



**Part
7c**

Resources for Implementing a Fragrance-free Policy

Acknowledgements

Produced by the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group: Compiled/written by Marni Rachmiel, with major contributions from Morna Leonard, Kathryn Bowman, Lindsey Dono, and Amy Wimmer. Writing and editing support from members of the task group. Published March 2024.

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Introduction

[Research has shown that around 30% of people experience health problems from exposure to fragranced products.](#) Chemical sensitivity is an invisible disability that can cause intense reactions to everyday products, creating a barrier to participation in public events. Please see the accompanying resource, *Scents and Access in Dance Spaces: An Introduction*, for an in-depth discussion of this problem and why it is an issue for music, dance, and song communities.

While it is not possible to keep any public event 100% fragrance-free, a lot can be done to keep chemical exposures to a minimum. Examples include checking your venues for scented products and doing all you can to remove, avoid, or mitigate these; providing safe products for everyone to use during your events; sharing information about safer practices and products with your community; making your policies clear; and making clear, kind requests for cooperation. If/when your group decides to adopt a fragrance-free policy, here are some suggestions for how to implement that commitment to accessibility.

Educate dancers and adopt guidelines and policies

Be clear that chemical sensitivity is a real though invisible disability. If you value being accessible to all, this is an important and often neglected context. Working toward a fragrance-free environment is like having elevators and ramps and braille plates in elevators (but a lot less expensive).

It is important to educate dancers that refraining from using perfumes or colognes is just a first step. Many other products can be every bit as problematic, but might not occur to people who are trying to be helpful. Try to educate your community to take chemical sensitivities seriously, to believe what people say they experience even if your experience is different, and to respond with compassion.

- Understand that different people react badly to different things. Some sensitive people may be tolerant of some scents and intolerant of others. There is wide variation between individual sensitivities. While one sensitive person you know may be fine with something like lavender or peppermint essential oil, another may have a severe reaction to even natural scents. A general fragrance-free policy is the most accessible approach.
- Ask everyone to check the products they use and avoid scented products on their bodies and clothing when coming to dance. Explain the scope of what is needed online and in written materials. Make announcements to refer to the detailed information. (See below for checklists and suggestions for safer products.)

- **Tips for communicating about fragrance-related access issues:**

- Please don't take offense or take it personally when someone has a reaction to a product you are using. **It's pretty common for a dancer, even someone who has their own sensitivities to not even notice something with a scent that is problematic for someone else.** "I'm sorry, but I can't dance with you/swing with you/stand close to you, I'm having a reaction to some kind of product you're using," is not an insult or attack; it's a boundary and a matter of health.
- Understand that it can be scary and distressing to have to tell someone that you are reacting to something they've used and that you need space from them. No one wants to be rude or give offense, and people with chemical sensitivities and other invisible disabilities have already had too many experiences of being disbelieved and criticized. It's natural to feel a little defensive, but as with any boundary issue, don't ever invalidate someone communicating to you about their experience and needs. An angry "No, it's not!" or "No, I didn't!" really adds to the distress. A good response is something like "I didn't realize, I'm sorry. Thank you for telling me," and give them space or let them take space from you.
- People who have become severely chemically sensitive can experience extremely difficult reactions to exposure, including severe breathing difficulties, cognitive impairment, confusion, anxiety, etc. People can be intensely knocked out and feel ill for days from a bad exposure. Please understand what is at stake for them and what they may already be experiencing by the time they need to step away from you. Imagine a time when you felt horribly ill and realize that they may feel this way, or are trying desperately to avoid feeling this way yet again, perhaps for long after an exposure. Try to empathize with how upsetting, isolating, and discouraging it is for them to be met with triggers for this distress in so many social settings.
- Use your knowledge of your dancers and your regional and local community culture to craft how to most effectively approach people whose fragrance use is causing an obstacle to access.

More things to keep in mind as you transition to a new policy:

- If you have chemically sensitive dancers who show up but still are exposed to more scents than they can handle, be sure they know who they can talk to.
- If there are only a few people wearing scents, they can be approached individually, and kindly asked if, by washing, they might be able to lessen or remove the fragrance.

- If a new dancer brings fragrance reactions to your attention, help them understand the normative ways they can try to protect themselves (e.g. switch lines as needed, if it's just a few people they're reacting to; give them polite scripts to use like "Sorry, I'd be happy to dance with you but unfortunately I'm reacting to some kind of scented product you're using so I can't, maybe another time." Or, "I'm feeling out of breath/dizzy, could we skip the swing?")
- If a dancer has to leave because of fragrances, try to respond in a way that does not further marginalize or "other" them (validate their experience, apologize that your dance wasn't accessible this time, tell them your group is working on the problem and encourage them to stay in touch/try again), and refund their money so they at least didn't have to pay cash to be disappointed and excluded. You might give them a coupon for a free admission in the future to help them try again down the road and feel that you really do want them to feel welcome at your dance.

On-site implementation tips

Regular series

Planning before the dance

Have someone with good awareness of these issues assess your location for accessibility. Some things will be out of your control, especially in a rented hall with other users.

- Halls with more soft surfaces (carpets, curtains, upholstery, etc.) may be harder to make safe than halls with harder surfaces. Some halls have other users who feel the need to use plug-ins.
- When possible, let hall managers know of your intent to be more accessible to the chemically sensitive community members. Point out that this is a legitimate ADA/accessibility issue. Ask that air fresheners not be used. Ask that the bathrooms not have fragrance dispensers/air fresheners.
- Let facilities know you'll provide your own soap, and be prepared to share information if they're interested.
- Have volunteers assigned to get, store, set up, and clean up your fragrance-free products, sink/dispenser signage, etc.

It helps to have one or two people able and prepared to talk to people who are identified as wearing fragrances. (You don't want the chemically sensitive person doing this, as it puts them at added risk, and their

distress can make the other person feel defensive.) Reach out to people with gentle energy who are well-liked and respected in your community, and ask if they would be ambassadors for accessibility. Be sure these folks are as fragrance-free as possible, so the affected dancers can safely approach them to ask for help communicating.

Announcements during the dance

Either the caller or an organizer should mention the fragrance policy along with announcements about other safety/protocol information. Suggested wording can be:

“We have a number of community members with chemical sensitivities. In order for everyone to be able to dance safely, we try to be as fragrance-free as possible. Please help us in this by switching to fragrance-free products. You’ll find a flyer over there which has suggestions for alternatives and where to easily buy them.”

On website

If your dance maintains a website or social media presence, mention the fragrance policy. Feel free to link to these documents from our toolkit.

- A truly accommodating policy will have wording such as “Please help us keep these events fragrance-free so that all may dance safely,” rather than “If you choose to wear perfume or other fragrances, use a light hand.” (Remember that any use of fragrance, even a small amount or “natural” fragrances/essential oils may still be a barrier to access for dancers who are severely sensitized.) There are examples in the [Fragrance-free Products](#) document.

In facilities

- In the bathrooms and kitchen—at *all* sinks used by dancers—provide fragrance-free soaps.
- Keep folks from using wall dispensers by taping off/taping paper towels over the front to prevent automatic usage. You might write **“Do Not Use”** on the paper.
- Additional tips for fragrance-free hand washing supplies:
 - Fragrance-free soap in foaming soap pumps uses less soap.
 - Buying in bulk can be cheaper, but gallon jugs of fragrance-free liquid soap may go rancid before they are used up, so smaller quantities may be better.

- The foaming pumps take a 3:1 ratio of water to soap. When refilling the pump, put the water in first, then the soap, so it doesn't foam up and make a mess/waste soap.
- Use only pumps that were new or came with fragrance-free soap. Bottles that formerly held scented soaps will always contaminate soap with fragrance.
- If the hall has scented soaps in bottles, just hide those bottles and put them back out after the dance.
- If your dance provides hand sanitizer gel, there are several fragrance-free versions available.
 - Only buy hand sanitizers labeled fragrance-free. Purell and other common mainstream hand sanitizers have problematic scents.
 - A great fragrance-free hand sanitizer is 3M's Avaguard D. It's widely available at Amazon and many medical supply websites.
https://www.3m.com/3M/en_US/p/d/b00041952/
<https://www.amazon.com/Avagard-Healthcare-Sanitizer-Moisturizer-Fluid/dp/B0043E6UF8>
 There are others in the [product listings](#).
 - If you put hand lotion in bathrooms or on your welcome table, make sure that it's fragrance-free.

Signage

Signs at the welcome table and in the bathrooms can help to educate your dancers. You can use the information and suggestions in this set of documents to create signs letting dancers know about your fragrance-free policy and asking them to please avoid fragrances so everyone can participate.

Resources for participants

- Put copies of [this educational overview](#) and this [list of product suggestions](#) on your flyer table.

Residential camps

- Make sure your contact person at the camp facility is aware of fragrance issues and makes a thorough assessment of accessibility, ideally before registration starts. Go over the types of products used, ventilation, etc.
 - Where possible, advocate with the facility for improvements to accessibility around fragrances—not using plug-ins, substituting fragrance-free cleaning solutions, etc.

- Be realistic and transparent about access on your camp website so affected participants know the situation in advance and can choose or ask follow-up questions accordingly.
- Think about access in lodgings as well as in dining/dancing/music areas.
 - Does everyone bring their own bedding? If any bedding is provided (either by the facility or local dancers for out-of-town visitors), check on fragrance accessibility. Request fragrance-free detergent and that no fabric softener or dryer sheets, even unscented, be used.
- Be aware of and transparent about ventilation in all spaces. Being able to open windows for fresh air can make a big difference.
- Some chemically sensitive dancers may want to bring their own tent or camper. Try to accommodate access needs when possible.
- Make attendees aware of fragrance-free policy and expectations and ask them not to bring any scented products to camp.
 - On website
 - In pre-camp letter
 - In camp orientation, explain what is and is not to be used, any details about what is on site to avoid (built-in dispensers, scented hand sanitizer the camp may provide), how to find safe products, where to look/who to ask for refills
- Provide fragrance-free products: hand and shower soap, shampoo, conditioner, hand lotion, hand sanitizer, dish soap, etc. so individual dancers don't have to try to figure it out.
 - This takes advance planning—assessing how much is needed, getting supplies and containers, portioning/filling, labeling. Don't leave til the last minute.
 - Remember to make it someone's job to check and refill products throughout the camp as needed. It's not one-and-done.
 - Remember to assign retrieval and cleanup/storage of fragrance-free products/supplies in advance.
- Have someone who's tuned in to these issues available to consult with dancers who have questions.

In-town dance weekends

- Make sure your contact person with the facility is aware of fragrance issues and makes a thorough assessment of accessibility, ideally before registration starts. Go over the types of products used, ventilation, etc.
 - Where possible, advocate with the facility for improvements to accessibility around fragrances: not using plug-ins or scented sprays, substituting fragrance-free cleaning solutions, etc.
 - See details under “Regular dance series” above for planning ahead, providing fragrance-free products for handwashing and sanitizing, etc., and making sure scented products at the facility aren’t accidentally used.
- Are walk-ins allowed or not?
 - It is easier to keep an event safe for chemically sensitive dancers if pre-registration precludes entry at the door.
- Hand washing away from the hall
 - If your dancers leave the facility for meal breaks, remind them that if the soaps/hand sanitizers they encounter in public restrooms are scented, they could come back carrying extremely problematic scents that have been known to cause severely sensitized dancers to have to leave, and to try to avoid or mitigate this as best they can. This can be a dilemma, as hygiene is more important than ever for everyone’s wellbeing. If your event is trying to be accessible to dancers who are severely sensitive, we recommend you have a problem-solving conversation in advance and try to discuss options that could work for everyone.
 - Some dancers with multiple chemical sensitivity have asked people to avoid scented soaps when out and instead wash vigorously with just hot water, waiting to wash thoroughly with fragrance-free soap on returning to the venue.
 - Some may be willing and able to help provide small portable “take-out” hand washing kits for dancers who are going to restaurants to use if needed.
 - Some organizers may try to address the dilemma by asking one dance line, perhaps closest to open windows, be avoided after a meal break by those who had to use scented soaps while out, to try to provide a safer line for sensitive dancers to try to dance in.

Final thoughts

We are grateful for all of the hard work that organizers and community members have dedicated to making dances accessible to the significant fraction of our population who suffer chemical sensitivities. We are aware that handling chemical sensitivities can feel like yet another hurdle for organizers, who already have a lot to handle and keep track of. We hope by providing the information in this and the other associated documents we can make it a little easier for you to increase the accessibility of your dance and music events. Thank you for your consideration!