

Youth square dance

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Youth square dancing has no precise definition, because *youth* is a relative term. Very generally, it refers to [square dancing](#) among people up to their mid-twenties. In specific contexts, e.g., in qualification for some event, it may refer to dancers up to a particular age such as 18. It also may refer to a style of dancing which, while most popular among the younger dancers, can be enjoyed by some older dancers.

Square dancing is an activity open to people of almost every age group, but many people think of it as an activity for people in their late fifties or older; in this context even people in their thirties or forties may be considered "young" dancers. But among those involved with the full age range of current dancers, early twenties is usually the upper limit for designating a group or event with the term "youth".

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Clubs for youth dancers

Youth square dancing, as a style, is typically open to all square dancers. The dancing is generally [modern western square dancing](#), as it is practiced throughout the world, standardized by [CALLERLAB](#).

Square dance clubs vary in their accommodation of young dancers, ranging from clubs organized specifically for youth, through ones that are populated by dancers of every age, to some that are oriented exclusively to adults.

Some representative categories of square dance clubs and classes with respect to age:

- those for children in a specific age range (e.g., 5-8, pre-teens, teens)
- those for children and their parents or other family members
- those which encourage dancers of all ages
- those which are primarily oriented to adults but allow children
- those which do not allow children

Distinctive features of youth square dancing

There are a number of ways in which youth square dancing differs from typical adult square dancing. These features are typical in clubs that are oriented specifically toward youth dancing, and also tend to be more common, even among adults, at mixed-age clubs and events where there are a significant number of youth dancers.

Energy level

Youth dancing tends to be "higher energy". The dancing tends to be faster, with the caller using faster and more modern music. (Youth square dancing shares this characteristic with gay square dancing.)

Styling

While all modern Western square dancing uses a common set of call definitions, which specify the basic dance movements and outcome of each call, there are many possible "frills" or "flourishes" -- extra movements that can be added without changing the resulting position. These include extra twirls, kicks, and other movements of the hands or feet. A few of these are traditional among adult dancers in certain geographic regions, but youth dancing generally includes more of them regardless of location. (Youth square dancing shares this characteristic with gay square dancing.)

Gender roles

Gender is an essential aspect of square dance choreography. Each square consists of four "boys" (or "gentlemen") and four "girls" (or "ladies"), who maintain this identity throughout a dance [tip](#). The caller uses this to address calls to a subset of the dancers. In addition, a relatively small number of calls, but ones that are commonly used, involve a different dance action for the boys and girls. However, for this to work it is not necessary that the biological sex of the dancers match the roles that they are playing at any given time, e.g., it is possible for a man to dance the "girl's part".

At the typical adult club, dancing the "opposite part" is relatively uncommon. Many clubs are dominated by married couples, most of the dancers are not familiar with dancing the other part, and there may even be social stigma associated with such role reversals. Sometimes it is accepted, but is seen only as a way to deal with special circumstances, such as to accommodate everybody when there are "extra" women.

In youth dancing, switching gender roles is much more common and accepted as a normal variation. A boy may dance the boy's part one tip, and the girl's part the next. A significant number of youth dancers know how to dance both parts, having learned this either for the additional challenge or simply to have more flexibility in squaring up with their friends. (Youth square dancing shares this characteristic with gay square dancing and [challenge-level square dancing](#).)

Partners

At many adult square dance clubs and events, dancers are expected to come with a partner, and dance mostly, in some cases exclusively, with that partner. A dancer who comes without a partner may be accommodated in some cases (e.g., a single guest dancer) by matching him or her up with somebody else so that they can be treated as a couple for the duration of the event. In other cases, he or she may simply not be able to dance.

In youth square dancing, it is very common for dancers to have a new partner for each tip, and in some cases this is accomplished by dancers simply joining squares as individuals with other dancers then coming along to be their partners, rather than by any sort of pre-arrangement. Thus, at most clubs which have a significant number of youth dancers, there is no requirement that dancers come with a partner and individual dancers are easily accommodated. (Youth square dancing shares this characteristic with gay square dancing and challenge-level square dancing.)

Learning style

In general, younger people learn more quickly than older people, and so on average clubs with younger dancers teach a given dance program in a shorter period of time. Some groups teach youth the basics in short-format classes such as a one-week day camp or a one day "blast" class. At some clubs, teens have been known to learn the calls by being "pulled through" sequences by their more experienced friends.

See also

- [Square dance club](#)
- [Gay square dance](#)
- [Tech Squares](#) — a club with many college members (older members, too) which exemplifies some of the characteristics of youth square dancing.

External links

- youthsquares.org - a directory of youth and youth-friendly square dance clubs
- [It May Be Called "Square" Dancing But It Really Is "Cool"](#) - promotional flyer aimed at youth (Acrobat PDF format)
- [Youth Square Dancing in the New Millennium \(A Parent's Primer\)](#) - promotional flyer aimed at parents (Acrobat PDF format)

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