

# Helpful Hints for Happy Dancing

Prepared for the Mississippi Squares by Brian Crawford



We have compiled this document so you may use it to answer some questions you may have or perhaps bring forward some points that will help your Square Dance Experience be even more enjoyable. Let's look at some of the questions we may have about the activity that brings us together for fun, fellowship (and exercise)

- o Square Dancing is a LEARNED SKILL that requires "floor time", it is quite important to be to the club at the beginning of the evening. I will review and we will look at new calls or concepts early in the evening.
- o Dance IN TIME with the music, move your feet 'in time' with the music. Your dancing will be smooth and your Dancing will be more enjoyable.
- o If you have the time and opportunity dance as much as you can, with different clubs and Callers. Modern Square Dance programs are designed so you can exercise your skills at any club that dances the levels / calls you have danced. (always confirm the level of the dance in advance to be sure you will be comfortable with the level being presented)
- o If you are away for more than few weeks and may **feel** that you may have missed too much to return, please let us know we will do all we can to make your return comfortable and smooth. We have in the past put together a "tune up" session if we feel that there is a need. Please communicate any concerns with us rather than giving up because you feel that you may have missed too much, we are here to help and we want you to feel comfortable and welcome... this is your club.
- o ASK the CALLER if you're not sure about something. That's what I'm here for.. (I like to talking Dancing)
- o Listening is very important for success, try and avoid chatting while you are dancing there is time for socializing during the break.
- o Angels: Just to clarify what an Angel is... An Angel is a dancer (s) that fill in a square of "student dancers" to ensure there are enough dancers to make up a square.. An Angel should be confident in their abilities and use their skills to be in the correct place at the correct time to assist our student in executing the calls being presented successfully. Angles should be sure not to Dance for our student but with them.



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Some more tips will make your dance experience even more enjoyable!

- o Promenades - keep them "tight" (Full Promenade is 16 beats) keep your squares tight. Over time you will get a feel for the comfortable square.
- o Be confident in what you have learned, if you dance with confidence and you do execute a call incorrectly we can work together to improve. If you are tentative and get "directed through your set" by others it may take longer to build your confidence.
- o Styling, as you get more comfortable with the calls you have learned you may want to add some "flair" to your dance, These additions are fun and can add to your experience but be sure it does not come at the expense of timing and safety. Extra twirls are not for everyone some dancers find twirling uncomfortable and they can be dangerous as some dancers have balance issues.
- o Hands... hand holds are so very important for successful dancing. Hand hold define the structure of the formations. (Couple, Line, Wave etc...) *although hand holds are so very important it is also more important to **not** hold on too long or squeeze hands tightly, we do not want anyone to have a bad experience because of pain or injury. When in ocean waves keep your thumb tucked in (no thumb wrestling please)*
- o Walls (?) Because our dance is a danced in a square formation walls are very important, always try and face a wall. This is very important when doing most calls (example would be "Bend the Line" If you start facing head wall after you bend the line you will be facing side wall, be aware that you your partner and your line is parallel to the walls) obviously this doesn't apply to "circle calls" circle left/right stars etc...
- o Recognize & remember who your corner is. Next to your partner, the next most important person in the square
- o Trust the Caller... In Modern Square Dancing we may dance certain calls many times in an evening of dancing but



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the Caller can and will "change thing up" and you may find yourself executing call from a different position, don't assume you are in the wrong position.

- o Make note of where your "home" is and especially who your partner and corner are.

## My Square BROKE DOWN "oh no" 🤪

There are two different scenarios that we need to consider and each one has a different answer... When we dance a "tip" it involves to different segments...

PATTER CALL (where we learn and dance to music but not a song) and a SINGING CALL (a song we dance to that involves the ladies progress around the square dancing with each man and ending up with their original partner)

- o If your square breaks down during the PATTERN call you are too make facing lines of 4 with normal couples (boy on the left side, girls on the right) and the caller will "pick up your square by getting the rest of the squares in lines and directing your square to commence dancing.
- o During a SINGING call you need to square your set, in this scenario your square needs to be aware of a cue to commence dancing (seeing the other squares are squares up or "swing corner").

## Dancer Etiquette

- o Do not walk by a partials formed square to dance in another square.
- o Do not walk through a square to get to a vacant spot even if you are planning on dancing in that square and especially do not pass through a square to go to another square.
- o Respect other dancers space, it is important to not hold other dancers to close or tightly, even though your intentions are innocent others may not appreciate having their space invaded.
- o Never walk out of a square unless you are unwell or if you have accidentally joined a square of a level you are not prepared to dance in.



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- o Respect dancer's abilities, in Modern Square Dancing we are always learning. You may be the one learning or you may be experienced dancer, either way please have patience with yourself & others.
- o Be aware that you may be in square that will have couples that may not be Boy / Girl.
- o Please pay attention to announcement and respect your executive member doing announcements by being quiet...you can be noisy on the floor (your caller likes that)

## Special Badges and Buttons

You may have noticed that some dancers are wearing extra ribbons or buttons? Well, these have specific purposes & the wearer will be especially grateful if you'll 'heed' what they mean! Here's a few examples that I can think of just off-hand -

- o SOLO ribbon being worn - often seen at Open Dances. This means that the wearer does not have a regular partner for the night and would REALLY APPRECIATE it if you would ask him/her to dance at least one tip with them!!
- o SORE HANDS - button being worn indicates that special care must be taken when dancing with this person. Gentle hand holds are a must !! Please be considerate !!
- o DON'T SWING ME button - means exactly that as the wearer either experiences dizziness, or has a physical problem that prevents them doing a normal 'swing'. What to do then when a 'swing' is called? - Get into the Promenade position & then wait until the rest of the dancers in the square start to promenade, then just fall into step! Note also that this
- o applies to the 'twirls' that often accompany the beginning & end of promenades. Again, be considerate - if not sure, then ask !
- o Wear a name badge. There are a lot of people to meet and badges help refresh the memory
- o Attire: Square Dance attire had evolved and changed over the past few decades and I am not going to direct anyone on their choices. It is still generally accepted that men wear a long



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sleeved shirt. It is very nice to see club members were "Club Colours" for our Halfway Dance (Royal Blue and White)
- o And, if you've enjoyed your dancing - Thank the Caller. If you've not, tell the Caller (especially when visiting other clubs but all Callers appreciate acknowledgment of a fun evening)

***Remember this is a hobby and perfection is not expected or even possible, but like all great things people enjoy and it is nice to be able to do it well. These tips will help us to make this activity we share with others more enjoyable for everyone!***

