


**UNITED SQUARE DANCERS OF AMERICA**  
SQUARE DANCE – AMERICAN FOLK DANCE



# Creating and Maintaining a Welcoming and Safe Square Dance Environment

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## CALLERLAB'S COMMITMENT

CALLERLAB is an international organization committed to building, promoting, and sustaining the beloved recreation of Modern Western Square Dancing and the art and craft of square dance calling.

CALLERLAB has created the document we will be discussing today to help callers, organization leaders and dancers in providing and supporting a welcoming dance environment where all dancers can enjoy the activity in a safe, nurturing, secure, and pleasant atmosphere.

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## The Beginning

To support this commitment, in the spring of 2018, the CALLERLAB Board of Governors updated the CALLERLAB Code of Ethics to include the following item:

- ▶ **5. Provide a safe and welcoming environment for all. I am committed to providing an environment free from sexual and other forms of harassment or bullying without bias based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability, and always be respectful of the hearts and spirits of others.**

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## CLUB COMMITMENT

CALLERLAB ask clubs to consider a similar commitment and provides this template:

The club or organization named above strives to provide an environment that is safe, secure, and welcoming for all participants. Ideally, all dancers will be comfortable and will enjoy their time in the square dance environment. The club or organization discourages inappropriate behavior and does not tolerate any form of harassment, Sexual harassment, discrimination, or bullying of dancers or other attendees at dance events.

The club or organization respects, and is bound by federal, regional, and local legislation that prohibits discrimination or bias based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability, and laws covering sexual and other harassment.

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### Club commitment, continued

This policy applies to all events that the club or organization sponsors. This policy also applies to interactions that take place immediately before or after dance events (such as conversations in the parking lot after the official end of a dance).

Members, guests, and other participants in club or organization activities found violating this policy may be sanctioned at the discretion of the governing body. Violations of this policy, and instances of concerning behavior, shall be reported to leaders. Serious violations shall be reported to law enforcement personnel

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## CALLERLAB Handbook for Dancers

- ▶ The Safe and Welcoming document also includes a handbook to inform and guide dancers:
- ▶ As a square dancer, you participate in a very diverse activity. Your age ranges from youths to seniors.
- ▶ You come from a wide range of social, ethnic, racial, and personal identification groups.
- ▶ You also hold a wide array of individual beliefs and philosophies.
- ▶ Square dancing involves a high degree of physical contact and social interaction, so some accidental bumps should be expected.

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However, in light of your varied background and social norms, sometimes what other dancers intentionally do or say can make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe or can even be painful.

This handbook describes behaviors that you can learn to create a safe, secure, and welcoming dance environment for yourself and for those with whom you dance.

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## Appropriate Dancer Behavior

- **Appreciate Diversity:** Appreciate diversity. Be aware that the square dance community is made up of a widely diverse population and be respectful of all dancers. Use our common joy in dancing as a basis for appreciating the full range of people who participate in our activity.
- **Expectations:** Square dancing is a friendly group activity that involves physical contact on the arms, hands, and shoulders, as well as eye contact while dancing. You should expect accidental touches and bumps that are occasional and fleeting. However, interactions should not make any dancer uncomfortable, so be aware of behaviors that are considered inappropriate.

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## Appropriate Behavior cont.

- **Communication:** Use the suggested defensive dancing techniques described in the next section to communicate your willingness or unwillingness to participate in actions involving close physical contact or rapid turns. This includes hugs, flourishes, and swings.
- **Social Interaction:** Have friendly conversations during breaks. Be aware of personal space outside of the square and remember that comfortable chatting distance varies.
- **Leadership:** Dancers as well as callers and club leaders need to be knowledgeable and vigilant about all these issues.
- **Procedures:** Understand the procedures for identifying inappropriate behavior and addressing the issue.

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## Appropriate Behavior Cont.

- **Awareness:** Recognize and avoid behaviors and words that are inappropriate or uncomfortable and could offend other dancers.
- **Styling:** Learn styling options to accommodate all couple combinations.
- **Gentle Holds:** Use hand and arm holds that can easily be released by either dancer. (Hold your thumb beside the fingers or loosely spread and inactive.) For calls with "pull by" actions, make sure to let go as your shoulders pass. Do not push. When assisting another dancer, be patient and use gentle pointing or hand beckoning.

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## Definitions of Harassment and Other Inappropriate Behaviors

As individuals, dancers have varying degrees of comfort with physical contact and personal interactions. An interaction is appropriate if neither person finds it offensive, and the interaction is based on mutual friendship and respect. This section defines the general behaviors that are not appropriate.

- A. Harassment is a series of incidents involving unwelcome and hostile, verbal, physical, or visual conduct directed toward one individual by another individual where the conduct:
- B. • creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment
- C. • causes a member's participation to suffer;
- D. • negatively affects a member's opportunity to participate in events.

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Specific actions that can be considered harassment include, but are not limited to:

- verbal conduct such as offensive name-calling, jokes, slurs, or negative stereotyping
- nonverbal conduct such as staring, leering, threatening, intimidating, or hostile acts
- physical conduct such as assault, unwanted touch, or intentional interfering
- visual conduct such as derogatory or offensive photos, cartoons, drawings, or gestures.

Constructive criticism or teaching is not harassment.

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## Bias and Discrimination

Bias is mental leaning towards or against a thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.

Commonly, the groups are identified by race or color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, political views, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age, or disability.

Discrimination is action resulting from bias and it may occur either directly or indirectly. Specific actions resulting from bias and discrimination include, but are not limited to:

- expressing negative stereotypes or making jokes based on bias;
- publicly refusing social interaction with someone based on bias.

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B. Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual or sex-based behavior.

Specific actions that can be considered sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

- demanding sexual favors with an implied or overt threat concerning conditions of membership
- conduct of a sexual nature that interferes with a member's participation and creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment; or
- uninvited or unnecessary physical contact of a sexual nature.

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## Defensive Dancing

How to decline or avoid unwanted or painful movements and flourishes:

- To decline flourishes while in Weave the Ring, Dosado, or similar calls, keep your hands “busy” with skirt work or put your hands behind your back.
- Physical Contact: To minimize the contact of an unwanted hug or Yellow Rock, hold up your right hand with palm out to block the hug and simultaneously suggest a “high five” instead.

If you are fond of twirling or swinging other dancers, please be gentle and be sensitive to the cues of the other dancer. Refrain from vigorous Swings unless there is clear communication of mutual enjoyment.

- Flourishes: If a dancer approaches you aggressively to force a flourish, make an “X” gesture with your hands, or hold your arms over your chest to minimize physical contact.
- To decline flourishes while in Weave the Ring, Dosado, or similar calls, keep your hands “busy” with skirt work or put your hands behind your back.

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**Handholds:** If a dancer holds your hand too tightly or too long, give a gentle or lighthearted reminder, such as grimacing in an exaggerated way (with a smile) while “shaking out” your hand, or say “Please, don’t squeeze”, or “Please, let go”. If the dancer persists in being too rough, ask a club leader to speak to the dancer.

- **Be Understanding:** Remember that dancers generally do not intend to make others feel uncomfortable, so keep the interaction friendly when turning down another dancer’s actions. If you are denied a flourish, do not take offense.

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## Directly Addressing Inappropriate Behavior

Politely but firmly advise the person that you believe the behavior is inappropriate and that you want it to stop.

Sometimes, an individual does not realize his or her behavior bothers or offends others. In many cases, individuals successfully resolve concerns through such discussions. If you choose not to address the issue directly with the person, or if the person fails to respect your request, then make a report.

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## The Safe and Welcoming Document

- ▶ A quick walk through of the document

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