



## Puttin' on the Dance Session Notes

### “Positive Solutions for Problems in Your Dance Community”

With Chris Weiler

Transcribed by: David Harris

*Comments/questions from workshop participants are italicized*

*Organizers watch dancers, if a problem is observed, then pull person aside and talk. Approach situation thoughtfully, not reactively. Approaching with anger will only inflame situation. Be calm, take a deep breath. “What's your name? What happened? Who was involved? Did anybody else see it? Okay, wait here.” Then get story from other party. Was situation miscommunication? Accident? Criminal?*

*Example of criminal situation: fight at a swing dance.*

If you're an organizer for any amount of time, a problem with a dancer or dancers will happen.

*A person with issues attended dance, organizers waited 'til end of dance, assigned people who knew the person to talk to him afterwards.*

*Swing dance series has written procedures, writes incident report to keep on file. Contradance Umbrella (Montpelier) policy distributed: Policy for Dealing with Complaints of Inappropriate Behavior/Helpful Hints and Etiquette for Contra Dancers/Report Form (6-page handout).*

*Policy in handout was not looked over by an attorney.*

*Keeping records allows one to see patterns. Sometimes it turns out complaints aren't valid. Be aware that we're all vulnerable to being sued for defamation of character. Get away from an emotional response.*

*If there was a heart attack on the floor that would be documented so don't be afraid to document behavior although it may not seem to fit in the spirit of the community.*

*Contra dancing attracts some people with issues. Sometimes understanding people with communications issues can make a difference. Sometimes the person isn't aware of bad behavior. Actions by organizers can have long-term consequences.*

Organizers must decide who is welcome and who is not. Sometimes people with limited abilities can change and grow into valued members of the community.

*Does anybody post behavior rules? Hartford Community Dance ([hcdance.org](http://hcdance.org)) has safety suggestions on website. It wouldn't reach the right audience.*

*You can get on scary ground if you try to enforce certain rules.*

*If posting a behavior message, what does that say to folks walking through the door? Boston Intergenerational Dance Advocates has positive behavior suggestions on small signs posted around the hall.*

*It's easier to have positives than to define what shouldn't happen.*

*My primary responsibility is to protect the dancers.*

*It doesn't make sense to have a thou-shalt-not-twirl policy but you can talk to people. It's important to have willing dancers in the hall who can partner with problem people. Dancers need to inform neighbors of issues like "don't twirl me"--but what about beginning dancers?*

*A new dancer in the area, now a regular, was socially disruptive. One dancer started talking to this person about other issues, then moved on to the problems. Some improvement has been seen. In this case there was one dancer who could talk to the person as a sort of friend after the dance.*

*Don't go to [board?]. Talk to person. Extend a hand.*

*Defenses may come up quickly if you "jump" on a person.*

*This happens in every community. Somebody comes in, the problem is corrected or somebody stops coming. If you want to keep the dance going, you need to do the work.*

*Some of these problem people are somewhere "on the spectrum." How do we communicate with them?*

*Attacking is never going to work. One-on-one conversations where an alliance has already been built are most likely to be successful.*

*We're not lawyers or psychiatrists. How can we amass resources on how to deal with these people?*

*Organizers must decide on a plan--3 months to show improvement? Commit to working with problem. Give up, problem person should go elsewhere?*

*Somebody may have a police record but if debt to society has been paid you can't really do anything about that.*

*A registered sex offender can't be near kids--check state websites.*

*There's a difference between asking and telling someone not to come back.  
Call police and have a chat about options. An order of no trespass could be issued if  
circumstances warrant.*

CDSS is working to build a network of organizers who can talk about this.

*It's not my job to fix all the problems in the world.*

*If you get an order of no trespass, the problem person can counter that. If one person is  
making the complaint, it may be best to have that person (rather than organizers) talk to  
police.*

Medical emergencies--does everyone know emergency phone numbers, is there an AED,  
do you know how to use it?

Are committee members easily identifiable at the dance so people with problems can  
approach them rather than bother the caller?

*Organizer of swing dance introduces self and committee members at beginning of dance.  
All have nametags.*

*Had a medical emergency at dance, cleared the area, somebody administered CPR while  
another met the ambulance -- all according to plan.*

CDSS newsletter had item on this problem in last 5 years.

Crowd control course available free online--Missouri?

*It's from Maryland, courtesy of Sandy LaFleur:*

<http://www.firemarshal.state.md.us/crowdmanager/>

Caller offers "tip of the month" dealing with courtesy issues.

Organizers can ask callers to give style tips or talk about safety issues.

If you have an incident and document it, it's important to let your insurance carrier know  
right away. Otherwise they may not cover the situation if you get sued.

*What about kilt wearers who eschew underwear?*

*One could suggest it is culturally acceptable for pipers, dancers, and athletes to wear  
shorts with kilts.*

*CPR: skip the breath part. Use STR for stroke recognition: ask the person to Smile, Talk,  
Raise both hands--a problem with any of those may prompt a 911 call.*

Should CDSS offer CPR training?