

Contact Improvisation Leipzig Consent-Jam Guidelines

English edition
12 July 2021

Welcome to the *Contact Improvisation Consent Jam Leipzig*

The Jam is a space for Contact Improvisation (CI) as a movement form and as practice of consent culture.

The CI community in Leipzig has been continuously built up and developed over the last 10 years by engaged dancers. If you want to learn more about the community, different formats such as classes, labs and workshops, please visit our website where you can sign up for the newsletters "info" and "Gemeinschaft" (community): www.contactimpro-leipzig.de/verteiler

The path to a consent-based Contact Improvisation community requires checking our privileges and challenging power structures. Discourses from #metoo to #blacklivesmatter raise the awareness that we need agreements to make jams safer and more inclusive and accessible. These guidelines are a first step. Our thanks go to Kathleen Rea's guidelines from Toronto which served us as a model.

Do you have any questions or safety concerns? Please approach the Consent Team or write to: consent-team@contactimpro-leipzig.de

Table of contents

1. Consent Culture in Contact Improvisation.....	1
2. Shared responsibility for physical and emotional safety.....	2
3. Arriving as a beginner.....	3
4. In the Jam Space.....	4
5. Initiating or entering a dance.....	5
6. Safe dancing.....	5
7. Leaving a dance: The gift of the no.....	7
8. The role of the Consent Team.....	7
9. Stages of consent culture and the Restorative Circles method.....	8
10. Sources and Resources:.....	10

1. Consent Culture in Contact Improvisation

Consent Culture has a lot of different connotations. We use this term for a culture that normalizes asking for and receiving consent. This consent culture actively opposes rape culture and is intersectionally conscious of how inherent power dynamics affect one's ability to consent.

For beginners and experienced dancers alike, Consent Culture is a practice of continuously checking with ourselves and our dance partners for consent - to ensure that all involved in the dance feel emotionally and physically safe. Checking in may be verbal, visual or energetic. If in doubt, we ask.

Practicing Consent Culture not only develops our awareness of others, it develops our self-awareness and our power to assert ourselves.

We should be aware that consent is in rare cases something absolute and constant because many factors can influence our feeling of consent. Societal position, biographical experiences and trauma, the concrete dance relationship in the moment as well as form of the day and health condition can affect our ability to consciously give, deny or ask for consent.

For experienced dancers, Consent Culture allows the exploration of wider boundaries and movement. At the same time, more experienced dancers have more responsibility towards others and especially beginners for Consent Culture in the dance.

When we just start to learn Contact Improvisation, we should respect where we are right now and which boundaries we feel.

2. Shared responsibility for physical and emotional safety

Creating a jam which is as safe as possible, physically and emotionally, is a responsibility shared by all participants.

In the past, the burden of responsibility was often placed on the more vulnerable party to say No.

This approach has a number of shortcomings:

- When the action causing injury is unexpected, there is sometimes no time to say No.

- The harmful impact may not be anticipated in the moment.
- Consent may be given because an uninformed person/a beginner does not understand the risk. A norm might be assumed that “this is probably just done like this in Contact Improvisation” or “this is surely part of the practice”.

Related issues arise in Consent Culture, particularly with newcomers. We cannot assume that participants with little or no experience with Contact Improvisation can give informed consent. Also, power imbalances such as age or gender and/or personal history with trauma or abuse can make it difficult to withhold consent.

We are all vulnerable.

We do not tolerate behavior that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual or creates an intimidating, hostile or harassing environment. Discriminatory speech or conduct which is racist, sexist, transphobic or homophobic is not acceptable at the Jam nor is any form of discrimination based on ability*, age, class, religion, language and/or ethnic origin. Verbal and/or physical aggression is not tolerated.

Harassment of other participants via email, phone calls or social media is not tolerated.

In case of incidents happening please contact the Consent Team (consent-team@contactimpro-leipzig.de).

3. Arriving as a beginner

Entering a practice which is new to us brings challenges. Many practices have clearly defined, mandatory training for beginners. Not so for Contact Improvisation.

There is no hard and fast measure of what constitutes a beginner. Nor is it possible to provide a list of specific "do's" and "don'ts" for dances involving beginners.

As beginners, we bring with us knowledge, strengths and vulnerabilities - and we are on a learning curve. Entry to Contact Improvisation often involves challenges such as sharing weight, lifting with momentum and sorting out physical and emotional boundaries. It also takes time to become familiar with Contact Improvisation culture - how to enter and leave dances, for example.

Contact Improvisation is highly complex because so many dimensions are involved into it (body, soul, encounter, past, present moment, creativity, freedom, boundaries and many others). Take your time for entering this complex field and don't ask too much of yourself.

As a more experienced dancer, be especially mindful of beginners. Be aware of factors which cause power imbalance including gender, age, and race. For example, a beginner who is a young woman* may - for any one of a number of reasons - not be comfortable with a lot of attention from older men*.

If you are a beginner:

- Take it easy! In order to better process the experiences, you might want to choose physically, emotionally and energetically light and short dances.
- You might observe some people hugging, cuddling in a bunch on the dance floor, or people engaged in Body-work on the side. Take your time to feel into when and how or if you want to engage.
- It is recommended that you attend classes to learn the fundamentals of Contact Improvisation. For example, to learn how to lift or be lifted safely can be physically and/or emotionally challenging or overwhelming (see: safe dancing)
- Don't dance with someone unless you want to. It is always OK to say No.
- Tell your partner that you are a beginner.
- If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe for any reason, leave the dance. You don't have to justify.
- Do not hesitate to seek the advice or support from the Consent Team.

4. In the Jam Space

Contact Improvisation is ... based on the communication between two [or more] moving bodies that are in physical contact and their combined relationship to the physical laws that govern their motion—gravity, momentum, inertia ... Practice includes rolling, falling, being upside down, following a physical point of contact, supporting and giving weight to a partner.

- Steve Paxton and others, Contact Quarterly Vol. 5:1, Fall 1979

The Jam is a space for practicing Contact Improvisation. Everything is possible, from solo to group improvisation. We follow our own intuition and curiosity in the space while staying aware about the fact that we are in a space with others. The balance between freedom and safety in the space is our shared responsibility.

When the room is unfocussed, anyone can play the singing bowl. If you hear the sound, please pause for a moment and check your presence in the space.

Please speak briefly, in a quiet voice. You are invited to take prolonged social conversations into the hallway.

If you are not dancing, please stay on the sides of the space, not on the dance floor.

Please, don't use mobile devices, cameras, food or glass containers in the Jam space. Please put pieces of clothes you currently don't use to the sides of the space.

Children should be supervised at all times for their own safety and for the safety of others. Caregivers are responsible for ensuring that the energy, activity and movement of children is appropriate for the jam. It is also possible to find solutions of community responsibility for the supervision of children.

Safety self-check

Ask yourself:

- *Is my body hygiene okay for others? Are my feet washed?*
- *Am I wearing non-slippery, loose-fitting, laundered clothing which covers my legs and shoulders?*
- *Am I wearing jewelry that can get tangled up?*
- *Am I free of substances which might adversely impact my behavior at the Jam or alter or impair my awareness?*

5. Initiating or entering a dance

Dancers with a history of dancing together often have their own protocols for initiating a dance that consider the emotional and physical safety of the involved persons.

If you are initiating or entering a dance with someone with whom you have not established such a relationship, please consider the following:

- Asking someone if they want to dance with you is an example of Consent Culture. Emotional and physical safety are a factor. (Some dancers prefer to know who is asking them to dance, e.g. inviting them face-to-face)

- People on the perimeter of the dance space may not be ready to dance. They may be meditating or may still be warming up. They might not want to be asked to dance.
- If the person indicates No (non-verbally), move on without asking why. Don't take it personally. If a person declines on two or three occasions, it is possible that the person does not want to dance with you. (If they do want to dance with you, they will ask you.)
- Before dancing with someone who is unfamiliar to us, we usually initiate a brief discussion about limitations (e.g. injuries) or boundaries either of us may want to set.
- When entering a dance that is already underway, whether it is solo, duet or group, be mindful and aware of whether the other dancers are giving consent to dance with you.

6. Safe dancing

Physical contact in this dance form may cause the release of endorphins. This may affect your judgement, for example your ability to set boundaries. At all times, do your part to maintain a safe and benevolent environment.

Jam skills

- Start dances gently. Apply weight gradually.
- Open your eyes for more awareness of other nearby dancers and the jam as a whole.
- Tune in. Listen to the movement of your partner. Maintain an awareness of your partner(s).
- Ask yourself if you are sharing power in the dance.
- Be alert for cues, such as facial expressions or body tension, which may indicate that your partner is not comfortable. Check in with them and/or stop the dance to discuss what is going on.
- When a dance is over, practice letting go of the dance experience - no matter how amazing it was. Let go of any expectations regarding your dance partner.
- Take breaks in between dances to center yourself.

Contact & chemistry

- Some dances might seem sensual or erotic, but do not assume that a person wants to have an intimate dance with you.
- After an intimate dance, do not assume your dance partner wants to continue beyond the dance floor or take it up in the next dance.

- You may become sexually aroused during a dance. Do not pursue the arousal. Just notice it and let it pass. It may be appropriate to leave the dance.
- Keep your hands and face away from your partner's breasts and genitals. Do not draw your partner onto your genitals.
- Do not stroke or dance front-to-front with your partner unless there is clear consent.
- People at the jam may get to know each other and develop a romantic/sexual relationship. Take your time to get to know the community and its dancers.
- Although approaching people for a date or for sex might be welcome at other venues, it is not acceptable at the jam.

Contact & physics

For many people, lifts are one of the most attractive and enjoyable features of Contact Improvisation. It takes time to learn to lift safely. It also takes time to learn to be lifted safely by others.

- As beginners gain experience with sharing weight and working with momentum, experienced dancers may wish to discuss introducing them to lifts. Take a gradual approach starting with lifts close to the floor.
- No one should attempt to lift you without first discussing it with you. If you are not ready, say No. If you do agree to be lifted but later feel uncomfortable or unsafe, tell your partner to stop, and/or, let your muscles go slack and release yourself onto the floor like a wet noodle if necessary.
- Learn to lift by following momentum instead of muscling partners into lifts.
- Clutching or restricting the limbs of your partner, especially in a lift, may limit their ability to move their limbs so they can fall safely.
- Taking classes to learn to lift safely is recommended.

7. Leaving a dance: The gift of the no

You may leave a dance at any time – if your partner is physically safe- for any reason or for *no* reason.

- You owe no one an explanation for leaving a dance.
- Leave the dance if you feel unsafe emotionally or physically.
- Leave the dance if you find yourself losing awareness of your boundaries or if you want to simply practice setting boundaries.

- Trust your instincts.
- To leave a dance you may use one, any or all of the following: Move out of the Dance, make a gesture, Say "Thank you" or "I am done".

8. The role of the Consent Team

The members of the Content Team are also Jam facilitators. They hold the space and make sure the guidelines are held. To be effective, they need the support and co-operation of *all* participants. This means anybody has the permission to confront inappropriate behavior.

You may approach them at any time, before, during or after the jam in person or via e-mail (consent-team@contactimpro-leipzig.de).

They will be participating in the jam and can be approached while dancing.

They have the authority to intervene in an encounter on or off the dancefloor if necessary, to initiate conflict resolution or require someone to leave or not enter the Jam.

9. Stages of consent culture and the Restorative Circles method

The stages model by Megan Emerson shows the process of dance communities to develop a sustainable Consent Culture through community accountability.

The Stages of Consent Culture for Dance Communities				
Ignoring	Reacting	Planning	Creating	Sustaining
"That's just how it is."	"If we think the problem is bad enough, we will confront someone."	"We have a good system for addressing inevitable problems."	"We are proactively working to head off potential problems."	"Our entire community understands and values consent culture."
This looks like:	This looks like:	This looks like:	This looks like:	This looks like:
What do you mean? We don't have problems here	Problems are only real after they happen to someone I know	Problems happen and are dealt with in a reliable and systematic way	Problems don't have to happen	All dancers feel safe
Response excuses or supports the perpetrator	Response depends on who you talk to	Response is timely, predictable, and community-wide	Response acknowledges microaggressions and intersectionality	Response is seen as a chance to teach and learn rather than as punishment
"Bathroom networks" tell you who to avoid	No formal tracking or institutional memory	Centralized tracking and consistent consequences	Tracking process seeks feedback from underrepresented groups	All dancers feel empowered to speak
Organizers dismiss or blame victim	Organizers ask for every detail, act as gatekeepers, or try to soothe the victim	Organizers value and track feedback regardless of source and severity	Organizers are aware of biases, work to educate themselves and others	Organizers plan for the continuing evolution of dance and consent culture

Created by Megan Emerson in Portland, OR 2018. Feel free to use or adapt for non-commercial purposes.

Conflicts could happen on different levels such as jam participant(s) to jam participant, jam participant to community guidelines, jam participant to jam facilitator(s) or awareness team, jam facilitator(s) or awareness team to guidelines.

Types of conflicts can include, for example, boundary transgression, micro aggression and forms of power abuse due to sexism, racism, ageism, adultism, ableism, classism, homo-/transphobia, xenophobia and other forms of oppression.

The conflict resolution process, as well as who would be involved in the process, would be determined primarily through individual consent. The Consent Team can also step in for a jam participant if community guidelines are broken and the member doesn't want or cannot confront the person who acted and/or does not want to be part of the conflict's resolution process.

We work with the *Restorative Circles method* which invites shared power, mutual understanding, self-responsibility and action in order to repair harm, restore connection and (re)integrate community.

Restorative Circles bring together the three parties to a conflict – those who have acted, those directly impacted and the wider community – within an intentional systemic context, to dialogue as equals. The dialogue process used is shared openly with all participants, and guided by a community member.

A) Pre-Circle

Anyone can call a circle by addressing the Consent Team. A Circle Facilitator is appointed who checks in with those who have acted, those directly impacted and gathers the community (if wanted).

B) Circle

1. Mutual Understanding

What is it you want known and by whom about how you are right now in relation to what happened?

2. Self-Responsibility

What is it that you want known and by whom about what you were looking for in the time you chose to act?

3. Action Plan

How do we move forward from here? What is it that you would like to offer?
What is it that you would like to request?

Facilitation Questions (directed at both parties)

What did you hear is important to her*him?

Is that what you wanted understood?

Is there more?

C) Post-Circle

How are you with the actions? Did they work in the way that you wanted them to work?

10. Sources and Resources

Contact Improvisation & Consent Culture

<https://contactimprovblog.com>

<https://contactimprovconsentculture.com>

Restorative Circles

<https://www.restorativecircles.org>

Transformative Justice

<https://transformativejusticela.wordpress.com>

Community Accountability

<https://communityaccountability.wordpress.com/resources>

The Revolution Starts At Home

<https://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Revolution-starts-at-home-zine.pdf>

Consent Academy

<https://www.consent.academy/consent-basics.html>

The Wheel of Consent

<https://bettymartin.org/videos>

Caring, Communication, Consent, and Caution

<http://ejhs.org/volume17/BDSM.html>

The Messy Consent Framework

<https://touchandplay.org/messy-consent-framework-v3>

Nonviolent Communication

<https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/resources>

Turning Towards Each Other / A Conflict Workbook

<https://turningtowardseachother.medium.com/turning-towards-each-other-embracing-the-gifts-of-conflict-for-social-change-ea28502016b7>

Conflict Is Not Abuse

<https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/conflict-not-abuse-activism-book-interview-sarah-schulman>