

## Consent

**You are always 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 you ask someone to dance and they say "no," take it gracefully and move on. If someone has declined to dance with you (without an offer to dance later), consider not asking that person again that same night. If they would like to dance with you, they can come ask you—it's their turn to do the asking.

**Communicate your needs to your partner so they know how to give you the most comfortable dance.** You can always speak up if a dancer is doing anything that makes you uncomfortable: for example, "Please swing slower," or "I'd like your hand a little higher." If you feel especially uneasy or unable to communicate such an issue with your partner, please seek out a board member or the dance manager—we're here to help!

**Check in with your partner every now and then.** Everyone is different. We have different joints, 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.

**Keep your partner safe.** Don't engage in rough dancing, use too much strength, force turns or swing too fast. Even if you have danced with someone on previous occasions, it is good to check in because they might have a new injury, for instance, of which you are unaware.

**If you like to use flourishes, ask your partner if they like being twirled before each dance.** Remember that every flourish is an invitation plus an acceptance; if you are attempting a flourish with someone, it is your responsibility to pay attention to your follower's responses, and only carry out flourishes if your partner accepts them. For instance, if you go to twirl someone and they tug their arm down, it means that they do not want to be twirled. If unsure, ask!

**Respect people's space.** If you like swinging in a close embrace (a close blues pivot), ask your partner if they too enjoy this before initiating such a swing. Pay attention to your partner's nonverbal cues regarding amount of personal space they'd prefer (e.g. they press away in the swing for more space). This is particularly important for new dancers, who may not be familiar with the norms of the dance or know how to decline a particular dance move.

**Contra is a social dance.** Contra dancing often includes lots of smiling and eye contact, which can be really fun! However, eye contact is best in moderation. If your partner is not smiling throughout the dance, don't take this personally; we all enjoy the dancing in our own way. It's completely okay not to smile or make eye contact! Sometimes it can be helpful to pick a more comfortable spot on your partner's face (e.g. nose, ear, forehead) to look at especially during swings.

**Apologize for accidental touching.** Inappropriate touching or harassment of any sort is not tolerated. If accidental inappropriate touching does occur, please apologize.

## Helping New Dancers

**Experienced dancers are always welcome at beginners' lessons to help show newcomers the ropes.** If you feel like showing up early, please do join us! It's a great way to introduce new dancers to our community and help them pick up contra as quickly as possible. Model good contra etiquette for new dancers by listening attentively to the lesson instructor.

**Use gestures and physical demonstrations** to show new dancers how something works, and keep verbal instructions to a minimum—it's hard for newer dancers to listen to you, the caller, and the music all at the same time! (This goes for beginners' lessons as well—the caller can't teach if there are other people teaching from the floor at the same time.) If you notice that your partner or neighbors are struggling, try to get in position for the next move early so they know where they need to go next.

**Don't fret if your hands-four gets mixed up.** Smile and use clear gestures to help our new dancers (and everyone) through the dance. If you're really mixed up, just take a beat to think about where you need to be to dance with the next couple, move there, and wait for them to come to you.

## Preparing for the Dance

**Dress comfortably and safely.** Wear clean soft-soled shoes secure enough for dancing. Avoid spiked heels and cowboy boots. Walking shoes will work great. Wear a dress or skirt if you like; regardless of your preferred dance role, a skirt can be a lot of fun!

**Please give care to your personal hygiene in a fragrance-free way!** Shower, wear deodorant, and make sure your breath is fresh. If you are prone to sweating, bring additional clean shirts to change into over the course of the evening. Please refrain from wearing perfume and cologne; many dancers are sensitive and/or allergic to artificial and natural scents, so please avoid these.

**Refrain from twirls, spins, and other flourishes with newer partners.** Fancy add-ons can be disorienting, and may slow the learning process for those newer to contra. Please make sure new dancers have a solid base for understanding contra dance before adding any extras. Please also refrain from flourishes during walkthroughs, as this is confusing for new dancers just learning the basics.

**Avoid alcohol.** Contra dancing is an active community dance, and everyone dancing must be able to move about safely with regard to those around them. Do not attend a contra dance heavily intoxicated, as you are likely putting your comfort (all the spinning!) and that of those around you at risk.

**And finally: we are all constantly learning and evolving as dancers and members of the contra community. We can do this best if we have an open dialogue with each other about dancing!**

Do you have questions about our contra dance? Have suggestions for improvement? Please [contact us here](#). If you've experienced an uncomfortable or inappropriate interaction, please [let us know here](#)—or speak to a committee member, caller, or manager at a dance. It is our sincere hope that all dancers will feel welcome and safe. We wish for everyone to have a good time and practice good behavior.

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Etiquette guidelines adapted by the San Diego Contra Dance Ad Hoc Conduct Policy Committee from several other contra communities' policies, including [Country Dance New York](#), [Portland Country Dance](#), and [California Dance Co-Operative](#)

Approved by San Diego Contra Dance Committee, 12/1/2018