

Guidelines for the Moab Jam

The Moab Jam is an annual international community event for exploring Contact Improvisation--a place to bring “the soft animal of your body”, your wonder, your questions and your heart. Sweat, take risks, be safe, have excellent dances, engage in deep conversation, create, investigate, and be inspired by the beauty of the desert. Well known for rich dancing, creative friends, beautiful surroundings and bountiful opportunities to explore both on and off the dance floor, our goal is to create a warm, safe, and supportive environment where you are part of creating and enjoying the jam that you want. In order to support the dance and to help promote safety and enjoyment in the space, here are some guidelines.

The MARC and Respect for Local Norms. We are guests at the Moab Arts and Recreation Center, and have agreed to follow their rules for the space. These rules will be posted, and we ask that all Moab Jam participants take a look at these, and speak to the Organizers or Jam Hosts if there are any questions. Sleeping or showering in the MARC are absolutely off-limits. It is a privilege to use this lovely space for the Moab Jam, and we want to treat the space with our utmost respect.

Everyone at the Moab Jam co-creates this community event. Each individual is responsible for helping make this event run smoothly which includes being considerate of the dance spaces, doing the kitchen-dance with a cooperative spirit, and helping keep the space clean and safe for all.

Also, as guests in this area of Utah, it is considerate to follow the local customs/norms regarding our public behavior. Contact Improvisation is something rarely seen in this community, and behaviors we consider “normal” may be considered offensive in public spaces. We ask that you are very aware of limiting public displays of affection (no puppy piles on the sidewalk), changing clothes in private (not in front of windows or in the lobby), and potentially adjusting other behaviors which might taint the locals’ view of us as a community. Skinny-dipping is not the norm here in Utah, and Moab Jammers have been ticketed for not wearing suits. Additionally, we are a large group of guests at several community campgrounds—be aware of the impact your behavior might have on those not part of our group.

Modifying our behavior might feel awkward and inconvenient, but being

respectful of others comfort levels in their hometown is really important.

No fire-dancing in or around the MARC property.

Jam Hosts. The Moab Jam is organized and facilitated by Gretchen Spiro and Todd Paulsmeyer. We also have “Jam Hosts” to help support your dancing and your experience at the Moab Jam. The Jam Hosts are the “go-to people” for Jam questions or concerns. You can ask them to help you with dancing skills, ask for suggestions of how to feel more included or how to emotionally navigate being in a large group experience, or you can suggest requests for things that you might want to have happen at the Jam. A list of the Jam Hosts will be posted in the lobby of the MARC.

While the Organizers and Jam Hosts are technically in charge of holding the space, the spirit of the Jam is truly contained and maintained by the community as a whole. We feel deep gratitude for every dance and dancer that enriches our collective exploration!

[The following is adapted from the Boulder CI lab guidelines]

Circles. We find that participation in circles and announcement times creates group cohesion, personal safety, and deepens our dances. Times for group meetings will be posted on the jam schedule in the lobby.

These circles may be logistical, “mixers” to create cohesion and meet new folks, or be times for more personal sharing. If you miss a group meeting, please check in with a friend to see what announcements or other important details you might have missed.

In sharing circles we may invite you to speak your intentions for the Jam, communicate any injuries that might affect your dance, and offer personal sharing related to your dancing. While the circle is a chance to share, it is not a time to fix or be fixed. We do not encourage cross talk or debate. We request that sharings 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.

Physical Safety. Contact Improvisation is inherently risky. Serious injury, though rare, is always a possibility in this form. By taking part in the Jam you acknowledge this fact and take responsibility for your own safety. Here

are some guidelines for safety:

- Know the limits of your skill. While it's worthwhile to take mindful risks, don't put yourself in physical situations that your skill level does not support. You might find that doing a movement at half speed allows mind and body to cooperate better.
- Be aware of what is happening around you. 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? Stay mindful about what is going on in the dance space.
- At the Moab Jam, we have 2 studios rented—if one studio feels too crowded for you to focus or move the way your dance is inspired, relocate to the other space.
- Do not allow your partner to manipulate you or push you beyond your abilities. Do not try to “keep up” with someone because you perceive that they have more skill than you. You can say "no" either with your words or with your body.

Music. Music can be an amazing addition to help support the dance. It can also be a hindrance. 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 mindful of the impact their music has upon the entire space and everyone's dance within it. Learn to “read the space”. When you make music you are basically introducing another dance partner into the space with which dancers must either contend or move. Generally speaking, music with a less driving presence and few or no words is more supportive of dancing at the Jam. Another rule of thumb is to create equal times of silence and music in the Jam.

We ask that the piano is only played by people who know how to play it (it's not a great venue to introduce your child to musical experimentation.)

Sound and Talking. Sound is a natural part of embodied movement and is welcome at Jam. Talking as a means of deepening into the dance is also welcome in the space, for instance when asking your partner to pursue some interesting facet of movement or giving/receiving feedback. However, we request that general social chatter be done off the dance floor or even

outside of the entrance lobby. Social talking, even when you are at the sides of the space, pulls people out of the direct experience of the dance. If you find yourself talking, please ask yourself the question, “Are my words deepening my dance or pulling me out of it?”

Boundaries. You have the right and responsibility to maintain your own boundaries in the dance. You have the right and responsibility to say “no” (or “yes”) in the dance, to end a dance, or move away from a situation that doesn’t suit you at any time. You don’t have to apologize, accommodate, or explain. If you don’t know what your boundary is, or if you have trouble saying no in your dances, you have the responsibility to learn how to do this. If something happens in your dance that is troubling to you or feels like a violation please talk directly to your partner (see Feedback section), refraining from blaming or projecting if possible. If you need help, you can ask a Jam Host or another community member for support.

Conversely, 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. If you’re not sure, ask your partners what your impact is. Practice hearing feedback without becoming defensive. Practice listening to non-verbal cues and get verbal feedback if there is any confusion or ambiguity.

Sexuality. Because we are sexual primates, sexuality will always be present in some way, shape or form in CI and in this Jam. 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.

The Moab Jam is not a place to look for sexual partners, or for overt sexual behavior. However, we do invite dancers to show up responsibly with their full beings and we do create a safe place for self-exploration and expression, using CI as our container.

If you witness a dance that makes you uncomfortable, you may choose to share your discomfort to the group or directly to the dancers. It may turn out that you are projecting/misinterpreting, you may be seeing unconscious/shadow behavior, or you may be naming unacceptable behavior. This is your Jam, and you are invited to share your experience of

it.

Different dancers have different tolerances and desires for sensuality in their dances. Do not initiate sensual dances unless you know your partner and know they would welcome sensuality in the dance. When in doubt, do your best to contribute to an atmosphere of safety, especially for women and dancers who are new to the Jam.

Power imbalances and gender oppression are real phenomena and can make it difficult for people to speak up when they feel threatened or make them confused about what they are actually feeling during a dance. While this can happen to men and women, it can be especially true for women. 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 unwanted agenda to your dance. Learn to play with the edge of containment vs. expression, and check in with your partner. You have a responsibility to understand how your behavior impacts your dance partner and the dance space.

Unwanted sexual advances and touching are NEVER acceptable and anyone experiencing this should stop the dance, tell their partner "no," or share their experience with a Jam Host or anyone else in the dance space that can help.

Feedback. A great way to get what you want from your experience at Jam is to give and receive verbal feedback whenever you feel called to. This can happen during the middle of a dance, immediately after a dance, after Jam, etc. While non-verbal feedback is inherent to the form of CI, spoken words can deepen our understanding of each other and create more satisfying and safe connections. Give/ask for feedback in your own way, or use our suggested script as a model to get you going:

What I really liked about our dance was _____.
Something that was challenging for me was _____.
My request is _____.

Children. While the Moab Jam is primarily for adult dancers, we attempt to make this event family-friendly. We welcome children to share the camping experience with the group, and there may be times that they are welcome

in the dance space. We ask that you bring children into the main studios only when the space is not filled, and only if your children can contribute in a way that is not disruptive to others who are dancing. The Moab Jam is a physically risky environment and parents need to be responsible for the safety of their children at all times. Also, while many people love children, some people find their energy and behavior a distraction, especially in verbal sharing times. If you find yourself being distracted or worried about children in the space, please speak immediately to the parents, who will likely appreciate your honesty.

The smaller downstairs studios may be a perfect place for children to explore the wonders of movement.

The Moab Jam would like to acknowledge the Boulder Contact Improvisation Lab for the creation and sharing of the above guidelines, which have been modified for the needs of the Moab Jam. For more information about the Boulder CI Lab Guidelines see their website: <http://sites.google.com/site/bouldercilab/>

May we continue to co-create fun, safe, and strong containers to dance and explore.

Enjoy the Moab Jam!