

## FRUSTRATED NEW DANCERS

In our activity – modern western square dancing – we require students go through a course of study to be proficient enough to join in. Unlike contra or line dancing, our entry level programs run for the majority of the calendar year in a format of cumulative learning. This means that new material is added to each class, making the number of calls grow with each class. If entry level is Basics then you are expected to have seventy-three calls in your knowledge base, ninety-two if Mainstream is entry level and if Plus is entry level the number jumps to one-hundred twenty-one calls. Let's be frank, it's not easy to become a square dancer.

Learning all this material may have moments of frustration where the dancer(s) are not “getting it” or the caller may not be able to communicate effectively or perhaps nothing is going right on a particular night. This frustration can go away as the new material is mastered, the caller finds a way to “get with the program” or a night of great dancing dims the memory of the not-so-great night. One type of frustration seems to be experienced repeatedly - it is what happens when the square breaks down.

First of all, we all agree every square breaks down sometime. Dancers may get frustrated, callers may get frustrated. New dancers, those folks who have recently graduated from square dance lessons, suffer from the complication that they BELIEVE when a square breaks down, it is their fault. Every caller will agree, squares with new dancers will break down because of experienced dancers making a mistake. It is not caused by the new dancer, but you will not convince them otherwise. Their belief is supported by an “experienced” dancer scowling at them. Unfortunately, more than one sad story has come from a new dancer being told by an “experienced” dancer that they should not be there. While little can be done to fix people with bad manners exhibiting uncouth behavior, actions can be taken to help the new dancer – especially when they are in class. Here is how our classes are taught.

- When a square breaks down, keep moving in small steps towards facing lines of four. Lines of four are dancers with the boy on the right and girl on the left in every couple and lines facing side walls. The same thing you would have if every static square did the call, “Heads Lead Right ... Circle To A Line”. We acknowledge there are other methods available, but this is a tried method that works quickly every time.
- When the square breaks down use hand signals to indicate to others to get in lines. This assumes dancers have been taught what to do when squares break down. While we advocate “no talking”, sometimes simply calling out “LINES” is necessary.
- Watch the squares that are not broken and when they are in lines of four like you are, then join back in. A good caller will watch the floor and encourage broken squares to get in lines, then say something like, “Everybody has Lines...” This is how good callers get all squares back dancing.
- Give dancers time to practice breaking down. It is important to know that mistakes are a natural part of dancing and the caller should say to the dancers “I'm going to try to break you down so you can practice recovering”. It is said in a jovial fashion and meant to let the dancers have fun while learning how to be a better dancer. Break the squares down a few times like this and let dancers get their squares in lines of four then resume dancing.

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Callers need to treat this process like they would teaching a new call, so dancers will get used it.

Learning how to break down may not lessen the incidents of breaking down but it goes a long way towards reducing the frustration from this experience. In this author's experience, dancers who have been taught "how to break down" are still actively dancing many years later. The frustration level of these dancers is much less than their contemporaries who are perpetually wandering around in broken squares. If every caller started teaching dancers how to break down, would it keep dancers from leaving square dancing? Maybe. Isn't it worth keeping even one dancer just by a simple teach?

More to come in future editions. Please send your comments to [buddy@buddyweaver.com](mailto:buddy@buddyweaver.com)