

Round Dancers, Watch Your Hands
by Richard & Jo Anne Lawson

Proper Hand Positions:

Proper hand positioning can add greatly to the overall appearance of a round dance couple. Proper hand positioning should begin in the early basics classes.

Butterfly Position:

We begin by having the couples stand in butterfly position with their palms vertical to the floor, arms outstretched but elbows bent slightly for comfort and to keep from looking stiff. Hand level should be about nose-high to the shorter partner. The hands should be placed palm to palm, thumbs parallel, with the heel of man's Left and woman's Right palms meeting (and man's Right and woman's Left). The man should grasp the woman's fingers between his thumb and fingers. The woman will now close her fingers over the top of the man's hand. Now the man will close his fingers around the outside of the woman's hand. At this point, the hands should be like a double fist with no fingers or thumbs sticking out any place. The thumbs may remain parallel or the woman can place her thumb on top of the man's thumb (to cover his thumbnail), whichever feels best to you.

The couples are now in butterfly position, arms outstretched with elbows slightly bent, hands about nose-high to the shorter partner, with no fingers or thumbs protruding from the double fists.

Blending from Butterfly to Closed Position:

Do not change the position of the "lead hands" -- man's Left and woman's Right. Release man's Right and woman's Left hands. Now the man will place the cuff of his

Right sleeve (his Right wrist) underneath the woman's Left arm just at the point where it joins her shoulder. His Right cuff, or forearm, should give a slight upward pressure to the woman's Left arm. (The man's Right cuff is the leading point of contact, or pressure point, not his Right hand.)

The woman will now place her Left hand on the man's Right arm with her fingers outstretched but relaxed. She should carry her own weight. (She should not lean on the man.) Her fingers should not extend above the shoulder seam on the man's sleeve. (If the man were tall and the woman short, she would place her hand further down on his arm for comfort.) Her Left hand should be like a feather. The man should feel it there, but it should be so light that it would not interfere with his body movement or drag down his Right shoulder.

The man's Right hand is still not touching the woman. He is touching the woman with his Right cuff only. Now, the man will point the fingers of his Right hand downward slightly, toward the floor and gently curve his hand to grasp the woman's back -- about shoulder blade high. (This downward tilt of his fingers will cause a slight upward pressure on the woman's arm and also keep the man's Right elbow from dropping too low.) Please note that the man's Right hand should never extend past the center of the woman's back (except to Tango).

Now the couples are in Closed Position, man facing the wall. Turn to Semi-Closed by each turning their head to face Line of Dance. This will turn their bodies slightly but the bodies should still remain more facing each other than facing Line of Dance. The lead hands should remain extended. The lead hands remaining extended out in front in Semi-Closed position will help to keep the bodies from turning completely to face Line of Dance. Also, the man's Right and woman's Left hands and arms remain unchanged. Men be careful not to let your Right hand slide around the woman. Keep your Right cuff under the woman's arm.

Key Points to Remember:

Hands joined heel to heel, palms vertical to floor, thumbs parallel, make double fists with no fingers or thumbs sticking out, man's Right cuff under woman's Left arm at shoulder, woman's Left hand lightly on man's arm, fingers not extending above shoulder seam, Man's Right hand fingers pointed downward slightly, gently grasping woman's back -- not extended past center of woman's back. Keep lead hands extended -- out in front -- when blending to Semi-Closed Position.

Keep Hands Up:

The dancers' hands should stay at their preassigned level (distance from the floor) at all times. For instance, during loss of hand contact while doing figures like "waltz away and together, twinkle through, double scissors, circle away and together, acknowledge, face-to-face, back-to-back", etc. the hands should not drop. They should remain at their respective heights. This way, when they are rejoined with their partner's hands they will be in the proper position and will not require fumbling to take the proper places. Dancers' hands and arms should not swing up and down. The grasp of the joined hands changes to a finger-tip grasp while doing figures like "waltz away and together, face-to-face, back-to-back, acknowledge, swing figures," etc., but should return to the proper position when appropriate.

Good hand positioning is the foundation to good dance posture.
