



## 6 Tips for Contra Dancing with Kids

*Excerpted from an essay by  
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*For the most part, the contra dance community is wonderfully warm and welcoming to its youngest members, appreciating their delight and cheerfully helping them out when needed. However, we have noticed a few counter-productive tendencies that many dancers have when they encounter kid dancers, and so we wanted to offer you this set of tips to help us all bring up the next generation:*

### **1. DON'T ASSUME YOU KNOW THEIR SKILL LEVEL.**

Yes, they might be a beginner. But so might any adult you don't know. And they just might be a complete pro. Even beginners can really resent being constantly told the next steps once they've figured them out or having their hands held in figures that don't call for it.

### **2. DON'T FORGET TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOU FIRST.**

Adult dancers often screw up the dance because they got fixated on "helping" the kid, and either told them something wrong or failed to do their own part right because they were distracted.

### **3. BE THERE FOR THEM, IF THEY NEED IT.**

Having said the previous two things, there are times when a kid dancer (or really any dancer) gets turned around or confused. For a kid dancer who is still getting their bearings, being right where you are supposed to be, giving them a nudge in the right direction, or giving them a few quick words like "now head back to your partner" can help the dance move along and them feel successful. Just do it at the same level as you would with an adult beginner.

**4. DON'T TALK DOWN TO THEM.** Sure, pay them an appropriate compliment about their dancing, but overwhelming gushing or baby talk is irritating. And don't assume you are their best friend because you had one dance with them.

### **6. DO ASK THEM TO DANCE, OR NOTICE THAT THEY MIGHT BE TRYING TO ASK YOU.**

It can be hard to be a short person standing in a sea of strangers, ready to dance with people other than your parents, but overlooked by a crowd of people above your eye level. If the child is standing with an adult who seems to be with them, make eye contact with the adult to get a sense of it's ok to ask.]



### **5. DON'T PICK THEM UP WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT.**

I sympathize, especially with you tall folks. It can be awkward to bend down and do a swing with a very short person. But it is possible. (A two-handed turn is a good alternative option for big height differences or people with back issues.) In any case, just as you would not (I hope) pick up an adult dancer you don't know without asking, don't do it to a kid. Kids are people, not teddy bears. Not to mention it can also be a hazard, especially on a crowded floor. Some kids do like being picked up, in some circumstances. But the only way to know is to ask first. Don't assume that because you saw someone else pick them up that they want you to—that might have been someone they know well.

## **MOST IMPORTANTLY!**

Remember, kids are people. It pretty much all boils down to "treat kids with the respect you should accord a grown up."

And have fun! These tips are not meant to make you anxious and tense. Kids are generally forgiving if you show them respect and admit it if you mess up. They are there to have fun, just like you are.

