

THE UNWANTED ELEMENT: Preventing issues from arising on the floor and dealing with them when they do

T-Claw Crawford & David Wiley

What do you do when someone is assaulted at your dance? How do you respond when people complain about that “creepy” dancer? When someone is dancing in a manner that is putting their partners in danger? How do you address these issues and still maintain the goal of being a welcoming, tolerant community? It’s best to be prepared before situations like this arise. We’ll discuss these issues through sharing experiences and thoughtful discussion.

Notes: The Unwanted Element

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Comments from people at the workshop

Concerns:

Are there differences in the ways that non-profit and private dances can deal with problems?

Harrasment

Safety issues

Rough and/or overly enthusiastic dancers who have no recognition of other people’s challenges, problems, and physical strength -- including crankers, whom T-Claw calls Helicopter Henrys

Who handles problems with rough dancers? Committee members? Callers?

The mildly creepy

Subtle incidents, that only one or two people notice

What a board’s reaction should be

How can dance committees be ready for problem situations

“What do we have the power to do?”

Martha Quigley mentioned that her group drew up a specific plan about what to do if a certain problem person showed up again.

Discussion outline

- A. Codes of conduct
- B. Procedures, including legal issues
- C. Mental illness

T-Claw has noticed three levels of problem dancers:

Socially awkward

“Creepin’ with your eyes”

Physical assault and/or verbal abuse

- A. Codes of conduct: Ideas and suggestions

Check online for sample codes of conduct that can help your group write their own.

One group posts a code of conduct to make sure that all their dancers are treated with respect and consideration. At the bottom of the page, in small letters, dancers are asked to report all violations.

Call your code of conduct “Dance Etiquette”

Include: personal space, crowded dance space, children.

Beware of problems both on and off the dance floor.

Include procedures for problems in your code: “If such and such happens, then we will have the Board talk to this person.”

B. Implementation/procedures: ideas and suggestions

Make sure people know who to go to with problems: dance coordinator, organizer, look-out person, etc.

Note: everyone agreed that callers have too much to do to be aware of or deal with these kinds of problems.

Have a designated person make verbal announcements, perhaps after the first dance.

Ideas to include:

“We have an obligation to our dancers for safety and for having fun.

“If you have any questions or concerns, come to me” --

Have a designated lookout person, who could give these announcements so people would know whom to go to in case of problems.

Have basic dance etiquette taught during beginner lessons before the dance.

If there’s a problem, first use clear, basic one-on-one communication, nicely.

Next, have the Board or other organizational body talk with the person.

Finally, if necessary, ban the person from the dance -- a community action.

Let other groups know about any serious problem.

Court action is a last resort, but is a difficult process.

Document all behavior, using your Code of Conduct, for proof against accusations of slander.

Have an organizational insurance policy.

Discussion about dancers’ habits that interfere with other dancers:

These could come from misunderstanding, following other dancers, not being taught.

“Chip away” at habits of rough dancing, bit by bit. Quietly suggest ways that might add to a person’s enjoyment and fun and also help calm the dancer.