

DANCE ETIQUETTE

Be Friendly

Anyone may ask anyone else to dance.

(Yes, women can ask men!)

May I have this dance?

When you ask someone to dance, offer your hand and ask “Would you like to dance?” If your would-be partner says Yes, smile, take his/her hand and escort him/her onto the dance floor and into position in the line of dance. This will make your partner feel supported and at ease, especially if s/he is inexperienced.

- Look for people who are sitting out, looking hopeful, who may want to dance. Invite them to be your partner. Extend a welcome to new dancers—make them feel welcomed. At all costs, don't ignore them.
- Don't be offended if you're turned down by someone you've asked to dance. Maybe s/he doesn't like this dance, or has promised it to another partner, or—altogether normal—is just tired and wants to sit this one out.
- At the end of the dance, ALWAYS THANK your partner and escort him/her off the floor (don't just vaguely wander away from the person you just shared a dance with).

Yes, thank you, I'd love to dance.

When someone asks you to dance, your usual response should be “Yes, thank you, I'd love to.”

- If you're sitting there looking available and you're asked to dance, it is polite to accept unless you have a good reason for not dancing. Never turn down a request and then accept another person's invitation for the same dance.

During the dance

Remember that dancing is fellowship—we cooperate and help each other.

- Pay attention to the caller's dance instructions. ONLY the caller should teach the dance, *everyone else should be listening. People around you cannot hear the caller if you are talking, which is considered rude.*
- *DON'T offer advice. The best help to others is showing them how—but only if the caller has called on you to demonstrate a dance figure.*
- *Never ask advice from other dancers. If you don't understand a figure, raise your hand and ask the caller so that everyone in the dance can benefit from the caller's answer.*

- When going onto the dance floor to join a longways set, always join at the bottom of the line (the end farthest away from the musicians). The line always forms from the top (nearest the musicians) and proceeds downward, first come first served. Never join in front of couples who are already in line.
- Except for emergencies, NEVER drop out of a dance after the dance has begun—your sudden absence will cause the people who were dancing with you to unavoidably break down, and, in most dances, the entire line of dance will then break down. Except in an emergency, if you must drop out, do so only when you've reached the top or bottom end of the set, but never-never while you're in the middle of the set.
- Hold hands gently. Be prepared to *loosen your handhold for your partner's comfort when turning*. It is especially important to respect older dancers whose joints may be more fragile, more easily strained.

- Maintaining eye contact with your partner is a longstanding dance custom of centuries duration. Looking “down, over, or away from” your partner conveys that you are not really involved in the dance or sharing it with your partner. Eye contact with your partner also helps prevent dizziness when swinging.
- Strive always to dance in time with the music and, with your partner, be on time for the start of every figure. Step lively—*arriving too late at the right spot can and often does cause a dance to break down.*
- Those who are not dancing should keep their conversation sufficiently quiet that it will not be noticed. Parents should ensure that their non-dancing children also maintain this courtesy to the dancers.
- Newcomers improve more quickly by dancing at least some of the dances with experienced partners.
- We were *all* beginners at one time. Those who have become experienced dancers should be “dance angels” and help beginners as well as less experienced dancers. The best help is “showing how by actually doing.”
- Thou shalt not be boisterous on the dance floor.
- Smile, and look for that little Mona Lisa smile on the lips of the other dancers. Invariably it’s there, and it conveys that the dancer is enjoying the fellowship of the dance.

Be Helpful

- Experienced dancers should ask beginners to dance—it helps the beginner learn more quickly and reinforces the experienced dancer’s skills. It also is common courtesy to newcomers who may be fearful of their first dance.
- Show respect for the dance caller who has taken time to prepare a full program of dances by not bringing onto the dance floor young children who are too small or too inexperienced to dance effectively with adults. Most children under age six are developmentally unable to follow callers’ instructions effectively, and are in any case too small to effectively dance with grownups (who should, for example, “share weight” when doing a two-person swing).
- Some callers program for children to join simple dances at the front of a program, then move off the floor to supervised care. Rarely, a few young children are already excellent dancers and may be permitted to remain on the dance floor provided they are partnered with an experienced adult dancer. Most children do fine at/after age eight.
- Experienced dancers should always separate young children who have partnered with each other. They will cause the dance to break down. Gently separate them, pair them with experienced adult or teen dancers if they are capable, otherwise remove them from the dance line and ask their parents to take charge.
- In order to maintain a safe environment for both children and adults, parents should prevent non-participating children from coming into the dance area during a dance, as this can be dangerous for all concerned.

Helpful Hints

- Learn the names of your fellow dancers, as well as the musicians who provide your dance music. All together you are a special community that is both local and worldwide, and collectively you are keeping alive our lovely artistic heritage of antique dances and their associated music.
- Learn the names of the dances you like, and request the caller to include them on future programs.
- Be gentle with the dance space in general, always leaving your host facility in as good condition as you found it.