

CALLERLAB Social Connections Committee Contest #1 Ideas for Group/Club Interaction

In late 2021 the Social Connections Committee ran a contest to solicit ideas to promote social connections and bonding in the square dance activity. The responses often included many valuable thoughts and ideas covering a range of topics. The ideas have been grouped into the following subject areas: New Dancer Sessions, Social Media, Group/Club Interactions, Dances, Club Activities, and National Outreach. All the ideas are presented in an omnibus document which you can view at <https://knowledge.callerlab.org/ideas-from-social-connections-contest-1/>. Several of the larger sections of that document have been copied out into separate documents focused on specific subjects. This document presents the ideas aimed at **Group/Club Interaction** to foster sociability and social bonding.

Group/Club Interaction

1. Square Dancers are the bricks of a square dance group. Social aspects are the mortar that hold everything together. One of the more important things is when dancers become good friends with at least one other dancer or couple in the group. If possible, friendships with several couples. Dancers will come to dance with their friends irrespective of their enjoyment of square dancing. The team aspect of dancing together as a team makes friends. New dancers friendships are usually based on common interests. The dancers should be encouraged to talk about their interests outside of square dancing. An easy way to start a conversation is to have everyone come to a dance in the costume of their favorite recreation other than square dancing.
2. In classes, work on the team aspects of square dancing. This will mean using correct timing in the delivery of the calls. Tell the dancers the correct number of steps each "basic" takes. You will see many of them counting their steps. Emphasize team success. The ability for all the square to finish the dance routine together. Cheer for your team (square) when you succeed. Square Dancers want to look good when they dance. Teach them how. If you are an experienced dancer, teach other dancers what is good styling. Good styling goes hand in hand with good timing. Have a continuing education attitude, Workshops may work well. Dancers want to do the dance routines right. Don't hesitate to walk through dance routines that may cause difficulties.
3. Start every dance with something special. End every dance with something special. It can be a special dance. It can be shaking everyone's hands. It can be anything. Something like Scatter Promenade for the last dance works well. If you can, provide an area where people can be comfortable when they take a break from dancing. This should be an area where they can talk without interrupting the dancing. If necessary have them exit the hall where the dancing is taking place. Find ways to mix people.
4. Mixers are good because almost everyone can do them. Anything danced in a big circle also works. Consider doing some simple line dances during breaks. There will be several subgroups that will form in any square dance group. Some dancers will move around several of these subsets. Don't worry about this. As long as they are mixing sets they are being part of the whole group.
5. Club members should be encouraged to participate in activities outside of the square dance. Pot luck suppers can be scheduled or going out to dinner before the dance. Dancers sometimes need to be encouraged to go out for snacks or even drinks after the dance. Afterparties in a club members home or even the dance hall can be scheduled occasionally. Utilize some of the other talents in the group. Play some games that can involve everyone. Be careful when you do. Don't do anything that will cause someone to become embarrassed. Attending sport events as a group or going to a theater production work well. Some groups may like to camp out. Put on a club picnic or a progressive dinner. Pick an activity and encourage members to attend.

6. Care about those who may become ill or have other reasons for missing a few dances. Keep them in contact with the group. Tell them what is happening. Tell them you miss them. Encourage them to come to the dance and just visit until they dance once again. If you can find someone who is willing, put out a monthly or quarterly newsletter. It doesn't have to be fancy, just informative and include as many club member's names in each newsletter as possible. Send get well cards if needed. Call your square dance friends and go out for coffee at times other than dance night. In this age of cell-phones, text them and tell them they are missed. Snap a picture of who was there and send it to them.
7. The following is an example of the social activities of one club:
 - 1) Members are encouraged to sit by/with and interact with visitors and new dancers at our dances.
 - 2) Encourage Angel support at your new dancer program.
 - 3) Have a Mentor program, where club members (who volunteer to do so) basically adopt a new couple. The Mentors are responsible for attending all classes and dancing with their mentees. Call them once a week, bring them to any "outside of the dance" club activities, and if they miss a class, the Mentors get together with them to catch them up, etc.
 - 4) Have a "Dinner Night Out" once a month at different restaurants in town.
 - 5) If one of your members performs or participates in a community activity, encourage the club to attend as a group; then go out to dinner after.
 - 6) Have a theme for every dance and support the theme with dress and decorations.
 - 7) Have a Club Picnics or Progressive Dinners once or more a year.
 - 8) When the home of a club member is available near an event, invite everyone to meet there for refreshments and fellowship before or afterwards.
 - 9) If your club is an active banner participant, encourage visitations to other clubs in the area.
 - 10) At the end of the dances, all members and visitors form a large circle, saying, "Thank You!"
 - 11) Zoom meetings can be held if a dance or event is canceled due to weather or other circumstances. Use the theme that had been chosen for that month's dance. Dress and share stories that have to do with that theme.