

4 THINGS EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW BEFORE CHOOSING A DANCE STUDIO

If most dance studios seem to have qualified, friendly teachers, experience teaching children and a big 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 4 main things that can make a huge difference in the quality of instruction your child receives, the amount of extra work and hassles the parents must deal with and the overall enjoyment and satisfaction of being involved with a dance program. Here are 4 things that every parent should consider before deciding on a dance studio for their child.

1. EDUCATION OR COMPETITION?

It is important to ask the question of a studio, is your emphasis on education or competition? Dance originated as an art form, and when dance schools compete for trophies and "places" then it becomes a sport.

Our dancers' classical training is showcased in performances for the community as artistic entertainment. This allows our students to gain confidence through personal and physical growth. At our school, competitions do not define our students as "winners or losers". Our dancers are equipped with the technique and knowledge to continue their study of dance at a higher educational level if they so choose.

2. WHAT TYPE OF DANCE FLOOR IS USED?

Dance is a very physical activity that requires a lot of jumping, which can put stress on bones and joints. Most dance footwear does not provide any cushioning or support, so the shock of dance movement can place a lot of pressure on the knees and back of a dancer. The best way to prevent against potential injury is by choosing a studio with a professional "floating floor". A floating floor is a dance floor that rests on a system of high-density foam, to absorb the shock of jumping. A high-density foam base is superior to a "sprung" floor, which usually consists of a wood structure built on the regular floor.

The top layer of the dance floor is also an important factor. A vinyl composite "marley" floor is accepted worldwide as the best surface layer for recreational to professional dance. Facilities such as the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the Royal Academy of Dance in London, England, and Riverdance - The Touring Show, all use marley floors as their dance surface. A marley floor allows dancers to slide, with a degree of "controlled slip, but is not slippery so there is less risk of slips and falls. Very few studios use professional marley floors because of the expense involved, and usually opt for a regular floor tile for a studio floor.

All of our studio locations have floating floors that have over 700 high density foam blocks under the floor surface and a marley top surface. Our special floors help reduce the risk of injuries and allow students to dance longer without getting tired.

3. WHAT TYPE OF PERFORMANCE DO YOU HAVE AT THE END OF THE YEAR?

Is the emphasis of the recital the technique that has been taught over the year or is it a dance that has been practiced for the entire year? We don't start our recital dances until the beginning of February, with an emphasis on technique throughout the year. We choose tasteful and age appropriate costumes and choreography for all of our dancers. We want parents to feel comfortable and proud of what their children are presenting on stage. We feel the focus of the performance should reflect what the students have learned throughout the year. In addition, each family is given two free recital tickets for the show!

4. CAN I GET IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICE?

In many studios the teacher or the studio owner conducts classes and does the administration. By trying to do two jobs at once, the class may suffer as the teacher has to use class time for customer service issues, or the studio may have no customer service available if the teacher is in a class. To have a good experience it is important to choose a studio that can assist you with details like costumes or schedules, even if a teacher is occupied in a class. Our studios have office staff on hand during regular class times, so you can get immediate assistance.

5 WAYS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF MUSIC LESSONS

These guidelines will help you to have a successful, rewarding experience learning an instrument. These are practical tips that we have discovered from years of teaching and our experiences with teaching hundreds of students each year.

1. STARTING AT THE RIGHT AGE & IN THE RIGHT PROGRAM

Adults can start any instrument at any time. Their success is based on how willing an adult is to commit to practicing. For children, starting at the right age is a key element to the success of their lessons. Typically, the younger the student the more involved the parent is as a practice partner and during lessons. It is important that both the parent and child understand the commitment of lessons and practicing. Your instructor will discuss your role and the students practice routine at the first lesson. Children who are older than the suggested earliest starting age usually do very well. The following are guidelines we have found to be successful in determining how young a child can start taking music lessons.

Suzuki Guitar, Piano & Violin

3 years old and up. This method is specifically designed for our youngest musicians. Due to the young age of students Reading notes is postponed until the basic playing technique is mastered. Suzuki students learn along with a parent who is the home teacher. Parents are asked to practice daily with their child and attend lessons. Although, a time commitment for parents, it is well worth the result and is a fun binding experience. Parents do not need to have any musical training and will learn everything they need to succeed during home practice from their instructor. The method is very engaging to the young child.

Piano/Keyboard

At our school 6 years old is the youngest age that we start children in traditional private piano lessons. At this age they have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease. By, 6 years old students are able to begin reading music, crucial to traditional piano methods.

Traditional Guitar – Acoustic, Electric and Bass

9 years old is the earliest we recommend for traditional guitar lessons. Guitar playing requires a fair amount of pressure on the fingertips from pressing on the strings. Children under 9 generally have small hands and may find playing uncomfortable. Bass guitar students generally are 10 years old and older.

Voice Lessons

10 years old is recommended as the youngest age for private vocal lessons. Due to the physical nature of voice lessons (proper breathing techniques, development of the vocal chords and lung capacity), the younger body is generally not yet ready for the rigors of vocal technique. For children younger than 10, voice lessons will be less structured – and not focus as much on technique but more on pitch matching. Another option is our children's choir (ages 6 and up).

Drums

The average age of our youngest drum student is 8. This varies greatly depending on the size of the child. They have to be able to reach both the pedals and the cymbals.

Flute, Clarinet, Trumpet, & Saxophone

Due to lung capacity (and in the case of the saxophone the size of the instrument), we recommend that most woodwind beginners are 7 years and older.

Traditional Violin

We accept violin students from the age of 7. Our Suzuki program will accept children as young as 3 years old.

2. INSIST ON PRIVATE LESSONS WHEN LEARNING A SPECIFIC INSTRUMENT

Group classes work well for preschool music programs, and theory lessons. However, when actually learning how to play an instrument, private lessons are far superior since in private lessons it is hard to miss anything, and each

student can learn at their own pace. This means the teacher does not have to teach a class at a middle of the road level, but has the time and focus to work on the individual student's strengths and weaknesses. For that lesson period, the student is the primary focus of the teacher. The teachers also enjoy this as they do not have to divide their attention between 5 – 10 students at a time and can help the student be the best they can be.

3. TAKE LESSONS IN A PROFESSIONAL TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

Learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, but also having an environment that is focused on music education. In a professional school environment a student cannot be distracted by t.v., pets, ringing phones, siblings or anything else. A school environment is not concerned with selling instruments, and have a 100% focus on education. With only 1/2 to one hour of lesson time per week, a professional school environment can produce better results since the only focus at that time is learning music. Students in a school environment are also motivated by hearing peers who are at different levels and by being exposed to a variety of musical instruments. In a music school, the lessons are not just a hobby or sideline for the teacher but a responsibility which is taken very seriously. All of our teachers are professionals who have music degrees, and actively work in their fields.

In addition all of our studios are equipped with high quality pianos, and instrument for students to play.

4. MAKE PRACTICING EASIER

As with anything, improving in music takes practice. One of the main problems with music lessons is the drudgery of practicing and the fight between parents and students to practice every day. Here are some ways to make practicing easier:

Time

Set the same time every day to practice so it becomes part of a routine or habit. This works particularly well for children. Generally the earlier in the day the practicing can occur, the less reminding is required by parents to get the child to practice.

Repetition

We use this method quite often when setting practice schedules for beginners. For a young child 20 or 30 minutes seems like an eternity. Instead of setting a time frame, we use repetition. For example, practice this piece 4 times every day, and this scale 5 times a day. The child then does not pay attention to the amount of time they are practicing their instrument, but knows if they are on repetition number 3 they are almost finished.

Rewards, Praise, and Performance

This works very well for both children and adult students. Some adults reward themselves with a cappuccino after a successful week of practicing. Parents can encourage children to practice by granting them occasional rewards for successful practicing. In our school we reward young children for a successful week of practicing with stars and stickers on their work. Praise tends to be the most coveted award – there just is no substitute for a pat on the back for a job well done. Sometimes the greatest reward is having your child play for you at home. Students can be very inspired to play their new music for mom or dad and receive thunderous applause.

5. USE RECOGNIZED TEACHING MATERIALS

There are some excellent materials developed by professional music educators that are made for students in a variety of situations. For example in piano, there are books for very young beginners, and books for adult students that have never played before. There are books that can start you at a level you are comfortable with. These materials have been researched and are continually upgraded and improved to make learning easier. These materials ensure that no important part of learning the instrument can inadvertently be left out. If you ever have to move to a different part of the country, qualified teachers and institutions will recognize the materials and be able to smoothly continue from where the previous teacher left off.

Most Importantly . . .HAVE FUN!!

Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime. So, try not to put unrealistic expectations on yourself or your children to learn too quickly. Remember, quality is far more important than quantity. Learning to play an instrument properly and beautifully is more rewarding than knowing a large library of music that you can play poorly. Everyone learns at a different pace and the key is to be able to enjoy the journey.