

# **Guidelines for The Toronto Wednesday Dance Jam:**

The Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam is intended to be a space to practice classic contact improvisation. The intention of these guidelines is to create and support a consent-based culture within which to do so.

**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 excited to attend and facilitate contact dance events whose focus is to use contact dance to explore such topics as relationship, communication, intimacy or massage. I believe that exploring the edges of what contact dance improvisation can be, extends the range of the form. I believe these exciting directions do not override the importance of still having classic contact dance improvisation events. It is my intention that the Toronto Wednesday Dance Jam be such a space.

For me it is 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. This idea of knowing what we are consenting to when we enter a space 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 and jams with no guidelines at all. 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 offer that people think of these guidelines as a score. That for an hour and 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 practice of classical contact dance improvisation.

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 and makes the form more accessible.

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.

## **The Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam Boundary Guidelines**

*The intention of these guidelines is to support the practice of classic contact improvisation and to support a consent-based culture within which to practice dance.*

These guidelines pertain to your time at the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam only. They are suggestions that help hold and frame your dance experience.

### **Suggested Dress**

- **Avoid wearing strong perfumes or essential oils.**
- **Exercise basic hygiene** by taking regular showers and wearing 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** that might scratch or hit another participant.
- **Minimize wearing long flowing clothes** that may wrap around you or your dance partner and inhibit movement choices.
- **Wear dance clothes that offer a lot of skin coverage.** Due to the sliding and rolling point of contact that occurs in contact improv, wearing longish pants and a long sleeved or short sleeved t-shirt made of a non-slippery fabric like cotton is useful.

### **Suggested 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.** Many times, other forms of touch can play into a dance when a theme or story organically develops. These explorations are welcome if 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.
- Body work (example receiving or offering a calf massage) is also part of what occurs in the context of the jam. **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 nonverbal. Non-verbal usually requires that the person see that you want to offer a massage and through body language lets you know that would be welcome. Therefore, during your time at the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam is not appropriate to come up to someone and start massaging their shoulders unexpectedly from behind.

- 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 Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam. **Non-consensual pass-by pokes, kisses, tickles, caresses, massages or pats while dancing or passing by someone in the studio or hallway are not recommended.** An example of a non-consensual pass-by touch would be coming up to a person from behind and tickling their lower back.

### **Suggested Safety Guidelines (physical and psychological)**

- **It is generally not a good idea to grab or lock another dancer into a position that compromises their safety.** Grabbing a person into a locked position during a lift reduces safety because your partner no longer has a choice as to how they will move. Also, you may be grabbing onto their landing gear, preventing them from orchestrating a safe fall to the floor. Having said this, there are many partnerships on the dance floor in which the couple or group, through consensus, decides to explore locking or holding a person to explore a theme that is emerging. Please know that to do this safely does sometimes require reduction of speed and amplitude and/or a high degree of skill. Also know that these types of dance often evolve through a process or building of trust with dance partner(s) over a period of time.
- During your time at the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam we suggest that you **focus on lifting using principles of following momentum and become less focused on “muscling” a dancer into a lift.**
- **All dancers are asked to learn technique that allows them to a) avoid being lifted when they do not want to be lifted, b) redirect weight when it becomes too heavy and 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. Please ask the jam facilitator to teach you these techniques if you need.

### **Suggestions for 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.** If someone declines when you ask them to dance, do not ask them their reason or pressure them to dance with you repeatedly during the jam.
- **Practice letting go of each dance experience.** No matter how amazing a dance was, try to let go of any expectations for future dances, or what meaning it might have once the dance is over. We are offering 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 expectation that a dance may illicit.

### Suggestions for Relational and Social Considerations

- While we understand that connections and conversations occur in the studio, **please** take louder, more concentrated **socializing into the hallway. If you do talk while in the studio, please talk quietly.**
- **The Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam is a screen free space.** Please turn your phone to flight mode and take your phones, tablets and other electrical devices into the hallway if you need to use them.
- **We offer that you *not* think of the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam as a place to find a date.** We offer that you think of the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam as an hour-and-a-half of your life in which to focus on practicing classic contact Improvisation. As a result of this focus, “cruising” behavior that might be welcome and expected in other circumstances such as a bar, is not part of the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam culture.
- **Hey, we are all humans and sometimes you may notice your self-becoming sexually aroused during a dance. We ask that in these circumstances that you do not pursue this arousal. Just notice 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.** You may discuss techniques, share tips, work through new lifts together and make requests (e.g. “Can you give me more hip weight?”), but we suggest your main focus at the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Class and Jam is to be there as a dancer.
- **If you attend the Jam with a partner, or you become friends with someone at the Jam, all the above boundary guidelines still apply even though you may have consensual touch and relationship agreements that extend beyond these suggested guidelines in other contexts.** Think of the hour-and-a-half jam as a *score* in which we generally follow these suggested guidelines as the frame in which to practice classic CI.
- **Activities such as spectating, socializing, 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.** Newcomers may watch a jam to help them decide whether to engage in Contact Dance Improvisation, but after this introductory process they are asked to attend with the intention to dance.
- **When a more experienced dancer dances with a newcomer, the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation asks that they consider that the newcomer might not understand the culture of a jam.** For instance, the newcomer might not know how to end a dance. It is therefore advised that dances with newcomers be relatively short (a suggestion is 5 to 15 minutes) so that the newcomer can dance with other people and acclimatize themselves with the culture of the jam. It also can be a good idea when dancing with a newcomer to briefly show them how to end a dance and to let them know they can do so at any point they choose.

- **Use of intoxicants directly prior to the Jam or during the Jam is generally not advised.**
- **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 couple or group, through consensus, decides to explore themes of aggression in a consensual dance. Please know that these types of dance often evolve through a process of building trust with one's dance partner(s) over time, and is based upon both parties being willing to explore such themes.
- **Abuse of power tactics such as gas-lighting or other predator victim grooming techniques are not tolerated.**

*All the guidelines on this card are specific to the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam and are created with the intention to create a consent based culture within which to practice classic contact improvisation. Other contact improvisation jams may have different intentions and may provide different boundary guidelines (or no guidelines at all).*

## **Promoting Your Boundaries During Dance Improvisation Jams**

### **Intention of the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam**

The intention of the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam is to create a place for people to learn about and practice classical contact improvisation in a consent-based culture. To create a safe-enough space for this to happen, the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam asks that participants honour each other's boundaries. We ask for appropriate, respectful verbal and non-verbal contact. Listed in this document are the guidelines to help sustain an open, safe, expressive, and respectful dance space for yourself and others.

### **Anti-Discrimination Policy**

The Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam protects the right of all participants 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, record of offences, sex, sexual orientation or any other personal characteristics.

### **Suggestions For What You Can Do To Assert Your Boundaries**

- **You have the right to accept or refuse any dance without needing to give a reason.**
- **These verbal and physical cues are usually a successful way to end a dance:**
  - Hands together as in prayer, look at your partner and nod your head
  - Tell your partner “thank-you for the dance” and then walk away
  - Tell your partner that you would prefer to dance on your own now
- **If your dance partner did something that you did not like, give them feedback.** For instance, if they grabbed your arm in a way that felt unsafe, you can ask them not to grab you and explain how grabbing decreases your level of safety because it prevents you from being able to make your own movement choices. You can then refer them to the laminated card at the front table of the Jam that outlines safety and boundary guidelines, or direct them to the Jam Facilitator who is present at every Jam.
- **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). You can ask the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam Facilitator for tips to help with this. You are also welcome to end a dance or switch to verbal feedback at any point.
- **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 work best). You can ask the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam Facilitator for tips to help with this. You are also welcome to end a dance or switch to verbal feedback at any point.

- **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 and/or enjoying front contact with someone.** Rolling against someone while “threading the needle” or “eating the banana” or “clocking” your arm around or making your arms like a “barrel” can help with this aim). If someone is inviting front-orientated contact that you are not comfortable with, you can use these non-verbal techniques to redirect the dance. You can ask the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam Facilitator for tips to help with this. You are also welcome to end a dance or switch to verbal feedback at any point.
- **Be cautious of anyone promoting themselves as a teacher or guild by using tactics that undermine your way of seeing the world or undermine your confidence in yourself and/or your dancing.** Please inform the Jam Facilitator if this occurs.
- **Please talk to the Jam Facilitator if you have any boundary concerns.**
- **You can refer a Jam participant to this card, which is on the front table at every Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam.**

If you need advice on how to present and/or assert your boundaries, or have concerns please talk with the Jam Facilitator. You may also email Kathleen Rea [kathleenrea@rogers.com](mailto:kathleenrea@rogers.com) with any concerns or questions.

*All the guidelines on this card are specific to the Wednesday Contact Dance Improvisation Jam and are created with the intention to consent-based space within which to practice classical contact improvisation. Other contact improvisation jams may have different intentions and may provide different boundary guidelines (or no guidelines at all).*



## **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**  
Teachers put the best needs of their student first rather than their own personal agenda.
- 2) CI educators are community role models who act honestly**  
Teachers understand their role and influence on the community. As role models, they are asked to live up to a high standard of honesty in all their dealings within the community.
- 3) CI educators have a broad knowledge base and understand what they teach**  
Teachers are skilled and experienced in the topics that they choose to teach.
- 4) CI educators engage in learning throughout their teaching career**  
Teachers are engaged in a process of exploring, learning and/or updating their skills throughout their career.
- 5) CI educators advertise and solicit students in an honest manner**  
Represent yourself in advertisements honestly and clearly. Refrain from tactics of soliciting students that use persuasion through force, threats or tactics that undermine confidence.
- 6) CI educators are asked to be supportive of other CI teachers.**  
RDDP believes that by supporting other teachers, you further the form and this will in turn make your own work and practice richer.
- 7) CI educators understand that the relationship between teacher and student has a power imbalance and act with according responsibility.** RDDP believes that 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. Given that a teacher inherently has power over the student, it can sometimes be hard for the student to even figure out what boundaries they are comfortable with. 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.
- 8) CI educators use best practices for gathering feedback for their teaching.** RDDP suggests that the best practice for getting accurate feedback on your teaching includes both verbal on non-verbal methods and possibly includes anonymous surveys in which identity is unknown. The reason for this is that students may have trouble speaking honestly about your teaching when speaking directly to you due to the power imbalance between teacher and student. Receiving feedback verbally might also mean that you only hear from those who are comfortable approaching you and this can skew the results. Also, it is important that when receiving feedback verbally or non-verbally that you do not share this feedback publicly unless you have permission do so.
- 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 behaviors and spot those actively engaging in them in the community.**