

Tips for Your Tips

A series devoted to helping you become a more confident dancer

By Jan Thompson

The Eyes Have It!

Just as hand contact is valuable for comfortable dancing and successful squares, so is eye contact. It also makes dancing more enjoyable.

1. Eye contact is social contact. You are dancing with people. Enjoy the smiles of your fellow dancers.
2. Keep your head up! See the whole picture, not just your feet. Your feet will carry you where you need to go, whether or not you are looking at them.
3. Look at the formation. Use your peripheral vision as well as looking straight ahead. Stay aware of where you are in the formation (center, end, facing in, facing out, left or right side of a couple) Since this is constantly changing, your eyes will always be moving. When you hear a call, identify where you should move and with whom you should interact. Don't just start to wonder.
4. Look at the person with whom you are going to interact, whether to pass through or to make hand contact. Make eye contact with him/her. This helps both you and the other dancer. During boys/Girls Trade, for example, dancers look down their wave/line to find the person of the same sex; he/she may be any of the other three people in the wave/line. "Trade The Wave" (a Plus call) is frequently preceded by the helpful reminder "Peek" because it is easier to successfully complete the call when you first see with whom you are going to trade.
5. When the caller starts a tip by saying "Bow to your partner, bow to your corner," don't just bow – actively note who the people are. During a singer, every time the women move on to their corner, once again take note of your new partner and corner. Ladies: during a singer, your corner will become your new partner after each figure choreography. If the square has a problem, you'll know with whom you should be when the caller says, "Swing your partner." You will return to your original partner before the closer.
6. Be aware of the flow of the dancers in your square. During Four Ladies Chain, for example, an uncertain woman can watch and follow the other women put in their right hands to form a star and turn it halfway.
7. Look for the open spot, especially if you are unsure of where to go. If there is a line of four dancers and a line of three, chances are you should be in that fourth spot.
8. If you are uncertain, look for helpful hand signals (a welcoming open palm, a pointed finger).
9. If you see a "deer in the headlights" look on a fellow dancer, gently assist him/her if you can
10. And don't forget to smile – the other dancers have their eyes on you. Happy dancing!

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