

Helpful Hints from Paul and Ann Clements
From
The Twisty Twirlers Round Dance Club (British Columbia)

We operate a pattern dance program at the local Community Living Association day program. It is for people with mental disabilities and some also have physical challenges. We dance many kinds of dances including squares, contra, reels, freestyle but primarily round dances. Each dancer is partnered by a staff member or a volunteer and the cues/calls are directed to the partner. We often have less partners than clients so we often repeat each dance so that all participants have the chance to dance. This also gives clients a chance to rest between dances.

My husband Paul is our cuer and I lead the teaching. All dances have been choreographed specifically for this program and they are greatly simplified from standard dances. We have modified all the figures so that there are no steps requiring independent action by the clients. So for example, we can use underarm turns but not solo turns. The figures are given twice as much time as a standard figure would take, to accommodate the differing needs in the group.

For example, a twirl is given 2 measures of music instead of one. Any clients who can execute the figure in one measure are led to do the figure twice by their partners. The partners often change so the program is kept simple enough to accommodate these new partners every week.

We all wear a glove on our left hands for two reasons. The directions right and left are too difficult for most dancers. So we cue directions as gloved and bare instead. We also find the gloves help reduce the spreads of colds in the group.

Our program has been going for 4 years and we tend to have 30 – 40 dancers at a typical dance. The energy in the room is amazing and is one of the most popular programs offered in the day program for both the clients and partners.