

The Andover School of Ballet

Located at 14 Park Street ~ P. O. Box 5070 ~ Andover, MA 01810 ~ (978) 475-5919

Introducing Our Early Childhood Dance Program

Our **Early Childhood Dance Program** is specially designed to provide children between 3 and 7 years of age with a strong foundation in dance and movement. It teaches the basic elements of dance: space and how we relate to it, both as an individual and as a member of a group; the eight basic locomotor movements; musical rhythm, beat and time; opposites and directions; some elementary positions of ballet. Integrated with these physical concepts are the intellectual concepts of self-awareness, creative expression, imagination, teamwork, and basic body/health awareness.

Through participation in these classes, students also learn the basics of classroom behavior and manners, which remain the same throughout their dancing years. These concepts include learning how to take turns; following another dancer or leading the way; waiting patiently; working together with others; and having a positive attitude.

Educators now know that training young children in the concepts of movement sequencing, patterning and spatial relationships lays a strong foundation for the later development of reading, mathematics and other educational skills. Children in our **Early Childhood Program** work actively in all these areas.

HOW CLASSES ARE STRUCTURED

Classes in our **Early Childhood Program** are grouped into age-specific levels for 3 - 7 year olds and meet once a week. Class structure for all levels is essentially the same, with the content of each section of the class based on appropriate developmental skills for the specific age. Classes will consist of several different sections, and repetition of these exercises from week to week engages the mind-body connection, and strengthens and conditions the muscles.

A center warm-up section will include all of the major muscle groups and provide the basis for the technique work taught in dance classes at a later date. From this students learn correct posture and the placement of the body over the legs. (This is very important for both dancers and non-dancers!). The exercises in this section also teach balance, port de bras (arm movements), and include various types of jumps that are the building blocks for the jumping steps of classical ballet and other dance forms.

A stretching section will consist of gentle exercises, which progress in difficulty as students gain flexibility over the years.

To develop the loco-motor skills that form the basis for all dance steps that travel, one section of class will consist of age appropriate steps across the floor or around the room.

Another section of the class will be devoted to creative expression. Students will participate in a variety of free movement exercises that teach such concepts as listening skills (by responding to the tempo and mood of the music), levels (high, medium, low), and directions (forward, backward, sideways). Young dancers who are consistently exposed to this type of activity are generally more creative in their own choreographic efforts in later years and are freer in their movement styles as they develop. Also, it's just plain FUN!

Finally, each month our instructors will work with the children on a different monthly objective geared to the age of the students. Concepts such as classroom etiquette, musical awareness, dance relationships to others, relationships to the working space and the stage, expressing emotions through movement, and pantomime are explored monthly during the year.

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(Early Childhood Dance Program cont'd.)

Examples of Developmental Skills As Taught In Our Early Childhood Dance Program

It is important to remember that the physical skills that often seem quite simple to us as adults are very difficult and complicated for young children. We group our early childhood dance classes by one-year age groups and plan our curriculum for the best benefit of each developmental group, using the cut-off birth date of September 1st of the school year.

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Kinderdance / 3 YEAR OLDS

Three year olds are quite new to learning how their bodies move, as well as how to behave in a classroom. Children in this program are gently introduced to the classroom environment. At this age children love and need repetition, so the same class work is repeated several times before being changed.

Some of the concepts taught are; stretching the feet, balancing on one leg (an essential skill for a dancer), weight transfers from one foot to the other, jumping, simple arm movements, stretching, and moving across the floor. Many types of movement characterizations are used to develop both movement quality and imagination. Toward the end of the year, hopping and skipping are introduced.

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Primary Dance 1 with Tap / 4 YEAR OLDS

The program for four-year-olds builds on the work done the previous year. Students at this age can learn to further control their movements. Weight transfers are continued forward, backward, and also from side to side. Balances are more sustained. Jumps are done in basic patterns, traveling steps may be done with a partner, and skipping and marching both forwards and backwards will be introduced. Students also start learning the concepts of counting music and opposites. The addition of tap dance at this age helps to develop an understanding of rhythm and the counting of musical beats.

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Primary Dance 2 with Tap / 5 YEAR OLDS

Five year olds (in Kindergarten) continue to work on the same concepts as 4 year olds, but in greater degrees of complexity. Their ability to count the music is developed; they utilize opposite arms and legs while skipping, galloping or balancing. Weight transfers and traveling steps are taught in more complex patterns. Students also begin to learn the technique of spotting (the snap of the head that allows dancers to turn without getting dizzy).

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Primary Dance 3 with Tap / 6 YEAR OLDS

At age six (1st graders) our students will continue to move in greater degrees of complexity to prepare for more intensive study of different dance techniques. This class takes the concepts learned in the Early Childhood Program and begins to put them into the format used in dance classes such as ballet class, jazz class or modern dance class. For instance, in this level students will learn to correctly use the barre for certain ballet exercises. They will also begin to learn traveling turns using the spotting technique learned the year before. After completing this level, the seven to eight year old is ready both physically and mentally to begin a more disciplined study of the theatrical art forms of ballet and/or jazz and tap.