

Contact Improvisation-Jam-Information

What is Contact Improvisation (CI)?

Contact Improvisation emerged in the early 1970s in a group of dancers around Steve Paxton and Nancy Stark Smith. It is a **form of dance** that is under ongoing development and that is being practised with various emphases today.

The **physical contact** between dancers plays a crucial role in CI. A shared, improvised dance develops from this contact and the dancers' **movement impulses**, influenced by the force of **gravity**.

CI is **improvised movement** – there are no choreographies or fixed steps to learn. Movements are continuously re-invented, combined and interpreted through improvisation. Still, sensorimotor skills and improvisation skills can be learned in various practice environments. CI is accessible to **everybody who is interested**, regardless of their prior knowledge - professional dancers and amateurs practise CI together.

How does a CI Jam work?

An informal group of people comes together to dance CI in a dance studio or gym hall for a period of approximately 2-4 hours. With some jams, you can come whenever you like, at other jams, there is a certain time frame for arrival – find out before you go!

Most jams have one or several **hosts**. Hosts are responsible for holding the space and they are the first people to contact if you have any questions, concerns or wishes.

Some jams start with an **opening circle** that provides dancers with important information about the jam. Before and/ or after the circle there is time to warm up on your own, or, in some cases, to take part in a guided warm-up.

Some jams are accompanied by music (**Music Jam**), others are not (**Silent Jam**). Please be aware that a jam is a space for dancing and not for talking – usually there is enough time before/ after a jam to chat and exchange.

Sometimes there is a **closing circle** at the end of a jam to share impressions and experiences with others.

New to a Contact Improvisation Jam? Welcome!

These seven tips might be helpful:

1. Take your time ...

... to feel how you are right now: Happy? Content? Insecure? Is there anything that hurts? Are you full of expectations? Or annoyed? Tired? Full of energy? Or something else? Take your time to arrive. Get in contact with the floor and do a warm-up to prepare for dancing.

2. Find your way into the dance ...

... with yourself, with another person, with several people, with everybody. Start with eye contact, physical contact, or verbally – and also, simply be present on the dance floor if you want to dance.

3. At any moment ...

... you can end a dance or start a new one. No justifications or explanations necessary! Trust in what feels good for you.

4. Show up and be responsible ...

... for yourself, for other people, for the security in the space. You are a part of the whole and you are co-creating this jam. Be aware of your own boundaries and of other people's boundaries so that everybody can enjoy dancing. Seek out the jam hosts for more information about the "rules" of the particular jam you are attending.

5. Talk about it ...

... if something is unclear to you. Say "No" if you're feeling emotionally or physically insecure, e.g. if somebody is lifting or holding you, giving you too much weight, or crossing your boundaries.

If your dance partners seem uncomfortable or seem to feel unsafe, ask them about it!

You can always talk to the jam hosts or other dancers if you need support.

6. Sex happens somewhere else.

Sometimes, sexual feelings can arise – notice them and then let them go again. The jam is about dancing; it's not a place to act on your sexual impulses.

7. Share ...

... your experiences and perceptions with other dancers. In doing so, you are contributing to the discourse and the developments in the community.

Safety in a CI Jam

At a CI jam, we share the basic agreement that all participants mind **their own safety AND the safety of their dance partners**. "Take care not to hurt anyone. Take care not to get hurt."

Knowing your own physical and emotional limits and learning to read those of your dance partners is part of the learning process in CI. Knowing our limits offers safety and opens up the freedom to move and experiment in close proximity to these limits.

For **physical safety** it is important to learn some basic techniques, such as rolling on the floor, pouring your weight, and rolling or sliding together.

Techniques for **emotional safety** are more diverse between individuals, and they are at least as important as those for physical safety.

- Wear **comfortable clothes** and remove jewellery that might get caught in clothes, hair, etc.
- Dance with your eyes open and **be aware of the space** („periphery gaze“) in order to be able to quickly react to what is happening on the dance floor.
- See movement impulses as „**invitations**“. Dancers should always have the possibility to decide whether to follow an impulse or not.
- **Don't hold on** to your dance partners' arms and legs – they are their landing gear!
- You can end a dance at any time – **no need to give a reason**.
- Boundaries are often communicated non-verbally. Still, it is always possible to **say a "No" out loud**.
- A "No" is **non-negotiable** and does not require an explanation.

Physical contact in CI

A CI dance mostly develops out of the dancers being in physical contact. This contact is necessary in order to be able to give and take weight and to dance with a mutual point of contact.

Using touch for making sexual advances is not CI!

Physical contact provides us with **essential information** about our dance partners:

- What is the body's organisation **in space** and in relation to my own body?
- What kind of **support** do my dance partners need; how much **weight** can they take?
- In which direction is **our point of contact** moving?

It is great fun and can be very inspiring to yield to the play of our bodies and the physical forces and to discover endless possibilities for movement – from the lightest touch to dynamic and forceful encounters.

Other CI formats

- **Workshops** and **classes** provide you with the chance to learn skills and techniques from experienced dancers/teachers – skills that will support your learning process. Workshops and courses are being offered for **different levels** of experience. Events for beginners are usually tagged as "open level" or "beginners class".
- **Festivals** are international meetings of people dancing and teaching CI that last for several days. Programs feature workshops, jams, labs (short for "laboratories", where the focus is on exploring and trying out), etc.
- **Mixed-ability sessions** are open to people of all physical conditions (accessible/ inclusive).

CI is not a protected term and there are many possible definitions and views of CI. There are also different forms that combine CI with other dance and body techniques.

Since different jams have different hosts, each particular jam has its unique atmosphere and focus. It is worth finding out what fits best for you!

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This info sheet represents a consensus of its authors. We are aware that many issues are presented in a very condensed form and many aspects of CI have not been mentioned. Our aim is to provide some orientation for participating in Contact Improvisation jams. .

You can find more information about CI in Vienna and Austria, including dates for jams and workshops, on

contactimprovisation.at