

Dearest Women Who Wish to Spread Joy By Way of Dance:

THANK YOU SO MUCH for your interest in starting a chapter of Dance Dance Party Party in your town. We are the ladies of the DDPP Chicago Chapter and we are here to let you know that your dream to start a DDPP in your town is the following:

- 1) A TERRIFIC IDEA – you and your town have no idea how much fun you needed to have
- 2) VERY EASY TO MAKE HAPPEN – the idea is as simple as things get
- 3) SOMETHING TO FEEL PASSIONATE ABOUT – it works best when there's a deep drive to do it

And it's for reason #3 that we are going to share with you a very long explanation of all things DDPP. If at any point you need to take a break and walk around the block to give your eyes a rest, we completely understand. We'll be here when you return.

So perhaps you know that New York City is the city that gave birth to the beautiful baby girl that is DDPP. It's where the genius concept of "no booze, no boys, no judgment – just dancing" began. Since its founding in January 2007, DDPP has spread across the United States and around the globe, with chapters on at least 3 continents (that we know of!). The women who began the vision, Glennis and Marcy, have since moved on to other fantastic things, but before they left they tapped Chicago to take over as the DDPP Mothership. In their stead, we are happy to answer any and all questions you might have about setting up your own dance party.

Really, we cannot adequately describe how personally fulfilling and ridiculously fun it's been to be dancing twice a week with ladies who were at first strangers, now great friends, for the last several years. And it has benefits far beyond getting a little exercise and unwinding in a fun, unique way. We've witnessed women's lives change as a result of the very simple act of being able to move in whatever way they want in an environment that is free of judgment. It's pretty incredible, actually, how badly women in these times, this country, seem to need something that just allows them to be exactly who they are and not feel bad or weird or shame or sad about it.

OK – that was the last of that talk. We could go on for pages about the merits of this kind of event, this kind of work. But that's not what we're here to relay to you right now. We want to give you all the information you need to know to make this happen in your town and get you started. We anticipate you will have more questions; we will have plenty of answers.

So speaking of this kind of work... it does take some work.

As we go through the steps below for what we see as a solid method for getting a DDPP launched, just keep in mind that it does require more than bringing an iPod to a studio and pressing play. At its best, that's all you need to do and the rest will run itself. But there are things that have to happen before that. And here's what that entails:

- 1) FIGURE OUT YOUR NEEDS: OK – you're going to be running things, so mamma's got to be happy. Decide on the day of the week and the time you think would work best for your schedule and consider committing from your start date until ??? using this day/time to host DDPP. Now think about if this seems like a day of the week that other women would probably be into. Of course you don't have a crystal ball, but

Friday nights are generally not so good. Early in the morning? Probably not great. Weigh your options and find what seems like a good fit.

2) FIND A STUDIO/SPACE: Depending on where you live and how well you know it, this could be as easy as making a phone call or as hard as making many. You may need to check out a lot of spaces to find the right spot. Chicago is a very urban place where most people don't have cars, so we had to look for a spot that was easily accessible by public transit. At the same time, we needed easy street parking for those with cars and wanted a spot in a relatively safe part of town where women would feel confident getting to and from the studio at any hour. So consider the neighborhoods in your town or the dance studios/dance-able spaces in terms of the crowd you want to attract.

a. Another great thing to keep in mind when studio hunting is whether or not the studio has its own speaker system. If it does – BONUS! You won't have to supply your own! But be sure to bring an iPod with you when you go to visit to check and see how rockin' you can get it to be. Make sure it's OK with the owner that you like to play your music loudly as they might have neighbors, renters, etc that could be pissed off if Madonna is blasting while they're trying to play Sudoku or get the baby to sleep. You don't want to be surprising anyone in the vicinity the first day of class and then needing to find a new space. We like nearly-club-atmosphere loud in Chicago. It makes it feel less weird to be dancing with strangers and well, dance music is meant to be pumped.

3) THE PRICE IS RIGHT: Now this #3 is a reference to the first #3 above—namely that this should be an endeavor you're passionate about... and not for reasons involving getting rich. Just to put the cards on the table: to our knowledge no DDPP anywhere is paying anyone's rent. It's a fun hobby to have, but do not get into it with the hopes of quitting your day job. One of the biggest considerations you'll have to make in finding studio space is the price they charge to rent it and then how much you'll be charging for women to come to DDPP. Now we know some yoga studios and such charge \$15 or so for an hour class, but to our cheap asses, that sounds like a lot. Most of the DDPPs charge \$5 or very close to that. You're not going to convince many women that giving them no instruction or anything other than "have fun and don't judge" is worth a lot of their \$. Which in some cases is sad, because a lot of women use DDPP as the cheapest form of therapy ever...but you get the idea. You're not going to get a lot of repeat dancers if the cost is prohibitive.

a. The most important thing to consider at the set-up stage is simple math: how much does the studio cost per hour/rental and how many women need to come every week to break even if we charge x amount for each class? In Chicago we charge \$5 and we need 5 women to break even because our studio is \$22 an hour.

b. Next figure out how many classes you, personally, can afford to LOSE \$ on before you get numbers to the point of breaking even. It's a bummer, but you should know that NYC did not break even or start making a (tiny) profit until well into its 6th month in business. So sometimes it takes a little while to spread the word and get the base started – know that ahead of time and plan accordingly so you're not strapped if you're losing a little cash at the beginning. It happens. We were lucky and have yet to be in the hole (knock on wood), but it's not out of the realm of possibility.

4) SPREAD THE WORD – So you got a good space, you figure out you don't need all that many women to make it work and not lose \$ and you're pretty much ready to rock. Now what? SPREAD THE WORD. And do it as long before your first class as you can manage. Build a buzz.

a. How & To whom? Well for starters, go paperless: email groups of your friends, post to your Facebook page, Twitter, Yelp, etc. Basically start with the people you know and encourage them to tell co-workers, friends, neighbors, etc who might be interested. See if they can RSVP to you so you can gauge interest level. A lot of the newer chapters have had great success building a Facebook page to advertise their events, post playlists and generally just get people excited about dancing (translation: post dancing

cat videos).

b. You can also email your local papers, radio stations, public access tv, websites, etc who might want to know that a national phenomenon all about women dancing their asses off for fun and exercise is coming to town. Some of the DDPPs have written press releases that you can just plug your information into and send along for a super professional read. Email us at [ddppchicago\[at\]gmail\[dot\]com](mailto:ddppchicago@gmail.com) for a sample document.

c. You can make flyers and distribute them. They don't have to be designed by an artist— just throw something together with all the pertinent details using your work copy machine and get them to any place in town you think women who'd want to rock out might congregate — coffeeshops, clothing/shoe stores, bars, record stores, etc. Festivals are great to flyer, too. We have some flyer templates you can just plug your town's info into if you want to use those — just email us.

5) FIND A FRIEND TO SHARE THE LOAD — If you're still reading this epic message, we want to hug you, because it looks like you probably have what it takes to get a DDPP off the ground! But we also want to recommend not doing this alone. Sure you can get all of this started by yourself, but it's far more fun if you have support and another woman committed to it. Not to mention it's also good for your morale. There will be classes that you can't make because shit comes up, or days when you're sick, or a day or two where you're just feeling too out of it to dance. That's fine! We're all human! And if you have a back-up plan/friend who can run things when you're not there — take advantage of it! Get each other's backs. There are SIX of us running the Chicago chapter and believe us, we are grateful that we can share the labor.

a. Fear not if you don't have someone to start the chapter with right away. Sometimes Kevin Costner movies are right, and if you build it they will come. You might find after a few classes there's a lady who seems cool and would be down for sharing the responsibilities (note: that's how ALL of us found our way into our den mother roles). Take her up on it.

6) MAKE PLAYLISTS! We're at a point in Chicago where our DJ schedule is booked up a few months in advance. That did not happen overnight. When the DDPP chapter began, our founding Den Mothers Jenn and Jenn (now emeriti) had each made 3 mixes so the first 6 classes had dance music to spare in case they couldn't get a DJ to commit before then. That might be overkill — but you get the point. It's better to be prepared than slapping together whatever you can come up with an hour before class starts. Your playlist selection, especially at the beginning, can help tailor the crowd you attract. Only playing Gangsta rap? Prepare to whittle down the # of women who might be interested. We find that eclectic mixes that feature a couple to many well-known and loved dance songs go over the best as they give something for everyone. Plus - it's really frickin' fun making mixes and having strangers go wild dancing to them. If you've gone through your song library and are feeling lacking, we encourage you to check out our song database (located on a tab on our blog: ddppchicago.wordpress.com). There are tons of suggestions to use; even copy whole playlists if you want. We don't care. (You have to buy or rip the music from somewhere, though — this data base is just text)

7) HAVE EQUIPMENT READY: If the studio you'll be using doesn't have its own audio system for you to use, then be sure to get something with some power. If you have a speaker system at home that you feel confident in, we'd still suggest going to the space with it before you have your first class to make sure it works and has the power you need. If not, there's plenty of stuff you can buy in the \$200+ range. Don't despair. But know you might have to invest a little to get a speaker system that will rock everyone's ears off. It was only within the last year that we had the funds to purchase a deluxe soundsystem and while we won't lie—it's really great to be able to feel that boomin' bass deep in our bones—many of our happiest DDPP memories come from the days of an old bookshelf system sitting on the studio floor.

8) BREATHE. HAVE FUN. We know we just threw the equivalent to “what to expect when you're

expecting” at you – but know that DDPP is above all else SO DELICIOUSLY FUN and wonderful to do. Once you get things going and have a steady base, you really can just put things on auto-pilot for much of the time and just relax and dance – which is all you really wanted to do in the first place, right?

THE NEXT ROUND: So once you’ve gotten the above stuff in order (at least the studio space down and start dates) – shoot us an email and let us know the details. We’ll add you to the www.dancedancepartyparty.com site and can start a blog for you if you want to blog about class and post updates. You’ll have access to your blog to write whatever your heart desires. And of course feel free to email us to let us know if you have any questions about the stuff contained above or anything else that may be burning a hole in your mind.

We could talk/type for days and days more about how we do things at our chapter, but we want to encourage you to make DDPP your own. We just want you to have fun and spread the love. That’s all. We’re also happy to pass along a copy of our logo to use in making press materials. Just email us.

So much love to you, lady of wonder. Keep up the good work and we hope to hear back from you.

Sincerely,

Amy Letcher
Catherine Carrigan
Jill Westerfelhaus
Kelly Peraino
Kristen Studard
Unity Ostercamp

CHICAGO Ddppchicago[at]gmail[dot]com

*A million thanks to Jenn Brandel, who authored the original version of this message.