

8 WAYS TO GET MORE OUT OF DANCE CLASS

These guidelines will help the dancer have a successful, rewarding experience learning dance. These are practical tips that we have learned from years of teaching and from our experience teaching hundreds of students.

- 1. Know when to start.** For adults, any age is a great time to begin. For children, starting at the right age is important to their success in dance. Starting too young may cause a child to feel overwhelmed and frustrated. Sometimes waiting a year can make all the difference. Also, children are all very unique. For some, starting at age three is a good thing. For others (maybe even in the same family), waiting until age five is more appropriate. Children who start older than the recommended start age do very well in dance. These older students can supplement their beginning level class with a higher level class to catch up with their peers. Because they pick up concepts and apply them more quickly than younger students, they quickly advance through beginning levels.
- 2. Know what to study.** Often a parent can tell what a child would most like by watching what type of movement they do at home and by what music they like. Some children may have never seen a certain style of dance, and often times will want to study a style once they have seen it in a performance. So, it is a great idea to expose your child to as much dance as possible. It is also important that a child take a class that is age appropriate. A three-year-old child, for example, would do best in a half-hour or at the most a 45-minute class in creative movement or tumbling because these styles are a good fit for their attention span and developmental stage. A good dance school will have a syllabus for each style of dance and a recommended start age for each style.
- 3. Study with good teachers.** When looking for a teacher, it is important that they have had good technical training themselves and that they have the ability to pass on this knowledge to the dancer. Qualities that are important to a teacher's ability to teach are: enthusiasm, friendliness, caring and interest, perception, ability to explain, variety, humor, good choices in music and movement, and praise. It is very helpful for a dancer to have studied with several teachers and in several styles. These dancers do better when they go out into the world because they know more and because they know how to learn from different teaching styles.
- 4. Apply teacher corrections and instructions.** A key teaching tool in dance is the use of verbal, visual, and hands-on corrections and instructions. Encourage a young child to listen, watch, and feel. An older student will benefit greatly by being open to new ideas and movements, and giving them a try. It is very common for a new movement or position to feel awkward or uncomfortable until the dancer has acquired the necessary coordination, strength, flexibility, and experience.
- 5. Practice outside of class.** Practicing skills and combinations at home will greatly improve a student's progress. Set aside time every day, so that practice becomes a habit. Often setting a goal such as four repetitions of an exercise or combination is more effective than setting a time limit to the student's practice. (Time goes faster when a dancer is on their third repetition and they know they just have one left.) Remember: practice doesn't make perfect, it makes permanent – be sure to check with your child's teacher to know what they should practice outside of class. Praise and rewards are great tools for encouraging practice. Often young dancers will naturally dance around the house. Praising a child for this type of natural practice will encourage further practice and creativity.
- 6. Come with a positive attitude.** It is important for the dancer to walk into a class thinking, "What can I learn today?" and to be open to trying new ideas and movements. Dance teaches more than just movement. It also teaches discipline, responsibility, and commitment. Someone once said that discipline is just remembering your goals and acting on those goals. Successful dancers build on a cycle of: goal setting, action, reaching the goal, setting a new goal, and taking new action. Obviously, a dancer will get more out of a class if they are responsible and committed, because they will practice, have good attendance, and probably enjoy working with other dancers who are also responsible and committed.
- 7. Attend performances, workshops, and master classes.** The more exposure a student has to the professional dance world, the better the connection they have from class to performance and performance to class. Suddenly, exercises take on new meaning and become more alive for the dancer. Many world-renown dancers can recall the moment that they knew they would dance professionally. Often this was after seeing a performance by a professional company or an individual dancer. This kind of artistic inspiration is indeed life changing. The same kind of shift can occur for a dance student in a workshop or master class, where they can discover new concepts, styles, and steps taught by master teachers.
- 8. Have fun.** Dance is an art form to be appreciated for a lifetime. Enjoy the journey!