

The Gathering 2010

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The one thing I love about square dancing is how it crosses any boundary! Think of all of the different nationalities, abilities, personalities, etc. we have in our activity and how we have embraced them all. When we are discussing "thriving", my first thought is "What is our outlook". In this particular session, we are discussing dancers who are "different" or not what we consider "square dancing normal". Are we trying to make these people fit into our outlook/vision of square dancing, or are we trying to adapt square dancing for them? This, I think is an important thing to look at! I checked out the definition of evolve and this is what I found:

1. a. To develop or achieve gradually
- b. To work (something) out; devise

I really like letter b. "To work something out." To me, that's the way we need to think! We have been trying to make people fit into square dancing. How about we adapt, or "work something out" so square dancing fits us all!! Remember, we are square dancers first, our different abilities come second!

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**Declining dancers: How do we keep our loved ones involved? Coping with physical problems--the halting step, one-handed dancer, failing sight and/or hearing, dancers with limited stamina needing to be replaced during a tip, etc.**

Back at the CALLERLAB Convention in 2006, we met to discuss this particular topic. Barry and Pam Clasper from Canada had a dancer in their group, and were not sure how to address this need. Please see the handout labeled "Dancers With Declining Abilities".

So, what do we do? DON'T FORGET!! These dancers are part of our square dance community and/or family!! It is important to find the appropriate balance of including our family members and meeting, as best as we can, the needs of all of our family!

Here are some ideas that you can possibly incorporate in your club to include everyone:

1. Make sure everyone can still socialize!! This is the best part of dancing!
2. Can your club have a part of the evening where everyone can dance at the level of the floor?
3. Can you arrange a set square to allow the best support for dancers who need some assistance?
4. Can two couples dance in the back so someone can dance if they want and you cannot get a square together?
5. What club activities can these dancers become a part of?
  - a. Club Historian
  - b. Club Photographer
  - c. Club Scrapbook Creator
  - d. 50/50 ticket money collector
  - e. Club Greeter
  - f. Can the dancer angel at teaching sessions for a preceding level?
  - g. Can callers adapt their calling or modify choreography to eliminate the use of calls that require more balance, flexibility and stamina?
  - h. Can people share partners to allow one person to take a break when necessary?

Any ideas, suggestions, questions?

**Including everyone at their own limits (not insisting everyone dance, but making it possible for them to dance when they want to and sit out when they want to do that)**

Have you ever had one of those nights when you just wanted to hang out? Who better to hang out with than our square dance friends??!! Don't forget, socializing is the best part of dancing. It's hard when you have a small club and many people want to sit out. Here are a few ideas of what you could possibly do:

1. Pick a certain part of the night to have a "chill out and socialize time". This allows some people to recharge their batteries, get time with their friends and keep more people dancing.
2. Don't forget two couples can do many of the things that four can!! If you can't get a square, why not dance two couples? It is a way to dance, challenge your mind and get to swing your partner and corner more!
3. When you know you have a few people who need to sit out due to physical needs, fatigue, etc., arrange a swapping out time between the patter and singer. Don't forget, some people have difficulty with swinging and may prefer a specific time to sit out. Our dancers sometimes have spouses and/or partners who dance also and this allows them to keep dancing and allows their partner to take a break. This is also a way to allow some of your singles to jump in and get a chance to dance!
4. I have always been of the philosophy that it pays to know how to dance both sexes! This way, when you need a body, you can do it no matter what the position is!
5. If you desire, you could have a sheet at the main table and people can select a tip they'd like to sit out, if they choose. Sometimes it is hard to know when you will need a break, but flexibility will have to be the key here. If people are aware of when they usually like a break, why not indicate it on a sheet so the club can plan ahead and do what is needed to help facilitate dancing for those who wish to dance.

Any ideas, suggestions, questions?

**Using cultural awareness to promote square dancing (encourage diversity)--How to encourage different cultural groups to embrace American square dance?**

Think of the diversity we have in our activity already? We all have ancestors and traditions that have played a part in our lives and probably played a part in our dancing. Think of all of the halls we use that are run by different cultural/social groups. How do we include more people? We have many cultures we have not even approached. Why? Is some of it a fear and lack of knowledge about that culture? Here are some ideas of ways to include more cultural groups:

1. Ask a member of the social/cultural group you rent your hall from to do a demo for them. Can you come participate in something they are doing?
2. Do some homework about a group you are thinking about approaching. Many cultures have an aspect of dancing and how it is a celebration!! This fits right up our alley!!
3. Do a party night for the group on a regular basis. Remember, a party night, once a month is dancing! This status of dancing is the same as people who may want to also come take lessons and join your club.
4. Think of the different businesses in your area. Businesses include a wide variety of cultures! Approach them about doing a staff appreciation dance!

Any ideas, suggestions, questions?

**In conclusion:**

Communication is one of our best tools!! Don't be afraid to ask if someone needs a break, ask if you can do a party night for a group, or give them a yellow rock and tell them they are doing such a great job being your club greeter! That communication is what is going to bring a smile to someone's face, make someone feel included and keep our dancing going!