

Mount Baker Council Recommended Code of Conduct

Square dancers on a whole tend to be a very friendly bunch, but many people have boundaries that we need to recognize, personal space that they do not wish to be invaded. No one should be made to feel uncomfortable at a dance. The days of “Yellow Rock” (square dance lingo for a hug) being called by a caller are on the way out, so be considerate of your fellow dancers, and practice restraint.

A certain amount of touching is required to perform most square dance calls. The guidelines are as follows:

- **Never have a grip on another dancer.** Your hand-hold should always be loose so that either party can let go. A light touch is the key. Do not lock thumbs, as this may make it difficult to move to the next call. Use a light forearm touch for allemandes and any other move requiring a forearm grip.
- **A courtesy turn might include touching the partner’s waist/back.** If your partner has a hand behind her back, that is a signal that you should take it rather than touch her waist.
- **Swings are optional and can be vetoed by either party.** If your partner in the swing is not mirroring your swing positioning just before entering the swing, then skip the swing. Don’t force it. If your partner is approaching you with their arms up in a ‘swing position’ then you can assume they want to swing. Some women prefer not to twirl after a swing. They will let you know by wearing a pin that says “do not twirl” or simply by keeping their arms down after the swing.

It is okay to assist/direct another dancer with words or a very gentle touch. Never push or pull another dancer. This includes lead/follow dances. **Do not try to guide another square dancer physically** except via a (loose) hand hold. Instead, simply let the people who do have hand contact help, or you can point, or whisper something verbally (e.g. the ending formation).

Since square dancing is a social activity which involves touching, occasionally some people (usually men-let’s be honest) will try to take advantage. Also, some men and women both may be open to finding a partner for dancing and possibly a social relationship. Common sense, common courtesy and The Golden Rule should guide all interactions.

All social interaction should be of the form of an ‘**offer**’ and ‘**response**’. If you offer someone a handshake or a hug and they hold back, respect that and withdraw. If you repeatedly ask someone to dance (or go out after the dance) and they decline, assume they are not interested and move on.

Certain behaviors exceed the bounds of appropriateness, but go unchallenged because the victim is unsure of what’s considered normal in this community, or doesn’t know how to react. In some cases, the perpetrator may not even be aware of his or her error. For the benefit of those

who are unsure and those who repeatedly offend, here is a partial list of things which are not acceptable at a dance or in lessons:

Pokes, tickling, or butt slaps

Staring at a woman's breasts or behind

Non-accidental breast touching-when it happens often or lingers

Derriere groping or butt-patting

Rude comments on someone's appearance, even if meant to be complementary

How to Handle Violations of the Code of Conduct

By being very clear in our expectations, we hope to simply avoid most problematic behavior. However inevitably there will be complaints, and thus we need a policy for addressing those complaints.

It is certainly appropriate to point out to someone that they've done something you found uncomfortable. If this is one of those situations where the perpetrator actually was unaware of his/her actions, then your words may end up benefiting the entire community. And even if he/she was fully aware of what he/she was doing, being told that his/her behavior has been noted may discourage its repetition. You might say something like "You are bending my wrist until it hurts" or "I'm not comfortable with the way you always stare at me." If you don't feel comfortable doing this, or you do not wish for a confrontation, you simply need to bring the issue up with a club officer.

The club officer will meet privately with the person violating the rules, making it clear that the behavior is unacceptable, and making it clear what the next level of response is. This private discussion does NOT need to get bogged down with determining guilt, because even if the person is innocent, he is only being asked to make a small adjustment to allow another dancer to feel safe and to follow the stated code of conduct. The conduct-breaker may be asked to avoid dancing in the same square as the complainant for some time (e.g. months to a year). If the conduct-breaker wishes to make an apology and the target is willing to hear it, that could be arranged, if appropriate. If the alleged conduct-breaker is unwilling to do what is requested (ignoring the question of guilt) that may be grounds for escalation by the club.

In addition to the private talk, the club will also make a general announcement reminding everyone of the code of conduct described here. This is just one more way we can be very clear what our standards are. This code of conduct should be presented during lessons, and should to be announced at regular intervals (probably annually).

Club Response

The Council or individual clubs should discuss levels of response to violations of the Code of Conduct, See document "Club Response to Violations".