

Square Dance Recovery Techniques

by Kurt Gollhardt 2024-06-06

If you get lost while dancing, and aren't sure where to go:

1. **Don't Panic.** It's OK; we all make mistakes. Try to relax and find a way to keep going. Don't stop and try to figure out what happened; you'll miss the next call.
2. **Go With The Flow.** Callers tend to use choreography that flows (keeps you going in smooth curves). If you follow your body flow rather than turning abruptly, there's a good chance you're headed in the right direction.
3. **Keep Listening.** The caller may be giving you clues like, "You're all facing out", or "You've got Lines". If you're facing the wrong way, turn around (individually, or as a couple, depending on whether you had just been moving as a couple).
4. **Look Around.** Someone may be offering help, with an outstretched hand or pointing to where you should go, or signaling for you to turn around.
5. **Look For The Hole.** If you're the only one who's lost, there will usually be an empty spot in the formation somewhere. Go fill it. Look around to see which way others are facing (all facing in, all facing out, or in a wave).
6. **Be Aware Of Formations.** Are you in lines, waves, columns? What formation is the call *supposed to* end in? Are you a Center or an End? If you can learn to be aware of these things as you're dancing, you'll be able to see where you're supposed to go much more quickly.
7. **Watch Opposites & Counterparts.** This technique is a bit more advanced, but if you make a mental note when you square up of who your *diagonal opposite* is in your square and who your *counterpart* (in the same spot as you) is in another square, you can use them to see where you probably should be if you get lost. (They may be wrong, too.) Only use this as a last-resort *recovery technique*; don't use it as a crutch to avoid learning the dance moves on your own.
8. **Be Flexible.** If something has gone wrong, you might end up in a different spot than intended. This could mean that you've *temporarily* switched from Girl to Boy or Heads to Sides. Keep going as best you can in that new role until you get home.
9. **Home Is Home.** If the caller says "Square Your Set", "Promenade Home", or anything like "You Should be Home", then go individually back to your original Home spot.

For (way) more detail, see Barry Clasper's "How May I Help" article at:
<https://clasper.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2024/02/HOW-MAY-I-HELP.pdf>

See Page 2 for guidance for when the whole square "breaks down".

If the whole square “breaks down” (you aren’t able to recover quickly) during a Patter Sequence (not a Singing Call):

1. **Declare “Breakdown”.** Someone in the square declares a breakdown by saying “Breakdown”, “Make Lines”, or “Make Normal Lines”.
2. **Make Lines.** Make “**Normal**” Lines Facing Side Walls (Boy on the Left of each couple), using one of these methods:
 - A. “**Reset to Lines**”
 - i. **Very Quickly Get Home.** Everyone go directly to their Home spot, then:
 - ii. “**Slide Out**” to Lines. Get into parallel Facing Lines facing Side Walls: In a move kind of like the end of *Circle To A Line* (but going to the *right*), Head Girls join hands with their Corners, bringing their Partner along, to face Side Walls, while the Sides slide to their Right.
 - B. “**Make Lines Directly**”
 - i. **Make Normal Couples.** Find the nearest dancer of the opposite role and make a Normal Couple (Boy on the Left), then:
 - ii. **Make Side-Wall Lines.** Couples adjust to line up in Lines facing Side walls.
3. **Wait for “Forward & Back”.** Wait for the caller to say “Lines Forward & Back” or “Normal Lines”. Then join in.
4. **Home Is Home.** If you reset to lines in the middle of a sequence (using either method), you probably won’t end up in the right order, with your partner, at the end. Just keep going (individually) during the “Promenade Home” until you get back to your own home spot; if the sequence ends w/o a Promenade, just quickly get back to your Home.

Note: **Method A** is simpler and more reliable, and won’t take long if done immediately and quickly. **Method B** is a shortcut some dancers like to use (especially if you can see that the square is not *too* scrambled), but unless **everyone** in the square is very comfortable with “*being flexible*” in dancing different roles or adept at forming Normal couples quickly (which newer dancers often are not), and everyone can quickly agree on whether the lines should face Head or Side walls, **Method A** is ***much*** quicker and the square is ***much*** less likely to break down again right away.

If your square breaks down in a Singing Call:

1. **Swing The One You’re With.** If you’re still moving but partly broken down when the caller says, “Swing (Your Corner)”, just swing whoever you can and Promenade to the Boy’s Home. The caller may try to fix it later, w/something like “Chain to Original Partner”, or you might just end up with a different partner at the end.
2. **Back To The Boys’ Homes.** If you break down earlier in the figure (before the Swing & Promenade), just quickly get home individually, with the Boys going back to their (possibly stirred) Home spots, and the Girls going to the “next” Boy (in promenade direction). If you haven’t been keeping track of the Girls’ progression and aren’t sure who your next Boy is, just fill the closest empty spot.

For more detail, see the CALLERLAB “Lost Square(s) Procedure”:
<https://knowledge.callerlab.org/lost-square-procedure/>