

SAFETY IN LINE DANCING - FOOTWEAR

We have had a couple of e mails lately regarding footwear for line dancing. One wanted to know if it was in order for her to tell one of her ladies that her high heeled footwear was inappropriate and the other asking if BWDA has a policy on footwear. The answer to both questions was YES.

We have mentioned footwear before when discussing insurance and an instructor's duty of care. If you allow someone to dance in the wrong type of footwear and an accident occurs, either concerning the person injuring themselves or injuring others, you could possibly be sued for negligence. The footwear most likely to cause damage to others are high heels. If the wearer steps back on someone, the heel can cause a lot of damage. Injury to themselves could result if they `go over` on their ankle or lose their balance and fall, as happened during one of our member's lessons and the lady broke her thigh. Our member had already warned the lady about her shoes and had taken a photo of them. The instructor had not been negligent in this instance. At a social, another lady got her heel caught in her own trouser bottom, which had a turn up, and broke her ankle. What beggared belief is, she continued to wear the same shoes after her ankle had mended - we attended the same monthly socials and saw this with our own eyes. Could the host be called negligent, debateable with it being a social and not a class, but possibly.

How do you tell someone they are wearing the wrong shoes? The easiest way is to have a notice where you take the entrance fee and have a leaflet to give to new dancers when they join your class. If you have anyone not wearing acceptable footwear ignoring either of the above, take them to one side and explain politely the reasons why their footwear is not appropriate. In one instance at one of our own socials, we actually banned a lady from dancing . She had pencil thin, very high fashion boots on and besides damaging the floor, she was a danger to others. She was a class member and thought she would `dress up` for the social. Why she thought it was ok to wear such boots at a social when we stress about footwear in class on a regular basis we could never understand. The lady thought we were worried about her injuring herself and told us not to worry as she always wore high heels. It had never occurred to her about injuring others or damaging the floor. When we explained our concerns, she was happy to change into her flats which she used for driving. These were not ideal either but so much better than the boots.

If you explain in a pleasant manner, the reasons why different footwear is not suitable, most people understand and comply. However, if a dancer does not take heed, you must stress, in the presence of others for your own protection, that if an accident occurs, she is responsible and not you. We suggest you still try and ensure she does comply, as if wearing the wrong footwear causes an injury to some else, you may still be held responsible as you have allowed her to dance.

BWDA policy is no sandals, no ordinary trainers, no high heels. Sandals do not give enough support and you can twist your ankle, trainers grip and can cause ankle/knee injuries and too high heels, already discussed above. We personally would also like to add ordinary ball room shoes with peep toes as we have seen folk tread on the open bit of their own shoe and stumble. If people don't want to lay out money for `proper` dance shoes/dance trainers, then we suggest shoes or boots which give support but not with grip/traction, to prevent twisting/spraining of ankles or knees, as already mentioned. Leather soles are preferable. Regarding height/thinness of heels, we say if you cannot do a heel grind, then the heels are too high and/or too thin.

One of the members who made one of the initial enquiries got back to us and told us about a piece for beginners on Copperknob web site where footwear is mentioned. It is a very good introduction for beginners but **do not take heed of the part where putting down talc on a `sticky` floor is suggested - DON'T DO IT, IT NEGATES YOUR INSURANCE.** The suggestion of putting tape on the bottom of your shoes for a `slippy` floor is fine.