

## INFO FOR PARENTS

### WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW

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#### Explanation of Young Beginner Program

The Young Beginner program is specifically designed to introduce our youngest students to a variety of dance styles and gently exposes their small bodies to formal movement. These classes are fun and joyful. Students are taught the importance of warmup, stretching, and the basic dance positions, as well as counting. They also learn about music, dance history and some basic dance vocabulary.

In addition, students are taught to work together in a group, to stand in line, to take turns, to raise their hands when they want to answer a question, and to follow simple direction from teachers, as they would be expected to do in any school environment.

We prefer that parents do not observe these classes. It has been our experience that when a parent is present in the class, it distracts the child. Please rest assured that each Young Beginner class has assistant teachers available to tend to little ones who need additional help or direction.

Even though Young Beginner students may be wearing ballet slippers, students below the age of seven are not yet ready for the structure and rigors of a formal ballet class. They do not yet have the self discipline to work at the barre for an extended period of time, or to memorize longer phrases of choreography on the spot. The strong focus required for participation in a ballet class can only come with age.

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#### Level Placement of Students

Students in the Young Beginner program are placed according to their ages. New students ages three and four years old are placed at Level I. New five and six year olds are placed at Level II. Returning students may be placed at different levels at the discretion of the teacher.

Students over the age of seven are not placed by age -- they are placed according to their capabilities. This is determined by a teacher's evaluation of the student's current skills, experience, physical strength and development, focus, work ethic, maturity and attendance.

It is not uncommon to find a wide range of ages within a single level in a formal dance class. Students are not automatically promoted to a higher level at the end of each school year, as many of the skills they are learning could take a longer time to master.

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## The Importance of Taking Ballet Classes

Ballet is the foundation of dance.



The ballet class contains a series of exercises specifically designed to condition the body for dance. These exercises build strength and flexibility in the muscles. They work the core and protect the back. They perfect the posture and they enhance the quality of the dancer's movement.

The ballet class begins with the demi-plie, in which the student learns the correct way to bend the standing leg at the knee and recover to the straight leg. This small movement appears in every single dance style across the spectrum and around the world -- it is basic to human movement. It may appear to be simple, but it takes consistent practice to maintain a good plie. Famed New York City Ballet ballerina Suzanne Farrell has said that, "Plie is the first thing you learn and the last thing you master."

A correct plie is crucial to the execution of jumps and turns, no matter what style of dance you're doing. NBA pros have been known to take ballet class in order to improve their "hang time" when they make a slam dunk, layup or jump shot. A strong plie will help hip hop and jazz dancers in their turn sequences, and in movement that stays low to the floor.

Barre work in ballet class begins with small movements which gradually open into bigger ones. This gives the teacher and the student the opportunity to explore the smallest details of the movement so that students will be able to develop beautiful lines, strong turns, clean and quick footwork and jumps, and grand traveling dance steps.

No matter what style of dance you perform, the exercises of ballet class will teach a dancer the proper way to lengthen the legs, to strengthen the stomach and to protect the back. It will help the dancer develop flexibility, agility, musicality, and a beautiful quality of movement, no matter what the tempo. It will greatly reduce the risk of injury to any dancer who pursues any other style of dance.

Best of all, you can always spot a ballet student, even when they are in their street clothes, by the way that they stand up straight and walk into a room exuding confidence. That is a benefit that will carry over into everything that a student experiences in life, no matter where they go, even into adulthood.

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## Why We Wear Uniforms in Ballet Class

It is important for your child to attend class wearing the appropriate uniform. The act of donning leotards and tights puts the student in the correct frame of mind to give their best effort to the class they're about to take. When the students are all dressed alike, it enhances their experience of moving together as a group. They will do this first in the studio and then later on the stage.



Dancers wear leotards and tights for specific reasons. As a student works in class, the teacher is not only watching how they follow the steps, but much more importantly, the teacher is carefully monitoring the way in which each student's muscles are moving and how their posture is held. In all forms of dance, not only do the steps have to be followed, but they have to be executed in the appropriate way, with strong technique. This is vital to making the movement beautiful and correct. It's just as vital in helping to prevent injury while dancing and to encourage good posture and good habits even when the student is not dancing. The teacher needs to see that the student's stomach is pulled up, the back is straight, the chest is held high, the shoulders are down, the legs are lengthened without gripping of the muscles, and that turnout is initiated from the inner thigh and not from the knee or the foot. It is very important for the teacher to be able to see the articulation of the muscles as the student works.



Teachers can't correct what they can't see. If a student comes to class dressed in sweat pants, and they inadvertently

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### **The Benefits of Learning Hip Hop**

Hip hop lives at the center of today's pop culture. A student may never have seen a ballet, but chances are good that they've seen hip hop being performed on television. They have already experienced the excitement, the rhythm, the athleticism, and the flash.

Hip hop dancing can be a wonderful avenue of self expression for a student, not only when they are executing choreographed movement, but also when they freestyle. In addition, hip hop offers fantastic physical benefits. Most of the movement is quick and this helps the dancer to build stamina, to burn fat and to alleviate stress. Hip hop students demonstrate improved coordination, balance and agility. They also learn to listen to music with a more developed ear, and they improve the musicality of their movement.

A hip hop class can provide a student with all the social benefits of belonging to a group. It can also provide a boost of confidence to overcome shyness at a dance or any other social function. A student who takes hip hop classes will have an increased appreciation of the professional dancers whom they see on television. They will understand the amount of work and discipline that goes into mastering these dances, and they will take pride in knowing that they are applying themselves with that same level of commitment.

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### **What Track is the Student On? Do they want to audition, or just have fun?**

Some students come to class just for fun. We are glad that we can offer them an enjoyable experience. Their dance training will benefit them, no matter where life takes them from here. If they'd like to sample all the different styles of dance that we have to offer, then they are welcome to do so.

Other students develop the ambition to take to the stage or to audition for specialized performing arts high schools, such as LaGuardia, Professional Performing Arts, or Frank Sinatra High School.

Contrary to what you may have seen in films, preparation for these auditions begins years in advance. It is nearly impossible for a student to succeed at an audition without years of focused ballet training and consistent training in other dance styles.

If a student wants to audition for the stage or for specialized schools, please let us know as early as possible, so that we can suggest and direct an appropriate course of training and preparation.

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### What makes a dancer?

Grace, poise, confidence, agility, flexibility, musicality, strength and fitness are characteristics that all dancers share. Dancers are lovers of beauty and they are dedicated to their art. They love the ritual of taking class. They love to feel their bodies move and they learn to express different emotions or to tell stories through their movement. They learn early on that they must never become flustered by making a mistake. Most of them love being able to entertain an audience. They familiarize themselves with the work of legendary dancers and choreographers and they use this inspiration to improve their own dancing.

More than anything, it's not about what step a dancer does, but it's about how they do it. A dancer is engaged and fully present in the movement. They love what they do, and anyone who watches them can feel it.

If you feel pleasure from moving your body, then you have the ability to be a dancer.

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