

FREE REPORT

Choosing the Right Dance Class for Your Child: 5 Things You *Need to Know* that are More Important than When the Class is Held and How Much it Costs!

If you're taking the time to read this report, you probably have a child that immediately starts to spin and twirl every time music is turned on; or they ask you everyday when they can go to dance class like their friend; or they like to move and move and move and you want them to have a place to where they can positively explore their boundless energy. And like most of the parents who call me, all three of those things happen almost daily. Well, whatever your reason(s), you now find yourself in the market for a suitable dance class for your child.

If you are new to all this, and even for those seasoned veteran dance parents, there are likely quite a few dance studios/programs in your area to choose from and you are unsure about what will be the best choice for your budding ballerina. Your first instinct is to go with the program that is the most affordable, and/or most convenient. At least that is what most people do. I urge you to take the time to read this short report about some of the most important yet most overlooked criterions in selecting the best choice in dance programs – FOR YOU and YOUR CHILD. I think you (and your dancer) will be glad that you did. ☺

You may be saying something like I have heard many times before, “My daughter will never be a professional dancer, so what does it matter where she takes dance at age 3?” And in fact, you are right; very few young dancers go on to professional dance careers. But something else is true – every professional dancer started somewhere and they continued dancing because they were having fun, making friends and becoming more proficient in their dance skills. That is where making the right choice – an informed choice – makes all the difference. Besides the aspect of making a career out of dance, I think that most parents would agree that you want the basics of Quality, Value and Comfort when you are looking to pay for lessons of any kind. You want your child to learn, have fun and to feel at ease with the teacher. Nothing is more frustrating to parents and students then to learn 5 years too late that they have spent all that time and money being taught an “inferior product” so to speak. You want your child’s teacher to be knowledgeable and to teach your child well. You want Quality. You also don’t want to pay through the nose to get it. I understand that, you want Value. In addition, you want your child to love what they are doing, to feel valued, to be loved. That’s the Comfort piece. And you thought you were just picking a dance school...

So, what else is there to consider when you are searching for a dance program besides cost and convenience? Let me first say that those are not unimportant items – they are. You do need to make sure that you can afford the lessons and that you can attend them consistently. I just want you to take the time to consider the 5 major differences among dance programs and not just go with the first dance teacher that has the cheapest classes that you can actually get on the phone. (By the way, that is what most people actually do.)

#1 RECREATIONAL or ARTISTIC

You must first start by asking yourself a few questions: What do you want your child to experience? Are you looking for them to just enjoy movement and get some energy out or do you want them (or do they want) to learn classical ballet and continue to progress as they age? [Note: I will use ballet as the main example of dance style in this report but you can also substitute ballet for jazz, tap or any other form of dance.]

The first thing you must find out is WHAT the program teaches and HOW they teach it. Let me use an example. A lot of schools will tell you that they teach ballet for ages 3 and up. Well, that could mean a lot of different things. Are they teaching a rhythm-based ballet program that focuses on finding the beat and moving to music? Are they teaching a fantasy ballet program that has lots of creative play and not a lot of actual ballet or are they teaching a classical preballet program that has age-appropriate ballet movements that will prepare them for their next step? All

have value and could be a great choice for your child, but you must first think about what YOU want and then ask each dance school to explain their programs in detail.

The kind of school that offers more of the rhythm-based programs is often called a recreational program. This is usually most appealing to the parent that is just looking for a positive dance outlet for their child. The dance school that offers the more classical approach is referred to as an artistic program. And I must warn you, many schools offer both. So, make sure you ask what is taught during each specific class. I highly recommend taking the time to observe the class or have your child take a trial class. This will, of course, give you the most accurate idea of their program.

Regardless of which you choose, make sure that you consider your child's interests and attention span. Making a right choice in this one area will greatly increase your chances of having a truly happy dance experience.

#2 TEACHER EXPERTISE and DEMEANOR

Finding the best, and most qualified, teacher for your child seems like an obviously important item on your checklist. But what makes a teacher an "expert" or at least qualified to teach your child? Obviously you might look for higher educational degrees or former professional dance performance experience, but those criteria don't always indicate the very best choice for you and your situation.

Some important questions to ask are, "How long have you (or the class's teacher) been teaching?" and "Tell me about your dance experience." Most quality schools will be more than happy to answer those questions. A newer teacher (under 5 years) does not always mean an inferior product, however. Many new teachers are full of excitement and are still fresh from their own dancing and eager to share what they have learned. And a more experienced teacher may have years of valuable knowledge under their belt, but they may also be older and a little less patient with younger children. So, it comes down again to your situation – what are YOU looking for? How old is your child? What do you want them to get out of the experience?

The 2 most important things in choosing your child's teacher, I believe, is the instructor's demeanor with students and their ability to teach basic, solid dance skills in a nurturing and encouraging way. Someone may be the most experienced teacher in town, but if your child feels like a failure every time they leave class, then that is a problem. Also, a teacher may be sweet but not really teach useable dance skills. Truly, the best way to find out more about the potential teacher is to observe an actual class that they are teaching and to ask other current parents/students what they have experienced in that teacher's classroom.

And above all else, if you find out after you have taken a few classes that it's a really poor fit for your child, then, by all means find another dance instructor. Just make sure you let your current teacher know that you will not be returning to class.

#3 PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Most private dance studios offer a yearly recital, which gives your child an opportunity to display what they have learned on a stage in a fun costume along with the other members of their class. It truly can be a wonderful time for dancers and most look forward to their time to "shine" with much anticipation. The advice I have for you is to find out what each studio's recital policies are and to make sure that it will work for you. It can be very frustrating to have a young child that has worked hard on their dancing all year and then you find out that you will be on vacation during recital. Also, how many recitals does each studio have? Some also stick in a Christmas program. This may sound great in September, but come December it may feel like a burden to an already packed schedule. There really is no right or wrong, just what works best for your family. There usually is also a recital fee or ticket sales that goes along with participation in a program. Just make sure you find out what the expectations are going in so you are not surprised at the last minute.

Some studios also offer dance teams, competition teams, or other performance related programs. The costs and time for these programs are usually more than a traditional class but the benefits can be outstanding. This is especially true if you have a child that LOVES to perform. If you don't know what I mean by that, then it doesn't apply to

your situation. But if your little dancer is always putting on “shows” for every guest that enters your home, then you should probably consider a dance team for them. This will give them the opportunity to perform multiple times each year instead of the traditional once or twice. Just ask lots of questions about what is expected of you if you join and what will need to be purchased.

#4 COSTUME POLICIES

This goes along with the information that you will gather about the recital and it is certainly important to know ahead of time. You might ask, “What was the cost of the average costume to your families last year?” “When is the costume money due?” “Do you order them or have them custom made?” “Will we get to keep them or do they belong to the studio?” “Who chooses the costumes – the teacher, the director or the parents?” This may seem like a lot of hullabaloo if you have never dealt with costumes before, but trust me, these things are important to find out up front. A lot of studios charge a *significant* amount above what they are charged to make a profit off their costume sales. It just happens and you should find out what the scoop is BEFORE you get involved.

Also important to know is what the general policy regarding modesty (or the lack thereof) when it comes to costume selections. A good idea is to ask to see last year’s recital pictures. This will give you the very best idea of what you can expect them to look like this year. Just think about what is important to you and go with what makes you the most comfortable. You will be glad you took the time to ask, come April and your child’s costume arrives... Once a costume is purchased, it normally cannot be returned or exchanged. So make sure you know what to expect!

#5 WHAT OTHER PARENTS SAY

After you consider all the things that we just covered, and you believe that you have found a dance school that suits you and your child, you still have one step left. It truly is imperative to find out what some current dance parents (from the school you are looking at) think of the programs, teachers, policies and staff. While most of the current parents will give you positive feedback, they also will give you an insight into the dance environment that you will not get anywhere else. This is vitally important information for you to access before you sign up your child. And beware of a dance studio that doesn’t offer the option of parent referrals – they may be hiding something! If the studio has referrals but doesn’t offer you a way to get in touch with these parents, make sure you ask to speak to someone. Please be respectful of these parents’ time and keep your conversations brief and general. Email is a really good way to communicate without taking too much of their time. Have a list of questions that you want to ask and try not to get too personal. Realize that they are speaking from their own perspective and that you may have a different experience in that same dance class. All in all, it will give you one last and honest look at the school where you are considering enrolling your child. It all comes down to your desire for making this the VERY BEST dance experience for your child.

Bonus

If you’ve read this far, then you truly are serious about finding the best possible dance situation for your child, so I want to give you one last little bit of advice: **TAKE A TOUR OF THE FACILITY and MEET THE TEACHER before enrolling!** This will be redundant if you have already been to the location and observed a class, but if you have not, please at least take the time to stop by and see with your own eyes what environment your child will be exposed to during their time in dance class. Some studios can sound fabulous over the phone but once you get there you have an entirely different feeling about them. Consider what time of day you will be attending classes and if there is lighted parking, sufficient parking, a place for you to sit and watch, what businesses are near the studio, and so on and so forth. Not to mention what is the condition of the dance classroom? Is it clean, uncluttered, large enough to dance in and most of all, are you COMFORTABLE THERE? Use your parental intuition and make that judgment call for the sake and safety of your child. Trust me on this – I have seen all kinds of studios and I wouldn’t want to take my child to some of them even if the teacher was George Balanchine (a very famous American ballet teacher/choreographer). So, take the time to check it all out, ask lots of questions and make sure that you have a good feeling about the whole situation. It really is worth it!

HAPPY DANCING!