

## *Protect yourself on the dance floor*

Dance is a non-verbal form of expression, but you still need to use your words to protect yourself while dancing. No one can read your mind. No one will "take the hint". Get in the habit of using your words while dancing, but use helpful words. "You're creeping me out" is not helpful. "I feel uncomfortable when you rub my back," can improve the situation. Be kind and straightforward. Give people a chance to correct inappropriate behavior.

People use the word "creepy" when they feel physically and socially unsafe, but might not be able to explain exactly why they feel threatened. "Creeps" threaten to cross boundaries or actually violate boundaries. Being a bad dancer, stinky, or physically unattractive does not make a person "creepy". Being disrespectful, abusive, or predatory is "creepy".

Innocent social mis-steps and bad dancing can look like abusive or predatory behavior. Give your fellow dancers the opportunity to improve their behavior before writing them off as "creeps". Use your words when you feel unsafe to improve the situation. Confrontation – even polite, kind

confrontation – can be difficult (and rewarding). Constructive criticism is an opportunity to improve your dancing, as well as your relationships with your fellow dancers. A person's response to polite criticism is their concern. Do not accept anger, ridicule, or coercion. Stay away from people who threaten or verbally attack you for speaking up for yourself.

Behavior that makes you feel unsafe is not acceptable in any situation—on or off the dance floor. Being physically close to a stranger tests personal boundaries. New partner dancers don't know which behaviors are acceptable within the framework of dancing, and won't necessarily know when a boundary has been threatened or violated.

Take dance lessons from professionals and learn to recognize the difference between appropriate dance form and unacceptable behavior. But even if you and your partner use good dance form and technique, that situation could still feel unsafe. Take a break and talk to your dance partner or an instructor about improving the situation.

If you have any movement limitations, be sure to tell your partner about them before the dance begins. Safe dancers want to know if you're nursing an injury, don't want to be dipped or lifted, or only want to dance in open position. Only dance with people who respect your limitations. You are not obligated to dance with anyone ever.

Look for dancers who are having a good time – sharing genuine smiles and warm hugs. Aim to dance with people who look comfortable and happy with their dance partner. Ask your fellow dancers about who they feel safe dancing with – not just dancers with good moves, but dancers who pay attention to how their moves affect other people.

**You are not obligated  
to dance with anyone ever.**

**Be kind to your fellow dancers.**

<http://tinyurl.com/partnerdancesafety>

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# Protect Yourself on the Dance Floor

*A practical guide to  
partner dance safety.*  
By R. Crane

## Use your words

When your dance partner makes you feel uncomfortable, hurt or scared, use your words to improve the situation. Politely tell your partner what you'd like them to stop doing. If they don't listen, stop dancing with them. No one actually *owes* anyone a dance. If someone won't let you go, call for help. It's that simple—ask your fellow dancers to help you; they want you to stay safe. You are not alone (especially on the dance floor).

The below phrases can help improve unsafe situations. Give people a chance to correct dangerous behavior.

### Practice saying . . .

Ouch.

Stop.

You're hurting me.

Let go.

No, thank you.

Your keys are poking me.

I'm not comfortable dancing with you.

Don't make me tell you again.

No means no.

Don't dip me.

Don't try to dip yourself; that hurts my back.

Let go of my clothes.

Whenever we dance together, I get hurt.

You're pulling on my arm really hard.

I'd prefer to dance in open position.

You keep hurting me. I don't want to dance with you anymore.

Stop touching my hair.

I feel uncomfortable when you stare at me.

You're leading with your crotch. Can you stick out your butt instead?

Your jewelry is scratching me.

Don't speak to me that way.

Ow, you kicked me!

Be more careful.

I need a break from dancing. Would you like to talk instead?

You're holding me too tightly.

Don't touch me there.

I'm not comfortable with you rubbing my back.

Your cologne is too strong for me; it's hard for me to breathe.

Stop touching my neck.

Don't lean on me.

You're spinning me too fast.

Step back a couple inches.

You've got quite a grip! Can you loosen up on me? (*Squeeze back to remind 'em to loosen up.*)

Ideally, you shouldn't need to use any of these phrases while dancing, but reality requires you to speak up for yourself to protect yourself and your fellow dancers. Don't feel ashamed of not speaking up in the past. Practice speaking up out loud so you can do it from now on. Imagine what you wish you'd said in the past and practice saying it out loud until you can do so clearly and comfortably.

### Stay away from . . .

#### Abusers

Abusers use fear, guilt, shame, and intimidation to wear you down and keep you under his or her thumb. <sup>1</sup>

#### Predators

##### Sexual predators

...do not respect your boundaries.

...do not wait for a "yes" (enthusiastic consent) before sexually moving forward.

...don't accept "no" for an answer.

...sexually or emotionally seduce and coerce,

masterfully. The real experts can even wind words to make it seem like it's your idea.

...use their position or social status to pressure you.

...make you feel nauseous or anxious – your body's warning system. <sup>2</sup>

Dance with people who respect your boundaries. Do not accept pain, ridicule, coercion, or anger. You can say "no" to a dance at any time. You have the right to walk off the dance floor at any time. You are not obligated to dance with anyone ever. Use your words to ask for support from friends or staff when you need it. Warn your fellow dancers to stay away from abusers and predators. Report abusive or dangerous behavior to event hosts and instructors.

Sources:

1 [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/domestic\\_violence\\_abuse\\_types\\_signs\\_causes\\_effects.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/domestic_violence_abuse_types_signs_causes_effects.htm)

2 <https://omgrey.wordpress.com/2011/10/12/emotional-sexual-predators/>

<http://tinyurl.com/partnerdancesafety>

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