

Especially for New Dancers

Top five styling tips:

- 1) Timing:** Dance each figure within its musical phrase.
- 2) Giving Weight:** Keep arms firm to support each other through the figures.
- 3) Eye contact :** Eye contact is an important part of contra dancing. It is more fun and it reduces dizziness during swinging.
- 4) Smooth and Gentle:** Move with an easy walking step.
- 5) Alert:** Be sensitive to others ' needs and preferences.

Less experienced dancers are encouraged to ask those whom you perceive to be more experienced to dance with you. Look especially for people wearing "Dance Angel" wings. It is the custom to change partners for each dance, and women ask men to dance as often as men ask women. You will learn faster, and have more fun if you dance with more experienced dancers.

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 make a mistake or miss a figure, no worries, 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 many more chances, because all the moves in the dance repeat. It is more important to the people you are dancing with that you be ready for the next figure than for you to complete each figure.

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. Refrain from twirls, spins, and other flourishes with newer partners. This can be disorienting, slowing the learning process for your partner, as well as for other less experienced 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.

Twirling the lady is a common and popular embellishment in contra dancing. The man typically leads the woman into a twirl, but it is the **woman 's prerogative** to follow the lead or override it, or, if followed, to limit the number of twirls.

Princeton Country Dancers, March 2006

For All Dancers

When the caller is teaching, be courteous and give your full attention. When the caller asks for hands four, this should be accomplished as quickly as possible to avoid confusion and later regrouping.

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.

Continuously adjust to the needs abilities of each dancer. If you dance with 30 people in line, big or little, older or younger, you'll need to dance 30 different ways. Aim to please every person (both genders) that you dance with.

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.

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.

Long line, short line. Nobody 's happy when a 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, 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 a dance is over before asking someone for the next dance. Everyone has the right to decline to dance.

Contra dancing can be quite aerobic and, especially during the hot weather, some dancers work up a good sweat. Men (especially): if you perspire heavily, please bring extra shirts. All: carrying a kerchief or small towel is a good idea too.

Some dancers become ill when exposed to perfumes. Please do not use perfumes prior to a dance.

Dancing should be fun and enjoyable. If your partner is doing something that hurts or makes you uncomfortable or embarrassed, don't hesitate to let them know. If needed, ask the caller or dance manager for further assistance.

Help protect wood floors. Please wear soft soled shoes.

**with thanks to Glenside for the original document!!