

AMERICAN SQUARE DANCING

INCLUSION STATEMENT & DISCLAIMER WITH REGARD TO ABILITY

Square dancing is a pastime whose strapline is “fun and friendship to music”. It aims to be a very inclusive hobby allowing all levels of dancing regardless of age, ability, race, gender and sexuality.

However, it does involve committing to memory a number of moves and being able to react quickly and then complete these moves correctly when directed by the caller. The moves are taught slowly and repetitively with all the dancers until they build up a full repertoire and some dancers find that as they progress and learn more and more moves they find it increasingly difficult to keep up.

All dancers should be aware that this is a moderate impact activity and it is a requirement that they are reasonably fit and well. It is their responsibility to advise their club if there are any physical or mental problems that could affect their ability to dance safely.

There are normally eight people in a square and problems can arise where one or more persons within the group consistently exhibits one or more of the following traits:

- Cannot remember the move and either stands still or goes the wrong way
- Remembers the move wrongly and goes the wrong way
- Reacts very slowly to the move and is not in the correct place when the next move is called.

Whilst it is accepted, and in fact expected, that the above will happen whilst people are learning – problems can, and do arise, when the majority of the group is proficient but one or two are not, and because of reasons beyond their control never will be. This can be due to a number of factors but is normally due to a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, never mind remembering moves and dancing at speed. e.g. problems with walking and turning, memory loss, dizziness, slow reaction times etc.

Dancers on the whole are very inclusive and try and help those that are not so able by guiding them when they go wrong – however, when this is happening all the time then one or more of the following risks may occur:

- Less proficient dancers get injured by other well meaning dancers who try and push or pull them into the correct positions.
- Dancers collide as the less proficient dancer is very slow or turns the wrong way.
- Dancers injure their wrists or shoulders as the less proficient dancer turns the wrong way or uses the wrong handhold.

These are very real Health and Safety risks that are exacerbated when, as is often the case in a small hall, a number of squares (each comprising of eight dancers) dance in close proximity. If a less proficient dancer goes the wrong way in this scenario they could easily injure a dancer in an adjacent square who does not know of their shortcomings.

Possible Options

Adjustments and precautions that may be taken include:

- Making part of the evening's dancing a fun session for the less proficient dancers where only the first few easy moves are used.
- Arrange a separate evening for the less proficient dancers where all the dancing is slower and easier.

However, this can only be done if the club is willing to arrange this, the caller has the time available, there are a minimum of eight people willing to dance at this easier level, and it is financially viable.

For most clubs and callers this is not “reasonably practicable” and therefore from a Health and Safety point of view it may be deemed appropriate for persons with such physical or mental impairments to seek a pastime that does not require the same interaction and speed of thought, thereby mitigating the possibility of injury to themselves and others.