

Parent Handbook for Dance Students – Introductory and Basic Levels

Welcome to the Academy of Movement and Music! In the following pages, you will find answers for many of the questions you may have about dance here at the Academy. Although we take teaching dance very seriously, we also believe it should be a positive and fun activity for students. Dance can be hard work, but children enjoy the accomplishments that they derive from hard work, and most students love to perform – the reward for the hard work - and performing has a high priority here at the Academy.

When you register your child for dance at the Academy of Movement and Music, you have entered your child into a developmental curriculum of study. Classical ballet has evolved over the past 400+ years, and there are historical styles and methods that are the basis of the program here. Introduction to Ballet begins at age three, Basic Ballet starts at age 6, pre-professional training begins in our Elementary Ballet levels –usually at age 8 or 9. Pointe work is introduced in the upper Intermediate Levels, when the student is attending ballet class three times per week and is 11 or 12 years old.

We offer Jazz Dance classes for children beginning at age 6; the style we use for the youngest children is upbeat and fun and always age-appropriate. The Jazz curriculum is also developmental, with a progression from one Beginning, or introductory level, through four levels of Continuing Jazz. Jazz is usually just taken once per week, but many of the students progressing through the levels also take ballet. Those students taking both ballet and jazz may progress more quickly than those taking just a single jazz class per week.

Modern Dance is required for students studying at the Intermediate levels in ballet. The Academy requires modern dance because it: 1) offers the student an opportunity to work creatively; 2) strengthens the torso, and 3) is found in most college dance programs and is therefore important for those students planning to major or minor in dance at the university level. The Academy is committed to historical, codified forms of modern dance – particularly the styles developed by 20th century dance pioneers Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. Modern Dance is usually taken once per week at each level.

Most of the teachers have studied dance at the university level and are familiar with kinesiology and dance history as well as with technique; many have trained at prestigious schools and danced with well-known dance companies.

All dance classes here, from the youngest introductory levels to the most advanced, stress correct spinal alignment and abdominal strength; many of our classes – ballet, jazz or modern - begin with floor exercises emphasizing these two important factors necessary for success in dance. Without good body alignment and core strength, a dancer can develop bad habits which can lead to structural deformities and chronic injuries.

INTRODUCTION TO BALLET

There are three levels of Introduction to Ballet:

Introduction to Ballet I – 3 to 4 year olds

Introduction to Ballet II – 4 to 5 year olds

Introduction to Ballet III – 5 to 6 year olds

All ages are as of September 1st. Each level represents a year of work that is developmentally appropriate for growing children.

The curriculum for the Introduction to Ballet levels includes:

Intro I – Floor Warm-up Exercises

Right/Left Discrimination Activities

Skipping (Bilateral Step-Hop), forwards and backwards

Balance activities on walking boards, forwards and tiptoe

Simple see-do ballet steps in modified turned out position

Marching to a Beat

Creative Movement

Intro II – All of the above, plus

Waltz (Down up- up)

Balance activities on boards, backwards

Step, step leap

Step together, step hop

Intro III – All of the above, plus

More complex see-do exercise

Third position in ballet

Polka pattern forwards

Right/Left discrimination with group in a circle

We try to balance the necessary repetition inherent in ballet classes with games and activities that hold a child's interest and capture the imagination. However, the fun built into the class lays on top of serious work on basic motor skills and the development of spatial and musical/rhythmic patterns. Repetition builds mastery and confidence, and the consistent format and order of the class provide a secure structure for early childhood learning.

Over the years we have found that many parents ask the same questions as their children begin – and continue to study dance at the Academy. Here are some of the most common ones, and some answers we hope will be helpful:

May I stay with my child on the first day of class?

On the first day of class, particularly for the youngest children, if a child is very reluctant to join class the parent and child may watch from the hall until the child is comfortable that what is happening in the classroom is more interesting than just watching in the hall. Sometimes this can take more than one lesson.

On the first day of class in the fall, the teacher will generally check each child's ballet shoes to make sure that the child's name is written inside each shoe, and that the laces are tied correctly and trimmed. This takes a bit of time on this first day, but it is time for the child and the teacher to be one-on-one, for the teacher to really learn each child's name, for shoes to be labeled so they can be easily returned if dropped or mixed up with another child's during dismissal, and to be sure that laces are not so long as to provide a tripping hazard. This same ritual will welcome a child beginning midyear or for one who has new shoes for growing feet.

If the parent feels more comfortable staying with the child this first day, we strongly encourage the parent to stay in the hall as a passive observer and allow the teacher to begin the process of getting the child focused on the class activities. Parents may observe in the hallway after this first day, and are asked to leave the child as soon as possible. Until the parent is out of sight, until the child knows that the parent is no longer there, the child will have a divided focus and will not commit completely to joining the class. Helping your child to become independent is part of parenting, and it is also what going to "school" is all about.

How can I help prepare my child for class?

1. **Try to arrive 5 minutes early and visit the bathroom first.** Usually when one child asks permission to go to the bathroom, the others want to go too, and the parade begins! Getting out of leotards and tights is a lengthy process, and students can miss many activities. On Fridays we have an aide to help younger children in

the bathroom. Saturday classes usually have extra helpers to assist the teachers as needed.

2. Fasten long hair back off the face. Two pony tails can be more comfortable for floor exercises than one. Headbands and decorative barrettes often slip on and off and can be very distracting.

3. No jewelry, crowns or long, fancy skirts. No gum ever at the Academy. **The Academy is a peanut/nut-free zone; we have a number of children enrolled who have life-threatening allergies to peanuts, tree nuts and all nut-oils. Even the residue of peanut oil left on a mat or a ballet barre can trigger anaphylactic shock in some of these children. NEVER SEND ANY SNACK WITH YOUR CHILD CONTAINING PEANUTS, NUTS OR PRODUCTS MADE FROM THESE!!**

4. If your child is wearing the required dancewear, the school “uniform”, on the first day, he/she will feel dressed and ready to participate in the classroom.

What does my child need for class?

The school catalogue lists the required dancewear for each class level. We prefer that the children wear this required dance clothing, especially for class observations. The required class “uniform” is the basis for all recital costumes. If the weather is very hot, children may wear short sleeved leotards and no tights, and if the weather is very cold, a close-fitting sweater is fine. Our classrooms are, however, nice and warm in winter and air-conditioned in summer. All girls studying in the ballet classes at all levels need pink tights and pink ballet shoes. Leotards for Introduction to Ballet are white, long-sleeved, scooped-neck, and girls may wear white bando net tutus to class and will need them for observations and recitals. Boys need a white t-shirt, black tights and black ballet shoes, but we also allow the boys to wear shorts or sweatpants. The closest dancewear store to Oak Park is Leo’s at 1900 North Narragansett (773-745-5600).

What should I do if we miss a lesson?

You may bring your child to another class to make up a missed lesson. Consult the schedule for a listing of classes that are at your child’s level. It is helpful if you call the office and tell them that you will miss a lesson. The office staff will be able to help you choose a time to come to make up. They will also notify the teachers of absent students and/or visitors making up missed lessons. The alternative class may be in a different room with a different teacher, and will certainly be with different children; it is important to tell this to your child in advance. Missed lessons must be made up within the six-week term.

When may I observe class?

Official observations are scheduled for two weeks in December and again in March. At that time we put chairs in the classrooms and invite parents, grandparents and/or caregivers to sit and watch class. We really would prefer you come without younger siblings to these observations; our activities are usually such fun that little ones struggle to be allowed to join in, or just have too much trouble sitting quietly. This is distracting to everyone in the room and makes your star performer feel upstaged. Occasionally older siblings are able to sit politely through class. If grandparents live out of town, or working parents cannot come during regularly scheduled observations, we will be happy to make an appointment for a special observation day to accommodate your schedule. When you come to observe, we ask that you sit quietly and let the class perform for you. Do not join in the activities or give directions to your child, unless the teacher requests you do so.

What should I look for during observation?

We work on the following things in class:

1. Listening to and following directions

Does your child focus his/her attention on the teacher?

Is she/he able to understand the directions and execute the exercise?

2. Attention and Cooperation

Does your child show self-discipline or does he/she need constant reminders to pay attention?

Is your child more interested in social interaction with classmates than in the work at hand?

3. Social Behavior

Does your child have a good relationship with classmates, or provoke negative responses?

Does your child wait peacefully for a “turn”, help to form a circle, dance happily with any partner?

4. Right-Left Discrimination

5. Flexibility

6. Coordination

7. Musicality – ability to move to a beat – sensitivity to phrase

While observing, please sit quietly and do not feel that you need to urge your child to participate. If you are very quiet and attentive to the teacher and the others in class, your child will be more likely to join in. When you give attention to a non-participating child, you are rewarding that non-participation. Sometimes we have seen parents who choose a strategy of completely ignoring a child by reading a book or newspaper; the child is soon bored with the non-response and decides to join the class.

How can I find out about my child's areas of strength and talent – and what about difficult areas?

Once a year, in late winter/early spring, the teachers prepare written evaluations which are mailed home to you. These give you specific information about your child's progress and work in class. The teachers consider social behavior as well as physical and musical skills. With preschool children, it is occasionally possible to point out an area of noticeable talent, but children all grow at different rates and go through phases of concentrating on different skills and interests. Some children feel secure and happy functioning meticulously within highly structured activities and will become shy and inhibited when encouraged to dance creatively; others are free spirits and consider the more structured parts of class "boring" or "hard" – but these same children light up for the more creative activities. Some children learn by throwing themselves whole-heartedly into activities regardless of success, others are perfectionists who prefer to observe, and possibly try it privately at home, before they participate.

If we feel that your child is having noticeable difficulty with a class activity, we will tell you what we are observing, and what we would normally expect. However, we are not qualified to "diagnose" disabilities and abnormalities. Sometimes new information from you (i.e. is a new sibling at home creating a negative behavior temporarily; or did your child wear corrective braces or shoes as an infant, etc.) will help us decide if your child needs further evaluation by qualified professionals.

Who are the young people helping in class?

Class demonstrators and assistants are from upper level classes at the Academy. A student as young as ten may already be in the pre-professional dance program at the Academy and may have danced for seven years. High school aged students who have acted as demonstrators for a number of years will be supervised and encouraged to learn to lead some of the warm-ups or to assist with class management. The Academy has had for many years a highly successful teacher-training program; many of our current teachers were students and demonstrators here at the Academy at one time. The demonstrators and assistants allow the teachers to focus on the entire class, but also the freedom to work with an individual and know that the rest of the class will be supervised and under control.

Will there be a recital?

All children enrolled in Introduction to Ballet are all eligible to participate in the big recital which is usually held the second Saturday in June. Regular classes run through the end of May, however, starting in April, teachers use a portion of class time to teach dances for the recital. It is important for the teachers to know whether or NOT you plan for your child to participate in the recital. You will receive a

mailing in early April detailing what the recital will be and rehearsal schedules. Included is a permission slip and ticket order form. It is VERY important that these forms be returned to us as soon as possible. The two weeks prior to the recital, there are no regular classes, but there are several rehearsals with all classes working together to glue the separate dances into the theatrical show we call our “recital”. We usually choose children’s stories and fairy tales for our shows. In recent years we have done “Aladdin” and “Winnie-the-Pooh.” We use older dancers for the lead roles. The younger children all sit on risers at the back of the stage and get to watch the story and the other dancers as they wait for a turn. The performance is at the Oak Park and River Forest High School’s Main Auditorium. We try to produce as professional a performance as possible with beautiful costumes and theatrical lighting and sets. There is a recital fee for each performer which helps us to provide the costumes, pay for the theatre rental and all the extra hours for the staff and theatre crew and help cover additional insurance costs. We ask parents to volunteer time to help with various things, but it is not “required”. Costumes, many from previous years, are the property of the Academy. Most children love the experience; the shows are not more than an hour and a half, so most parents and grandparents enjoy watching. A family member may stay nearby at big rehearsals and even for the performance if a child is very insecure; usually a little extra support at the first big rehearsal does the job. For families new to the Academy and the recital, we have videos from previous years that are available to borrow. Watching a recital video with your child will help you make a decision about participating. Sometimes children can confuse the word “recital” with less appealing words – over the years, in asking children what they thought a recital was, we have heard “a waste-basket” (receptacle) – and “place for sick people” (hospital) – not quite the same!

BASIC BALLET

There are three different levels for Basic Ballet:

Basic Ballet I – ages 6 to 8

Basic Ballet I-II A – Beginning class for 9 - 12 year olds

Covers Basic I & II in one year

Basic Ballet II – ages 7 to 9 who have had at least a year of ballet

Students in all Basic Ballet levels attend class once per week.

Three of the levels are beginning level classes that present the basic structure of a classical ballet class. We still include preparatory, warm-up exercises on the floor to build abdominal strength and increase flexibility. We present barre work. For most of the first year, students will work facing the barre until they can begin to understand correct body alignment and the use of turnout. After the barre work, we have exercises in the center, often repeating some of the basic moves without the support of the barre. The last 15 – 20 minutes of class is reserved for moving across the floor with basic dance steps and patterns and finally some creative, expressive dancing to finish class.

Basic Ballet II is a continuation of the first year of work, but students learn to work with one hand at the barre and do increasingly complicated steps and combinations of steps.

Students in Basic Ballet I – II A may be able to cover the work of both Basic Ballet I and Basic Ballet II in one year. These older children are usually able to focus longer, retain material more completely from class to class and can master more complicated patterns. Students completing Basic I-II A will be evaluated individually for promotion to higher level classes; some may need another year in Basic II, others may be ready for the Elementary levels.

The first day of class

If this is your child's first day at the Academy, you are welcome to come into the classroom (leave shoes in the hall, please) to meet the teacher, but, unless your child is really very uncomfortable, we encourage you to leave once the teacher is ready to begin class. On the first day of class in the fall, the teacher will generally check each child's ballet shoes to make sure that the child's name is written inside each shoe, and that the laces are tied correctly and trimmed. This takes a bit of time on this first day, but it is time for the child and the teacher to be one-on-one, for the teacher to really learn each child's name, for shoes to be labeled so they can be easily returned if dropped or mixed up with another child's during dismissal, and to

be sure that laces are not so long as to provide a tripping hazard. This same ritual will welcome a child beginning midyear or for one who has new shoes for growing feet.

Parents may observe from the hallway at any time, but the children are often distracted by adults peeking in through the windows. Until the parent is out of sight, until the child knows that the parent is no longer there, the child will have a divided focus and will not commit completely to joining the class. Helping your child to become independent is part of parenting, and it is also what going to “school” is all about.

How can I help prepare my child for class?

1. It is best if students arrive a few minutes early. It is advisable to go to the bathroom before class starts; interruptions to leave class to visit the bathroom can be at a time when the teacher is explaining new work.

2. Fasten long hair back off the face. Students with long hair can begin to wear the universal symbol of the ballerina – a bun. Students in Basic Ballet often like to carry a dance bag; this is a good place to have a baggie full of hair-elastics and barrettes – and a comb.

3. No jewelry, crowns or long, fancy skirts. No gum ever at the Academy. Many students come straight from school and bring snacks. **The Academy is a peanut/nut-free zone; we have a number of children enrolled who have life-threatening allergies to peanuts, tree nuts and all nut-oils. Even the residue of peanut oil left on a mat or a ballet barre can trigger anaphylactic shock in some of these children. NEVER SEND ANY SNACK WITH YOUR CHILD CONTAINING PEANUTS, NUTS OR PRODUCTS MADE FROM THESE!!**

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class if they choose. Girls in Basic I-II A wear black, tank-topped leotards, and may wear a wrap skirt or tight-fitting black bike-shorts. Boys need a white t-shirt, black tights and black ballet shoes, but we also allow the boys to wear shorts or sweatpants. The closest dancewear store to Oak Park is Leo's at 1900 North Narragansett (773-745-5600).

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When may I observe class?

Official observations are scheduled for two weeks in December and again in March. At that time we put chairs in the classrooms and invite parents, grandparents and/or caregivers to sit and watch class. We really would prefer you come without younger siblings to these observations; our activities are usually such fun that little ones struggle to be allowed to join in, or just have too much trouble sitting quietly. This is distracting to everyone in the room and makes your star performer feel upstaged. Occasionally older siblings are able to sit politely through class. If grandparents live out of town, or working parents cannot come during regularly scheduled observations, we will be happy to make an appointment for a special observation day to accommodate your schedule. When you come to observe, we ask that you sit quietly and let the class perform for you. Do not join in the activities or give directions to your child, unless the teacher requests you do so.

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What about Jazz Dance?

Many students enjoy taking Jazz dance at the beginning level – either as a single class per week, or in addition to ballet. Students must be six years old (by September 1st) in order to study Jazz. The Jazz recital is in May. All of the above information about Basic Ballet is applicable to Jazz Dance, except that the class uniform is a black tank-topped leotard, black jazz pants and black jazz shoes.

Will there be a recital?

All children enrolled in Basic Ballet are all eligible to participate in the big recital which is usually held the second Saturday in June. Regular classes run through the end of May, however, starting in April, teachers use a portion of class time to teach dances for the recital. It is important for the teachers to know whether or NOT you plan for your child to participate in the recital. You will receive a mailing in early April detailing what the recital will be and rehearsal schedules. Included is a permission slip and ticket order form. It is VERY important that these forms be returned to us as soon as possible. The two weeks prior to the recital, there are no regular classes, but there are several rehearsals with all classes working together to glue the separate dances into the theatrical show we call our “recital”. We usually choose children’s stories and fairy tales for our shows. In recent years we have done “Aladdin” and “Winnie-the-Pooh.” We use older dancers for the lead roles. The younger children all sit on risers at the back of the stage and get to watch the story

and the other dancers as they wait for a turn. The performance is at the Oak Park and River Forest High School's Main Auditorium. We try to produce as professional a performance as possible with beautiful costumes and theatrical lighting and sets. There is a recital fee for each performer which helps us to provide the costumes, pay for the theatre rental and all the extra hours for the staff and theatre crew and help cover additional insurance costs. We ask parents to volunteer time to help with various things, but it is not "required". Costumes, many from previous years, are the property of the Academy. Most children love the experience; the shows are not more than an hour and a half, so most parents and grandparents enjoy watching. For families new to the Academy and the recital, we have videos from previous years that are available to borrow. Watching a recital video with your child will help you make a decision about participating.

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