

DANCING MATTERS

Dancing Matters is one of a series of 5 brochures for people working in the sex industry. The others cover *Security, Law, Money, and Health Matters*.

Dancing Matters covers:

- ★ Some of the most common health and security concerns raised by dancers, and
- ★ Tips for how to deal with them.

The logo for STAR (Sex Trade Advocacy and Research) features the word "STAR" in a bold, stylized, hand-drawn font. A five-pointed star is positioned to the right of the letter "A", partially overlapping it.

Sex Trade Advocacy and Research
Défense du travail du sexe et projet de recherche

www.uwindsor.ca/star

Information in this series of brochures comes from research conducted with dancers, escorts, masseuses, street workers, and doms in Toronto and Montreal from 2001 to 2003. Although the information in this brochure largely reflects the experiences of women, it may also be useful to men or TS/TG workers. **Select the tips that work best for you or modify them to meet your needs.**

HOW TO GET STARTED

If new to exotic dancing or thinking of changing the way you work, here are some tips for getting started:

If you can, check out a club or bar before you dance there:

- Find out the club rules. For example:
 - What customers are allowed to do.
 - How the club supports and protects dancers.
 - Who sets the rules for stage and floor dancing.
- Whether working free lance or on schedule ask about the:
 - Fees you are expected to pay (e.g., to DJs, bouncers, wait-staff).
 - Times you can work, your schedule, and how you can change it.
 - Number and type (couples or girl-on-girl shows) of stage shows you have to do.
- If working free lance, also ask about:
 - Types and number of breaks you can take.
- If working on schedule, also ask about:
 - Whether the club is submitting taxes for you (see *Money Matters*).
- Check if the change rooms and bathrooms:
 - Are clean.
 - Have hot water and soap.
 - Have doors and locks on toilet stalls.
 - Have a clean shower.
 - Have a place to lock your things.
- Check if the VIP room:
 - Has camera surveillance and if it does, find out how it works and what happens to the tapes.
 - Has a bouncer to come to your aid.
- If you feel intimidated, uncomfortable, or threatened, this may not be a good place for you to work.

If thinking of working for an agent, ask about:

- The clubs you will be working at:
 - Get a list of the clubs the agent works with.
 - Ask about differences between clubs.
- Find out:
 - If you can refuse a club.
 - If clubs expect extra or special shows and what these are.
 - The fees you must pay (to the agent, drivers, hotels, clubs, floor fees, DJs, bouncers and wait-staff).
 - Whether you have to do stage shows, how many, how often.
- Make sure the agency knows what kind of dancing you are willing to do (e.g., lap dance, girl-on-girl, couples shows).

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS and the laws that affect your work

- You have a right to be respected and to set your own limits.
- If you need a city license to dance, get a copy of the licensing bylaw.
- Find out if there are any city bylaws that affect you. Call an exotic dancers' or sex worker organization for information.
- See *Law Matters* for more information.

HEALTH AND SAFETY ON THE JOB

TIPS about staying healthy and safe on the job:

- Know your limits and what you are willing to do.
- DJs control what is played and how long songs are. Dancers often find that increasing DJ tips can be helpful.
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizers as often as possible.
- Clean your genitals with unscented non-alcohol based wipes.

- Use a scarf or towel when sitting on any surface.
- During your menstrual period:
 - If you use a tampon, cut the string shorter and tuck it inside.
 - Consider a sponge or cone. They are invisible and may be more comfortable than a tampon.
- Some dancers use sponges or tampons between periods to absorb vaginal fluid.

When dancing on stage:

- Avoid using creams or oils that do not sink into your skin just before your show. They can make the pole and stage slippery.
- Check to see if there's water on the stage that could make you slip.
- Be sure poles are solidly attached to the ceiling and floor.
- Make sure the poles are clean. Use your own alcohol wipes to clean them if you aren't sure.
- Use your own towel and floorshow blanket.
- If you use a mini-stage, watch getting on and off, and make sure the pole is secure.

If using a table dance box:

- Check the box for splinters, broken wood, loose frames, or cracked plexiglas. Alert the management if any are in bad repair.
- Watch for roaming hands. Clients have an easier time touching you when you dance on a box, especially when you're bending over.
- Get accustomed to how much space you have on the box to keep yourself from falling off.

On the main floor – Table dances

- Watch out for unruly or aggressive customers.
- Use the mirrors to keep track of your back.
- Move deliberately and be aware of your customers as well as the condition of the floor and the furniture.

Booths or VIP Rooms

- These are secluded areas; there's a greater possibility of assault.
- The best security in a VIP room is a bouncer who is making rounds or standing just outside.
- If a customer is trying to manhandle you, try holding his hands in a sexy way to control him. But be aware that touching violates some municipal bylaws.
- If you're being assaulted, scream.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Like anyone else, some dancers use drugs or alcohol for relaxation, recreation, or to manage work-related stress. Depending on the quantity you use, develop strategies for staying alert and in control.

THINGS TO CONSIDER if you use drugs:

- When getting a new supply, or if you haven't used in a long time, try a small amount to make sure it's safe.
- If you use needles:
 - Use a new one each time.
 - Use rubbing alcohol to disinfect the injection spot.
- If you snort drugs, use your own tube.
- Whatever way you do drugs, it's better not to share paraphernalia.
- Your problems may increase if you are carrying drugs and questioned by police.

MORE TIPS:

- If you drink as part of your work but want to limit how much, ask the bartender or wait staff to water down your drinks or to put just a few drops of alcohol on top of a mixer.
- Many women (and men) have been raped or assaulted because someone slipped a rape drug in their drink.
 - Only accept a drink served by the wait-staff or bartender.
 - Don't put your drink down or leave it behind when you go someplace.
 - If after one drink you feel like you've had 10, alert staff, a co-worker, or someone you trust and have them take you to a hospital. If you've been slipped a rape drug, you will lose consciousness very quickly.

WORKING PRIVATELY

TIPS for dancing at private parties or doing strip-o-grams:

- When booking the appointment:
 - Get a callback number and phone it to make sure it is a legitimate call.
 - Be clear up front about your rules. For example, decide:
 - Whether videotaping is allowed.
 - How many customers you will dance for.
 - Whether you will do private dances.
 - Whether you will do lap dances.
 - Try to arrange pay for your driver or look-out person.
- If possible, check out where you're going ahead of time. Plan an exit route.
- When you arrive:
 - Tell your contact person they are responsible for your safety.
 - Remind your contact person of your rules.
 - Get paid up front.
 - Have a cell phone – if you don't have a driver or a look-out person, call someone when you arrive and let them know where you are and how long you will be, or call your answering machine and leave a message. Call again when you're ready to leave.
 - If you didn't check the place out beforehand, now's the time to plan your exit route.
- Ideally have a driver, friend, or lookout come with you and wait in the room for you.
- Strip-o-grams (private out-call dances)
 - This is usually in the customer's territory and is often a one-on-one situation.
 - Find out who will be there ahead of time.
 - Be clear about the rules before you book.
 - Use your cell phone to call someone when you arrive and again when you leave.
 - Have a driver wait for you.

STAYING HEALTHY

See *Health Matters* for tips on staying healthy.

LEGAL ISSUES

See *Law Matters* for tips on legal issues related to dancing.

OTHER HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS

We've only been able to cover some of the main concerns of dancers. If you want more information on the topics covered in this brochure or other health issues, a Montreal organization run by and for sex workers has excellent health and safety tips on their website in their *Striptease Guide*. You can find it at: www.chezstella.org or by calling 514-285-8889. The Exotic Dancers Association of Canada (EDAC) can also help with tips and advice, go to www.livegirlproductions.com or call 1-888-295-7335.

This brochure is only meant to provide basic health information. If you have health concerns contact a health professional. Local sex workers organizations can often point you toward health care professionals who will provide quality service and understand your needs.

*Aussi disponible en français.
www.uwindsor.ca/star*

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of SSHRC, NNEWH, the official policy of Health Canada, or any of the organizations, partners, or individuals named in this brochure.

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