



Guidance on Inclusion and Accessibility in Social Folk Dance

What does this document aim to achieve?

This document aims to raise awareness of issues around inclusion and accessibility in a social folk dance context, and to highlight and suggest some standards of good practice.

It provides guidance on making events as welcoming as possible, and how to avoid excluding people unintentionally. It aims to provide a framework for building safer spaces within the social folk dance world, which means moving towards dance spaces being supported by well thought out and inclusive organisational practice.

There are many other aspects to consider when running social folk dance events, here we are talking only about issues relating to accessibility and inclusion.

Who is it for?

This document is for anyone involved in social folk dance who might be interested in these issues. There are sections with guidance for dancers, callers and organisers.

- Please feel free to show this document to anyone who could benefit from it, or use it to inform your own policies and practice.
Please always credit this document if quoting from it directly.

For Event Organisers

- **Give as much information about an event as you can, as clearly as you can.** When advertising an event, give as much information as possible. Consider the accessibility of the information itself. When printing and designing information, prioritise clarity to make your advertising legible by as many people as possible. Information such as calling style, venue accessibility, lighting and sound levels, and even pictures of the venue can be valuable to those with access requirements when deciding whether or not to attend your event. Do ask for access requirements prominently at the ticket booking stage and make sure it is easy for people to communicate with you about any access needs they have.
- **Manage your venue with accessibility in mind.** In the set up of your venue, make sure that areas are managed so as to be clear and safe for wheelchairs or those with sensory or mobility impairments. Even if the event is a dance where participants

expect to dance for an extended period of time, having plenty of seating available can make it easier for those with mobility problems, fatigue, or injuries to manage pain and energy during an event. Ensure good signposting of accessibility features; for instance if level access is via a separate entrance, make sure that's very clear. If you have available space at your venue, consider designating a quiet area – this can help neurodivergent people to cope with a busy environment.

- **Be aware of your sound levels.** Monitor your sound levels, and consider the health and safety aspects of a loud event, as well as accessibility for those with sensory impairments or those who might struggle in loud environments. Consider offering earplugs to attendees if your event is loud.
- **Make expectations clear with artists.** Be clear with artists when you're at the booking stage of any expectations you have around accessibility, such as calling style, or if you expect attendees with specific needs. For instance if a caller knows in advance that there may be wheelchair users at a dance, it is easier for them to ensure that everyone will be able to participate fully. It is also important to consider the access needs of your artists.
- **Set out clear policies.** For formally run or regular events, set out clear Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion policies, as well as Safeguarding, Health and Safety and any other relevant policies. Make sure these policies are easily accessible and reference their existence openly, this helps people to feel secure at your events.

Consider pinning up a policy on the wall at your event.

- **Be visible and approachable as an event organiser.** Do you make announcements to welcome people and introduce artists at the beginning of your events? Are your staff and volunteers easy to find or recognise if people are new to the event? Consider branded clothing or identification badges. Being friendly and welcoming to people when they come to your events is a large part of the success of any event, and people who feel like an event is well run by approachable organisers are far more likely to return to your event. Make it clear that your event is a safer space, where everyone feels equally respected, and where people can speak up about issues without fear of reproach.

For Dance Teachers and Callers

- **Let people know what to expect during your event.** When introducing yourself and beginning your event, set out expectations as much as you can. This can make an event more accessible for neurodivergent people and will help everyone to manage their energy and participation during the event. Be open about your dancefloor being a safer space and make it easy for people to speak up about anything problematic they might see on the dancefloor.
- **Use gender free language when calling dances.** This ultimately makes your event more accessible to everyone and prevents people, usually women and minority genders, from regularly being

misgendered on the dancefloor. If you address a dancer directly, do not assume their gender or pronouns if you don't know them, as there are plenty of easier ways for someone to be identified, such as their position in the set or the colour of a piece of clothing they are wearing. Consider introducing yourself with your own pronouns to make others feel more comfortable to do so. It's important to note that in some circumstances, gendered calling can be more accessible to some people. In all circumstances call with your dance community in mind and be careful to avoid misgendering dancers as a default position.

- **Give information about each dance in advance.** When setting up dances and asking dancers to make sets, give dancers as much information as possible about what they will be doing. For example, some people prefer to avoid dancing in certain rhythms, or will avoid partner changing dances.
- **Don't dictate what positions people dance in a set.** Never try to move people around to dance with a different person, as they may not feel comfortable to do so, or feel comfortable to say no. This will affect people's enjoyment of your event and can also affect their safety. Make it clear that people are welcome to dance anywhere they wish.
- **Avoid pressuring people into dancing.** Sometimes floors can be slow to fill, consider changing the dance if dancers demonstrate that they aren't enthusiastic to dance something you're suggesting. There are many different reasons for wishing to sit out of a dance,

such as tiredness, feeling overwhelmed, or just not liking a particular dance. Model good consent by allowing people to make their own choices about their participation during your event.

- **Be aware of any potential issues for the group of people you are instructing.** Dance populations can be very diverse and could include people with disabilities, sensory impairments, limited mobility, injuries, age related issues, or neurodivergence. Give options for different variations of difficult or close contact moves for those who might be less able or willing to engage in a particular move, for instance a close swing hold.
- **Consider the language you use when addressing dancers.** For example, saying 'couples' or 'partner/partners' in some contexts can make single people who are attending alone feel excluded, or could make people feel uncomfortable in regard to how their relationship status is being perceived. The term 'pairs' is a good alternative. Avoid sexualising dance moves, as this can make many people uncomfortable.
- **Take the time to find out the policies and procedures at any event you're booked to call or teach at.** You are the first point of contact for attending dancers, so you should know how to escalate an issue to staff at the event, or where to direct people for information.

For Dancers

- **Remember you can decide if you want to dance or not.** Do ask people to dance if you are comfortable to do so. If someone asks you to dance, you don't have to say yes if you don't wish to dance with them for any reason. If you ask someone to dance, you should be prepared to accept no as an answer without expecting an explanation.
- **Never try to move other people around within a set,** or suggest that you know better than another person which role they should be dancing. Trust people to be dancing in a position in which they are comfortable. Don't try to split up pairs based on your perception of their gender or other attributes.
- **Pay attention to the caller or teacher and don't talk over them or offer help,** unless you are asked to do so. Even if you are a very experienced dancer, this is rude to artists and can be very confusing for other dancers.
- **Don't try to guide people by pushing or pulling them** if you think they are in the wrong place during a dance or walkthrough. You can do this just as effectively via other methods such as gestures, which avoid non-consensual contact.
- **Always make sure you have consent for the way in which you dance with other people.** For example, ask how someone would like to swing, or if people in a set are OK with a modification or

variation you want to dance. Avoid touching other dancers unnecessarily. People should respect your boundaries on the dancefloor too, and it's OK to speak up if something makes you uncomfortable.

- **Be aware of injuries and treat people carefully.** Even if you've seen them dancing in an energetic way, they may have injuries or health issues that you don't know about.
- **Don't be afraid to speak up about any harmful behaviour that you see on the dancefloor,** if you feel safe to do so. If you don't feel you can speak up, consider passing on your observations to someone who may be better able to deal with the situation.

With thanks to:

Alan Brunier, Alex Cumming, Andrew Swaine, Charlotte Rich-Griffin, Fee Lock, Jane Bird, Lisa Heywood and Rosie Butler-Hall for their invaluable work in this area.

Further reading:

efdss's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Information:

<https://www.efdss.org/about-us/what-we-do/diversity>

efdss's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy:

<https://www.efdss.org/images/present/Docs/Documentation/efdss-EDI-Policy.pdf>

EFDSS's Code of Conduct:

<https://www.efdss.org/code-of-conduct>

One Dance UK's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Page:

<https://www.onedanceuk.org/programmes/equality-diversity-and-inclusion>

Considering Difference:

<https://udancedigital.org/considering-difference-making-dance-accessible/>

Swing Patrol's Code of Conduct: <https://www.swingpatrol.co.uk/swing-patrol-london-code-conduct>

Traditional Music Today's 'Traditional Music Community Principles'

https://docs.google.com/document/d/14dJ_q0iZJD_NR58TJTfBvrHC-C-Mm86pkzyLM7UKZA/edit?usp=drivesdk

People Dancing's Online Courses:

<https://www.communitydance.org.uk/training-and-qualifications/online-courses>

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