

Note from Kathleen Rea, founder and facilitator of the Wednesday Dance Jam

I value the diverse types of contact jams and events in Toronto and around the world. Diversity benefits our community. For example, I am personally glad that contact dance improvisation is being used to explore such topics as relationships, communication, massage, intimacy, sexuality, tantra, Kink, BDSM and polyamory. I believe that exploring the edges of what contact dance improvisation can be extends the range of the form. I also believe that these exciting directions do not override the importance of still having classic contact dance improvisation events. I believe classical contact dance improvisation is the base from which all else flows, and as such there needs to be space maintained for its practice. For me it is also all about consent; that each contact dance event is clear about what it is. Then each of us attending knows what we are consenting to when we enter the space and can make informed choices.

This can include contact jams with no boundary guidelines. For example, if I go to a contact Jam that has no boundary guidelines then I can enter with clear understanding that the boundaries of that jam will emerge organically through the group that shows up, the nature of contact improvisation itself, and the manner the jam is facilitated.

I value jams with guidelines that are different than the ones in this document. I believe each dancer requires varying degrees and types of structure to best reach their creative potential. And the exact recipes for this can change from day to day depending on their mood or what is going on in their lives. For some, a jam with no set guidelines best supports their creativity. These types of jams also allow the art of contact dance improvisation itself to lead the way by providing structure that is inherent in the form itself. For others, guidelines like the ones in this document may be the best holding container within which to bust-out creatively.

I would be upset if the Toronto Wednesday Dance jam guidelines became a prescription for what all of contact dance improvisation should be because then the contact dance world would lack the choice and diversity that I feel benefits creativity. I also believe that each jam has a unique culture and will require a system of boundary management that uniquely fits its specific values and goals.

I offer that people think of these guidelines as a score. That for an hour-and-a-half, once a week, a group of people gather in Toronto and use these guidelines as a score, or holding container, within which to dance. A score for a specific time and place and group of people. A score that supports the intention to practice of classical contact dance improvisation in a consent-base culture.

So, come on in and see if this score suits you. Go to other jams and events and try out their scores. Find the circumstances that best support your dancing and your creativity.

Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam Boundary Guidelines

Intention: to support the practice of classic contact improvisation in a consent-based culture.

Dress

- **No strong perfumes or essential oils and** take regular showers and wear clean clothes.
- **Please limit pet dander on your clothes** in consideration of people with pet allergies.
- **Do not wear long flowing clothes, jewelry, watches or clothing with buttons**
- **Wear dance clothes that offer a lot of skin coverage and are not slippery** (cotton works great as non-slippery fabric)

Types of Touch

- **The predominant forms of touch in Classical Contact Dance Improvisation are:**
 - 1) **rolling point of contact**
 - 2) **sliding**
 - 3) **giving, taking and sharing weight**
 - 4) **using touch to follow momentum**

The Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam asks that these forms of touch be inspiration from which all else arrives. Other forms of touch can come into play when a theme or story organically develops. These explorations are welcome, provided they are consensual (all people involved in the dance are willing) and the touch is not explicitly sexual.

- **Do not intentionally caress another dancer on their breasts or genitals during a dance.**
- **The Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam welcomes the occurrence of consensual body-work,** and defines consensual body-work as body-work that occurs by offer or request and acceptance or this offer or request. This process can be verbal or non-verbal and usually requires that the person you are offering a massage to sees who you are and through words or body language lets you know a massage would be welcome.
- Accidentally grazing someone, giving a proximity warning touch or merging someone into a dance if they seem willing are within the context what occurs at the Jam. **Non-consensual pass-by pokes, kisses, tickles, caresses, massages or pats while dancing or passing by someone in the studio or hallway will not be tolerated.** An example of a non-consensual pass-by touch would be coming up to a person from behind (i.e. they can't see who you are) and tickling their lower back.

Safety Guidelines (physical and psychological)

- **It is generally not safe to grab or lock another dancer into a position that compromises their mobility** because your partner no longer has a choice as to how they will move and their landing gear (feet and arms) can become inaccessible. Having said this, there are many partnerships in which dancers, through consensus, decide to employ locking or holding to explore a theme. Please know that to do this safely requires different combinations of the following: dancers lower themselves to floor level, reduce their speed, reduce amplitude, and/or have a high

degree of skill. Also, know that these types of dances often evolve through a step-by-step verbal or non-verbal consent building process.

- **Explorations of different themes such as intimacy, sensuality, surrendering control, anger, fighting, being contained, grief etc. are welcome as long as they are acted-out through the form of classical contact dance improvisation, are not explicitly sexual, and are created through a step-by-step verbal or non-verbal consent building process. Please note that a newcomer to contact dance improvisation often has not yet acquired the language or skill through which to build consent for dances exploring intense themes. We, therefore, ask that you do not delve into dances exploring intense themes with newcomers.** If you have had an intense dance with someone and you are unsure of how the process of acquiring consent for that exploration went, it is a good idea to check-in with them verbally.
- During your time at the Jam we want you to **focus on lifting using principles of following momentum and become less focused on “muscling” partners into lifts.**
- **All dancers are asked to learn techniques that allow them to:**
 - a) **avoid being lifted when they do not want to be lifted**
 - b) **redirect weight when it becomes too heavy**
 - c) **redirect to back-to-back contact if front-to-front contact begins to feel uncomfortable.**

This allows each dancer to oversee having the type of dances that they want to have.

Starting and Ending a Dance

- **Let someone disengage or end a dance when they want to.**
- **Do not pressure a person into dancing with you.**
- **Practice letting go of each dance experience.** No matter how amazing a dance is, let go of any expectations for future dances, or what meaning it might have once the dance is over. We offer that any meaning that may develop (i.e. you become friends with the person outside of the jam) does so on its own time, free from expectations that a dance may elicit.

Relational and Social Considerations

- While we understand that connections and conversations occur in the studio, **please take louder, more concentrated socializing into the hallway and only have quiet conversations in the studio.**
- **The Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam is a screen free space.**
- **We are all humans and sometimes you may notice yourself becoming sexually aroused during a dance.** We ask that in these circumstances that you do not pursue this arousal. Just notice it and let it pass.

- **The Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam asks that you attend the jam with the intention to dance rather than to teach others how to dance.**
 - **If you attend the Jam with a romantic partner, all the above boundary guidelines still apply.** Think of the jam as a *score* in which we follow these suggested guidelines as the frame in which to practice classic CI.
 - **Activities such as spectating, doing yoga or writing in your journal are very welcome if these are not your exclusive activities and you spend a portion of your time at the Jam engaged in your own dance practice.** Exception: newcomers may watch a jam.
 - **When a more experienced dancer dances with a newcomer, we ask that they consider:**
 - 1) The newcomer might not know how to end a dance.** You can briefly show them how to end a dance and let them know they can do so at any point they choose.
 - 2) Keep dances with newcomers relatively short** (a suggestion is not longer than 10 minutes) so that the newcomer can dance with other people and acclimatize themselves to jam culture.
 - 3) Dances that explore different themes are welcome at the Wednesday Dance Jam if both parties consent to explore these themes and the dancing is not explicitly sexual. When a newcomer arrives, we believe they frequently do not yet understand how to give or not give consent for these explorations because they do not yet understand the nature and culture of CI.** It often takes a good three months of regular attendance to begin to understand that one can choose/ request/ accept/refuse exploration of different themes that can emerge in a dance. Therefore, when a newcomer is acclimatizing themselves to CI culture we require that you direct your dances with them towards classical contact improvisation and do not dive into an exploration of intense themes.
 - 4) During the time a newcomer is acclimatizing themselves to jam culture, we ask that you refrain from leading newcomers into aerial lifts because they do not yet have the skill to say yes or no to such lifts.**
- Do not look at a newcomer and think, “what can I get from them?” Please look at a newcomer and think to yourself, “what can I do to help this person have a safe (both emotional and physical) entry into our community?”
- **We offer that you not think of the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam as a place to find a date or sexual partner. “Cruising” for sexual partners that might be welcome and expected in other circumstances (such as a bar or club) is not tolerated at the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam.**
 - **Use of intoxicants prior to or during the Jam is not tolerated unless medically necessary.**

- **Unwelcome verbal and/or physical aggression or posturing is not tolerated.** It is noted that there may be partnerships on the dance floor in which the dancers, through consensus, decides to explore themes of aggression in a consensual dance. Please know that these types of dances often evolve through a process of building trust with one's dance partner(s) over time, and are based upon both parties being willing to explore such themes within a safe frame.
- **Abuse of power tactics such as gas-lighting or other predator victim grooming techniques are not tolerated.**
- **Harassment of other participants of the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam via private email, phone calls or social media is not tolerated.**

Promoting Your Boundaries During Dance Improvisation Jams

- **You have the right to accept or refuse any dance without needing to give a reason or apology.** If you are not practiced in saying "no" without reason or apology, we suggest you practice this by saying "no" to dances frequently until you gain comfort.
- **End a dance whenever you want, even if it has only lasted a minute** (hands together as in prayer. Look at your partner and nod your head and back away)
- **Learn non-verbal techniques to avoid being lifted that you can use when you do not want to be lifted** (the "wet noodle" approach often works best).
- **Learn non-verbal techniques that let you be in control of how much weight is borne on to you** (nudging someone back onto their own weight and refraining from offering ledges or only offering very steep ledges to bear weight often works best).
- **Learn non-verbal techniques that redirect a dance away from front-to-front contact in case you find yourself involved in a dance in which you are not feeling comfortable with front-to-front contact** (putting your arms out in front of you like a barrel or pushing someone way to create more space between you can work).
- **Be cautious of anyone promoting themselves as a teacher or mentor by using tactics that undermine your way of seeing the world or undermine your confidence in yourself and/or your dancing.**
- **Move to verbal feedback whenever you need.**
- **Speak with Jam Facilitator to learn how to assert your boundaries, or if you have concerns.**

RDDP's Professional Conduct Standards for CI Teachers & Community Leaders

REASON d'etre dance productions (RDDP) strives to work with contact dance educators and community leaders who have the intention to reach for these standards of practice:

- 1) **CI educators value and care for students and act in their best interest.**
- 2) **CI educators have a broad knowledge base and understand what they teach.**
- 3) **CI educators are community role models who act honestly.**
- 4) **CI educators engage in learning throughout their teaching career.**
- 5) **CI educators advertise for, and solicit students, in an honest manner.**
- 6) **CI educators are asked to be supportive of other CI teachers.**
- 7) **CI educators understand that the relationship between teacher and student has a power imbalance and act with according responsibility.** When romantic relationships or friendships occur within the teacher/student power imbalance there is a risk that the person with less power may feel a reduced ability to enforce boundaries. The lines that separate what is okay from what is not okay can become blurry. The student may sometimes find it hard to even figure out their own comfortable boundaries. Thus, relationships with power imbalances have a greater risk of leading to hurt and even abuse. CI educators are asked to be aware of these risks and refrain from proceeding with sexual relationships when they perceive a large power imbalance.
- 8) **When gathering feedback from students, CI educators include anonymous feedback methods.** This is recommended because the power imbalance inherent between teacher and student can make it challenging for the student to give honest feedback when asked directly by the teacher.
- 9) **CI educators educate are aware of abuses of power such as gas-lighting and other predator-victim-grooming techniques so that they can avoid these behaviours and spot those actively engaging in them in the community.**

Dealing with Boundary or Consent Accidents and Violations

The process begins when REASON d'etre dance productions (RDDP):

1) receives a complaint about a participant.

AND/OR

2) the Wednesday Contact Improvisation Jam Facilitator notices inappropriate behaviour.

The process continues with:

What happened?

Using the Toronto Wednesday Jam Boundary Guidelines as a guide, RDDP figures out which specific boundary have been crossed.

Calling-in

If a Toronto Wednesday Jam Boundary Guideline can be identified that has been crossed, a **calling-in** process begins. This involves:

- a) Pre-notification about the process involved in calling-in
- b) That the people overseeing the calling-in are not people that are close friends with either party and are not people directly triggered by the issue that is being brought up.
- c) Telling the person what boundaries have been crossed in an honest manner that also involves support, compassion and time for the person to speak and reflect.
- d) Identifying a support person that they can talk with about what they have been told.
- e) Creating a plan together that both protects the community and supports the person in learning to respect the boundaries they have crossed.

We will try to ensure that two people oversee the calling-in as this helps ensure checks and balances are in place. However, due to limited resources, the calling-in might be done by one person. A person involved in a calling-in may request that two people are present and they may bring their own support person.

Calling-out

In cases where RDDP determines, using reasonable judgement, that there is an immediate danger to the community, or if the calling-in doesn't work, RDDP may start with or move to a ban.

- a) A person who is banned may ask for an arbitrator to facilitate a discussion between them and RDDP.
- b) The person in question may appeal their ban when a minimum of six months have passed. Jam access may be reinstated if RDDP thinks that a self-growth process has occurred.

Who do I go to?

The Wednesday Dance Jam is produced by REASON d'etre dance productions (RDDP), a registered charity. RDDP is run by a board of directors. Kathleen Rea is the founder of the company but she answers to the board. This leaves you several avenues to take a boundary or consent accidents or violation concern. They are contacting:

- Wednesday dance jam facilitator (see sign at each jam with name and picture)
- Kathleen Rea the director of REASON d'etre dance productions kathleen.rea@reasondetre.com
- member of the REASON d'etre dance productions board of directors.
See <http://www.reasondetre.com/mandateBD.html> for current board list. Email the RDDP board at board@reasondetre.com
- A board meeting can be called to review a certain issue. As Kathleen Rea is not on the board and answers to the board this can be done with or without her.