

Calling for Youth

By Kristy Jacobs

Youth dancers are the future of square dancing. They may be future callers, club leaders, or festival directors. In fact, every current member of the Executive Committee of CALLERLAB and over half of the current board began as youth dancers. Recruiting youth dancers is essential to keeping our activity alive, but just as important is retaining the dancers we already have. This is a hard task. Youth dancers are busy with school, activities, family, friends and a lot more. The only way to keep them involved in square dancing is to make sure they have fun!

Tips for youth club callers:

- **Teach square dance etiquette.** Don't assume that your dancers will know how to act at a square dance. Especially those who don't have family members in the activity may have no idea how to act, and no one but you to guide them. Teach them to square up when the music starts, to applaud at the end of a tip, to thank everyone in their square, etc. Keep an eye on your dancers at festival and conventions. It is important that they know they are representing all youth dancers when they are traveling.
- **Organize visits to adult clubs.** Not only will they impress the adult dancers; your youth dancers will begin to feel more comfortable dancing with adults. This will help make the transition from youth dancer to adult dancer much easier on them. It may also help to change the attitude that many dancers have towards youth dancers.
- **Involve your dancers in the organization and running of their club.** Make sure they know that their ideas and feelings count.
- **Keep parents involved.** Encourage them to support their kids in this activity. They should be able to trust you with their children. Also, remember that parents who don't dance could easily be recruited to your adult clubs.
- **Take a personal interest in your dancers.** They should feel comfortable coming to you with any problems they may have. A relationship should be established so that you are able to tell them if their behavior is inappropriate. If you are not dedicated to your youth dancers, you are doing them a disservice. If you really care, you can help ensure that they will want to stay involved in square dancing.

Tips for all callers:

Be Patient

- Remember that many of these dancers are young and inexperienced. They may have just learned to dance, they may be dancing for the first time without their parents, or they may have only danced to their club caller.
- Help dancers with calls or figures they are having problems with. If they feel like they can't get it right, they'll get frustrated and want to quit. Help them to succeed.
- Don't be surprised if youth dancers seem to want to do more socializing than dancing. Socializing is a huge part of the activity to them, even more so than it is to adult dancers.

Correct any behavioral problems in private.

- Never scold a dancer from the stage. They are easily embarrassed. Speak to them privately, or speak to another adult who they know and would feel comfortable talking to.
- If you do choose to speak to the dancer yourself, be calm. Assume that the dancer is acting this way because they don't know any better. Gently explain what they have done wrong and what they should do in the future.

Interact on and off the stage.

- Youth dancers appreciate callers who take an interest in their lives. Talk and joke with them between tips and feel free to make comments over the microphone as well. They'll love you if you make them laugh. Just be sure not to say anything that might embarrass them or hurt their feelings.
- Be available if a dancer is having a problem and needs help or someone to talk to.

Choreography does not have to be basic.

- Most youth dancers like to be challenged. Just be sure that the dancers are capable of executing the material you're calling. If you have a floor of experienced youth dancers, go ahead and challenge them.

Music choice doesn't have to be a source of anxiety.

- Don't think you have to play the newest, hippest song. If you're not comfortable performing a certain singing call, don't do it! Stay within your comfort zone and use music that accentuates your strengths.
- You may be surprised to find that almost any singing call that is popular with adult dancers will probably be popular with youth dancers as well. I took a survey of about 50 youth dancers in my area and at the National Convention in Oklahoma. Here are the 15 singing calls they said were their favorites:
 1. Pink Cadillac
 2. Fisherman's Luck
 3. Light the Candles
 4. Neutron Dance
 5. Who's your Daddy?
 6. Devil Went down to Georgia
 7. Butterfly Kisses
 8. Will it go Round in Circles?
 9. Good Night Sweetheart
 10. Friends in Low Places
 11. Sold
 12. Sweet County Music
 13. Old Time Rock and Roll
 14. American Pie
 15. Amarillo By Morning
- Play a variety of music. Very often, especially at the National Conventions, youth dancers hear the same music over and over again.

And most importantly....

Have fun!

- Youth dancers will appreciate the fact that you're enjoying yourself and that you really want to be there. Unfortunately, many callers have a bad attitude towards youth dancers and it shows. Just the fact that you're having fun will make a big difference!