

WOMEN IN FORRÓ | WORKSHOP KIT

GUIDE 2

NAMING HARM IN DANCE SPACES

From Uncomfortable to Violent: Naming Harm in Dance Spaces

THIS GUIDE APPLIES TO:

FORMAT A 60 min class	FORMAT B 90 min festival	FORMAT C dedicated event	FORMAT D leadership only
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ABOUT THIS KIT

This guide is part of the Women in Forró Community Workshop Kit, a modular series of facilitated sessions designed for the European forró scene. Each guide addresses one theme and can be used as a standalone session or as part of a longer programme.

The kit draws on the HeForShe Barbershop Toolkit (v1, 2017) and the Barbershop Toolkit 2.0 (2025), adapted for the specific dynamics of social dance communities.

How to use this guide

1. Read the full guide before running any session.
2. Choose your format (A, B, or C) based on your event context.
3. Read the Facilitator Notes carefully, especially if you are not a trained facilitator.
4. Adapt the forró scenarios to your specific community if needed.
5. Always prepare a referral resource before the session starts (see Facilitator Notes, page 3).

FACILITATOR NOTES

This guide is written for the person running the session. You do not need to be a gender equality expert to facilitate these workshops. What you do need is a willingness to hold space for discomfort, to stay curious rather than defensive, and to model the kind of respectful engagement you are asking of participants.

If you are not a trained facilitator

UNTRAINED FACILITATOR TIPS

- Read this guide in full at least two days before the session. Do not prepare the night before.
- Identify a co-facilitator if possible. Having two people in the room means one can hold the group while the other manages difficult moments.
- Your job is not to have the answers. Your job is to ask the questions and make it safe to think out loud. If you do not know how to respond to something, say so: 'That is worth sitting with. Let me come back to that.'
- You will likely know some participants personally. That is both an asset and a risk. Your social standing in the community does not give you authority to override or dismiss someone's experience.
- Prepare for resistance. Some participants will push back. That is normal and not a sign of failure. See the Handling Resistance section in this guide.
- Do not try to run Format B or C alone if this is your first time facilitating. Find a co-facilitator, even if they are also untrained.

Before the session: what to prepare

- Read the full guide.
- Identify a referral resource for anyone who may need support after the session. This could be a local counselling service, a trusted person in the community, or a national helpline. Have the contact details ready to share.
- Prepare the room: chairs in a circle or semicircle, no desks between facilitator and participants. You can also sit on the dance floor itself.
- Print or display the Continuum Visual (see Exercise 1) where all participants can see it.
- If you are using the scenario cards (Exercise 2), print and cut them in advance.
- Set your own ground rules with yourself: what will you do if someone discloses a personal experience of harm? What will you do if someone becomes hostile? Know your exits before you open the door.

Disclosure protocol

This session addresses harm. Someone in the room may have experienced what is being discussed. If a participant discloses a personal experience during the session:

- Thank them for sharing without making it the centre of the group's attention.
- Do not ask follow-up questions about their personal experience in front of the group.
- Continue the session. Check in privately with the person afterwards.

- Have your referral resource ready to share one-to-one, not announced to the group.

This is not therapy. You are not a counsellor. Your role is to facilitate a community conversation, not to process individual trauma. Stay in that role.

Ground rules to establish at the start of every session

- One voice at a time.
- Speak from your own experience. Use 'I' not 'women always' or 'men never.'
- What is said here stays here. Confidentiality is not optional.
- You can pass. No one is required to share anything personal.
- Discomfort is expected. Disrespect is not.
- We are not here to judge individuals. We are here to examine patterns.

Handling resistance

Resistance is a normal part of this kind of work. The most common forms in a dance community context:

What resistance looks like

- 'This is just how forró is.'
- 'In Brazil, this is normal.'
- 'You are making people afraid to dance.'
- 'Not all men are like that.'
- 'She could have just said no.'
- 'This is too political for a dance class.'

How to respond

- 'What part of forró requires this to happen?'
- 'Norms are different in different contexts. We are talking about this context.'
- 'We are not talking about fear. We are talking about awareness.'
- 'Yes. We are talking about patterns, not every individual.'
- 'Let us talk about what makes it easy or hard to say no in a dance.'
- 'Safety in a community is not separate from the community.'

WHY THIS SESSION

In dance communities, harm often goes unnamed because there is no shared vocabulary for it. The word 'violence' feels too heavy for what happened, so nothing gets called anything at all. Someone grips too hard and says nothing when it hurts. A follow signals discomfort and the lead adjusts for three seconds, then returns to the same grip. A woman leaves a festival early and does not come back. A man's behaviour is discussed in whispers but not addressed because 'he is a good dancer' or 'he means well' or 'it is complicated because he is a teacher.'

The continuum framework names what is happening. It shows that harm does not start with assault. It starts with patterns that go unchallenged, that are absorbed into the culture of a scene, that train everyone in the room to look away.

This session introduces the continuum to a dance community audience. It is not about creating fear or suspicion. It is about giving people a shared language for something that many already feel but struggle to name.

The forró-specific context

Forró is a partnered social dance with a tradition of close hold and improvised leading and following. This creates a physical intimacy that has real value. It also creates specific conditions for harm that are not present in other social contexts:

- Physical contact is the default, not a choice made in the moment.
- Saying no to a dance or to a specific touch requires interrupting the social contract of the dance floor.
- The lead/follow structure can replicate dynamics of control and deference when left unexamined.
- Power imbalances between teachers and students, between experienced dancers and beginners, and between those with social capital and those without, shape who can speak and who stays silent.
- Forró communities in Europe are multinational, multilingual, and carry different cultural norms around physical contact, consent, and confrontation. These differences are real and do not excuse harm.

Online spaces are also part of the scene. Private messaging groups, social media comment sections, and group chats extend the social dynamics of the dance floor into contexts that are harder to witness and harder to challenge. Patterns of sharing images or sexual commentary about community members without their knowledge or consent have occurred in European forró communities. These are not separate from the dance scene. They are part of it.

THE CONTINUUM: CORE CONCEPT

Gender-based violence exists on a continuum. It does not begin with the most serious acts. It begins with the small acts that teach everyone in a community what is normal, what is acceptable, and what will go unchallenged.

The continuum is not a hierarchy where only the far end 'really counts.' Every point on it causes harm. Every point reinforces the conditions for the next.

NAMING HARM IN DANCE SPACES IN THE FORRO SCENE		
LEVEL	ON THE DANCE FLOOR	ONLINE / OFF THE FLOOR
Normalised discomfort	Grip that hurts but 'that is just how he leads' Unsolicited dips, lifts, or moves that were not agreed to Being told to relax or trust more when expressing discomfort	Comments rating women's dancing in terms of their bodies DMs that begin with compliments and move to sexual content
Boundary violations	Continuing to touch someone who has physically pulled back Asking repeatedly for a dance after being declined once Adjusting a follow's body without asking	Sharing someone's contact details without their consent Discussing a woman's body or behaviour in a private group chat
Sexual harassment	Sexual remarks during or after a dance Genital contact that is not incidental to the dance Using the dance as cover for escalating physical contact	Sharing intimate images or videos of community members without consent Sexual commentary in comment sections or group chats about named or identifiable women
Sexual violence	Assault. The same dynamics that enable earlier points on the continuum, left unchallenged, create the conditions for this.	Coordinated sharing of non-consensual intimate images. Targeted online harassment of someone who has reported harm.

Facilitator note: the 'it is just dance' deflection

The most common pushback when introducing the continuum in a dance community is that the physical nature of dance makes these categories ambiguous. 'It is just how we dance.' This is worth addressing directly.

The question is not whether physical contact happens in forró. The question is whether the person on the receiving end of that contact is comfortable with it and whether the person giving it is paying attention. The dance frame does not remove the need for attention to another person's comfort. It makes that attention more necessary, not less.

SESSION FORMATS

This guide offers three format options. Choose based on your event context. All formats use the same core concepts and exercises — the difference is depth, time, and group composition.

Format A — 60 Minutes (Weekly Dance Class)

	Format A at a glance
Duration	60 minutes
Group size	8 to 25 participants
Setting	Dance studio, during or after a regular class
Facilitator	One person, can be the teacher or a trusted community member
Materials	The Continuum Visual (this guide, page 5), no scenario cards needed
Goal	Introduce the continuum and establish shared vocabulary

SESSION FLOW

6. Welcome and ground rules (5 min). Set the tone. Use the ground rules from the Facilitator Notes.
1. Introduction: why we are talking about this (5 min). One or two sentences on why a dance community needs this conversation. No statistics. No lectures. 'We care about this community. That means we need to be able to name what goes wrong in it.'
2. The Continuum Visual (10 min). Display or describe the continuum table. Walk through each level. Give one forró-specific example per level. Ask: 'Has anyone witnessed something that would sit on this continuum? You do not need to share details. A yes or a nod is enough.'
3. Small group discussion (25 min). Groups of 3 to 4. Question: 'Where on this continuum have you seen something go unnamed? What made it hard to name?' Bring groups back together. Facilitator summarises themes without attributing individual comments.
4. Closing (15 min). One word from each person: what they are taking from the session. Facilitator closes with: 'Naming something is not the end of the work. It is the beginning.'

Tip for Format A: if you are the regular teacher

Running this session in your own class means you have existing relationships with participants — which is an asset. It also means some people may be reluctant to speak freely in front of you, especially if there is a power dynamic between you as teacher and them as students. Acknowledge this at the start: 'I am a part of this community and I am not exempt from these dynamics. I am here to learn alongside you, not to evaluate you.'

Format B — 90 Minutes (Festival Community Exchange)

	Format B at a glance
Duration	90 minutes
Group size	15 to 40 participants
Setting	Festival workshop room, community space
Facilitator	Two facilitators strongly recommended
Materials	Continuum Visual, Scenario Cards (see Exercise 2), sticky notes, pens
Goal	Name the continuum, practise recognition, begin to build shared accountability norms

SESSION FLOW

7. Welcome, ground rules, and introductions (10 min).
1. Introduction: why a dance community needs this (10 min). Slightly longer than Format A. Include the online dimension explicitly: 'This is not only about what happens on the dance floor. It is also about what happens in our group chats, our comment sections, and our private messages.'
2. Exercise 1: The Continuum Visual (15 min). Full group. Walk through the continuum table. Invite brief responses — not full discussion yet. 'Where does something fit that you have seen or experienced? You can place it on the table without describing it.'
3. Exercise 2: Scenario Cards (30 min). See Exercise 2 below. Small groups of 4 to 5. Each group receives two scenario cards. Groups discuss: What is happening here? Where does it sit on the continuum? What made it hard to name or address?
4. Full group debrief (15 min). Each group shares one key insight. Facilitator weaves themes together. Do not try to summarise everything. Name two or three things that came up across groups.
5. Closing: one commitment (10 min). Each participant writes one commitment on a sticky note — something they will do or stop doing based on the session. Not shared aloud unless they choose to. Sticky notes go on a shared wall.

Tip for Format B: managing a mixed-nationality group

Festival groups are typically multinational. Differences in cultural norms around touch and consent will come up. Do not shut them down. Acknowledge them: 'Cultural context shapes what feels normal. And we are also here, in this community, in this room, where we can choose what norms we want to hold.' Do not allow 'this is cultural' to function as a conversation-ender.

Format C — Dedicated Safer Space Event (Half Day or Full Day)

Format C uses all of the same exercises as Format B but adds depth, follow-through, and space for a panel or storytelling component. It is designed as part of a longer event and works best when Guide 2 is paired with Guide 3 (Bystander to Ally) on the same day.

	Format C at a glance
Duration	2 to 3 hours for this guide alone, within a longer day
Group size	20 to 60 participants
Setting	Dedicated event space with breakout capacity
Facilitator	Two facilitators plus a panel moderator if using the panel option
Materials	All of the above plus panel speakers (optional), full documentation
Goal	Deep engagement with the continuum, including online harm; collective accountability-building

Format C follows the same flow as Format B with the following additions:

- After Exercise 2, add a 20-minute panel or storytelling component. Invite two or three people from within the community to speak briefly about moments when they named something or were named. Not full testimonials. Specific moments.
- Add Exercise 3: Online Harm Mapping (see below) as a standalone 30-minute session.
- Close with a full group commitment circle rather than individual sticky notes (see Closing Options).

EXERCISES

Exercise 1: The Continuum Visual

Use the continuum table on page 5 of this guide. It can be printed, projected, or written on a flipchart.

Walk through each row from top to bottom. For each level, give one concrete forró example from the table and ask the group if they would add anything. Do not rush. The goal is recognition, not speed.

Key question for Exercise 1:

'Think about the last time you saw something in this community that made you uncomfortable. Where does it sit on this continuum? You do not need to share the details. Just notice where you would place it.'

Exercise 2: Scenario Cards

These scenarios are fictional but grounded in patterns that occur in forró communities across Europe. They are not case studies. They are starting points for conversation.

Print and cut the cards below. Each group of 4 to 5 participants receives two cards. Allow 15 minutes for group discussion, then 15 minutes for full-group debrief.

Discussion prompts for each card:

- What is happening here? Can you name it?
- Where does it sit on the continuum?
- What made it possible for this to happen?
- What would have needed to be different, in the moment or in the culture of the community, for this not to happen?

SCENARIO CARDS

Card A

During a party at a festival, a woman mentions to her friend that a well-known teacher adjusted her hold during a class in a way that felt uncomfortable. Her friend says: 'He does that with everyone, he is just very hands-on. He is a great teacher.' The woman does not bring it up again.

What is happening here? What role does the teacher's reputation play?

Card B

A man at a weekly class consistently asks the same woman to dance at the end of every class. She has declined twice. The third time she says yes to avoid the awkwardness. Later she tells a friend she has been thinking about switching to a different class or stop classes entirely.

What does 'saying yes to avoid awkwardness' tell us about how the dance floor works?

Card C

In a private messaging group used by a group of male dancers to organise rides to festivals, a member posts a comment about a woman who was at the event, including a description of how she danced and what he would

like to do with her. Several members react with laughing emojis. No one says anything.

What does the silence of the other group members do? What would it have taken for someone to respond differently?

Card D

A festival organiser receives a complaint about a DJ who made sexual comments to a volunteer during the event. The organiser knows the DJ well, values him professionally, and decides to 'have a word' privately. The DJ is invited back to the next festival. The volunteer stops coming to events.

What did the organiser's choice communicate to the community? Who was protected, and who was not?

Card E

During a class, a teacher corrects a student's posture with extended hands-on guidance. The student is new and does not know whether this is normal or not. She looks to the other students to read the situation. They continue dancing. She does not say anything.

What does 'looking to others to read the situation' tell us about how new members learn what is normal in a community?

Card F

After a festival, photos and short videos taken on the dance floor begin circulating in a group chat. Some of the images focus on specific women without their knowledge. The people sharing them find them funny. One person in the group asks if it is a good idea to share them. The conversation moves on.

What made it possible for the concern to be raised and then dismissed? What would 'taking it seriously' have looked like?

Exercise 3: Online Harm Mapping (Format C only)

This exercise is designed for Format C and can also be added to Format B if time allows and the group has already engaged well with Exercises 1 and 2.

Ask participants to individually list, on a piece of paper, any online behaviour they have witnessed in forró community spaces: group chats, comment sections, direct messages, social media posts, that made them uncomfortable. They do not need to share specifics. They are mapping for themselves.

Then, as a group, ask:

- What patterns came up?

- Does the online space feel like the same community as the dance floor, or a different one?
- When you see something harmful online, what stops you from responding?
- What would it mean for this community to hold the same standards online as we are trying to hold on the dance floor?

Facilitator note: online harm in the forró scene

Private messaging groups where community members share sexual commentary about women, including images and videos of identifiable individuals without their consent, are a documented pattern in European social dance communities. This is not speculative. You do not need to reference a specific incident to name it honestly. The framing that works: 'This has happened in forró communities. It happened in ours. The question is not whether it could happen. The question is what we do about it.'

CLOSING OPTIONS

Option 1: One word (Format A)

Go around the circle. Each person says one word that captures what they are taking from the session. No explanation required. The facilitator closes with a brief statement.

Suggested closing statement: 'Naming something is not the end of the work. It is the beginning. The next step is noticing. And the step after that is deciding what to do with what we notice. We will keep that conversation going.'

Option 2: Sticky note commitment (Format B)

Each participant writes one commitment on a sticky note. It can be something they will do, something they will stop doing, or something they will pay attention to. Sticky notes go on a shared wall. The wall stays up for the duration of the festival or event.

Facilitator reads a selection aloud (without attributing them) before closing.

Option 3: Commitment circle (Format C)

Sitting in a circle, the facilitator invites anyone who wants to share their commitment aloud to do so. Not a requirement. The circle continues until everyone who wants to speak has spoken.

The facilitator closes by naming what was said in the room collectively: 'Here is what this community said today.' This is a form of collective accountability. It is also something that can be shared with those who were not present.

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER GUIDES IN THIS KIT

Guide	Connection
Guide 1: What Is Gender?	Run before this guide if participants are new to the conversation. Establishes the vocabulary for norms and roles that underpins the continuum.
Guide 3: Bystander to Ally	Run directly after this guide. Guide 2 names what happens. Guide 3 addresses what to do about it.
Guide 4: Power in the Scene	Scenario Cards C, D, and E in this guide are directly relevant to the power dynamics covered in Guide 4. Use them as a bridge.
Guide 5: The Box We Dance In	The cultural clash dimension raised in Format B connects to Guide 5's work on masculinity norms and intersectionality.

SOURCE MATERIAL

This guide draws on the following sources, adapted for the social dance community context:

- HeForShe Barbershop Toolkit v1 (2017), UN Women Iceland / Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iceland. Tool 5: What is Violence?
- HeForShe Barbershop Toolkit 2.0 (2025), UN Women. Module 9: Gender-Based Violence; Module 2: Bystander Intervention and Allyship; Module 3: Digital Masculinities and Online Behaviour.
- Promundo / ABAAD, Programme Ra (adaptation of Program H).

The scenario cards and forró-specific examples were developed by Women in Forró based on patterns documented in the European social dance scene.

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Community Workshop Kit — Guide 2: Naming Harm in Dance Spaces | English version

Portuguese and German versions forthcoming.