

# Providing a Safe and Secure Dance Environment

## I. Welcome and Introduction

## II. Overview:

- a. Explanation of the topic: We live in an ever-changing world and with recent news reports of harassment and personal attacks, we must learn to protect our dancers and callers from potential harm and embarrassing situations.

The focus of this session is on developing an awareness of issues and behaviors that can make a dance event uncomfortable, threatening, unsafe, or a source of harassment, bias, or sexual harassment for some dancers. We will try to define, describe and quantify these issues and provide callers with suggestions on being aware of and monitoring their behavior and handling issues that may be brought to them by dancers.

- b. Goals of the session:

- i. Increase caller awareness and understanding of the areas included when talking about creating a safe and secure dance environment.
- ii. Give callers guidelines for monitoring their behavior and actions
- iii. Present callers with ideas on being proactive in avoiding incidents that can be interpreted as harassment and bias
- iv. Describe specific guidelines, tools and skills for handling complaints about dancers brought to them
- v. Provide callers tools to use should they observe inappropriate behavior
- vi. Answers questions participants have
- vii. In general provide you with an increased awareness of the topics covered, some initial educations on these topics, and guidelines for what to do when inappropriate behavior occurs.

## III. Contextualizing the Topic:

- a. As Joe Biden recently said you need to “know and understand this generation and times you are living in and, know and understand yourself.”
- b. The fact is that we are in a time where people are more aware of the issues surrounding inappropriate behavior and that people feel the need to speak up when something occurs that makes them feel uncomfortable, offended, intimidated or harassed
- c. Issues surrounding personal space and when that space feels invaded have become front and center.
  - i. Square dancing by its very nature entails sharing personal space
  - ii. However, we need to share that personal space in a manner that:
    1. Is sexually neutral, but still interactive and congenial
    2. That feels safe and has no connotations beyond doing the calls and enjoying sharing in the choreography and social experience.

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3. Feels right—is pleasant and enjoyable
  4. Doesn't make anyone feel uncomfortable.
  5. Understanding that there needs to be consent before certain physical interactions occur. Dancers consent to certain types of physical interaction the very fact that they choosing to square dance. This is non-intrusive contact and they need to feel that is respected.
- d. People are also more sensitive and aware of comments that could be considered offensive than in earlier times, and it is incumbent on all of us—especially callers to have an awareness of that and filter what we say in a wise and thoughtful manner.
- e. In terms of square dancing, dancer (or caller) should ever feel uncomfortable, violate, intimidated, disrespected or attacked.

### IV. What specifically are we talking about?

#### a. Defining Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment refers to a range of behaviors which are sexual in nature and which are not wanted, not asked for, not reciprocated, and which make the recipient feel uncomfortable, humiliated, intimidated, offended, hurt or upset. Not all forms of sexual harassment are criminal, but all are unacceptable. The behavior can take many different forms and may include physical contact, verbal comments, jokes, propositions, display of offensive material or other behavior which creates a sexually hostile social environment. Sexual harassment may not be intentional. Acts or behavior which are funny or trivial to one person may hurt or offend another.

Examples of Sexual Harassment may include:

#### Verbal sexual harassment

- rude jokes or comments;
- making promises or threats in return for sexual favors;
- requests for sex;
- repeated invitations to go out after prior refusal;
- sex-based insults, taunts, teasing or name calling;
- offensive or abusive telephone calls; or
- persistent questions or insinuations about a person's private life.

#### Non-verbal sexual harassment

- putting sexually suggestive, offensive, or insulting material including posters, pin-ups, cartoons, graffiti or messages, on walls, noticeboards, desks, computer screen savers, electronic mail or other communal areas, "flashing" or offensive hand or body gestures;
- staring or leering at a person or parts of their body;
- wolf whistling and similar actions
- unwelcome practical jokes.

#### Physical harassment

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- uninvited, unwanted, or unnecessary physical contact such as touching, pinching, patting, brushing up against a person, kissing, hugging or massaging a person without invitation; indecent or sexual assault or attempted assault

Sexual Harassment is Not:

- Sexual harassment does not refer to compliments or behavior which neither party finds offensive and which is based on mutual attraction, friendship and respect.
- If the interaction is consensual, welcome and reciprocated, it is not sexual harassment.

### **b. Defining Bias and Discrimination:**

Discrimination may occur either directly or indirectly. Direct discrimination happens when a person treats, or proposes to treat, a person with an attribute less favorably than another person without the attribute. Indirect discrimination happens when a person imposes, or proposes to impose, a condition a) with which a person with an attribute does not or is not able to comply; and b) with which a higher proportion of people without the attribute comply or are able to comply; and c) that is not reasonable. Discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favorably because one of the personal characteristics noted above. Discrimination may involve (but is not limited to):

- Making offensive 'jokes' about another member's racial or ethnic background, sex, sexual preference, age or disability;
- Expressing negative stereotypes about groups e.g. 'Mothers shouldn't work';
- Judging someone on their political or religious beliefs;
- Undermining a person because you dislike one of their personal characteristics;
- Using selection processes based on irrelevant personal characteristics such as age, race or disability rather than skills and merit.

### **c. Defining Harassment/Bullying**

- Harassment/bullying can be defined as the repeated less favorable treatment of a person which may be considered as unreasonable and or inappropriate practice.
- It includes behavior that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates a person.
- All forms of intimidation

Harassment / Bullying behaviors may include, but are not limited to:

- Poorly managed conflicts of opinion or personality;
- Intimidation
- Abuse of power Yelling, screaming abuse, offensive language, insults;
- inappropriate comments about a person's appearance, life or lifestyle,
- slandering;
- Belittling constant criticism;
- Isolating members from participating in normal team selection
- Exclusion, creating a feeling of uselessness
- Teasing or regularly being made the brunt of pranks/practical jokes

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- Displaying written or pictorial material which degrades or offends someone

### V. What this means for callers:

- a. First and foremost you are a leader with the responsibility of ensuring a safe environment for all dancers.
- b. Implications for caller behavior: use good judgement, common sense and an increased awareness to monitor your personal behavior, as new ways of interpreting things, may make some behaviors no longer appropriate.
- c. Your responsibility when complaints are brought to you—what your initial response should be to complaints.
- d. Guidelines for caller action and leadership when an incident occurs between dancers—what you should do if you get a complaint—remember inaction is compliance
- e. Callers make their own choices and decisions if they want to continue to use language/actions that may lead to a complaint.

### VI. Incidental verses intentional situations examples:

- a. More and more a distinction is made between incidental situations and intentional ones.
  - i. Incidental: A caller or dancer does something that someone finds offensive, but this was done unintentionally.
  - ii. Intentional: there was intent to do somethings that is found offensive.
- b. a caller says “skirt work girls” which a dancer finds offensive as compared with a caller inappropriately touches a dancer;
- c. a caller inadvertently says something that a minority dancer finds offensive as opposed to a caller using a racial slur
- d. Traditional words and actions that are now sometimes called into question: e.g. the “Yellow Rock dilemma” and others.
- e. Specific threats and bullying as opposed to “John Doe” is always so mean to me”.
- f. Incidental situations can often be resolved with and apology noting that no offense was intended
- g. Intentional situations call for more direct action

### VII. What to do when a situation arises.

- a. When someone complains to you about someone else’s behavior.
  - i. It is always best to ask the offended person how they would like the situation addressed and resolved. Ask: What would resolve this situation for you?
  - ii. How can I help with that—what can I do?
  - iii. Then, after realistic reflection and consideration—say: Here is what I can do.
  - iv. Follow through—this is important.
- b. In club ran dances and festivals, it is the responsibility of the sponsoring group to handle the resolution. Refer the concerned dancer to the leadership for their action, offer to assist with

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getting them talking to the leadership. Once turned over to the club leadership—your involvement is done—but document what you did just as a common practice.

- c. When someone complains to you about your behavior.
  - i. Stop, think, plan your response carefully.
  - ii. What would resolve this for you?
  - iii. Do not argue, make excuses etc.—stay objective and say little—over reacting, arguing and saying to much can be your worst enemy.
  - iv. Document
  - v. Hopefully you can say “making you uncomfortable was never my intent, and I am sorry if I did.
  - vi. Seek advice

### VIII. Legal considerations and the possibility of a legal criminal complaint being filed.

- a. Unless something criminal occurs legal action is probably not an option.
- b. Other considerations

### IX. Bottom line:

- a. Be aware of:
  - i. Sexual Harassment
  - ii. Bias
  - iii. Harassment and Bullying
- b. **Always** use good judgement, common sense and now, an increased awareness of how words and actions can be negatively interpreted and when something is blatantly wrong.
- c. Why doing nothing is not an option. Basically, doing nothing when you are made aware of an incident amounts to complicity.
- d. Again, guidance here can usually be easily ascertained by asking: What would it take to resolve this for You? What would you like me to do?

### X. Discussion/question and answer period: Possible scenarios you could face and what to do when they occur.

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