

Hampshire Contact Improvisation (HCI) Health & Safety Guidelines

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Content

Introduction.....	p. 1
Participation.....	p. 2
Inclusiveness.....	p. 3
Personal Care and Hygiene.....	p. 3
Safety.....	p. 4
Awareness.....	p. 4
Boundaries.....	p. 5
Sexuality.....	p. 5
Sound and Talking.....	p. 6
Environment & Music.....	p. 7
Copyright.....	p. 7

Introduction

The aim of Hampshire Contact Improvisation is to provide a safe and creative platform for the exploration of Contact Improvisation as a dance movement form. The intention of these guidelines is to create a container of health & safety for our Contact Improvisation dance space. To create supportive boundaries for our creative explorations within a movement practice where closeness and friendship between the participants is easily developed. To establish a platform from which Hampshire Contact Improvisation events can be organised. They are not rules, they are simply guidelines to facilitate a fair and equal space for us to meet in relation to Contact Improvisation; to learn, explore, give, share, develop, create and contribute. We ask that all who attend Hampshire Contact Improvisation events read, understand and respect these guidelines, please let us know if you have any questions.

Following consultations from 2012-14 between Suna Imre, Richard Parker, Gabriel Galvez, Helena Eflerová and Yonat Nitzan-Green.

With thanks to Bristol Contact Improvisation for there guidelines and inspiration.

Compiled by Helena Eflerová and Richard Parker in January-February 2014.

Participation

Be on time so we can all start together (whenever possible). Being part of the opening and closing circles creates group cohesion, personal safety, and deepens our dances. In the circle we invite you to communicate about any injuries that might affect your dance, and offer any personal sharing's related to your dancing for the day.

The workshop/warm-up part of the session is a group-learning experience in Contact Improvisation. It is an opportunity to establish group cohesion, learn new skills, be challenged, explore new movement techniques, gain knowledge and improve awareness. For everyone's safety and benefit always listen, appropriately follow and respect the process as it is instructed. Ask questions if unsure. This is not a time for jamming or free practice, other times are allocated for this. Witnessing/observing is always welcome if any exercise is not suitable for personal care reasons, within this we invite you to stay connected with the group.

The jamming part of the session is a free creative exploration of Contact Improvisation as a dance movement form. You are welcome to dance solo, change partners, join a dance, dance in groups, witness/observe, write notes and draw. Please keep social/casual conversation quiet and outside the dance space.

Witnessing is also part of the form, a lot of learning occurs this way. Witnessing is a practice in being present to yourself and to those who you are watching, cultivating an open heart and a non-judgmental mind.

Please feel more than welcome to watch from the outskirts of the dance space. Everyone on the dance floor is "in" whether dancing or witnessing.

Whilst the opening and closing circles are a chance to share and discuss our experience within the dance, it is not a time to fix, be fixed or advise. We do not encourage crosstalk (unless requested by the speaker), or debate.

Sharing is an opportunity to express your experience and learning's. We request that sharing's come from your direct experience ("I" statements) in the moment rather than abstract thoughts or a prepared agenda, as these things tend to take us away from the dance or being connected with ourselves and others.

Whilst this dance forms brings a wealth of healing possibilities and personal growth we are not facilitating group or personal therapy. Please bare this in mind during a group sharing.

Inclusiveness

Contact Improvisation strives to be inclusive, welcoming newcomers and supporting regulars, regardless of age, skill level and physical ability. We create the jam together and it's enriched by everyone's contribution. Be aware of newcomers and others who may be unsure how to come in.

You can always leave a dance (or conversation). Also, if someone leaves your dance, do not take it personally. You can always join a dance. Enter dances with a spirit of listening and tuning into what is already there.

Grazing is always welcome as a way to explore and invite new dances. This is a term used in Contact Improvisation describing a series of warming up interactions and short connections to attune with other dancers.

Personal Care and Hygiene

You are responsible for your own injuries and physical conditions. Please allow time before the workshop starts to warm up your body e.g. stretch. Please make facilitators aware of any significant injuries and health issues that may affect you during the session.

Wash your hands thoroughly before and after dancing. It's particularly important to wash well before you come. Consider your dance partners. Come in fresh clean clothes. If you sweat a lot, bring a towel and fresh t-shirt. Keep toenails and fingernails trimmed.

Wear appropriate clothing that covers the body and is suitable for close contact movement. Remove jewellery that can cause injury to yourself and others. You are advised not to wear socks for safety reasons as slipping and lack of grip can cause injuries especially during partner work. No shoes in the dance space. You are responsible for your belongings at all times, allocated space will be made available for any valuables.

You are advised not to eat within 2 hours prior to a session. Please do not bring food onto the dance floor at any time. Please drink plenty of fluids as required by your own body needs. Water is allowed beside the dance floor in sealed containers.

The physical intimacy of contact dance requires extra precaution to prevent spreading illnesses. Don't come to class with any contagious infections e.g. colds or flu. Cover open wounds, cold sores, warts, etc...

Safety

You are responsible for your own safety – physically and emotionally during the session. Serious injury is possible when dancing Contact Improvisation and you dance at your own risk. Please be aware of your own safety in the space.

Listen to yourself; be aware of what is comfortable for you, for your body. We are all different and have different skills, abilities, and comfort levels. It is always okay to say “NO” or “STOP” if something is uncomfortable or unsafe.

Learn how to dance safely, for example: keep your body soft so collisions hurt less; beware when rolling over sensitive areas (knees, head etc...); practise falling safely; lifts need to be a mutual agreement between dancers through verbal or non-verbal communication, don't impose lifting on your partner, offer platforms and invitations and allow them to decide, it is safer not to hold or grab your partner's hands, feet, legs & arms as they may need them for landing.

Be particularly mindful if you are dancing with speed, large amounts of weight, jumping, or other potential risk-taking. You might find that doing a movement at half speed allows mind and body to cooperate better.

We encourage you to cultivate patient curiosity, and a soft and supple relationship with the floor.

No parking in the middle of the space. Take chatting, socialising, snuggling and bodywork off the active dance floor, so you're not a hazard.

Kneepads can make it more comfortable to take weight in kneeling positions, especially on hard floors.

There will be a first aid kit available in case of accident.

Awareness

Practice cultivating awareness of yourself, your dance partners, the entire group and the whole space. Even as you focus on the dance you are in, stay aware and mindful of your what else is going on in the space around you.

Things to consider: What are your dance partners needs and abilities? Are there a lot of people in the room? Are people generally horizontal or vertical, moving fast or slow? Are there people on the floor near you?

Extend your awareness in and out to take in the people and environment.

Boundaries

You have the right and responsibility to maintain your own boundaries in the dance, you have the right and responsibility to give an honest yes or no with your body or your voice or to move away from a situation that doesn't suit you.

You don't have to apologise, compromise or explain. If you have trouble saying "no" in your dances, you have a responsibility to learn how to do this. Refrain from blaming or projecting. If you need help, ask a facilitator for support.

Equally, you also have the responsibility to understand how your dance, your energy, and your own sense of personal boundaries impact your dance partners and the dance space around you.

Practice hearing feedback without becoming defensive. Practice listening to non-verbal cues and get verbal feedback if there is any confusion or ambiguity.

Sexuality

As sexual beings, the question is not whether sexuality is present, but how it shows up, to what degree it shows up, and how is it held/expressed in the dance. For some, a distinction between "sensuality" and "sexuality" is helpful, while for others the distinction is not clear. Different dancers have different tolerances and desires for sensuality in their dances. Expressing sexual energy openly and outwardly on the dance floor is not appropriate.

We invite dancers to be mature and responsible, we aim to create a safe place for self-exploration and expression, using Contact Improvisation as our container. When in doubt, do your best to contribute to an atmosphere of safety, especially for women and dancers who are new.

A good rule to follow about sexual/sensual energy in a dance: when in doubt, don't escalate the energy. You can dance in your own energy without overtly expressing it with your partner. It is possible, even likely, to misread signals or to allow your energy to bring an unwelcome agenda to your dance.

Unwanted sexual advances and touching are NEVER acceptable. Speak up! It's important anyone experiencing this should stop the dance and tell their partner "no" and share their experience with a facilitator or anyone else in the dance space that can help.

Sound and Talking

Sound is a natural part of embodied movement. Sounds or words that are a part of the dance are quite welcome; and low-volume talking with a partner as a means of deepening into the dance or creating safety for yourself is welcome, for instance when cautioning your partner about your boundaries, an injury or giving/receiving feedback within the dance.

While non-verbal feedback is inherent to the form of Contact Improvisation, spoken words can deepen our understanding of each other and create more satisfying and safe connections. You can request to give or receive verbal feedback whenever you feel called to, i.e. during a dance, immediately after a dance, or after jam/class.

If something happens in a dance that troubles you, you may also consider talking with those involved. It is often helpful to first express curiosity about how your partner(s) experienced the dance. You can then share your experience, and initiate a discussion of what was difficult for you. Refrain from blaming or projecting. If you need help, ask a facilitator for support. We ask that you take this off the dance floor.

The aim is to maintain a focused environment. Be mindful of how sound and language affect the Jam. The jam is meant for the practice of contact improvisation and related movement practices. We encourage you to refrain from general social chatter in the dance space. Chatter pulls people out of the direct experience of the dance, and affects everyone within earshot. If you find yourself talking or sounding, you might ask yourself, “is this deepening my dance, or pulling me out of it? Am I aware of how my voice might be affecting the other dancers in the room?”

Please keep social/casual conversation quiet and outside the dance space.

We also recommend turning mobiles off or at least to silent to support a focused environment and not disturb others.

Hampshire Contact Improvisation has a group page on Facebook that you are welcome to join, for sharing news, inspiration, event details, thoughts, experiences and feelings in relation to contact improvisation.

Environment & Music

The facilitators look after the buildings environment, in terms of heating, air conditioning, lighting and music. If assistance is needed we will ask. Please make us aware if you feel uncomfortable and we will make every effort to facilitate your needs in relation to the group and facilitators needs.

Whilst music can bring inspiration to the dance, our main inspiration is the exploration of Contact Improvisation as a dance movement form and can often be danced in silence.

For guest musicians, playing music for improvisational movement is different than playing for a listening audience. Sometimes people feel like they want the added support of a musical score in the dance space and sometimes they feel like the music is creating the agenda of the dance instead of their own inner improvisational impulse. In this light we ask that musicians be very mindful of the impact their music has upon the entire space and everyone's dance within it. Learn to "read the space", and also allow for silent spaces. When you make music you are basically introducing another dance partner into the space. Music with a less driving presence and few or no words is more supportive of dancing. Another rule of thumb is to create equal times of silence and music.

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Please feel free to let us know any feedback and suggestions.