

## Safety & Boundaries

This document is an expression of the principles and practices of the Philadelphia Contact Improvisation community. It attempts to convey the behaviors that are expected and those that are unwelcome at Jams and Classes. Additionally, it provides a basis for common understanding and guidance when addressing disputes within in the community.

### **Some of our Principles**

1. We practice consent.
2. We acknowledge and respect everyone's unique physical, sexual, and emotional boundaries.
3. We support a focused jam environment.
4. We take responsibility for our actions and individual safety.
5. We communicate our need for support or help in resolving issues of safety or boundaries.

### **Practices in support of Principles**

#### **1. Practice consent.**

Understand that Contact improvisation is a consent-based practice.

- No person consents *automatically* to touch by being in the jam space.
- Consent can be granted or revoked verbally or nonverbally.
- Consent can be fluid.
  - Stay attuned to how your partners' wishes may change through the course of a dance, or from one dance to the next.
- Consent between two dancers does not necessarily extend to others.
  - Do not expect a person to dance in a particular way with you, just because they were doing so with another dancer.
- Consent-building is mutual.
  - Express your own boundaries clearly and respect those of others - both are equally important.
- Unequal power can interfere with consent.
  - Be aware that advantage can create power dynamics that - intentionally or not - diminish the ability of the less advantaged person to consent. These dynamics can play across such factors as expertise, experience, education, class, physical strength, size, ability/disability and age; as well as racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender identities.
  - Everyone - but particularly those who come from marginalized populations - has a need for bodily autonomy and freedom of movement. People from dominant populations need to dial up their listening, rather than putting the onus on members of disenfranchised groups to use their ability to say "no."

Check in verbally with your partner(s) if you are unsure whether your dancing is consensual.

Sexuality and romance are not inherently part of contact improvisation practice and should not be the focus of dancing in this space, *even if consensual*.

## **2. Acknowledge and respect everyone's unique physical, sexual, and emotional boundaries.**

### Check your intentions. What are you here for?

- The jam is a space for Contact Improvisation.
  - Rehearsals, extended teaching, and sexual exploration are not appropriate in this space.
- Do not intentionally caress another dancer on their breasts or genitals.
  - Contact Improvisation is not an invitation to romantic or erotic touch. Nor is it an invitation to a relationship off the dance floor.
  - If you become aroused sexually, notice it and let it pass and/or excuse yourself from the dance. Although excitement is possible and can be experienced with no shame, a Contact Improvisation jam or class is not an opportunity to explore sexual touch or arousal.

### Make space for dances to change or end.

- Respect someone's wish to disengage or end a dance.
- Do not pressure or pursue a person into dancing with you.
- Recognize that a partner may attempt to end a dance nonverbally, or may have difficulty articulating that they wish to end a dance.
- Make special accommodations for newer dancers, who may be unaware that they are tired, dehydrated, or overstimulated and could use a break.

If you are unsure, check in verbally.

For example, ask, "would you like to continue?" or "do you feel like a break?"

### Do not grab or lock limbs and joints.

- Restricting another dancers' mobility places them in danger
- Be particularly careful when transferring weight or rolling over/on delicate places like ankles, knees, elbows, fingers, neck, and skull.

### Listen to your partner.

- Take a gradual approach when dancing with unfamiliar partners, and especially people new to Contact Improvisation.
  - Someone who is new to Contact Improvisation may not have acquired the language or skills to communicate their own physical and/or emotional boundaries.

- If you have had a dance that may have tested your partner's boundaries, it is a good to check in verbally. For example, ask, "did that feel OK for you?"
- Do not assume that what feels OK or safe for you will feel OK for another.
  - For example, you may feel comfortable being lifted in a particular way, but your partner may not want you to lift them in that way.
  - Realize that particular qualities of touch, varying speeds, and different amounts of pressure/tone or speed resonate differently with different dancers.
- Avoid excessively manipulative or coercive maneuvers, such as the over-use of hands, that prevent your partner from moving and expressing themselves freely.
  - Cultivate a practice based on mutual freedom and clear communication.
  - Contact Improvisation is not about making things happen.

### **3. Support a focused jam environment.**

Be aware that your behavior and actions affect the entire room.

- If you feel excited and high energy and are dancing with a lot of speed, weight, liveliness, and/or space used, take responsibility for increasing sensitivity, awareness, and adaptability to keep yourself and others safe.
- If you are stationary, moving slowly, or lying down you may be an obstacle to the dancing in the room. Stay at the periphery of the room when witnessing, warming up, stretching, or engaging in body work.
- Remember that you affect the room, even when you are not dancing.
  - Active witnessing can support the entire jam by increasing awareness and focus.
  - Avoid creating distraction, keep social chatter to a minimum, and avoid the use of phones.
- Although you and your partner(s) may have reached consensus about your dancing, if it appears overly sexual or aggressive to others, it may negatively impact the jam space. Under such circumstances, you may be asked by a facilitator to change your dancing or leave the space.

### **4. Take responsibility for your actions and individual safety.**

Develop and practice skills for taking charge of your dance.

For example, be familiar with skills that allow you to:

- Avoid being lifted when you do not want to be
- Redirect weight when it becomes too heavy
- Redirect body parts in contact if the area or quality of touch begins to feel uncomfortable.

- Change the quality, tone, or speed of a dance

*If you are uncertain how to develop and apply these skills, attend Contact Improvisation classes (see resources list in our Welcome Dancer document or visit [contactimprovphilly.com](http://contactimprovphilly.com)).*

Check in with yourself before, during and between dances:

- Take time to warm-up before dancing, as needed on that particular day.
- If you are feeling “off”, spaced out, aroused, angry, or not quite yourself, take a pause on the side of the room to stretch, watch, write, talk to someone, or have some quiet time.

Offer to start or join a dance.

- Dance without a partner (soloing)
- Invite others (verbally or nonverbally) to join you in dancing.
- Enter ongoing dances with a spirit of listening and tuning into what is already there.

*If an ongoing dance is not open or ready for you to join, respect the situation and don't take it personally; it is most likely not about you.*

Choose to accept or refuse any dance.

Transform or leave a dance at any time for any reason or no reason.

If you are not comfortable ending or refusing dances without reason or apology, practice by saying “no” to dances both verbally and through physicality frequently until you gain comfort.

Be aware of the dances happening around you.

- Notice the quality (speed, size, and space...) of your dance in relationship to the others nearby.
- Keep yourself safe, and avoid hurting others.
  - Collisions happen, but with awareness of what is around us, injuries are less likely.

Follow your intuition when something feels unsafe. Unsafety can look like:

- Physical danger:
  - For example, being forcefully lifted, being forced to bear too much weight, or having your torso or limbs pinned in a way that **restricts your mobility**.
- Sexual danger:
  - For example, receiving **overly sensual touch**, or touch that seems to be asking for something outside of Contact Improvisation practice; getting a weird vibe from someone in a dance.
- Emotional danger:

- For example, receiving touch that feels **manipulative or aggressive**; receiving verbal threats or humiliation.
- Social danger:
  - For example, being subject to behavior or language that is **racist, ageist, able-list,** or otherwise **denigrating**.

Some of the ways to respond to an unsafe or uncomfortable situation include:

- Pausing or ending the dance.
- Communicating verbally with your partner(s).
- Clarifying your boundaries, rather than accusing someone of doing something *wrong*.
  - For example, avoid statements like, “you are being too sexual,” or “you make me feel bad.” Instead, say “I didn’t feel comfortable with that movement,” “I felt scared by that,” or “Less weight, please.”
- Finding allies and/or a facilitator for support.

## **5. Enforcement of these guidelines.**

We recognize that there is no such thing as a perfectly safe space, but we will all strive toward building the most respectful and inclusive space possible.

- When someone behaves counter to these guidelines, we will use compassionate calling-in as a strategy to build awareness around the behavior.
- If someone repeatedly behaves in ways that undermine the spirit and ideas of these guidelines, they will be asked to leave the jam.
- If there is a conflict between participants that cannot be resolved with support from the facilitators, an outside mediator might be called to assist in working through the conflict.

*If you have questions about safety, touch, nonverbal communication or anything else, please to speak to a facilitator.*

***We are all here to create a safe, awesome jam environment for everyone!***

## Resources:

### Documents for Reference

#### Welcome Document.

Introduces dancers to the Philadelphia CI jam space. Explains what Contact Improvisation is, and includes practical guidelines on things like appropriate clothing, and jam etiquette.

#### Articles on boundaries and consent in CI

Google "Compendium of Contact Improvisation Jam Guidelines"

This document owes a debt of gratitude to CI communities across the country from whose guidelines and protocols it borrows heavily. In particular, we wish to acknowledge Kathleen Rea/Toronto Jam and the West Coast Jam whose documents were particularly influential in our conceiving and writing this one.

This document was created by members of the NYC contact improvisation community in 2018 and adapted (with permission) for the Philadelphia community in 2019. It is a living document and is updated regularly. Please speak with a jam facilitator if you'd like to offer comments or suggestions for its improvement.