

Things to Consider

Contact dance improvisation and fusion forms

RDDP values diversity in the types of contact jams in Toronto and around the world. We feel that diversity benefits the community. For example, contact improvisation is being used to explore such topics as relationships, communication, massage, intimacy, sexuality, tantra, kink, BDSM and polyamory. RDDP believes that exploring the edges of what contact improvisation can be extends the range of the form. We also believe that these exciting directions do not override the importance of having events that solely focus on contact improvisation. RDDP believes “classic” contact dance improvisation is the base from which all else is born, and as such maintaining space for its practice has value.

The importance of knowing what you're heading into – informed consent

When each contact improvisation event clearly communicates its mandate and what will be involved, then each of us attending knows what we are consenting to when we enter the space and can make informed choices. This is known as informed consent (consent given after person has been made aware of nature of activity). This can include contact jams with no boundary guidelines. For example, if it is communicated that boundaries at a jam will emerge organically through the group that shows up, then a person can make informed choices as to whether to attend or not.

Different “recipes” for what enables us creatively

RDDP believes each dancer requires varying degrees and types of structure to best reach their creative potential and the exact “recipe” for this can change from person to person and even from day to day depending on their life experience, mood or what is going on in their life. For some, a jam with no or few 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 POC spaces are inspiring and help create a sense of belonging not found at other jams. For some, guidelines like the ones in this document may be the best holding container within which to bust-out creatively.

Every jam has its own culture and as such needs guidelines that uniquely support it

If the Toronto Wednesday Dance jam guidelines became a prescription for what all of contact dance improvisation should be, then RDDP believes the contact dance community would lack the choice and diversity that we feel benefits creativity. We also believe that each jam is a unique culture and will require a system to support healthy boundaries that fits its specific values and goals.

RDDP invites you to try on this score

RDDP offers that you 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 holding container, within which to dance. A score for a specific time and place and group of people. A score that supports the focused practice of contact dance improvisation in a consent-based culture. So, come on in and see if this score suits you. Go to other jams and events and try out their “score”. Find the circumstances that best support your dancing and your creativity.

Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam Boundary Guidelines

Intention: to support the practice of contact improvisation in a consent-based culture. These are guidelines for “best practices” which means that we have the agreement that we reach for these with the knowledge that it will not be perfect.

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 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 focus at the Toronto Wednesday Dance Jam is on:**
 - 1) **rolling point of contact**
 - 2) **sliding**
 - 3) **giving, taking and sharing weight**
 - 4) **using touch to follow and ride momentum**

Other forms of touch are welcome and come into play, 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 lets you know a massage is 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, hugs, kisses, tickles, caresses, massages or pats 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.
- **It is best practice to start dance in a manner that the person can see who you are.** Depending on circumstances this might not always be possible but it can be your general aim.

Safety Guidelines (physical and psychological)

- **It is generally not safe to grab or lock another dancer into a position that compromises their mobility** because they no longer have a choice as to how they will move and their landing gear (feet /hands) may become inaccessible. Having said this, there are partnerships in which dancers, through consensus, decide to explore 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 and/or reduce their speed and amplitude. Also, we ask that explorations of “locking themes” 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 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 sometimes has not yet acquired the language or skill through which to build consent for dances exploring intense themes. We, therefore, ask that you limit 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 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, see if you can let go of expectations for future dances, or what meaning the dance might have once the dance is over. We offer that meaning that may develop (i.e. you become friends or lovers 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.
- **Moments of teaching are welcome as long as teaching others is not your predominant jam activity**
- **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 dance.
- **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) We recommend that you keep dances with newcomers relatively short** (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 sometimes do not yet know how to give consent for these explorations because they do not yet understand the form.** It often takes a good three or more months of regular attendance to learn how to request/accept/refuse exploration of different themes that can emerge in a dance. Therefore, when a newcomer is acclimatizing themselves to CI culture, we ask that you limit diving into the 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 may 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 instead think, “What can I do to support this newcomer’s 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.** Please note there may be partnerships on the dance floor in which dancers, through consensus, decide to explore themes of aggression. This is welcome when these types of dances evolve through a process of building trust and are based on both parties consent to explore such themes within the frame of the dance.

- Abuse of power tactics such as gas-lighting and 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.
- RDDP strives to protect the right to be free of discrimination, harassment and hate activity, based on age, ancestry, citizenship, creed (religion), colour, disability, ethnic origin, family status, gender identity, level of literacy, marital status, place of origin, membership in a union or staff association, political affiliation, race, receipt of public assistance, sex, sexual orientation or any other personal characteristics. RDDP staff are committed to a life long state of educating ourselves about these issues and we will try our best and at times will not get everything right. If we have any blind-spots in providing the above for jam attendees, please let us know at board@reasondetre.com. Also, please know we are aware that our current space is not wheelchair accessible as we are searching for a wheelchair accessible space.

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 spaghetti noodle” approach often works best. This involves reducing muscle tone, so your body is floppy).
- **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”. A ledge is created when you offer a body-part that someone can bear weight upon).
- **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 comfortable with the level of front-to-front contact** (putting your arms in front of you like a barrel or pushing someone away to create more space 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** (see picture of jam facilitator on table as you enter jam. This lets you know who to go speak to)

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 are community role models who act honestly.**
- 3) **CI educators engage in learning throughout their teaching career.**
- 4) **CI educators advertise for, and solicit students, in an honest manner.**
- 5) **CI educators educate themselves about social justice issues such as race, gender, neurodiversity, ableism, sexual orientation etc. to better understand the role they place in systemic power imbalance issues and implicit bias that affect their teaching and facilitation.**
- 6) **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. When the teacher is in a position of privilege in society, the teacher/student power imbalance can be intensified. CI educators are asked to be aware of these risks and proceed with caution when entering relationships with students where they perceive a large power imbalance.
- 7) **When gathering feedback from students, CI educators it is best practice to include anonymous feedback methods.** This is recommended because the power imbalance between teacher and student can make it challenging for the student to give honest feedback when asked directly by the teacher.
- 8) **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 story about a participant. AND/OR
- 2) the Wednesday Contact Improvisation Jam Facilitator notices inappropriate behaviour.

What happened?

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

Calling-in

If a boundary guideline can be identified as having been crossed, a **calling-in** process begins. This involves:

- Pre-notification about the process
- People overseeing the calling-in are not close friends with either party and are not people directly triggered by the issues.
- 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.
- Identifying a support person for them if needed.
- Creating a plan together that both protects the community and supports the person in learning to respect the boundaries they have crossed.
- Creating a statement that communicates the result of the calling-in. Both the called-in person and the calling-in team need to reach an agreement about the content of this statement.

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.

Calling-out

In cases where RDDP determines, using reasonable judgment, that there is an immediate danger to the community or the calling-in team is not able to complete the above steps, 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.

Communicating with REASON d'etre dance productions

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 RDDP 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 a sign at each jam with name and picture)
- Kathleen Rea the director of RDDP kathleen.rea@reasondetre.com
- RDDP board of directors. See <http://www.reasondetre.com/mandateBD.html> for current board list. Email the RDDP board at board@reasondetre.com. This email goes directly to the board (i.e. Kathleen does not receive it)
- 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.