

BALLET TRAINING: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

When do I know if my child is ready for Pre-Ballet?

For ages under 6, readiness varies greatly from one child to the next. In order to start, a child must be able to:

- Follow instructions (listen and try to do as they are told).
- Have an attention span greater than 15 minutes.
- Be potty-trained.
- Want to dance.

How can I help my Pre-Ballet student have the best experience?

Make sure that your child is:

- Well-rested.
- Dressed appropriately.
- Not hungry or thirsty.
- Been to the bathroom.
- On time for class, so that they don't feel rushed.

How can I keep my Pre-Ballet student interested in dance?

- Play classical music at home to encourage dancing.
- Take your child to as many live performances as possible.
- Find books (DVD's) about dance, especially ones that inspire and share stories of the classics, and how hard work pays off.

Is there anything I shouldn't do as a parent of a Pre-Ballet student?

- Try to get their attention to tell them to "pay attention" during class. Please only give directions to your child before or after their lessons.

When do I know if my child is ready for Ballet?

- When the child has developed enough sense of self to know if ballet is something they want to do, their mind will be focused and body matured enough to start to develop technique. Generally, age 7.
- When their Pre-Ballet teacher tells you.

What is the worst/best way to communicate when I have a problem/question?

- The worst way to deal with any problem is to gossip with other parents in the hallway. No one knows anything more than you about any situation. Mulling it around as a group just aggravates the speculation and confusion. Gossip is counter-productive! As we all teach our children, "Be a part of the solution, not part of the problem!"
- The best way to deal with any problem is to come directly to us and ask for yourself. You may schedule an appointment with your child's teacher, the Associate Academy Director or the Academy Director.

How do I help my child deal with competitiveness?

- Competition is easier to accept if you realize it is not an act of oppression or aggression. There will always be someone who is younger, can do more turns or jump higher. The earlier you can accept that, the happier you can be. Try and teach your child not to waste time on comparisons. They have to work for themselves, with their teachers, and not compare themselves to someone else in class. They will rarely have a realistic idea of the differences and what someone else does is quite irrelevant anyway. Remember, your child is only in competition with himself/herself and the person he/she could become. The better your child's peers do in class, the better the whole class will be – including your son/daughter!

Why do they appear to complain about dance when they say they love it?

- Once your child is dancing at an Intermediate level they know much more about ballet than you, and they work hard, very hard in ballet class. They give an intense focus and keen determination. Often, after class (when they get in your car) they need a chance to vent. Maybe they feel that they didn't do as well as they would have liked or that the teacher gave them too little attention OR too much attention by correcting so many things. What the important thing to remember is that they are venting, not complaining. Venting is just a release (often what many adults do after a full work day) and does not have a call-to-action attached to it. Your child usually does not want you to try and do anything to help (just like you would not want your spouse to go talk with your boss) – they just need to get it out of their system. This is very hard on us parents, we feel the need to fix things, to make the road less bumpy for our children, but experience shows that almost always our children just want us to listen and not act, but if this behavior becomes chronic, then it is time to address it.

Why is ballet the backbone for all other types of dance?

- Ballet is the backbone for all other types of dance because it develops the body's abilities fully. Other types of dance such as jazz, tap, hip hop and modern often introduce a dance student to dance routines or combinations right from the start. Learning a dance routine will not improve dance students. They might be challenged with some exciting steps that are too complicated to perform, but they will not improve and grow as dancers. In ballet, the learning process is opposite to what is described above. Ballet starts with training, creating the dancers body and developing physical abilities using traditional ballet exercises. Only after this training is achieved to a certain level can the student perform the choreography. For example, to create any music you need the instrument: a piano, violin, drums, etc... The same is true in ballet; we need to have a finely tuned instrument – a dancer's body – that can then succeed in performance. This is similar to sports: a coach would never put his players on the field without the proper repetitive drills to develop their skills. Ballet training is an opportunity to master and develop physical abilities. Battement tendu, grand plie, rond de jamb a terre – these are all tools for training. Choreography is not.

How can I keep my Ballet student interested in dance?

- The art of dance (and especially ballet) is a multi-faceted discipline. It combines dance movement and music with an appreciation of painting, literature, history and sculpture. It requires concentration, organization, ability to overcome obstacles and a strong sense of self. As parents you could help your child learn as much as possible about this wonderful art form, by helping to keep their interest piqued through an exposure to classical music, books or videos of ballet stories such as *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, or *Cinderella*. In addition, always try and attend live dance performances as this is an essential part of dance training. Performances by Ballet Idaho are wonderful experiences for the entire family as they demonstrate the goal of dance training.

How do I help them when they feel that they are not improving?

- In our fast-paced society, we have found ways to speed up almost everything. Fortunately (or unfortunately) there are a few things that can't be sped up and as this is unusual our patience is often tested. Dance skills, just like nature, can't be rushed. Ballet is just too difficult and demanding to expect immediate skill. True ballet grace is only achieved through constant work, time and training, and as with other beautiful art forms, what we see as spectators is the culmination of arduous effort, extensive learning, and talent honed through dedication and patience.

How can I help my Ballet student have the best experience?

- Your child can only improve if they come to all their classes regularly. Often students have the ability to do well but, for various reasons, miss a lot of classes. Sometimes this is the main reason that they do not advance, and do not accomplish what they are capable of. It also gives the idea that they are not serious students and are not really interested. So it is very important for them to attend all of their classes.
- Of course, it is impossible for them to attend all their classes unless they stay healthy. Please assist them in getting enough sleep, a proper diet, and keeping a positive attitude – the absolute necessities.
- The last thing that is important for your child is to stay focused. Help them make each class happy and productive by encouraging them to be totally present and focused and believing in what they are doing. Remind them that energy spent in negative thoughts during class is wasted energy. They should take that energy and put it into making the next step better. Students who learn to work intelligently, and who don't get overly upset with themselves over mistakes are the ones who will improve the quickest.
- In order for your child to handle all the hours of dance and still get all of their schoolwork done takes major organization and commitment on their part, and a great deal of effort and cooperation within your family. Thank you for helping your child develop a love of the arts.

My child loves to do ballet, but loves other things too. How can he/she dance well without taking so many classes per week?

- Your child can develop a decent technique as a recreational student by taking only two to three classes per week, (if they are consistent in attending classes), BUT, their ability will develop slower. If your child enjoys other endeavors in addition to dancing, the more different kinds of activities a child embraces the less they can become truly expert at any one.