MAKING ROOM FOR DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES & COMMUNICATION STYLES

One of the greatest strengths of square and round dancing is the people. We pride ourselves on being friendly, welcoming, and inclusive. But sometimes our efforts to be welcoming can unintentionally make some people uncomfortable.

Not everyone experiences social situations the same way.

In a group of 100 dancers, roughly 15–20 people may be neurodivergent.
Psychologists believe 35–45% of the population is introverted.

As an introverted, neurodivergent person myself, I have occassionally been judged as unfriendly and not welcoming.

During our panel discussion at the 2026 Colorado State Square Dance Convention, I was surprised that several participants identified and felt judged by people who misinterpret what for us are normal expressions as unfriendly or having difficulty with dancing.

For the record, all of us LOVE SQUARE AND ROUND DANCING!

- **Some dancers are outgoing and energized by meeting new people.** They enjoy long conversations, enthusiastic greetings, and being the center of attention.
- **Others are quieter.** They may be introverted, neurodiverse, shy, socially anxious, or simply more reserved. They may enjoy people deeply while needing less conversation, less attention, and more personal space.

The important thing to remember is this:

There is no single "right" way to be friendly.

Different Doesn't Mean Unfriendly

- A dancer who is quiet may still be having a wonderful time.
- A dancer who doesn't smile constantly may still be happy.
- A dancer who leaves quickly after the dance may still feel connected to the club.
- A dancer who avoids long conversations may still love the people around them.

We often assume we can tell what someone is feeling by their facial expressions or social behavior. In reality, people express themselves differently.

When we label someone as unfriendly, angry, aloof, or disinterested simply because they communicate differently, we risk making them feel unwelcome.



Welcoming Doesn't Have to Be Performative

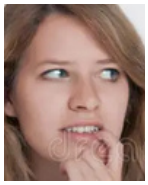
Most dancers genuinely want newcomers to feel included. That's wonderful.

But sometimes enthusiastic welcomes can become overwhelming.

A new dancer may be greeted by multiple people in rapid succession, asked many personal questions, introduced to numerous strangers, and become the focus of attention before they've had a chance to settle in.

For some people, this feels exciting!

For others, it feels exhausting.



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A simple, authentic welcome is often enough:

"Hi, we're glad you're here. Let us know if you need anything."

Then give people space to engage at their own comfort level.

Avoid the "Smile!" Trap

Many people have heard comments like:

- "Smile!"
- "You look unhappy."
- "What's wrong?"
- "Are you mad at someone?"

These remarks are usually intended to be helpful, but they can feel judgmental.

- Some people naturally have neutral facial expressions.
- Some are concentrating.
- Some are tired.
- Some are neurodiverse and express emotions differently.

A smile should be an invitation, not a requirement.

What This Means for Square & Round Dancing

If clubs want to attract younger dancers and grow membership, they should assume that a substantial percentage of newcomers may prefer:

- Warm but low-pressure welcomes
- Time to observe before engaging
- Optional social interaction
- Acceptance of different communication styles
- No assumptions based on facial expressions
- No pressure to "smile more"
- Opportunities to participate without becoming the center of attention

A useful principle for clubs is:

"Be welcoming, not overwhelming."

That approach works well for extroverts, introverts, neurotypical people, neurodivergent people, younger adults, older adults, and almost everyone in between.
It creates a culture where people can connect in the way that feels most natural to them while still enjoying what brought them there in the first place—the dancing!

