

*In 1996 the leaders of America's largest dance education organizations came together to found UNITY. As a 501 (c) (3) corporation. The organization promotes cooperation and dialog within the dance profession. One of the organizations committees include The Committee Addressing Responsible Education in Dance (C.A.R.E.D).*

*The C.A.R.E.D. Committee has authored a document to assist the dance teachers in educating parents who are contemplating dance education for their children or for themselves.*



### Class Placement and Age Considerations

It is never too late to become a student of dance; training can begin at any age as long as your expectations are realistic. Most professional dancers begin their training in childhood; however, some respected dancers and choreographers did not start training until they were teenagers or college students. Class placement should be based on ability, not age, although classes are

usually structured according to age. Teenagers or adults without dance experience should not expect to take advanced classes simply because they are older; instead, they should be placed in age-appropriate beginners classes.

There are many training options across all sectors of dance education for the young child, teenager, and adult. When looking for classes, keep the following developmentally appropriate guidelines in mind:

**Ages 3–6:** Creative movement, pre-ballet, basic tap skills

**Ages 7–11:** Beginning dance technique in one or more genres

**Ages 12–14:** Intermediate-level dance technique in one or more genres; pointe work may begin for appropriately trained ballet students with adequate strength.

**Ages 15–18:** Advanced dance technique in one or more genres

**Adult:** Beginning- to professional-level classes in one or more genres

Many schools offer a pre-professional track for students who wish to pursue a college program or a career in dance.

Class placement for children is highly individual and the

factors that go into the decision are complex. Your child is not necessarily being held back if he or she is not placed at a certain level. Often children are placed in groups or classes in which they will feel confident, in order to promote the development of self-esteem. Some students who are placed in a higher level may become discouraged and lose interest in dance. Others may respond to the challenge of being in a class with dancers who are more proficient by pushing themselves to work harder. Teachers are the best judges of a child's class placement.

### Know What You Are Looking For

- Ask yourself these questions before starting your search:
- What are your expectations of the teacher or teaching style?
- What are the teacher's expectations of the students
- Is the studio environment safe, comfortable, nurturing, and challenging?
- Is the program pre-professional, recreational, or both? What do you want your child's training to accomplish?



- Do you agree with the school's philosophy and curriculum?
- Are you looking for the kind of activities for your child that this school offers?

### How to Choose a Teacher or School

In shopping for a **school or teacher, you should watch several classes at each school, including different styles and ages.**

#### First consider the instructor's qualifications:

- What credentials, certificates, or degrees does he or she have?

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- What types of dance (e.g., ballet, jazz, modern) does the teacher have experience in?
- With what age groups does the teacher have experience?
- Have any of the teacher's students gone on to a more intense study of dance? Are any of them dancing professionally?



**Ballet**—A codified, classical form of dance with soft ballet shoes or pointe shoes (for women), specific terminology, and appropriate music. Various techniques include Cecchetti, Vaganova, Bournonville, and Royal Academy of Dance. Many schools offer an amalgamation of styles.

## Next, look at teaching style:

- Does the teacher give equal time to each student?
- Is the instruction given in language that is age and level appropriate?
- Does the teacher have good rapport with the students and give corrections and feedback in a positive manner?

## Observe students' behavior in the class:

- Are the students enthusiastic and supportive of one another?
- Are they focused on the instruction?
- Are they grouped by age and ability level?
- Are they wearing appropriate dance apparel, with hair in place?



## Assess how age appropriate the class is, in terms of:

- Instruction
- Practice attire or costumes
- Music
- Choreography

## Finally, look at the facility. You can tell a lot about a school's teaching by its physical space.

- Is the school clean and well lit, with good air circulation?
- Is the classroom equipped with a safe floor? (A sprung floor is best, but is not always available.)
- Is the space large enough to accommodate the class sizes?
- Are the barres and mirrors secured safely?
- Is the sound system sufficient for the room size?

## Dance Genres/Techniques and Styles

Today's dance education market offers many choices. The following brief descriptions will give you an idea of what to expect.

**Tap**—A popular American dance form in which metal taps are mounted on shoes and are used to make rhythmical sounds. Various styles abound. Some famous tappers who made the genre popular are Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire, Brenda Bufalino, Gregory Hines, and Savion Glover.

**Jazz**—A very popular dance form. One kind of jazz dance is lyrical with fluid movements; another is more percussive, with accented beats and body isolation movements, danced to popular music. Broadway (musical theater) dance and vernacular dance (popular dances of particular time periods, e.g. Charleston, swing, Latin, Afro-Cuban) are included in this category.

**Modern**—An ever-evolving dance form that is usually taught and performed in bare feet. Many schools teach an amalgamation of styles and techniques from modern-dance pioneers such as Isadora Duncan, Charles Weidman, Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham, José Limón, and Merce Cunningham.



**Creative Dance**—Takes a student through the creative process. Students make decisions about how they will move and why.

**Improvisation**—A spontaneous form of dance. The creative process is a strong component of classes, and the movement is usually based on modern dance.

**Partnering**—An integral part of advanced dance classes, in which the movement involves a sharing of weight and space. In classical ballet men and women work together, with the man doing the lifting and guiding and showing off the woman. In more contemporary works, partnering can occur with women, men, or any combination thereof.

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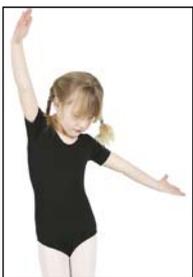
**Character**—A theatrical version of regional folk dances.

**Hip-Hop**—A fairly recent development in dance that started on the streets of big cities. It now has its own vocabulary. Sneakers are the favored shoes.

**World/Cultural Dance**—The study of dances from around the world. Styles include African, Afro-Brazilian, Asian, Middle Eastern, Irish step dance, clogging, contra dances, salsa, and flamenco.

**Acrobatics/Tumbling**—Tumbling moves performed on mats and perhaps a balance beam (not to be compared with gymnastics that uses equipment like uneven parallel bars or the horse).

**Social/Ballroom Dance**—Current and traditional dances (e.g., waltz, fox trot, tango, swing) that are done in social environments like clubs and at weddings or celebrations.



## What About Cost?

Ask prospective schools these questions:

- How long is each class? Is the cost per class based on length?
- Is tuition paid monthly, quarterly, annually, or in some other increment? Will I get a discount if I pay for a whole semester or year?
- Are there fees other than tuition? What do they include?
- Are there additional costs for costumes, traveling, performances, and competitions? If there is a student company, is there a fee for participating?

## What Is UNITY?

UNITY, a 501 (c)(3) corporation, is a coalition of dance education and associated organizations that promotes cooperation and dialogue within the dance profession and speaks as a unified voice on dance education and dance-related issues.

One of its purposes is to provide accurate, caring information to consumers to enable them to make informed, responsible decisions about dance education. As such,



UNITY offers dance consumers of every age ideas about how to find places to study dance and what to look for in choosing a teacher or mode of training.

To learn more about UNITY, visit [www.unitydance.org](http://www.unitydance.org)

## Organizations involved in creating and approving this document include:

- American Academy of Ballet
- Chicago National Association of Dance Masters
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