

7 Things Every Parent Should Know Before Choosing a Dance Studio

If most dance studios seem to have friendly teachers, experienced teaching children and produce a show at the end of the year, aren't they all pretty much the same? Does it really matter which place you decide to enroll at? **YES.** There are 7 things that can make a huge difference in the:

- quality of instruction and safety your child receives
- amount of extra work and stress the parents must deal with and
- overall enjoyment and satisfaction of being involved with a dance program.

Here are the 7 things that every parent should consider before deciding on a dance studio for their child.

1. Is my child's teacher (or studio director,) licensed, accredited and/or professionally trained?

Most parents are unaware that anyone (even unlicensed,) may open a dance studio. For any haircut or manicure your technician must be licensed. Isn't our children's education as important? Check to see where and with whom your child's dance teacher studied. Have they studied Anatomy, Movement Education, Physiology, Music, Kinesiology (how the body moves,) Child Psychology and Development, Early Childhood Education or Teacher preparation? Has the teacher attended any specialized teaching courses, granting a license to teach children? Is the teacher recognized by any professional organizations?

The Royal Academy of Dance (London) and Dance Masters of America are wonderful resources. Dance Educators of America's Teacher Training School Graduates are also respected; general certification with DEA is open to anyone.

2. What type of syllabi (or guide) is taught at the school? Will he/she progress?

Starting your child in the right school is as important as planting your seeds in the best soil.

"Recreational" programs are wonderful, but would you want your child to take music lessons without learning theory or the ability to read music? Recreational programs that are also educationally professional are more "cost effective" for parents. The Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) is an internationally accredited program taught to almost 200,000 students each year. The RAD program has 10 levels designed especially for children and 6 professional vocational levels of study.

Classes are "fun" where students also enjoy a rich education of music and dance, in 4 class divisions:

- Classical (This is the technique at the barre and center familiar to most parents)
- Free Movement (teaching beautiful hands, arms, poise, spins and "flowing" suspended moves)
- Rhythm and Music (Students learn musical notation, rhythmic patterns, how to listen to music.)
- Character Dance (Ballet originated in the little European villages. In the RAD program, students learn the Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Greek, Italian and Irish national dances.)

Allegro is one of only 7 schools in the entire state of New Jersey registered with London to offer this wonderful program. Students progress through 16 Ballet levels, 21 Tap levels, many styles of Jazz, Musical Theatre Arts. Learning to *"love to dance"* is our special gift we share.

3. What is the size of the class?

If a dance class has fewer students in it, each child will receive more personalized attention, learn more and have more fun. With younger students it is easier for a teacher to organize and make sure each student understands the concepts and instructions. A smaller class size also allows our teachers to ensure that students are not developing bad habits or improper technique. Our pre-school class sizes make sure that no fundamental concepts are being missed. Often, each class has 2 senior teachers and an assistant.

Our greatest honor is when an alumna student brings her own child back for classes. We have almost 30 "grand-students"!

4. Is the focus of the school on “competition,” “winning trophies” and preparing for the annual recital or production?

Competitions involve extra classes, rehearsals, costumes with extra expenses. Often, students are asked to endure humiliating “auditions” to be “accepted into the company” requiring students be the same size, same weight, wear the same wigs and make-up (even eyelashes). Competitive students learn one dance per year, perfecting this for many months for a few judges. “Recital schools” rarely teach technique and often start teaching their one dance in the fall (or January), and the entire year is focused on perfecting that one dance. Will your child be learning *“how to dance”* or just one dance?

Students have numerous performance opportunities with Allegro’s “Footlights” Children’s Theatre Company, community “Holiday Spirit Team,” enjoy guest Master teachers from NYC and many invitations to attend Broadway theatre & Ballets. Recital dances are started in March–April, after technique is learned.

5. What type of dance floor is used?

The physical activity in dance requires a lot of jumping, which can put stress on bones and joints. Dance footwear provides some cushioning or support, but this movement can also place pressure on the dancer’s knees and back. The best way to prevent against potential injury is by choosing a studio with a professional “floating floor”. This is a floor that rests on a system of high-density foam, to absorb the shock of jumping. A foam base is superior to a “sprung” floor, which usually consists of a wood structure built on a regular floor. Very few studios opt for a professional floor due to the extra expense and choose a regular tile or laminate floor over concrete.

Marley (dance linoleum,) is impossible to Tap dance on. Ask if this rubber flooring has any sub-floor supporting and cushioning jumps. Allegro has a floating floor (yes, it’s not attached to the walls!) of seven (7) layers made of “neo-shock” absorbers. Our floor company also built the sports floors in the Meadowlands arenas, NJ.

6. What are the “extras” required for the year end show?

Most studios perform a year end performance with costumes. Some may require parents to sew their child’s costumes, or pay extra when the parents are left to find their own seamstress to do the alterations. This can be inconvenient and frustrating for parents who are busy or can’t sew.

Our seamstresses are parent and grandparent volunteers who “lovingly” sew and alter costumes for you. This way, you as a parent are not faced with extra work or expenses.

7. Can I get immediate assistance and customer service?

In many studios the teacher (or owner) conducts classes and does administration. By trying to do two jobs at once, the class may suffer as the teacher uses class time for customer service issues, or the studio may have no customer service available if the teacher is in class. To have a great experience it is important to choose a studio that can pleasantly assist you with the little details like scheduling, missed lessons, purchasing dancewear, and is willing to answer questions. Remember, when you’re interviewing a pediatrician, the office staff plays an equally important role in each visit. Choose a team of dance professionals who take the extra step to smile, “make your day,” and get to know and care about your child and your family.

Our “family friendly” office staff is on hand during all regular class times, for your immediate assistance.

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