

Parents Guide To Choosing a Dance Studio

Selecting the best dance studio and the right teacher is vital. How can you, a student or a parent, become more informed about selecting a good studio? Here are some things we believe you should investigate:

1. THE SCHOOL'S PHILOSOPHY: Inquire about the artistic director's vision. Everything comes down from the top. What are the principles behind the teaching methods employed in the studio? What are the goals of the studio?

Our school's main goal is to help students develop a love for dance and a self-confidence that lasts them for a lifetime. Director Janielle Scott's mission for the school is "to provide excellent, quality instruction in a safe and nurturing environment. We want to develop in students a love of dance while improving their self image, perseverance and concentration."

2. FACILITIES: The overall environment of a dance studio is key to your child's success. The dance studio should be warm and inviting, as well as the staff. The studio should be clean and well-maintained. The dancing room should be well-ventilated and spacious, with mirrors covering at least one entire wall. Your child should be provided with adequate space to change clothes and free access to washroom facilities. Certain styles of dance can put stress on young bones and joints, especially ballet, with its many leaps and jumps. Look for a professional floor that is well-cushioned to absorb the shock of jumping. Never allow your child to attend a dance class on a concrete floor.

Exisdance has a sprung dance floor, which is very important for dancers. This type of floor helps absorb the impact of dancing and helps keep teachers and dancers more energized, while greatly aiding in injury prevention. There are full mirrors throughout the studio to help students observe their movements while learning and two levels of ballet barres to accommodate the differing heights of the dancers. The studio is a bright and spacious place to learn. Our studio also offers viewing times for parents and there is a comfortable waiting area which is used by parents and young siblings during class times. There are also plenty of off-street parking spaces.

3. RECITALS

A formal late spring recital is recommended for all children and should be a satisfying, informative experience for the child and the families. For all children a chance to perform can be an important and exhilarating experience.

Our annual year-end recital was held before a full-house at the Yates Theatre, giving our students the opportunity to perform publicly with family and friends present. Some studios may require parents to sew their child's costumes. This can be inconvenient and frustrating for parents who are busy or can't sew. Our studio orders or sews costumes for you, so parents do not have to worry about costume hassles.

4. DIVISION AND SIZE OF CLASSES: How are classes divided--by age or technical ability? Division by age means that the class is composed of students with different degrees of ability. The fewer students in your child's dance class, the more individual attention he or she will receive. It is easier for a teacher to maintain control over a smaller class, and having a only a few students at a time allows for more personalized instruction.

At Exisdance we feel class size is extremely important. For 3- 5 year olds our classes have a maximum of 10 students per class. For ages 6 and up we have a maximum of 12 kids per class. Our classes are divided by both age and technical ability.

5. QUALIFIED TEACHER

A dance class should be disciplined, encouraging, and nurturing. Just as all dance studios are not alike, neither are all dance instructors. Your choice of dance instructor is crucial to your child's future success as a dancer. Bad habits learned at a young age are extremely hard to break. Make a point to check the dance instructor's qualifications. Make sure he or she holds a diploma or degree in dance, is certified to teach dance, or has danced with a professional company.

Exisdance only hires instructors with professional experience as well as post secondary education and or certification in dance or kinesiology/movement.

What do I look for in a teacher?

Ask yourself the following questions, *Does the teacher....*

- Encourage the love and joy of dancing in each child and show an interest in each child's growth and development?
- Seem aware of the physical and mental capabilities of the particular age group being taught?
- Are the children grouped with consideration as to age and ability?
- Does the teacher seem to have a working knowledge of anatomy? Many chronic injuries are traced to poor movement habits learned in early years of training.
- Maintain an atmosphere comfortable and supportive to all students in the class?
- Begin with a class warm-up and progress from simpler steps to more complicated ones?
- Use imaginative language when giving instructions?
- Include creative work along with formal instruction?
- Include rhythmic training in the lesson?
- Encourage appropriate apparel for the class?
- Make age appropriate musical selections?

Our teachers strive to achieve all of the above points in our classes. We want to be the absolute best dance teachers around and we are continually trying to improve our abilities, ideas and communicative skills.

Footnotes

*Dance Magazine, Sept 1994 by Yasuko Tokunaga, Emiko Tokunaga

*Dance Masters of America website