

Tips for Experienced Dancers Dancing With Beginners

Dancing well with beginners is a skill separate from being able to dance well with other experienced dancers. Revealing the joy of contra dance to a new person is one of the rewards of being an experienced dancer. The only way to learn, of course, is to practice, so try to dance with at least one new person at each dance. Many of these tips are also good advice when dancing with experienced dancers, but they are particularly important when dancing with beginners. These were written with contra dance **in** mind, but many apply to other dance forms as well.

- 1 Smile
- 2 Make eye contact.
- 3 Show the other people you enjoy dancing with them.
- 4 Help the beginners have fun. Remember that's what we're here for.
- 5 Don't push, pull or shout; that's rude.
- 6 Lead the new dancers through dance figures with eye contact, body language and hand gestures as appropriate.
- 7 Make your leads part of the dance (i.e. use a sweeping motion of your arm and perhaps a small bow to indicate a person should precede you in a given direction).
- 8 Lead your partners gently by the hand.
- 9 Hold your hand out clearly for them to take (as on allemandes and right and left across).
- 10 Men, gently place the woman's hand where it needs to be for stars and chains.
- 11 Women, help your partners end swings in the correct direction.
- 12 Tap your shoulder (the one to be passed by) on heys, etc.
- 13 Don't do extra whirls and spins. The beginners look to you for example; you may know where you need to be next and which way to be facing. but they don't. Let them get the basics before trying to add flourishes.
- 14 Swing gently. Many beginners are affected by dizziness at first.
- 15 Dance smoothly; show them how it's done. Save fancy moves for your experienced friends. Allow your beginner partners and neighbors to master the basics.
- 16 Don't get upset at them when mistakes are made. Everyone makes mistakes from time to time, even you!
- 17 Let them know that if they happen to be very late for a figure, it is better to skip that figure and go on to the next, rather than try to rush through the figure(s) they may have missed. Explain. If they ask why, that the music and dance go together and that each figure should be done during the same section of the music each time through the dance.
- 18 Encourage and acknowledge the real efforts the beginners are making.
- 19 Communicate acceptance and affirmation as much as possible.
- 20 Communicate willingness to answer questions about the routine or any aspect of the dance.
- 21 If the new person has obvious difficulty with something in particular. simply ask, "Do you mind if I show you?".
- 22 Refrain from forcing any issue.
- 23 Listen to the caller/prompter and do not get ahead of him/her during the teaching/walkthrough. Set a good example for the new dancers to follow.