



Recently, I had someone ask me why I thought our Silver City Square Dance club has attracted, and sustained so many youth.

Here is a bit of background on me...I am a homeschooling mom of 4 of these teenagers. They all love to dance at our club. My 2 older kids joined our club in 2021, my other 2 joined in 2022 and have loved every minute of it.

But how did they get involved?

Not far from our grange hall is a church camp. My kids had close friends that they spent all summer with as camp staff, who also happened to be square dancers. At that time, there was enough youth for about 3 squares in our club.

The next fall lessons, another homeschooling parent and I decided to post videos and information on the 2 huge homeschool families Facebook pages and we had a significant response. Our club is now bursting at the seams.

I am sharing this with ya'll as a way to hopefully have more successful clubs around our lovely state and promote square dancing further.

Here are a few suggestions to get teens to come to your club...

- Are there church camps near your square dance clubs? Call them in January, and ask them if they would ever be interested in having a team building square dance event for their staff. I encourage you to keep it to the staff in their off hours during the summer, because campers do not carry the same enthusiasm as camp staff do. Camp Staff love being silly, and have fun doing things they don't normally do.**
- Find local homeschool co-ops, many meet in churches. Most of these offer elective classes, and see if they want to have lessons as a class hour.**
- Find homeschool families that can advertise on their homeschooling Facebook pages!**

Here are a few things I've learned from my teens...that I believe has kept our club strong and growing.

Some of these might be things you already know...some things I may share might cause you to feel a bit offended. It is not my intent to be offensive, instead I'm trying to communicate through the lens of our youth.

1. When new youth come to new dancer lessons, try not and split them up. I know it's customary for an angel to be with a new dancer as a partner, but this breed of teen does not like to spend the night dancing with "old people". They want to dance with their friends. Instead, put a couple of energetic adults in the square with them and since we all know that the women are circulated through the square, eventually they will have an angel as a partner.

Allowing the teens to start out in the same square, and holding hands with the partner of their choice; this lowers their inhibitions, and prevents a possible reason why they won't want to come back. It's a good suggestion for adult couples too. My husband stopped attending lessons with me 10 years ago because the club we attended insisted that we could NOT start out in a square dancing as partners with each other. He hated having the lessons with someone he didn't want to dance with, quit the lessons and won't return.

2. Let them try and dance with whomever they want to in a square. Ya, they will screw up. Yes, they will struggle...and in the end they will be much more willing to have a mixed square with angels who are older, because they will learn that they really don't know much and need help. It will take their arrogance down a few notches by their failures.

3. Don't put pressure on them to have square dance attire at dances. Kids just want to have fun, some want to wear petticoats and skirts and collared shirts. Some just want to come and not dress up. There is an added stress of the kids wondering how they look, and the possibility of feeling like they have to spend \$\$ on an outfit – even if it is a gently used item. Or wondering if they will be the only teen there that put on the square dance attire and they would then feel stupid and like an outcast. Give freedom for teens to choose to wear their normal street clothes.

4. Let kids go bare foot if they want to. Yes, we know they can have their feet stepped on by boots. But it's their problem not the person who is wearing the boots. I don't know why, but there are many kids in our club that just prefer dancing bare footed. We don't care, we are just happy they want to dance. If this is an insurance issue, then have the kids sign a waiver that they won't hold the club liable for any injury they incur from going barefoot.

5. Don't be offended if teens don't want to dance in a square with older adults. The teens want to dance with their friends, and while it is not the code of conduct for 20 years ago...it may be time to change. I promise eventually teens will warm up to dancing with adults, but most feel they have the most fun with their peers. Remember...these are teenagers, with lots of hormones, they are looking to dance with their crush. Let's let them.

6. Teens love to do all the fancy swings, and twirls and grand square show off moves. Teens don't know which adults they have to worry if they have bad

shoulders. Teens also like to dance FAST! “Circle to the left” our teens practically run/skip while traveling in a circle. They don’t want to go slow with older adults.

7. Most kids hate “do si do” but they love the “highland fling”....let them. If you put rules telling them that they can’t dance this move in a square dance lesson, it will be one more reason why they probably don’t want to come back. They love the fancy moves, and “do si do” for some reason has a really negative history for kids to make fun of square dancing.

8. Have a caller that is extremely patient. These kids talk A LOT during lessons. This is a huge social hour for them. If a caller is always getting angry or frustrated that students aren’t listening – it will reflect in his/her manners and tone, and the kids will interpret that the caller doesn’t like them. Yes, the students should be respectful and not talk. Yes, the caller needs to keep order, but patience without frustration matters. I suggest finding a caller that has worked with youth and learn some tips on how they have navigated working with youth.

9. Ditch the meal time. From what I have observed...most teens want to dance and snack and dance and snack. To sit down for a potluck meal means they possibly have to have conversations with adults they don’t know. This causes a stressful situation for most youth. The reality is, it can cause a stressful time for many adults. If you think about it, we have a society that doesn’t often eat meals together. Yes, many clubs do this because they want to encourage relationships with each other; however, I suggest to have to have an open snack bar during a dance or lessons, and a meal optional for all the long time club members after or before a dance. Don’t be too surprised if the youth don’t stick around, it just takes time for them to get comfortable.

10. Music...I know this is a tough one, but if we have songs that are the oldies like “Elvira” by the Oakridge Boys, most youth aren’t going to want to stick around. Ask around and find out what country songs the kids like to listen to. It may take some extra work to accommodate but I think it will be helpful to keep people and youth returning if they like the song selections.

11. Offer Line dancing at the end of a square dance lesson, or between tips if you don’t have round dancing going on. Kids love line dancing...it doesn’t require a partner so it feels more comfortable for them and it’s fun!